Introduction:

Joseph was a Just Man. What does it mean to be a ‘just’ person? If Joseph had followed the letter of the law he would have reported Mary and she would be stoned to death for adultery. What does it mean for a Sister of St. Joseph to be a ‘just’ person? The word justice means different thing to different people and situations. In a recent interview a family was waiting for ‘justice’ to avenge the killer of a family member and was impatient to see him die in the death chamber at San Quentin. Was it justice or revenge that this family desired? Is justice a strict adherence to the law or are we challenged as Christians to approach the right and dignity of all persons with mercy. Pope Francis has been an example of seeing all people, regardless of their sin or state of life through that lens. It doesn’t exclude or dismiss our responsibility to obey just laws and the moral teachings of the Church. If everyone lived in the spirit of these laws the human community would live in peace and harmony.

The underlying principle of all the social teachings of the church is the acknowledgement that all persons have dignity. When Sr. Rose Cecelia Harrington began her volunteer work at St. Joseph Center’s Bread and Roses she wanted those who came for a meal to be treated with dignity. Thus began a long history of table’s covered with clean clothes and fresh flowers. The homeless women, men and children are provided nutritious meals and are seated and served.

In their pastoral *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* the U.S. Bishops have summarized seven themes that we as just persons are to incorporate into our lives as Christians. The first theme is titled *The Rights and Dignity of the Human Person*. It stress that all life is sacred from the moment of conception to its last breath. In paragraph 45 the Bishops state: *Catholic teaching about the dignity of life calls us to oppose torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty; to prevent racism, and to overcome poverty and suffering. We revere the lives of children in the womb, the lives of persons dying in war and from starvation, and indeed the lives of all human beings.*

It may be easier for us to respect the dignity of those outside of our communities or families. We are called to treat all persons with dignity. Can we, like St. Joseph and Pope Francis, be merciful to all we encounter during our daily activities even those who may irritate or disagree with us?

Opening Prayer

**Creator, you entrusted Jesus to the care of St. Joseph. By the help of his prayers may we continue the mission entrusted to us. May we fulfill it with the same unselfish love of Joseph who lovingly cared for Mary and your Son. May we also serve you and all those we encounter with mercy and compassion.**

Reading: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24 (Reading can be found in missal for the Feast of St. Joseph)

Reflection: What does God call me to? Do I listen to God’s voice uttered ever so softly? Am I willing to listen to God’s call through an “angel” even though it conflicts with my plans? To whom is God calling me to be merciful and compassionate to today?

Sharing:

Intercessions

St. Joseph, you who accepted the word of an angel,

**Teach us faith**

Joseph, you who obeyed God through following the word of an angel

**Teach us to prayerfully discern your call.**

Joseph, you who were known as “just”’

**Teach us to work for justice and to live justly.**

Joseph, you who worked long hours to support the Christ child,

**Teach us to work not for reward but to support the mission of Jesus**

Joseph, you who worked with so few tools,

**Teach us poverty and to be good stewards of the tools you do give us.**

Joseph, you showed the highest degree of love by respecting and loving Mary.

**Teach us the true meaning of unselfish love**

Joseph, you who dealt with unpleasant customers,

**Teach us to be patient and kind toward those who are not pleasant to us in our day to day ministry.**

Joseph, you who were an alien in a foreign country,

**Help us to welcome and support all migrants and their families.**

Please add your own prayers of intercession. For whom and what should we pray?

Concluding Prayer:

**O God, You were pleased to choose Saint Joseph as the husband of Mary and the guardian of your Son. Grant that, as we honor him as the patron of our community, we may imitate his life of compassion and mercy. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**