

+ + + The Year of St. Joseph + + +

December 8, 2020 through December 8, 2021

Some Basic Facts...

Pope Francis announced a “Year of St. Joseph” on Tuesday, December 8, 2020 – the *Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception* – in honor of the 150th anniversary of Pope Pius IX’s proclamation in 1870 of St. Joseph as “Patron of the Universal Church” (*Quemadmodum Deus*). The “Year of St. Joseph” began on December 8, 2020, and will conclude on December 8, 2021, according to the [Decree](#) authorized by the Pope. The Decree states that Pope Francis established a “Year of St. Joseph” so that “every member of the faithful, following his example, may strengthen their life of faith daily in the complete fulfillment of God’s will.” The Decree adds that the Pope has granted special Indulgences to mark the year. The December 8, 2020 Decree was issued by the Apostolic Penitentiary, which is the dicastery of the Roman Curia that oversees the practice of Indulgences.

In addition to the Decree, Pope Francis also issued an [Apostolic Letter](#) on December 8, 2020 dedicated to the Foster Father of Jesus Christ. The Pope explained in the Letter, titled *Patris corde* (“*With a father’s heart*”) that he wanted to share some “personal reflections” on the *holy* and *just* Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Holy Father said, “My desire to do so increased during these months of (the) pandemic,” noting that many people had made hidden sacrifices during the crisis in order to protect others (just as St. Joseph did with the Holy Family). 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,” he wrote. “St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.”

In its Decree, the Apostolic Penitentiary said that, “to reaffirm the universality of St. Joseph’s patronage in the Church,” it would grant a Plenary Indulgence to Catholics who recite any approved prayer or act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, especially on **March 19**, the Saint’s solemnity as “Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” and on **May 1**, the Memorial of “St. Joseph the Worker.”

Other notable days for the Plenary Indulgence are the “Feast of the Holy Family” on **December 27** and “**St. Joseph’s Sunday**” in the Byzantine tradition, as well as the **19th of each month** during the Year and **every Wednesday** throughout the year, which is a day traditionally dedicated to the memory of St. Joseph in the Latin Church.

The Decree further states: “In the current context of the health emergency (of the pandemic), the gift of the Plenary Indulgence is particularly extended to the elderly, the sick, the dying and all those who for legitimate reasons are unable to leave the house, who, with a soul detached from any sin and with the intention of fulfilling, as soon as possible, the *three usual conditions*, in their own home or where the impediment keeps them, recite an act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, *Comfort of the Sick* and *Patron of a Happy Death*, offering with trust in God the pains and discomforts of their life.”

The *three usual conditions* for receiving a Plenary Indulgence are Sacramental Confession (which, under the “usual conditions,” means going to Confession within 20 days *before* or within 20 days *after* the day the Plenary Indulgence is sought); also, the reception of Eucharistic Communion on the day the Plenary Indulgence is sought; and prayer for the Pope’s needs and intentions on the day the Plenary Indulgence is sought (which, under the “usual conditions” is understood to be an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*; or, one may also recite the *Creed*). As stated above, a sincere and willed detachment from sin, both mortal and venial, is also required.

According to the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, an Indulgence is “the remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sin whose guilt has already been forgiven. A properly disposed member of the Christian faithful can obtain an Indulgence under prescribed conditions through the help of the Church, which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. An Indulgence is Partial if it removes part of the temporal punishment due to sin, or Plenary if it removes all punishment.” (CCC, 1471)

In his Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde* (“*With a father’s heart*”) Pope Francis reflected on the fatherly qualities of St. Joseph, describing him as *beloved, tender and loving, obedient, accepting*, and “creatively courageous.” He also underlined that St. Joseph was a “working father.”

The Pope referred to St. Joseph as “a father in the shadows” and stated that, “In his relationship to Jesus, Joseph was the earthly shadow of the Heavenly Father: he watched over Him and protected Him, never leaving Him to go His own way,” the Pope wrote.

Pope Francis also said that the contemporary world requires examples of true fatherhood: “Our world today needs fathers. It has no use for tyrants who would domineer others as a means of compensating for their own needs,” he wrote. “It rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, (and) power with destruction.”

The Holy Father went on: “Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of *mature* sacrifice (St. Joseph did just this). The priesthood and consecrated life likewise require this kind of maturity. Whatever our vocation, whether to marriage, celibacy or virginity, our gift of self will not come to fulfillment if it stops at sacrifice; were that the case, instead of becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love, the gift of self would risk being an expression of unhappiness, sadness and frustration.”

The Holy Father continued, “Every child is the bearer of a unique mystery that can only be brought to light with the help of a father who respects that child’s freedom. (That is,) A father who realizes that he is most a father and educator at the point when he... sees that his child has become independent and can walk the paths of life unaccompanied. (In other words,) When he becomes like (St.) Joseph, who always knew that his child was *not* his own but had merely been entrusted to his care.”

The Pope added: “In every exercise of our fatherhood, we should always keep in mind that it has nothing to do with possession, but (that fatherhood) is rather a ‘sign’ pointing to a greater Fatherhood (that of God the Father). In a way, we are all like Joseph: a shadow of the Heavenly Father... a shadow that follows his Son.” It is worth noting that Pope Francis has promoted devotion to St. Joseph throughout his pontificate.

He began his Petrine ministry on March 19, 2013, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and dedicated the **homily** at his inauguration Mass to St. Joseph. In that homily, he said: “In the Gospels, St. Joseph appears as a *strong and courageous* man, a *working* man, yet in his heart we see *great tenderness*, which is not the virtue of the weak but rather a sign of *strength of spirit* and a *capacity for concern*, for *compassion*, for *genuine openness to others*, for *love*.”

Also, Pope Francis' *Coat of Arms* features a spikenard, which is associated with St. Joseph in Hispanic iconographic tradition, and on May 1, 2013, the Pope [authorized a Decree](#) instructing that St. Joseph's name be inserted into Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV.

And, during an Apostolic Visit to the Philippines in 2015, the Pope explained why he kept an image of the Saint on his desk. He said: "I would also like to tell you something very personal. I have great love for St. Joseph, because he is a man of *silence* and *strength*. On my table I have an image of St. Joseph sleeping. Even when he is asleep, he is taking care of the Church! Yes! We know that he can do that. (He is the Patron of the Universal Church!) So, when I have a problem, a difficulty, I write a little note and I put it underneath St. Joseph, so that he can dream about it! In other words I tell him: *'Pray for this problem!'*"

At his general audience on March 18, 2020, Pope Francis urged Catholics to turn to St. Joseph in times of adversity. He said, "In life, at work, and within the family, through joys and sorrows, St. Joseph always sought and loved the Lord, deserving the Scriptures' eulogy that described him as a '*just*' and '*wise*' man," he [said](#). "Always invoke him, especially in difficult times and entrust your life to this great Saint."

The Pope concluded his new Apostolic Letter by urging Catholics to pray to St. Joseph for "the grace of graces: *our conversion*." He ended the text with this 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."

*Adapted from the Catholic News Agency article, *Pope Francis Proclaims Year of St. Joseph*, Vatican City, December 8, 2020.



