

To mark the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX's declaration of St. Joseph as patron of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis has decreed a special year dedicated to St. Joseph, hailing him as a model of fatherhood and a crucial intercessor for our times.

The Year of St. Joseph began on December 8, 2020 and will conclude on December 8, 2021. Holy Father envisions the year as an opportunity for all the faithful to imitate St. Joseph's virtues and strengthen their life of faith through his intercession.

The Holy Father's decree outlined several instances in which faithful will be able to obtain a plenary indulgence during this special year, provided they meet the usual conditions of going to confession, receiving the Eucharist, and praying for the intentions of the pope.

A plenary indulgence will be available under these conditions:

- To those who meditate on the Our Father prayer for at least 30 minutes or take part in a spiritual retreat of at least one day that includes a meditation on St. Joseph.
- To those who perform a corporal or spiritual work of mercy.
- To families or engaged couples who recite the rosary together.
- To those who entrust their daily work to St. Joseph and those who ask St. Joseph to intercede for the unemployed.
- To those who recite a prayer to St. Joseph for the relief of Christians persecuted both inside and outside of the Church.
- To the faithful who recite any legitimately approved prayer or act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, with an encouragement to do so on the March 19 and May 1 feasts of St. Joseph, on the 19th of every month, and on every Wednesday, which traditionally has been dedicated to St. Joseph.
- To the elderly, sick, dying and those legitimately unable to leave the house, who recite an act of piety to St. Joseph under his title of Comfort of the Sick and Patron of a happy death, provided they offer their discomfort to God and fulfill the conditions for the indulgence (confession, Eucharist, and prayers for the Holy Father) as soon as possible.

In the apostolic letter entitled *Patris corde* ("With a Father's Heart") that accompanied the decree for the Year of St. Joseph, Pope Francis recalled Joseph's actions in the bible, noting that after the Virgin Mary, no other saint has been mentioned as frequently by popes.

Francis said the figure of St. Joseph has been on his mind in a particular way during the coronavirus pandemic, a crisis he said showed how "our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television show, yet in these very days are surely shaping the decisive events of our history."

People such as doctors and nurses, supermarket workers, caregivers, cleaning personnel and transport workers, as well as priests and public safety officials, he said, have understood amid COVID-19 that "no one is saved alone."

"How many people daily exercise patience and offer hope, taking care to spread not panic, but shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents, and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday ways, how to accept and deal with a crisis by adjusting their routines, looking ahead, and encouraging the practice of prayer," he said.

With the backdrop of the pandemic, Francis said faithful can rediscover St. Joseph, "the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence," as an intercessor and source of support and guidance.

Saint Joseph, he said, “reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. A word of recognition and of gratitude is due to them all.”

Pope Francis then offered a series of personal reflections on St. Joseph, focusing on different aspects of his fatherhood based on the bible and devotion to St. Joseph in the Church, describing him as a “beloved,” “tender and loving,” “obedient,” “accepting,” “creatively courageous,” and “working” father, as well as a father “in the shadows.”

Through his faith, the pope said, Joseph teaches that God can work “even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses...that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture.”

Referring to Joseph’s acceptance of Mary despite her surprise pregnancy, whereas the law would have condemned her, Francis said Joseph’s “nobility” in this act is seen in the fact that “what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity.”

“Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary’s good name, her dignity and her life.”

Francis pointed to St. Joseph’s reaction to the unexpected twists and turns of his life, noting that while most people’s reaction would be “disappointment and rebellion” when things don’t go as planned, Joseph embraced them.

“Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow,” he said, adding, “We need to set aside all anger and disappointment, and to embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish. Not with mere resignation but with hope and courage.”

By doing this, he said, “our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel. It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed. God can make flowers spring up from stony ground.”

Noting that Joseph was forced to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus because of King Herod’s determination to find and kill the newborn messiah, Pope Francis said that because of this he considers St. Joseph a patron for all those forced to flee their countries “because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty.”

Francis also pointed to the fact that St. Joseph is often associated with work. At a time when so many have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic, St. Joseph can be an intercessor amid a crisis which the pope said, “should serve as a summons to review our priorities.”

He offered a reflection on fatherhood, saying fathers themselves “are not born, but made” by taking on responsibility and caring for the children under their protection.

“Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person,” he said, insisting that genuine fatherhood is not possessive or overprotective, but allows children to develop in freedom.

“Perhaps for this reason, Joseph is traditionally called a ‘most chaste’ father,” the pope said, noting that the title “is not simply a sign of affection, but the summation of an attitude that is the opposite of possessiveness. Chastity is freedom from possessiveness in every sphere of one’s life. Only when love is chaste, is it truly love.”

“Our world today needs fathers,” he said, insisting there is “no use for tyrants who would domineer others as a means of compensating for their own needs. It rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction.”

Joseph “found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust,” the pope said, noting that every vocation, including the priesthood and religious life, “require this kind of maturity.”

To mark the Year of St. Joseph in our parish, we will pray the Prayer to St. Joseph composed by the Holy Father at every Mass after the Prayer After Communion and right before the final blessing and dismissal. This is the prayer:

**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.**

With a little practice this short prayer can easily be committed to memory.

A hundred and fifty years ago Blessed Pius IX asked the faithful to pray the following prayer at the conclusion of the Rosary, after the Salve Regina. Perhaps we could do this regularly throughout the Year of St. Joseph.:

**To you, O blessed Joseph,
do we come in our tribulation,
and having implored the help of your most holy Spouse,
we confidently invoke your patronage also.**

**Through that charity which bound you
to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God
and through the paternal love
with which you embraced the Child Jesus,
we humbly beg you graciously to regard the inheritance
which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood,
and with your power and strength to aid us in our necessities.**

**O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family,
defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ;
O most loving father, ward off from us
every contagion of error and corrupting influence;
O our most mighty protector, be kind to us
and from heaven assist us in our struggle
with the power of darkness.**

**As once you rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril,
so now protect God's Holy Church**

**from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity;
shield, too, each one of us by your constant protection,
so that, supported by your example and your aid,
we may be able to live piously, to die in holiness,
and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven. Amen.**

After Jesus and Mary, it is important for the Christian faithful to establish a fruitful relationship with St. Joseph. I will be looking for resources to help us do a year-long reflection on the person of St. Joseph. Perhaps we could do something together online. I will also be mindful of including St. Joseph in many of my homilies this year.

There is an ancient exhortation that the Church has used for centuries, especially in times of difficulty: *Ite ad Joseph* (Go to Joseph.). I invite all of us to go to Joseph frequently throughout this year dedicated to him, especially for assistance in recovering from the scourge of the pandemic and in healing the many political and social divisions within our country.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Walter