

PASTOR'S CORNER

St. Joseph Altar History and 2021 Dates



We are happy to report that our St. Joseph Altar will be back this year on March 19-20 after a year's absence due to Covid. See the Schedule of Events in this bulletin.

History of St. Joseph Altar: In Sicily, on the Feast of St. Joseph, March 19, Catholics give thanks to their Patron Saint for interceding in a time of a famine during the Middle Ages. According to tradition, there was a severe drought in the country and all the crops were dying. The people prayed to St. Joseph for rain, promising that if their prayers were answered, they would prepare a great feast to honor him. The rains came, the crops grew and the people were saved from starvation. In gratitude, they prepared a banquet for their patron saint and set up food tables for the poor in their towns and cities.

From this beginning, the custom developed of setting up altars annually on St. Joseph's Day to recall the saint's intercession and to give thanks. A typical St. Joseph Altar includes religious items, memorial photos, candles, flowers, fava beans, and special foods, cakes, breads and cookies. There is no meat on the altar since the Feast falls in Lent.

The altar and food have a symbolic value. The altar is set up in the shape of a cross to represent the crucifix of Jesus in three levels representing the Trinity. Altar breads are shaped like St. Joseph's carpentry tools. A baked whole fish represents the miracle of multiplication and the wine the miracle at Cana. The fava bean decorates the altar, because during the drought, it alone survived and kept many from starvation. The custom of the St. Joseph Altar came to New Orleans with the Sicilian immigrants who settled here in the 1800s.

At this year's Altar, there will be timed entrances, social distancing, masking and dinners to-go. Help us spread the word. *Vive San Giuseppe!*

God bless,
Fr. Joe