

## *Into the Desert with Joseph* *Lent 2021*

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith”*  
(Hebrews 12:1-2).

The passage above makes no mention of St. Joseph, as a matter of fact, very few verses in scripture refer to St. Joseph. Those that do are mainly found in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels. Yet even with little scriptural content on the foster father of Jesus and the spouse of the Virgin Mary, he is, as Pope Francis reminded us in December, the Patron of the Universal Church, a powerful witness of faith in Jesus Christ.

What makes St. Joseph a companion for us during Lent? Doesn’t tradition tell us he had already died prior to the start of Jesus’ public ministry? It does. That does not mean, however, that his life’s example, his witness, cannot offer us much to reflect upon these forty days.

In his apostolic letter announcing the Year of St. Joseph, *Patris Corde (With a Father’s Heart)*, Pope Francis distinguishes Joseph’s active faith from a passive acceptance. With very little explanation Joseph let go of any plans he had for his life to care for God’s only Son and provide for Mary. He embraced the numerous trials associated with this great responsibility *always in silence*, always with trust. In this sense he followed in the footsteps of “a great cloud of witnesses,” as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, witnesses like Abraham and Moses.

Going “*Into the Desert with Joseph*” this Lent is an invitation to *follow his example of silence* as the first of his virtues to embrace. To go *into the desert* is to remove the distractions that crowd our lives. In our busy worlds there is so much noise that to hear God’s voice can almost be impossible. Can we embrace the fortitude needed to eliminate noise? Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once said, “one sometimes gets the impression that people are frightened of being cut off, even for an instant, from the torrent of words and images that mark and fill the day” (General Audience, March 7, 2012). Can we, for example, eliminate a constant need to check the news feed on our smart devices? Can we fast from television and streaming? Can we let go of the need to check our favorite blogs or to make cruel or insensitive comments about others be they a national figure, family member or stranger? Can we instead set aside time for prayer, listening to God as he speaks in scripture? Silence is a type of asceticism. Silence is to actively listen to God, like Joseph did, to listen to God who comes to us in silent moments.

As we begin Lent this week consider setting aside a specific time for prayer each day, sign-up for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament at Church on Fridays or come up on your own during the week or on Wednesday evenings. Pray for a loved one or for someone in the parish (see the information on Lent Postcards under *Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament*). Commit to prayerfully reading the Gospel of Mark. It’s the shortest of the four gospels. If the whole Gospel is too much for you, then use the *Little Black Book* to mediate on the Sunday Gospels of Lent. Pray with your family. Mediate with the *Stations of the Cross* on your own or with the parish every Friday evening. Participate in daily Mass or livestream Mass.

Each of us needs to be vaccinated now more than ever with the best medicine to fight off the diseases of the world. Going “*Into the Desert with Joseph*” protects us with his silence that we might hear God’s voice and on hearing carry out the work God commands. In the words of the psalmist, “*Be still and know that I am God*” (46:11).