

# Editorial: This year, meet your spiritual father, St. Joseph

The newly declared Year of St. Joseph is a great blessing for the Church. It provides a beacon of hope during a dark time, and an opportunity for people of faith to focus on a just and righteous man who has much to teach us.

In his surprise announcement on Dec. 8 – the 150th anniversary of the declaration of St. Joseph as patron saint of the universal Church – Pope Francis said it was the coronavirus pandemic that encouraged him to write and reflect on St. Joseph, that strong presence in salvation history who accomplished so much so quietly.

“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,” Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic letter *Patris Corde* (“With a father’s heart”). “St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.”

This Year of St. Joseph, which began this Dec. 8 and ends Dec. 8, 2021, offers Catholics the chance to grow in their relationship with the foster father of Jesus, learning from him and striving to be more like him.

In his letter, Pope Francis gets us started. Defining Joseph as a father, the pontiff describes him in part as beloved, tender, loving, obedient, accepting and creatively courageous. While reflecting on St. Joseph, Francis also shows how we can emulate him. For example, describing how Joseph accepted Mary unconditionally, trusting in the angel’s words that her son had been conceived through the Holy Spirit, Pope Francis

counsels: "Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history. 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" (No. 4).

What, then, are some ways to take advantage of the Year of St. Joseph? We have three simple suggestions. Begin by making the invisible visible. St. Joseph may have been "in the shadows," as Pope Francis says, but we can help bring him to the fore by giving him a prominent presence in our homes this year. Consider obtaining a statue, an icon or another image of this holy man to grace your domestic church. A prominent reminder of St. Joseph will serve as an aid during prayerful reflection as well as a visible reminder to seek his intercession. Use it to grow in relationship with him.

We also recommend praying the powerful Litany of St. Joseph regularly, if not every day. While it is one of only six litanies approved by the Church for public recitation, the litany also is excellent for private recitation. With its short, descriptive petitions, it can help focus prayer and is highly family friendly. In this time of pandemic, it reminds us to seek Joseph's intercession under the titles of "hope of the sick" and "patron of the dying." As the family is threatened, it reminds us to call on Joseph as "pillar of families" and "glory of home life." And as the Church struggles under the weight of great sin, it reminds us to turn to him as "protector of Holy Church."

Finally, take full advantage of the plenary indulgence offered by the Apostolic Penitentiary for the Year of St. Joseph. There are many ways to do this, but options include meditating for 30 minutes on the Lord's Prayer, performing a spiritual or corporal work of mercy in the example of St. Joseph, reciting the Rosary, and reciting the Litany of St. Joseph mentioned

above. The usual conditions apply, including detachment from sin, sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the pope's intentions. During the public health crisis, the plenary indulgence can still be obtained by the sick, dying, elderly or those unable to leave their homes as long as one has the intention of filling those three conditions "as soon as possible." The individual must also "recite an act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, offering to God the pains and hardships of their lives."

Extra ideas: Celebrate in a particular way the feast of the Holy Family (Dec. 27), and the feasts of St. Joseph (March 19) and of St. Joseph the Worker (May 1). Ask St. Joseph's intercession upon the fathers in your life. Give him a special place in your prayers during March, the month traditionally set aside by the Church for his veneration.

May St. Joseph, patron of the universal Church, accompany us this year and always.

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