

St Pius & St Anthony Holy Family Sunday Homily 2026 Year A Matt

A lot of dreaming going on in the gospel today! Dreams are the stuff of music, right? Aerosmith tells us to “Dream On”, or the classic Gary Wright, sings to a “Drreeeeeam--weaver”, the Eurythmics say “Sweet dreams are made of this”, but our reading today is swimming in dreams! If you are wondering why I seem hung-up on them today, well, “You may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one....” I am with John Lennon! But we are not the only ones, our gospel writer Matthew is singling out dreams as a primary means of God’s communicating to the Holy Family for their guidance. Matthew knows his Old Testament scripture and that St Joseph’s namesake from there is the Patriarch Joseph-son of Jacob, was highly regarded as ‘close to God’ by his gift of interpreting dreams (Genesis 40:12, 13, 18, 19, 41:25-32). Joseph is right up there with the prophet Daniel being comfortable with dreams, fluent in dream language (Daniel 2:16-23, 28-30, 4).

Dreams are intriguing. Some cultures make a practice of sharing dreams over breakfast as a bonding event, maybe like a moment of prayer together. But we may ask, “Is there really anything to them?” Different researchers propose several theories, as to the purpose of dreams. Are they simply, 1) the brain filing away memories of the day, or 2) the heart’s way to process/understand people & emotions, , or 3) do dreams ‘practice’ us through terrifying fears or desensitize us to past traumas? Or how about 4) dreams’ purpose as background slow simmer, to creatively surface new solutions to old problems. Or are dreams, as I hear Matthew telling us, 5) subtle, personalized hints from God about directions to take or postures to assume about something important?

What suggest to me the importance of dreams, is that everyone I bet has a recurring dream? Are we still dreaming about riding to the city park on bikes while both bike tires are flat? Or getting to the high school final exam room and door is locked, or school bell rings and we are stuck turning our book locker knobs-forgot combination? Some of the situation details may change but the experience of that emotion is the same – when I opened/closed our family business in college, ‘d always dream of forgetting the alarm code, and I’d set it off--police are coming! Everyone has some recurring dream: Caught outside in a terrible windstorm, lost in an unknown city, or can’t find a bathroom, or what happened to my clothes?

Psychologists tell us to be patient about them – each dream is individual and details surface based on unique associations for our own experience. And to be careful about them – don’t rashly jump to conclusions. In this high stress, visit busy, time of year, with end coming, I bet we are all having a wild share of dreams.

About dreams, I like the story of the man dreaming of being chased and caught by a bear. It plays out that after a hot pursuit, the bear knocks him to the ground, and while standing over him showing his big teeth, the man asks, (because all animals talk in dreams?), “Are you going to eat me?” and the bear suspensefully, says, “*I don’t know, this is your dream!*” Again, every dream is individual, and its meaning has to be worked out personally.

So, back to our gospel reading, Mary’s Joseph is blessed with recurring dreams, and four divine messages given him through dreams. We hear about three of the travel ones, in today’s gospel, as an angel directs him where to go (*even recalibrating the exact endpoint – first southeast to Egypt, then back over to Judea later, but then adjusting it to go far up north to Nazareth for best safety*) to keep Jesus alive, (*the travel directions are Matt 2:13, 19 & 22---& His first dream was Joseph’s annunciation Mt 1:20-21*). Dreams factor large in Matthew (the most Old Testament -friendly gospel), as we also see the wise men dream a warning not to return to Herod’s palace (Matt 2:12) next Sunday & later in the gospel we see, Pilate’s wife have a disturbing dream about her husband interacting with Jesus (Mat 27:19).

So, since God speaks to Joseph in dreams, he may be a lesson to us not to overlook dreams as one channel among many, that God can use to broadcast to us! I was blessed in the seminary to be invited by a psych professor on the staff to join a small “Dream Interpretation” group. He (professional) guided it, but each fellow offered (or projected) our experiences to help interpret each other’s dream meanings. It was a great mining of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell’s explorations of mythological symbols found in our collective unconscious’ archetypes & personalities.

Again, we know of several ways of how God can speak to us, such as **1) through His written word** (*Isaiah 55:11 ...my word that goes forth from my mouth: will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it*), but also **2) through his creation** (*Romans 1:20 “Ever since the creation of the world, God’s invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made*) which includes out Catholic sacraments with their material elements (*“I will come to you.....” John 14:18*) **3) but God also communicates to us through his people** (Matt 18:20 “where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I”)/**and prophets** -trusted counselors-magisterium (*Isaiah 51:16 “I have put my words into your mouth*) but maybe most often **4) through our hearts/conscience** (*Deut 30:14 “my word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it”*) and **5) Through prayer in Spirit** (*Romans 8:26 “Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings”- in us*). But we don’t want to overlook, God coming to us, through dreams, where God may use these multiple ways together: our hearts & prayer, his creation as

material, and His word and people to touch, to speak and encounter with us. But as our spiritual directors and psychologists advise: Be patient and be personal. Meaning doesn't come pre-packaged and ready-made – No. we have to open it and prepare it. Details are individual, and need fine-tuning (notice that in Joseph's dreams often we hear of "an angel appeared in a dream" too- that's a helper within the dream). So what do we do? Here's two spiritual principles to guide interpretation of your dreams: 1) First, test the spirits: (*1 John 4:1 "but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" & 1 Thessalonians 5:21 "Test everything; retain what is good."*) And secondly, what is the dream's fruit? The fruit proves the proposition. Jesus teaches us that "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt 7:16 & 20)

So with St Joseph, we don't want to overlook dreams as a possible way of God's communicating with us. By them, God may bring His peace to us, and guide us through our journeys safely to Him.

Joseph's Dreams

- **First dream:** In Matthew 1:20–21, Joseph is told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because she has conceived by the Holy Spirit.
- **Second dream:** In Matthew 2:13, Joseph is warned to leave Bethlehem and flee to Egypt.
- **Third dream:** In Matthew 2:19–20, while in Egypt, Joseph is told that it is safe to go back to Israel.
- **Fourth dream:** In Matthew 2:22, because he had been warned in a dream, Joseph awakens to depart for the region of Galilee instead of going to Judea