

- While today is the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, it's also our patronal feast day: the feast of Sts. Ann and Joachim, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- It's good for us to reflect upon their lives, for Joachim and Ann are wonderful examples of people who grew in true holiness by their faithfulness and absolute trust in God.
- We don't know a lot of the details about the lives of Ann and Joachim; Scripture doesn't even mention them. But a few details have come down to us through tradition.
- In particular, we know that Joachim and Ann suffered a great deal with infertility. They had prayed for years for a child, but to no avail. As you may know, infertility in their time and culture was thought to be a punishment from God.
- In fact, one day when Joachim went to the Temple to make a sacrifice, he was turned away because he and Ann were childless, and it was believed that they were not in God's favor. Embarrassed and grieved, Joachim went to the wilderness near Jericho to fast and pray.
- While St. Ann grieved, she also persevered in her prayer, and one day – while St. Joachim was still out in Jericho – they were both visited separately by an angel who told them that Ann would bear a child who would be spoken of around the world.
- Overjoyed at this thought, St. Ann promised that she would dedicate this child to God's service as a sign of her gratitude for this answer to her prayers.
- Joachim returned home, and as we know, St. Ann not only conceived a child; she conceived an immaculate child – a child without the stain of original sin; a child of singular perfection.
- As the Immaculate Conception took place within the womb of St. Ann, it's customary to dedicate a chapel or an altar to Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception in churches named after St. Ann, just as our chapel is.
- As we reflect upon our own family lives, it is good for us to ask for the intercession of Joachim and Ann, that they may help us grow in holiness and faithfulness.
- Moreover, those of you who are trying to raise your children to be holy, or those of you who are currently trying to have children, will find Sts. Ann and Joachim to be very helpful intercessors indeed.
- Yet we shouldn't simply ask for Joachim and Ann's intercession in our prayers; we should earnestly try to imitate their lives. They are beautiful models of people who persevered in prayer and continually gave thanks to our Lord for His blessings.
- St. Ann and St. Joachim show us that the natural fruit of marriage is holiness. They show us the power of hope and trust in the Lord. They give us an idea of how blessed family life can be. They remind us of the necessity of placing God above all things in our life.
- But even more than imitating Joachim and Ann, we must thank them! The world is indebted to this blessed couple because through their generosity and faithfulness, our Sovereign Lord was offered a gift of surpassing beauty: a chaste mother who alone was worthy of Him.
- If it weren't for St. Ann and St. Joachim, we wouldn't have the Virgin Mary. And without the Virgin Mary, there would be no Jesus, and thus no salvation for any of us.
- Today's Gospel presents us with more parables: the parable of the treasure buried in the field, the parable of the pearl of great price, and the parable of the net thrown into the sea.
- While the details of this week's parables are different than the last two weeks, the general message is still the same: we must do our very best to live our faith with integrity of heart if we hope to see the Kingdom of God.

- We must try to make Christ and our faith in Him the highest priority in our lives. For in doing so we secure the only thing that's going to matter in the long run, our salvation.
- The Lord and His holy will must be our pearl of great price, and we must be willing to forsake all else for Him. The Kingdom of Heaven and the hope of someday going there is something that must be constantly on our minds.
- In our world today it is so easy to become cynical and to lose hope, especially when we encounter suffering, or when things don't go our way, or when our prayers aren't answered as we want them to be.
- Sadly, many people's hearts become bitter and hard because of the sufferings they have to endure or because they feel like God isn't listening to them.
- Perhaps it would have been very easy for St. Ann and St. Joachim to lose the hope of ever having a child. Maybe it would have been easy for them to turn their backs on God. Perhaps in the pain of their infertility they felt they were being unjustly punished by God.
- And yet in their faithfulness, they didn't lose hope. And eventually they were rewarded by becoming the parents of a child who would come to be known as the Highest Honor of our Race, and the grandparents of the one who would be the Savior of all Mankind!
- Had they allowed bitterness and cynicism a place in their hearts, they might not have accepted the Lord's blessing when it finally came. And that would have been catastrophic for all of us!
- The point is that we never know when and how God will choose to act in our lives. We simply cannot comprehend the mind of God. We can only trust Him.
- And if we truly believe in the Gospel message – that our Lord *is* Love and Mercy, that He is Goodness Itself – then we have every reason to trust Him. His will, however painful it may seem at times, is the very best thing that could ever happen to any of us!
- Thus, we should humbly accept all that comes our way – both the good and the bad – and faithfully persevere in our prayers as did Joachim and Ann.
- Perhaps today you find yourself dealing with something difficult, or perhaps a particular prayer of yours has never been answered. Do not despair, and do not lose hope! And like St. Ann and St. Joachim, persevere in your prayer.
- Our Lord is kind and loving, and if He doesn't answer your prayer as you want, it's probably because He has something better in mind for you.
- Make our Lord your pearl of great price, for as His passion, death and resurrection make abundantly clear: we are His pearl of great price.