

A YEAR OF St Joseph 2020-2021



On the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of St Joseph being proclaimed as Patron of the Catholic Church (8 December 1870), Pope Francis is inviting the whole Church to reflect on this 'extraordinary figure' who serves as an example of daily patience, hope and responsibility.

In his document, *Patris Corde* (With a Father's Heart), Pope Francis reminds us that 'each of us can discover in St Joseph - the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence - an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble.' Jesus's earthly father reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.

After Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse. Various popes have reflected on the message contained in the limited information handed down by the Gospels in order to appreciate more fully Joseph's central role in the history of salvation. Blessed Pius IX declared him 'Patron of the Catholic Church', Venerable Pius XII proposed him as 'Patron of Workers' and St John Paul II as 'Guardian of the Redeemer'. St Joseph is universally invoked as the 'patron of a happy death'.

During these months of pandemic, we have experienced, amid the crisis, the Holy Father writes, 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. Doctors, nurses, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caregivers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests, men and women religious, and so very many others.'

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. How many are praying, making sacrifices and interceding for the good of all.'

Each of us can discover, in Joseph, an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. Let's use this year to reflect on the quiet, the discreet and hidden nature of God's love in action in the world. Let us echo Joseph's willingness to cooperate with God's plan and his love for Jesus, whom the gospels refer to as 'the son of Joseph'. Here we offer a series of prayers for individual and group use through the year, as well as three short scriptural meditations.

St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church

Pray for us that we may receive the grace of graces: our conversion to Jesus

Image: St Joseph and the Christ Child (1640) by Guido Reni - Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

St Joseph

POPE FRANCIS' PRAYER TO ST JOSEPH FROM PATRIS CORDE

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.

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html

A PARENT'S PRAYER TO ST JOSEPH

O glorious St Joseph, to you God committed the care of His only begotten Son amid the many dangers of this world. We come to you and ask you to take under your special protection the children God has given us. Through holy baptism they became children of God and members of His holy Church. We consecrate them to you today, that through this consecration they may become your foster children. Guard them, guide their steps in life, form their hearts after the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

St Joseph, who felt the tribulation and worry of a parent when the child Jesus was lost, protect our dear children for time and eternity. May you be their father and counsellor. Let them, like Jesus, grow in age as well as in wisdom and grace before God and men. Preserve them from the corruption of his world, and give us the grace one day to be united with them in Heaven forever.

Amen.

<http://www.catholicdoors.com/prayers/english5/p03043.htm>

A STUDENT'S PRAYER TO ST JOSEPH

Father Joseph, you taught Jesus how to work and play, help us to realise that we can only gain knowledge by listening and learning. With you to help and guide us we pray, O St Joseph, that we will choose the right path and will remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR PROTECTION OF THE FAMILY

St Joseph, please protect our families from the seductive attractions of the world and the subtle attacks from the evil one. Bless our fathers with the strength, courage, foresight, and self-sacrifice that you possessed in leading and protecting the Holy Family from the many evils of the day. Bless all the members of our family with a single-mindedness to respect each other; to be obedient to our father's headship; to always strive to do the will of God; to trust in Jesus; and to be worthy dwellings for the Holy Spirit. We especially ask for these favours for our family now [*lay your requests before him*]. St Joseph, we are so grateful, help us spread our devotion to other families.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR GRACES FOR FATHERS IN LEADING FAMILIES

Father God, thank you for giving us, St Joseph, the greatest patron to lead our fathers – the heads of our families. Please inspire and obtain special graces for these our fathers, Great Saint, so that they may image, in some way, your greatness and virtues just as you so unselfishly lead, protected and loved the Holy Family of our Lord and God. We especially ask for these favours for our fathers now [*lay your requests before him*]. Thank you for blessing our families.
Amen.

PRAYER TO BEAR OUR CROSSES WITH JOY

Dear St Joseph, foster father of our Saviour, you who for many years carried the weight of the world on your shoulders; you whose humility and obedience to God knew of no limits to sacrifice; you who would not hesitate to give all, do all, be all for your Saviour and His Holy Mother; and you whose life is so hidden, yet profoundly prominent in God's plan for salvation. Intercede for us and grant every member of our family the graces necessary to bear our crosses with joy, to be obedient to the Saviour's Holy Catholic Church, and to treat each other and our neighbours in need as images of the Crucified Christ.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR FAMILY NEEDS

Dearest St Joseph, St Teresa of Avila said, 'I cannot remember having asked St Joseph for anything which he did not obtain.' With this confidence and trust, St Joseph, I implore your kindness and mercy in obtaining for my family these humble needs [*lay your requests before him*] that I place before you now. I will spread my devotion to others so that they may too come to know and love you as I do. Thank you, oh Great Saint and friend!

Amen.

PRAYER TO EASE SUFFERING IN DAILY BASICS

Most compassionate and protective St Joseph, please come to the aid of all those in great suffering and in need of even the basics of life. We believe and know, beyond any doubt, that you, oh Great Patron of the Afflicted, will come to the aid of our family and those that we now pray for [*lay your requests before him*] on this very day. Thank you, Great Saint and constant friend for already aiding us in this time of need.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR COUNSEL AND PROVISION

St Joseph, foster father of Jesus, protector of the Queen of Heaven, and shadow of the Father in heaven, your life was hidden while on earth. But your eyes were always on heaven, seeking only to do the will of the Father. We implore you, Great Saint, be our counsellor, be our provider, be our father in all of our necessities both materially and especially spiritually during our journey through this valley of tears. We especially ask for your powerful intercession before God these our needs [*lay your requests before him*]. We are grateful for your help, now, and at the moment of our death.

Amen.

<https://connectusfund.org/7-uplifting-prayers-to-st-joseph-for-family>

St Joseph

BETROTHED AND HUSBAND OF MARY

Gospel Reading – Matthew 1:18–25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us).

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Reflection

From the New Testament we can draw various conclusions about Joseph. We read that Joseph was betrothed to Mary when the conception occurred, but had no sexual relations with her. After the conception, Joseph took Mary into his home as his wife and together they shared their faith in the mystery. Together they cooperated in fulfilling their mission to be parents to the Son of God. As spouses they showed each other all the love and affection that resulted from their experience of God's love and that contributed to providing a loving human family for Jesus.

From the Gospel of Matthew, we learn that Joseph is a just and obedient man, who names Jesus and gives him a place in the line of David. Being of the house and lineage of David himself, he is Jesus' legal, genealogical father. It is through him that the Son of God has a genealogy in the human race springing from Adam, and through him Jesus inherits Davidic descent, comes to be born in the city of David (Bethlehem), and can be called the Davidic Messiah (see 2 Samuel 7:1–16).

Luke presents Joseph somewhat in the background of his narrative, which is developed from the perspective of Mary (it is her annunciation that Luke recounts, 1:26–38). Nevertheless, Luke's Gospel provides a rather definite portrayal of him and of the roles he fulfils.

It is Joseph who guards and defends Jesus under God's guidance, and who raises him as a carpenter at Nazareth. He receives his vocation in dreams, and is the final link in the line of the Old Testament patriarchs who await the fulfilment of the promise.

Joseph and Mary are called 'parents' together (Luke 2:41–48), and Joseph is called 'father' and referred to as such by Mary (Luke 2:48). Together they see to the circumcision and naming of the child, obediently fulfil all the prescriptions of the law and temple worship, and are blessed by Simeon (Luke 2:27). Together they are subject to parental worry and incomprehension while raising Jesus. Together they are obeyed by him.

- *What strikes you most about the passage from Scripture?*
- *Why do you think God made Joseph wait (as he considered these things) before sending an angel to tell him what was going on with Mary?*
- *What difficulties might they both have faced as Mary's pregnancy became evident?*
- *How do we see Joseph's role and character in this passage and in the little we know of him?*

St Joseph

OBEDIENT FATHER AND PROTECTOR

Gospel Reading – Matthew 2:13–23

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.' And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'

Reflection

While rare in the New Testament, dreams are rather common in the Old Testament. When foreigners such as Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar dream, a Hebrew man of God, such as Joseph or Daniel, is needed to interpret for them (Genesis 40:5–41:36; Daniel 2:1–49; 4:1–25). Israel, however, needs no help in interpreting dreams, which are often means of divine communication. The Lord, whom no one can see and still live (Exodus 33:20), commonly reveals in dreams his plans for his people and the role they are to play. Here we have one of Joseph's dreams, one to leave for Egypt and the second to return; his obedience to the message echoes his earlier obedience at the angel's annunciation (Matthew 1:25).

