

St Pius & St Anthony 4th Sunday Advent Homily 2026 Year A Matt 3:1-12

Proverbs 19:21 "Many are the plans of the human heart, but it is the decision of the LORD that endures."

Mr Fix-it, is in a fix! St Joseph is a carpenter, so he knows a thing or two about how to work oneself out of a jam. But in the gospel, St Joseph faces a dilemma. Things aren't going as planned or blueprinted and what is he to do? He is betrothed to Mary, and has entered a formal contract for marriage, yet a major deal-changer has popped up in the arrangement, Mary is already with-child! Where did this come from? Well, we know it's the Holy Spirit, but Joseph hasn't received that memo yet -a work change order, a contract adjustment. So what is Joseph going to do?

Maybe related to this, change in plans, I wonder if this had ever happened to you? You open up the box, lay out all the pieces, and begin to assemble the house, shelves or new cabinet, and then you run into a bad fit, some of the last pieces (always those last pieces-Why?) seem to have wrong dimensions--they don't match up, and then what do you do? Maybe ask, "Is there anything else in that box?", to hear back, "Oh yes, the manual!" What do they say but when all else fails, refer to the instructions! Or did Bart Simpson say, "Sis, give me the *Destructions*"

St Joseph tries! Things are not going as he planned. Don't we hear a lot, the saying, "To make God laugh, tell him your plans!" Not that God needs a laugh, but this emphasizes our shortsightedness when taking pride in our work only to have our ideas get frustrated by life's many variables and breakdowns.

Which, by the way, as a pastor I want to include this here, that as we enter this chaotic and rushed holy day period now, I tell everyone, "Be gentle with yourselves and others, because few plans truly ever go as we want them to for a ***perfect Christmas***. We plan it, and should, but also be patient, as everyone's schedules and life will inevitably intervene too, and adjust what we expected. Plan on that too! And prepare with patience, with yourself and everyone else!

But back to Joseph's dilemma: the Scottish poet has a line people often repeat that goes, "The best-laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, Go often awry..... His poem tells of a little mouse's home overturned by a farmer's plow's blade, yet the poet says the mouse is the more blest because he only knows the present! He is not haunted by despair over past plans burnt, nor is he anxious over contingent future plans. No, the mouse just gets on with 'next right thing'. Between the mouse and man, the industrious mouse is the blessed one who adjusts and builds again – which is what St Joseph ends up doing here too! But not until first trying it again His own way.

I credit Joseph for being creative. As a carpenter, he is used to finding a work-around on the jobsite and to think up a plan-B when the initial blueprints are frustrated. But here, it takes him one more step of his own doing, before he realizes that God is the real project manager on this job! So, what is Joseph's initial solution? The reading reminded us that he was a "righteous" man (Matt 1:19) He knows societal custom and propriety (normal order of marriage before the baby carriage!) He knows his faith tradition's law, too (prohibition of reproduction outside of marriage!). Yet above all, he has a compassionate heart to do both the right thing and to take care of people while doing it. He loves and has deepest care for Mary, yet also feels bound to uphold honestly and with integrity the institution of marriage (*he feels he would be 'lying' to go ahead and marry--Think of his squirming every time someone commends/praises little Jesus "What a son you have! And Joseph would feel inside "He's not mine."*) So, this set-up makes Joseph so uncomfortable – it is not the proper sequencing of action. As a carpenter he knows that footers come before the house joists, load-bearing-walls before roof trusses, so he wishes to ask off this job, by coming up with a plan to dismiss Mary and break this contract amiably. Being 'righteous' Joseph is not a gossipy tattler, and not a vengeful punisher. He can live and let live, and so wishes to simply take care of Mary with another arrangement - maybe send her to live with relatives out of view -still take care of her as family, but not as his wife.

As a gifted carpenter, Joseph knows how to come up with plan b's to get things done, like when wood supplies come up short, or workers don't show up.

But this is a Way larger project than he has ever encountered, and when he asks off the job, that is when God shows up through angel in a dream to introduce the change-work order, and adjustment to the blueprint plan. God saves this job! God brings this home building project to completion (*the Old Testament had foretold of God building an 'eternal house of David' of which Jesus is born into as Messiah- 2 Samuel 7:16 "Your house and your kingdom are firm forever before me; your rule shall be firmly established forever*) Joseph came up with a great idea, but it was not God's idea. It was a great plan, but it was not God's plan. I learn from Joseph the importance of thinking ahead and planning, but ultimately subjecting all my plans to God's Board of adjustments (Gabriel, director of it?). My idea may even be good, but it needs to be God's. I have to go to THE instructions – the source. And that is God. God has the only plan that matters-that lasts, and only God's will, will be done in the end.

Psalm 127:1 "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain."

Matthew 7:24-26 "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand."