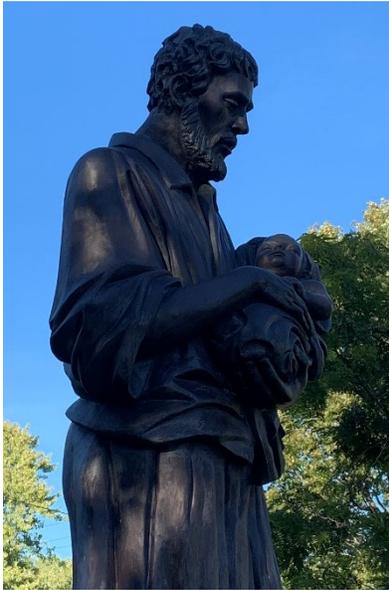


Saint Joseph, the Hidden Saint at Easter

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Pope Francis has proclaimed 2021 a special Year of Saint Joseph to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Pope Pius IX naming Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Catholic Church. Of course, Saint Joseph is also the Patron Saint of Canada. According to Friar Ed Debono of Saint John the Apostle Parish in Kingston, the Canadian devotion to Saint Joseph has its roots in the earliest days of the settlement known as New France. In 1624, the French settlers designated Saint Joseph as their patron saint, as proposed by the Recollect Franciscan Friars who served in the new colony. This designation, which was confirmed by Pope Urban VIII in 1637, has particular significance for the Archdiocese of Kingston. In 1808, the first church built in the area of the present city of Kingston was named for Saint Joseph, and Saint Joseph's was the only Catholic church in Kingston until Saint Mary's Cathedral was built in the 1840s.

Pope Francis refers to Saint Joseph as one who often goes unnoticed. This reminds us, he says, that those who appear hidden or in the shadows play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. I think of Saint Joseph as one who can accompany us through this paschal season. The Gospels tell us that the Blessed Virgin Mary accompanied Jesus on his way of the cross and crucifixion, and I think of Saint Joseph as the hidden person who also accompanies Jesus from heaven. He now accompanies us on our journey as we complete the way of Jesus's cross in our time. Saint Joseph certainly knew the cross in his life, but now he shares the joys and glory of heaven. Jesus has promised us new life, and that is the joy of the Easter Season.

The joy of Easter is not based on earthly happiness or situation, but on the love of God revealed in Jesus and confirmed by his Resurrection. In these troubled and worrisome times, we can ask Saint Joseph to inflame our hearts with spiritual joy. The Second Reading for Easter Sunday exhorts us: "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above...for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory" (Colossians 3.1-4). In a time when the concern and vision of most people is focused only on this earthly life, Saint Joseph can help us lift our thoughts and hearts to the reality of God's Kingdom. Let us pray in a special way this holy season for spiritual joy.

Our family celebrations will be smaller this Easter, since the pandemic has made it impossible for us to gather as we normally would, but we can make Saint Joseph present at our Easter meal. It was a Jewish custom to set a place for the expected Prophet at the Passover Meal. Similarly, we could set a place for Saint Joseph at the table or at least remember him in prayer. If we are unable to attend Mass, we can think of Saint Joseph homeless in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus, or exiled in Egypt far from his family in Nazareth. We are not alone -- Saint Joseph is with us, and, where he is, there also are Jesus and Mary.

Very little is known about the life of Saint Joseph; we presume that he died before Jesus began his public ministry. Over the course of this pandemic, many parishioners have lost loved ones,

and some were not able to be with their dying relatives in their final hours. At times like these, we can look to Saint Joseph as a patron and consoler. I think of him being with those who are dying, just as Jesus and Mary were with him in his death.

I cannot think of Saint Joseph without reflecting on the family. Families are facing pressure from all sides, which is pulling its members in diverse directions. The family is key to the wellbeing and life of the Church, as well as the State, even if this fact is not recognized by many in our society, including civic leaders. This is an excellent time to pray to Saint Joseph to safeguard the family. In many ways, Saint Joseph is a 'man for all seasons'. He is the Guardian of Families, who knows the perils that many families experience. He had to leave his home and livelihood in Nazareth to go to Bethlehem, and then had to flee with his young family to Egypt to protect them from the wrath of King Herod. In the same way, he is the Protector of those in our world who are migrants and exiles, especially those persecuted for their Christian faith. Saint Joseph was a carpenter who worked with his hands to provide a living for his family. As Pope Francis tells us, he is an example both for workers and for those seeking employment and a life of dignity for themselves and their families. "In our own day, when employment has once more become a burning social issue, and unemployment at times reaches record levels even in nations that for decades have enjoyed a certain degree of prosperity, there is a renewed need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which Saint Joseph is an exemplary patron." (*Patris Corde*) Although there is little written about the life of Saint Joseph, we can imagine him as a model of humility, courage, and the patient acceptance of the will of God, who will help us in our present difficulties and in all the circumstances of life.

Normally, during a special Year of Prayer, there would be diocesan celebrations and pilgrimages, but neither is feasible during a pandemic. The Archdiocese of Kingston has within its borders five public health zones, each with a different colour designation. This makes it impossible to have diocesan celebrations or parish events. Since Saint Joseph was a family man and is the Guardian and Protector of the Holy Family and all families, perhaps it is appropriate that this year devoted to him must be celebrated within families. Suggestions for family prayer, including a special Prayer to St. Joseph, can be found on the Archdiocesan website. Since the Church and State rise and fall on the strength of families, it is important that we do all that we can to strengthen our own families in prayer and the practice of the faith.

Saint Joseph, pray for us. May we all have a blessed and happy Easter.