



Introduction

The tradition of St. Joseph Table dates back to the Middle Ages originating from the island of Sicily. It was said that there was a drought on the island and that the crops were in danger. The people prayed to St. Joseph for intercession to end the drought and promised him that if the drought ended they would prepare a feast in his honor to which everyone, especially the poor, would be invited. The drought ended and the tradition started. This custom was brought to the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries when Sicilians immigrated to Louisiana, Texas, California, Colorado and New York.

Today this tradition continues and can be adapted for local communities. Traditionally it was called the St. Joseph Altar Table because the food was set up under a statue of St. Joseph in the church, which was typically a side altar. As social halls or community spaces were built in the United States, the tables were set up outside the main body of the church. Yet, the tradition of the elaborate set up continued to make it look like an altar.



Making the Table. It is important to make the St. Joseph table appealing by adding special touches, such as using a table cloth and placing candles around it. Students can be involved in making items in honor of St. Joseph which can be placed on the table as well. You don't have to make it elaborate, but it should be more than just putting out some food on a table with a free sign.

St. Joseph's Table Checklist

The Table

The first part is making the table to St. Joseph. A tablecloth is placed on a table. Then the statue of St. Joseph placed in the middle. Around the statue are placed candles, flowers and other items that the students have made in honor of St. Joseph. An empty basket for petitions should also be placed on the altar for people to place petitions in.

Table Checklist (ideas)

- _____ Statue of St. Joseph
- _____ Flowers
- _____ Candles
- _____ Table cloth
- _____ Prayer cards of St. Joseph to give away
- _____ Empty basket for card/ petitions and empty sheet to write more.
- _____ Empty basket for any monetary donations to the poor



Food

The second part is the food. The tradition of the table is to provide breads, but also food that is special to your community or ethnic heritage. It is not a potluck table for a party. The idea is to provide food that others can take home, this is why bread and fruit work well. You may ask people to come bring food but then to help themselves to something else on the table. The food is offered to all who need it.

Blessings and Prayers

There is a Rite in the Book of Blessings for this tradition. "The Blessing of the Saint Joseph Table"