

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Thursday, March 19, 2026
Saint Joseph

Solemn Eucharist
5:30 pm

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Preston Gonzalez-Grissom

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We Are All Step-Parents

The Feast of Saint Joseph

I come to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. You may be seated. We gather this evening. Maybe you're just coming outside. Maybe you actually plan to be here, but it is the Feast of St. Joseph, who is, I must say, one of my favorite saints. He's given this unreal role in the world, maybe one of the most important roles in the history of the world. He is to parent the Son of God.

Can you imagine the pressure? I'm a priest for children and families, and I can tell you, speaking to parents normally, they experience a lot of pressure over getting in the right school. I can't even fathom being told you'll be the parent to the Son of God. And yet the Bible seems almost bent on telling you about all his limitations.

He did nothing to make this happen. He's met by an angel, and the angel says, you're being hunted, you and the family, so you have to go to a far-off place, and you need to do so now. And so, I guess he needs to do that. And then he gets there, and he can't even provide a room for his beloved to have the child, this son of God. He's so limited, and yet he has this great responsibility.

We know from history, and if you read the Bible even a little bit closely, you'll see that Joseph doesn't make it to the end. He dies sometime between when Jesus is 12 and 30, so he doesn't even get to see Jesus preach or perform a miracle or raise from the dead. He doesn't even know how this responsibility turns out. We meet him in our gospel reading, which you just heard read, and he has lost Jesus. He loses him, which is, if you look a little closer, it's much more understandable, but nevertheless, he loses him, and it takes four days to find Jesus, and they find him in the temple. And the Blessed Virgin Mary comes to Jesus and says, what are you doing here? You had me and your father worried sick. And Jesus says, you should have known that I was doing my father's business.

It's almost like he's saying, Joseph's not my real dad. And the Bible seems bent on explaining this very, very clearly, that though he is given this immense responsibility, he is the step-parent to Jesus. He's his step-parent.

And I think this is incredibly important, not just because step-parents were both popular then and now, and it's important to have someone to look up to, but it's extremely important because in the Christian life, you are a step-parent to every responsibility you have. You have been given much by God, and yet you are in control of very little.

We may think that we are in control, but it doesn't take very long to see. We have this illusion that if we try harder, if we just could figure it out, or if this person would just get out of the way, or this person come along, then I'd be able to control the outcome. But we know that this is not true. Even the parts of our lives where we have the most responsibility, parents.

You will work your hardest, and your children will do things in the future that you couldn't possibly have imagined, both good and maybe not so good. But you're not in control. We work really, really hard at our jobs, and yet some projects just don't work. Maybe it's a habit that you're trying to kick, and no matter what new thing you're trying, if you could just, just doesn't work out. We're in charge of our bodies. That's a responsibility.

We're not in control of what happens to them ultimately. We are step-parents to every responsibility we have been given. And I hope that you receive that as good news, because it means two things. It means, one, you should feel validated when you feel pressure for the responsibilities you actually do hold. God could have done all things God's self, and yet...in his infinite love, and just by the sheer nature of his beauty, always wants to be sharing responsibility. And so he brings us in. So the things you feel pressure over are not just because we're neurotically thinking about ourselves, but it's because God has really given us things to look after. And secondly, it's good news because you're not ultimately in control. God is.

If Joseph could not determine Jesus's life and neither could Virgin Mary, then you can't control your life. But what happened to Jesus is up to God. What happens to you is up to God. The work that you do is ultimately determined by God, and that is good news, because the work that God starts, God finishes. And the Holy Spirit loves to help us determine, are we holding on to something we need to let go of that we're really, it's an illusion, we're not in control.

Or is there some responsibility that we carry that we're refusing? The Holy Spirit loves to reveal this to us. So let us now, just for a moment, go to God in prayer and see what the Spirit may bring up in each of us. God, we ask that you reveal what you have asked us to hold, to be responsible for. And would you kindly reveal to each of us where we have fallen for the illusion, of control. We place those into your hands, and we trust that you will prepare us to do the work you have given us to do. Through Christ we pray. Amen.
