

Year of Saint Joseph

On December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX had given Saint Joseph the title of Patron of the Catholic Church, calling on Saint Joseph to protect the Church in the troubles of that time. On December 8, 2020, Pope Francis recalled this declaration by his predecessor and invited us to renew our trust in the intercession of Saint Joseph in any troubles that we face in our time. Pope Francis announced a Year of Saint Joseph to run from December 8, 2020, until December 8, 2021.

This Year of Saint Joseph will overlap with the Year of the Family and it might seem confusing to have two such Years running at the same time. In this case, however, the Years complement one another very well. While Saint Joseph is Patron of the Church in general, his role of caring for Mary and Jesus makes him well suited to be Patron of Family Life in particular.

Pope Francis nominated Saint Joseph's feast day of March 19 as the start of the Year of the Family. It is also the date when "Amoris Laetitia" was published. So March 19 is doubly appropriate as the starting date for the Year of the Family. It is the feast of Saint Joseph, patron of family life. It is also the anniversary of Pope Francis' document on the family.

If we look back on Pope Francis' ministry, we find a further link with Saint Joseph. Pope Francis began his service as Pope on the feast of Saint Joseph in 2013. In his homily that day, Pope Francis drew lessons from Saint Joseph for his own mission and for the mission that we all share. He highlighted Saint Joseph's vocation to be the guardian or protector of Mary and Jesus and protector of the Church.

"How does Joseph exercise his role as protector? Discreetly, humbly and silently, but with an unflinching presence and utter fidelity, even when he finds it hard to understand. From the time of his betrothal to Mary until the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem, he is there at every moment with loving care. As the spouse of Mary, he is at her side in good times and bad, on the journey to Bethlehem for the census and in the anxious and joyful hours when she gave birth; amid the drama of the flight into Egypt and during the frantic search for their child in the Temple; and later in the day-to-day life of the home of Nazareth, in the workshop where he taught his trade to Jesus. How does Joseph respond to his calling to be the protector of Mary, Jesus and the Church? By being constantly attentive to God, open to the signs of God's presence and receptive to God's plans."

Pope Francis then spoke of our own call to be guardians or protectors of one another and of all creation. "The vocation of being a 'protector' means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people,

showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. It means caring for one another in our families: husbands and wives first protect one another, and then, as parents, they care for their children, and children themselves, in time, protect their parents. It means building sincere friendships in which we protect one another in trust, respect, and goodness. In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God's gifts!"

From these excerpts from his first homily as Pope, we see how Francis linked Saint Joseph with care of the family so it is not surprising that he has now linked the Year of Saint Joseph with the Year of the Family.

In a later homily, Pope Francis mentioned a practice that he follows that illustrates his personal devotion to Saint Joseph. It was in 2015, during a visit to the Philippines for a meeting with families in Manila. He described Saint Joseph as someone who was in tune with God even while he was asleep! He spoke of the times in the gospels where we read of an angel speaking to Saint Joseph in a dream. Then he referred to a little statue that he has on his table showing Saint Joseph asleep and his practice of entrusting concerns to Saint Joseph by putting a note under this statue.

"On my table I have an image of Saint Joseph sleeping. Even when he is asleep, he is taking care of the Church! Yes! We know that he can do that. So when I have a problem, a difficulty, I write a little note and I put it underneath Saint Joseph, so that he can dream about it! In other words I tell him: pray for this problem!" (Below is an image of Bishop Paul's own sleeping Saint Joseph)



In declaring a Year of Saint Joseph, Pope Francis is inviting us all to entrust our concerns to him. In having this Year of Saint Joseph overlap with a Year of the Family, he is inviting us to include our family concerns among the intentions that we entrust to Saint Joseph's care.

May this Year of Saint Joseph encourage us to go to Saint Joseph in our needs. May the coming Year of the Family inspire us to live our family lives in a truly Christian spirit, rejoicing in the blessings that we share and supporting one another when trials come. Through this year of reflection on family life and through the intercession of Saint Joseph, may our families experience anew the joy of love.

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