



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend we celebrate the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. For centuries, St. Joseph has been the forgotten member of the Holy Family. Yes, he is there in the Manger Scene, but rarely do we think more about him. It is understandable, since he is little seen in the Scriptures. Over the last couple of centuries, though, St. Joseph is taking a more central place in the devotional lives of Catholics. On December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX declared St. Joseph the Patron of the Universal Church. This gave him more “screen time,” as it were.

This year, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis declared a year dedicated to Joseph, from December 8, 2020-December 8, 2021. Pope Francis has established this year to St. Joseph so that every member of the faithful may strengthen the day-to-day life of faith by following St. Joseph’s example. The Pope wrote an Apostolic Letter – *Patris Corde* (“With a Father’s Heart”) – on this occasion. In it, he looks at the different aspects of Joseph’s fatherhood (to read it, go to vatican.va and search “Patris Corde”).

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, 18.3 million children, about 1 in 4, live without a biological, step or adoptive father in the home. Research shows that when a child is raised in a father-absent home, s/he is affected. Some of the effects are: four times greater risk of poverty, higher likelihood for behavioral problems, more likely to go to prison and commit crimes, more likely to face abuse and neglect, more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, and twice as likely to suffer obesity and to drop out of high school. These statistics show us the need for good, present fathers. The Church lifts St. Joseph as a model of fatherhood for us – present, prayerful and protector of the Holy Family.

More than a model, though, Joseph is offered as an intercessor from Heaven. We can cry out to him to bring healing to the wounds caused by our fallible fathers. We can ask him to be the father we need. We can turn to him for strength to be the parent we have failed to be. Many saints are patrons of particular things (for instance, St. Sebastian is the patron saint of sports); St. Joseph is the universal patron. No matter the circumstances, we can go to Joseph for help!

With all of this, I invite you to get to know St. Joseph more throughout the upcoming year. Maybe you could read and meditate on the Joseph passages of the Bible (Matthew 1-2, Luke 2). Another option is to pray through the consecration to Jesus through St. Joseph. Over the last couple of years, two good books have come out to prepare for this consecration: 1) *Consecration to Jesus Through St. Joseph: An Integrated Look at the Holy Family* by Dr. Gregory Bottaro and Jennifer Settle (shop.corproject.com/collections/books/products/consecration-to-jesus-through-st-joseph-an-integrated-look-at-the-holy-family); and 2) *Consecration to St. Joseph: the Wonders of Our Spiritual Father* by Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC (www.shopmercy.org/consecration-to-st-joseph-the-wonders-of-our-spiritual-father.html). Both are great resources that teach us about St. Joseph and devotion to him.

As we begin this new year dedicated to St. Joseph, may we come to know our spiritual father better, may he be an example of faith and fidelity to us, and may we fly to him for our needs, that he may whisper into the ears of his adopted Son, Jesus.