



Letter to Priests and Faithful on the Year of Saint Joseph December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021

Dear Priests, Religious, and Lay Faithful,

How can so many things be said about a man who is silent within Sacred Scripture? An abundance of devotions, prayers, litanies, and feast days exist for a figure who utters no words. What Joseph says, he says in silence. Yet, his silence resounds and proves more deafening than words. St. Paul's counsel to the faithful in Corinth could have been written with him in mind, "*For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power.*" (1 Corinthians 4:20)

Saint Joseph is needed now more than ever to intercede powerfully for our Church, country, and families. On December 8, 2020, Pope Francis decreed a "Year of Saint Joseph", to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Joseph as patron of the universal Church. What blessed news this is for us! After his beloved spouse the Virgin Mary, we can find no saint more worthy of imitating.

The Year of Saint Joseph offers special graces. In these difficult days when many continue to suffer the effects of the global pandemic, Saint Joseph is a faithful guardian that points the way to Christ. The Holy Father tells us in his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* (A Father's Heart): "Each of us can discover in Joseph – the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence – an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble."

To facilitate devotion to Saint Joseph and provide the opportunity for the faithful "to obtain, with the help of Saint Joseph, head of the heavenly family of Nazareth, comfort and relief from the serious human and social tribulations that besiege the contemporary world today," the Holy Father has granted special indulgences to be obtained during this year. In addition to the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the pope's intentions), indulgences will be granted to those who participate in the Year of Saint Joseph in ways indicated by the Apostolic Penitentiary (including saying the rosary as a family, reciting the litany of Saint Joseph, and performing spiritual or corporal works of mercy).

In *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis invites us to contemplate the fatherhood of Saint Joseph to discover how the virtues he exemplified can help us grow in our own vocations. Fr. Bob Bedard, founder of the Companions of the Cross, said that "it's

not easy to be a father today. The great masses of physically and emotionally absent fathers have served to produce a largely unfathered people.” In a society that does not value fatherhood as much as it should, Saint Joseph is a great model for priests - spiritual fathers, and biological fathers.

With great insight the Holy Father guides us into the heart of Saint Joseph. He speaks of him as a **beloved father**, one who as Saint Paul VI pointed out, “concretely expressed his fatherhood ‘by making his life a sacrificial service to the mystery of the incarnation and its redemptive purpose.’” The Holy Father shares that Saint Joseph is a **tender and loving father**, noting that “even through Joseph’s fears, God’s will, his history and his plan were at work. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course.” Especially during these times of COVID, we can take comfort in his guidance.

We see that Saint Joseph is an **obedient father**, as the Holy Father recalls Joseph’s acceptance of his divine vocation following the announcement of the angel: “Joseph’s response was immediate: ‘When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him’ (Mt 1:24). Obedience made it possible for him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary.” He noted further that, “In every situation, Joseph declared his own “fiat”, like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. In his role as the head of a family, Joseph taught Jesus to be obedient to his parents (cf. Lk 2:51).” We find that Saint Joseph is an **accepting father**, as the Holy Father writes, “Joseph’s attitude encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak, for God chooses what is weak (cf. 1 Cor 1:27).”

Saint Joseph is a **creatively courageous father**, as the Holy Father says, noting that “God always finds a way to save us, provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence.” He reminds us that “we must learn that same care and responsibility. We must learn to love the child and his mother, to love the sacraments and charity, to love the Church and the poor.” We know Saint Joseph as a **working father**, who engaged in the work of forming God’s own son. “Saint Joseph was a carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family. From him, Jesus learned the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one’s own labour.” Finally, the Holy Father writes that Saint Joseph is a **father in the shadows**, one who “found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust. His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust.”

The two principal feast days recognized by the Church in honor of Saint Joseph (the Solemnity of Saint Joseph on March 19, and the Feast of Saint Joseph the worker on May 1) will take on new and deeper meaning as we spend the year growing closer to

our spiritual father. The Solemnity of Saint Joseph has ancient roots connecting Joseph with the patrimony of the Universal Church, and veneration on this day recalls Saint Joseph's part in the work of redemption. The Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker emphasizes Saint Joseph's dignity as a 'worker', and by association the dignity of all persons in their respective work. I encourage everyone to take part in these feast days as you are able with great joy.

Many great saints had a devotion to Saint Joseph throughout the centuries. Among them is Saint André Bessette, whose words we may adopt for ourselves: "I have great confidence in Saint Joseph. This it is that guides me and gives me full confidence." Like St. Teresa of Avila who "recognized in Saint Joseph the protector for all the circumstances of life," we too can entrust ourselves to the protection of this beloved saint.

As your Bishop I invite you to enter this Year of Saint Joseph with fervency, participating in any number of the special prayers and practices available to us. An *Addendum* with ideas for the parishes and faithful on how to participate more fully in this Year of Saint Joseph is attached to this letter for your consideration.

The Holy Father tells us that "fathers are not born, but made...Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person." May each of us grow closer to Saint Joseph this year and be led by the gifts of his fatherhood to a deeper encounter with Jesus. We join our Holy Father in asking for his intercession:

*"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."*

Saint Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patron of the Universal Church, and Patron of the Church in Canada – pray for us!



Most Rev. Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

January 15, 2021