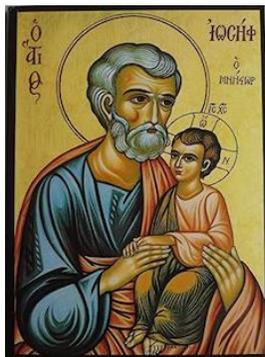


Pope Francis proclaims “Year of St Joseph”



With the Apostolic Letter “Patris corde” (“With a Father’s Heart”), Pope Francis recalls the 150th anniversary of the declaration of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. To mark the occasion, the Holy Father has proclaimed a “Year of Saint Joseph” from December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021. The International Centre is celebrating this year with this month’s newsletter dedicated to St. Joseph and Sr. Thérèse Vacher’s explanation of why the Congregation took the name of St. Joseph.

St. Joseph and the Preparations for the Foundation

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When Monsignor **Henri de Maupas**, chaplain to Anne of Austria, came to Le Puy to take possession of his episcopal see in 1644, one of his first activities was to rehabilitate the Montferrand Hospital, which took in orphan girls and widows. The developments and enhancements continued in the years that followed. Françoise Eyraud, the future superior of the first community of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy, present at the hospital as early as 1646, has just been appointed "mistress" of the orphan girls. A document from 1648 tells us that the Hospital bears the name of "Maison de la Charité des Filles Orphelines de St Joseph" (House of Charity of the St. Joseph Orphan Daughters.) Could it be because **Father Jean-Pierre Médaille**, a Jesuit had given the Rules to the Daughters of St. Joseph and the girls and women who worked there were already living it as early as 1646? Or was it simply because Monsignor de Maupas had a special devotion to this saint? This is what he expressed in a letter addressed to his sister on May 4, 1648: "This great saint," he said (who is my particular patron this year) "must be in singular veneration for many reasons." It is possible that the Daughters of St.

Joseph were among the reasons for thanksgiving by Monsignor de Maupas to St. Joseph during that year.

Indeed, Monsignor de Maupas could not ignore the activities of Father Jean-Pierre Médaille in his diocese, and in particular the existence of this group of pious widows and daughters, eager to consecrate themselves to God and to the service of their neighbor, and for whom a Rule had already been written. At the same time, Father Médaille and Monsignor de Maupas are preparing, on the one hand, the regrouping of the first sisters of St. Joseph, and on the other hand, the Hospital for Orphans, which they will have to take care of. This Rule itself, the first draft of a life project, is well named Rule for the Sisters (or: Daughters) of St. Joseph."

The date of the official foundation is given to us in the preface to the first Constitutions. Printed in Vienna en Dauphiné in 1694, this preface gives us more precise indications about the foundation.

It was "on the fifteenth day of the month of October, feast of St. Thérèse, in the year one thousand six

hundred and fifty," that the bishop assembled the first sisters "in the Hospital of the Orphans of Le Puy, and gave them the direction"... He gave them "an exhortation... by which he animated all these new Sisters to the purest love of God, and to the most perfect Charity of the Neighbor; he then placed them under the protection of the glorious St. Joseph; and ordained that their Congregation should be called the Congregation of the Sisters or Daughters of St. Joseph; he gave them Rules for their conduct... and finally he confirmed the establishment of the said Congregation, and the Rules which he had given them by his Letters Patent of the second of March, one thousand six hundred and fifty-one."

From this first recognition of the Sisters by the bishop, let us first recall what interests us, namely: the name of St. Joseph. We do not know which of the Hospital, or of the group of Sisters, was the first to receive this patronage. It may be that, since the first Rules were written in 1646, the women - at least some of them - for whom they were intended, were already working at the Hospital of the Orphans of Le Puy. In any case, it is this patronage and this blessing that has crossed the centuries. It is important for us to understand its meaning.

The Name of St Joseph, Why This Choice?

Remaining in the shadows until the 16th century, St. Joseph then took a prominent place in Catholic devotion. In 1562, Teresa of Avila placed the first Reformed Carmelite convent she founded in Avila under the patronage of St. Joseph. The same would be true for almost all the monasteries - about ten - that would follow this first foundation until her death in 1582. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, St. Joseph is presented as the one who lives, unceasingly,

close to Jesus, that is to say, the model of the mystical life. His cult spread in France through the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, then the Jesuits, the Franciscans and many brotherhoods. St. Joseph then became the model for manual workers and also the patron saint of the Christian family. Later, he will become the "Patron of the Good Death". A large number of brotherhoods developed under his patronage, associating charitable services with pious activities.

In the middle of the 17th century, for the sisters, whom he named "Sisters of St. Joseph," Father Médaille first wrote a Rule, then Constitutions. It is noteworthy that the official foundation of the new Congregation took place on October 15, 1650, on the feast of St. Teresa of Avila. The choice of October 15 is certainly significant of the mystical aspect of the vocation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Already at the beginning of the Regulations, Father Médaille indicates that this new Congregation, "all consecrated to the pure and perfect love of God ... bears the name of St. Joseph as being especially in love with the virtue hidden in this great Saint. The "hidden virtue" of St. Joseph of which Father Médaille speaks is not primarily synonymous with humility. Here the word "virtue" must be taken in its strong seventeenth-century sense of physical or moral vigor. St. Joseph is the man who carries within him a vigorous and discreet holiness, a holiness further explained as a consecration "to the honor of the uncreated Trinity of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit", a holiness lived in the manner of the "created Trinity of Jesus, Mary and Joseph" (P.C. no. 106). At the time of Fr. Médaille, this enumeration - a little artificial for us - of the six persons, to each of whom is associated a virtue or a spiritual attitude, is a kind of catechetical summary, easy to remember, and suitable for every Christian, even illiterate ones

Pope Francis' Prayer to St. Joseph

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.*

*Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father
and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen*

