

Creating a St. Joseph Altar

A common Catholic tradition for St. Joseph Feast day (March 19th) is to create an altar in his honor. These altars can be as big or as small or as elaborate or as simple as one would like!

A little Background to the St. Joseph Altar:

The tradition of a St. Joseph's Altar began ages old and in Sicily after the people prayed to St. Joseph to intercede for them. They prayed for an end to a horrible famine that was plaguing them. After their prayers were answered, they made wonderful altars to honor St. Joseph to thank him for his help. Every year on his feast day they continued to honor him and create beautiful altars filled with a feast of artistically designed food. Then, when everyone had all they could eat, the rest of the food was given to the poor!



Here are some traditional ideas for creating your own altar:

- **3 Tiers (steps):** The base of the altar has three tiers to symbolize the Holy Trinity. The 3 tiers can be made by added steps of boxes to a table top, then drape a cloth over it and the table. There are countless ways to make 3 tiers - use whatever you have on hand.
- **Statue or Picture of St. Joseph** at the top. Don't be afraid to add images or statues of Jesus or Mary, of other saints, too! If you don't have a statue or image of St. Joseph you might like to print one from the internet.
- **Candles** - Candles are beautiful on these altars; however they can be scary if you have kids around. Another option is electric candles or make some fake candles.
- **Shaped Breads and Pastries** - Bake the bread and pasties in symbolic shapes like: a staff, lilies, saw, hammer, Sacred and Immaculate Hearts, doves, Bible, monstrance, crown of thorns, chalice and hosts, crosses, fish, lambs, palms, decorative wreaths, angels, wings, etc. Kids enjoy helping with this; it's like play-doh! (see recipe below)



- **Flowers** - Lilies are a symbol of St. Joseph, but any flowers will work. If you can't buy real flowers, consider artificial flowers, or make some paper lilies
- **Fresh Fruit** - pineapples, oranges, bananas, apples, grapes, etc. - lots of produce to show the abundance of food and the end to the Sicilian famine. It shows how blessed we are!
- **Wine** as a symbol of the Wedding at Cana and God's blessings. **Bottled water** might be good to go with the wine or in place of the wine, if needed.
- **Prayer Intentions** - Add a basket to the altar so everyone can write prayer intentions on small slips of paper and add them to the basket.
- **12 whole Fish for the 12 Apostles** – Whole fish can be difficult for most situations so consider canned tuna or tuna salad formed into the shape of a fish. Also see our Tuna Fish Cake recipe below. Another idea to consider is fish-shaped gummy candy or goldfish crackers.
- **Names or Images of Friends and Relatives Who Have Died.** St. Joseph is the patron of a happy death we ask that St. Joseph help these souls enter into heaven if they are in purgatory.
- **Fava Beans:** During the famine the peasants began to eat fava beans which were often fed to the cows. Create a fava bean soup or if you like you can just display some beans on the altar.
- **Meatless foods:** The food is typically meatless because the Sicilian peasants rarely had meat. Plus, St. Joseph's feast day is always during Lent.
- **Sawdust or cracker crumbs in a bowl:** This symbolizes the saw dust of St. Joseph's workshop.
- Last but not least: **Goodie Bags!** These are filled with treats, a medal, prayer cards and other holy items.

Remember, these are just ideas to consider adding to your St. Joseph's altar. They are NOT requirements! Do what makes sense for you in your situation. Maybe just a statue with flowers is all you can do and that's fine!

Flat Bread

- 4 cups flour (whole wheat, white, or both-mixed)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 stick of butter -soften
- 1 ½ cup water

Mix dry ingredients together. Cut in butter and mix together. Add one cup of water, mix well. Then, add an additional ½ cup water (a little at a time). Too much water will make it too sticky. Stir until it starts to take form.

Use your hands to knead it and make shapes. (Don't over knead it - kids love to over-knead.) You could roll this out on floured surface and use cookie cutters if you desire.

Bake on buttered cookie sheet at 350° for 10 to 30 minutes -depending on the size and thickness of your shapes.



Tuna Fish Cakes

- 6 cans of tuna in water - 5oz. cans (drained and crumbled with a fork)
- 3/4 cup ranch dressing
 - **or** mayonnaise
 - **or** sour cream
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup of shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup Italian bread crumbs



Need Gluten Free? Used crushed corn flakes or crushed rice cereal.
A half cup of coconut flour will work, too.

Note: You might want to add Italian seasoning if you are not using the seasoned bread crumbs.

Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients together. Make sure the large pieces of tuna are crushed and well mixed.
2. On a greased cookie sheet form a 1/2 cup to 1 cup of the tuna mixture into fish shapes. Press the shape together to keep it firm. Make them about 3/4 to 1-inch thick.
3. Bake at 350° for about 30 minutes; until the cheese is bubbling and they are getting brown. They will be a lightly crisped on the outside and softer in the middle.