

## SAINTS ALIVE! MARCH 19: ST. JOSEPH, PATRON SAINT OF FAMILIES



St. Joseph is the patron saint of families.

We don't know much about Joseph yet what we do know leaves us with the comforting knowledge that Joseph placed family first:

Despite his intention to quietly divorce Mary, who was pregnant before she and Joseph were betrothed, Joseph responded to a visit from an angel in his dream and immediately took Mary as his wife.

When the angel came to tell him that his family was in danger, he immediately left his possessions, his family, his friends, and fled to

Egypt with Mary and Jesus. When it was safe to return, Joseph protected his family by settling in Nazareth.

When Jesus stayed in the Temple Joseph and Mary searched with great anxiety for three days for him (Luke 2:48).

Joseph placed family first. In Catholic social teaching, the family is the seed of society. Pope Francis eloquently describes the importance of the family: "it is necessary to reaffirm the conviction that every family is the principal setting for the growth of each individual, since it is through the family that human beings become open to life and the natural need for relationships with others. Over and over again we see that family bonds are essential for the stability of relationships in society." He concludes that "there is a need for suitable policies aimed at supporting, assisting and strengthening the family!"

No family is alike. None are paradigms of perfection without the stains of conflicts and emotions and history. Joseph is one of the three members of the Holy Family yet Joseph was also a stepfather.

My mother remarried when I was in high school. Sitting in church hearing about the importance of the family, and thinking that it only meant mom and dad and a handful of kids made me feel different, excluded. I wish I knew then what I realized much later: Joseph was a stepfather and part of the Holy Family.

The black and white television version of the family with a mom and dad and a handful of well-behaved kids is atypical.

- Parents die.
- Children are removed from parents and placed in foster care.
- Half of all American children will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage.
- The number one reason parents divorce is over finances and financial stress; most families have a difficult time making ends meet, a problem that has grown exponentially since the Great Recession.
- Because of our biased legal system, black children are seven and a half times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison.
- Parents remarry.

Although he was a stepfather Joseph exemplifies any parent's priority: put family first. To repeat the words of Pope Francis, we must advocate with our governments to create "for suitable policies aimed at supporting, assisting and strengthening the family!"

The family is the seed of society.

St. Joseph, pray for us and our families.



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