

POPE FRANCIS ANNOUNCES "THE YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH."

Today, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Holiness Pope Francis has used the feast day to declare the year ahead, beginning today, the "Year of St. Joseph," her blessed spouse and the foster-father of the Lord Jesus. In an apostolic letter released today entitled "***Patris corde***" ("With a Father's Heart"), marking the 150th anniversary of the declaration of St. Joseph as "Patron of the Universal Church" by Blessed Pope Pius IX, Pope Francis indicated that the "aim of this apostolic letter is to increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtue and his zeal." The Holy Father noted that "after Mary, the Mother of God, no saint is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph, her spouse. My predecessors reflected on the message contained in the limited information handed down by the Gospels in order to appreciate his central role in the history of salvation."

Commenting on the apostolic letter, the Vatican News Office explained that "The Holy Father wrote ***Patris corde*** against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which, he says, has helped us see more clearly the importance of "ordinary" people who, though far from the limelight, exercise patience and offer hope every day. In this, they resemble Saint Joseph, "the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence," who nonetheless played "an incomparable role in the history of salvation."

Throughout the document, the Holy Father describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows.

The full text of the apostolic letter may be found on the Vatican website.

In a separate decree, Vatican Apostolic Penitentiary has announced that a plenary indulgence is attached to the faithful who commemorate St. Joseph throughout his special year "with prayer and good works."

The plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the Pope's intentions) to Christians who, with a spirit detached from any sin, participate in the Year of St. Joseph on these occasions and manners indicated by the Apostolic Penitentiary:

- The plenary indulgence is granted to those who will meditate for at least 30 minutes on the Lord's Prayer, or take part in a Spiritual Retreat of at least one day that includes a meditation on St. Joseph. "St. Joseph, an authentic man of faith, invites us", the decree reads, "to rediscover our filial relationship with the Father, to renew fidelity to prayer, to listen and correspond with profound discernment to God's will."

- The indulgence can also be obtained by those who, following St. Joseph's example, will perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy. St. Joseph "encourages us to rediscover the value of silence, prudence and loyalty in carrying out our duties," the decree notes.
- The recitation of the Holy Rosary in families and among engaged couples is another way of obtaining indulgences, in order that "all Christian families may be stimulated to recreate the same atmosphere of intimate communion, love and prayer that was in the Holy Family."
- Everyone who entrusts their daily activity to the protection of St. Joseph, and every faithful who invokes the intercession of St. Joseph so that those seeking work can find dignifying work can also obtain the plenary indulgence. On 1 May 1955, Pope Pius XII instituted the feast of St. Joseph "with the intent that the dignity of work be recognized by all, and that it inspires social life and laws, based on the fair distribution of rights and duties."
- The plenary indulgence is also granted to the faithful who will recite the Litany to St. Joseph (for the Latin tradition), or the *Akathistos* to St. Joseph (for the Byzantine tradition), or any other prayer to St. Joseph proper to the other liturgical traditions, for the persecuted Church *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and for the relief of all Christians suffering all forms of persecution. Because, the decree notes, "the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt shows us that God is there where man is in danger, where man suffers, where he runs away, where he experiences rejection and abandonment."

In addition to these, the Apostolic Penitentiary grants a plenary indulgence to the faithful who will recite any legitimately approved prayer or act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, for example, "To you, O blessed Joseph" especially on "19 March, on 1 May, the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, on St. Joseph's Sunday (according to the Byzantine tradition) on the 19th of each month and every Wednesday, a day dedicated to the memory of the saint according to the Latin tradition."

Amid the ongoing Covid-19 health crisis, the gift of the plenary indulgence is also extended to the sick, the elderly, the dying and all those who for legitimate reasons are unable to leave their homes.

They too can obtain the plenary indulgences if they are detached from any sin and have the intention of fulfilling, as soon as possible, the three usual conditions and recite an act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, offering to God the pains and hardships of their lives.

The Diocese of Trenton will begin planning special opportunities to celebrate the universal patronage of St. Joseph throughout 2021.