What most stands out in Matthew's manner of presenting all of this is Joseph's tremendous faith. Before the angel's appearance, Joseph is the first one, together with Mary, to believe in the virginal conception of the promised Messiah. This faith is why he is called 'a just man' from the start, and why he decides to separate from Mary out of reverent awe for the mystery. This faith makes him open to receive divine communications and recognise their authenticity. Joseph is a model of faith in always complying exactly and without hesitation to whatever God indicates to him. His faith is totally oriented to collaborating with the divine designs for the Saviour conceived in Mary's womb and raised as their child.

As one from Nazareth in Galilee, Joseph was religiously, socially, and economically marginalised in the eyes of the Jerusalem authorities. However, here we see how Joseph exercises his role as protector and father with diligence, quiet strength and affection. In the 'hidden life' of Jesus, Joseph provides for his family, was concerned for his child's well-being, protected and defended him, educated him in a profession and in the practice of obedience and religious observance.

- *What strikes you most about the passage from Scripture?*
- *Where and how might we exercise our protection of those entrusted to us?*
- *How would Joseph and Mary feel towards God when they were fleeing to Egypt?*
- *How do we exhibit our obedience to the will of God, not competing with the 'mission' given to us?*

St Joseph

MODEL OF FAITH-FILLED RESPONSE TO GOD

Gospel Reading – Luke 2:39–52

When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.' And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.

Reflection

In the gospels, particularly Luke, we see Joseph as a man totally obedient to God and compliant with the law of the Lord. He is the model of a faithfully observant father who fulfils all the natural and religious obligations of a human parent for the Son of God. He lives out this role in the background, a part of Jesus's 'hidden life,' raising Jesus at Nazareth in a way that appeared totally ordinary. Joseph never competed or interfered with Jesus' mission, but faded from the scene when the time came for Jesus to proclaim his divine Sonship.

In this faith Joseph is a type of first Christian, with Mary, a model of faith-filled cooperation for all who follow and also call the name 'Jesus,' Lord and Saviour. Joseph plays a most key role in the mystery of the Incarnation and is a model of righteousness for the Church. He dedicates his whole life to the interests of Jesus, trusting in God's providence. Obscure Joseph, from a Galilean backwater, is an privileged instrument by which the light of the world and bread of life are presented to us.

Just as Joseph was called to obedience and righteousness, so too is the Church and her members. In this way, Joseph can be seen as an anticipation of the Church. In another very particular way, as Joseph protected the physical body of the child Jesus on earth, so does he continue to protect, through his intercessory prayer from heaven, the mystical body of Christ, the Church. As the mother of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is called mother of the Church, so also her husband, the guardian of Christ, is called the protector of the Church and her universal patron.

- *What strikes you most about the passage from Scripture?*
- *Jesus was eager to hear the rabbis' teaching and learn what the experts in the Law had to say. How should a similar eagerness manifest itself in the life of today's Christian?*
- *How should we be living out the Fourth Commandment ('Honour your father and mother') in the particular circumstances of our lives?*
- *How can we make our prayer life more sincere and trust in God's providence?*



ST JOSEPH AND THE CHRIST CHILD (1640) BY GUIDO RENI

Oil on canvas at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston,
The Rienzi Collection, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harris Masterson III

Guido Reni was the most famous Italian painter of his day, revered for the grace and naturalness of his wonderful compositions. He was even referred to as 'the divine Guido' by his contemporaries

Working during the Catholic Counter-Reformation in the seventeenth century, Reni depicted images of saints and holy figures in the less stylised, more humanised and accessible form the Church required (though a faint halo is barely visible above St Joseph's head).

This intimate portrayal of Joseph demonstrates Reni's skill through his rendering of the foster father of Christ as a simple man tenderly holding his infant son. Following tradition, Joseph is shown as an old man (typically because he is not present in the accounts of Jesus' public ministry, though Mary is) who holds the almost seated Christ-child as if he weighs as light as a feather.

The fruit held by the infant Jesus is a reminder to us of both the fall of man in Eden - a fall that Jesus, as the second Adam, came to put right - as well as the fruitfulness of redemption brought through Jesus.

In an earlier depiction of the same scene, instead of fruit, Jesus is shown holding a lily close to the heart of Joseph. The lily, associated with Mary, is a sign of purity and a sign to us of Joseph's gentle goodness and love for God's own Son.

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Agency for Evangelisation
and Catechesis
Archdiocese of Southwark