

## The Year of Saint Joseph



For the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Joseph being proclaimed Patron of the Universal Church, Pope Francis has declared a ‘Year of St Joseph’ from 8 December 2020 until 8 December 2021, publishing for the occasion the Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* (‘With a father’s heart’).

Many will be especially delighted by this – simply because we love St Joseph! In the Legion there is deep awareness that the heartbeat of faith isn’t ideas and abstractions, but enthusiastic and devoted love for real-life *persons*. Ruling all, obviously, is our encounter and relationship with God, who has become flesh in Jesus Christ. Yet this love overflows – most especially into our love for Our Lady, but also for all the Saints, and in a special way for the humble St Joseph, the ‘just man’ chosen by God for the extraordinary role of husband of the Blessed Virgin and foster-father of God the Son made man.

Prior to *Patris Corde*, over the years there were already various Church documents about St Joseph. In 1989 Pope St John Paul II published his Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, ‘Guardian of the Redeemer’, the occasion of which was the centenary of Pope Leo XIII’s 1889 Encyclical on St Joseph, *Quamquam Pluries*. By reading these documents we can deepen our knowledge of all that the different aspects of Joseph’s life can teach us.

We’re already familiar with some of these – his marriage to Mary, making him the model of what it is to be a good husband; his modelling of fatherhood through his exercising that role in the life of Jesus. John Paul II emphasises the importance of upholding that the union of Joseph and Mary was a true marriage, in accordance with the angel’s words in Matthew’s gospel, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife’. (*Mt* 1:21) The essence of marriage is something spiritual, the consent to an ‘indivisible union of hearts and souls.’ And following St Augustine, the Pope also insisted that there is a sense in which Joseph can truly be called the father of Jesus. ‘By reason of their faithful marriage both of them deserve to be called Christ’s parents, not only his mother, but also his father, who was a parent in the same way that he was the mother’s spouse: in mind, not in the flesh.’ (St Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, quoted in *Redemptoris Custos* 7; cf. Mary’s words in *Lk* 2:48.)

Then we consider Joseph’s faith and obedience, like that of Mary, which led him to immediately do God’s will when that was revealed to him. His life of work as a carpenter, indeed teaching this trade to Jesus, makes him a model for all workers. And through his intimacy with Jesus and Mary, St Joseph is a great model of always living in their presence ourselves, a model of the interior life: of prayer, of silence, of contemplation. What an amazing privilege he must have felt it to be: living the hours of every day in their company, speaking to them, learning from them, loving them. We can consider also what he means for *consecration* to Mary: there was no one who was more truly and completely consecrated to Mary than her own husband. So somewhat as Mary shows us what it means to be a perfect disciple of Jesus, Joseph shows us what it means to be a disciple who truly loves and honours Mary herself.

And just as Joseph watched over Jesus and Mary, so it was also very fitting that in 1870, Pope Blessed Pius IX pronounced Joseph to be the heavenly patron watching over the Universal Church – because the Church is the Body of Christ, and Mary is the perfect image of the Church. Then finally, St Joseph is the special patron of the dying, and of a happy death, because we can suppose that he died with Jesus and Mary at his side. May this Year deepen our own devotion to St Joseph, and may he lead us ever deeper into his own closeness to Our Lord and Our Lady.

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## Special Indulgences for the Year of Saint Joseph

It remains to be seen what special activities the Church may organise for this Year of St Joseph. The main thing so far is that the Apostolic Penitentiary, by mandate of Pope Francis, has announced many plenary indulgences for different acts of prayer and devotion to St Joseph. These are listed in the following article from *Vatican News*. (It is noteworthy that in the circumstances of COVID-19, special provisions are made for the sick, elderly, dying and housebound to gain the indulgences, and legionaries should facilitate this.)

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-12/apostolic-penitentiary-plenary-indulgence-year-st-joseph.html>

In view of these many opportunities, it's good to recall the meaning of indulgences, and the conditions for fully receiving them.

Even when a sin is forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, normally some purification remains to be undergone – whether in this life by prayer, penance, and the offering up of our sufferings to God; or otherwise after death in purgatory. But by the authority of the Church applying the merits of Christ, Mary and the Saints, an indulgence removes (completely or partially) this debt of punishment for past sins, the guilt of which has already been forgiven.

For a plenary (complete) indulgence, besides the specific indulgenced work, three 'usual conditions' must also be fulfilled within several days before or after (about 20 days, the Apostolic Penitentiary has said): Confession; Holy Communion; and prayers for the Pope's intentions (e.g. 1 Our Father and 1 Hail Mary). Also, one must be free from all attachment to sin, even venial sin. That is a bit more difficult – but simply ask God's grace and make a sincere act of contrition prior to the indulgenced work, and leave the rest to God. (And even if all the conditions are not fulfilled, a partial indulgence can still be obtained.)

One Confession suffices for multiple plenary indulgences, but Holy Communion must be received and prayers for the Pope's intentions recited for each indulgence. Normally only one plenary indulgence can be gained per day. We recommend reciting the indulgenced prayers vocally, not just in one's mind. However, it is legitimate to alternate with others who are reciting, as in the Rosary; or to follow mentally as another recites.

By default, an indulgence normally gets applied to oneself, but we can choose to offer it as a prayer for the souls in purgatory. So especially if we are gaining plenary indulgences frequently, it makes sense to generously offer the bulk of these for the faithful departed, rather than leaving them all only for ourselves (when we may already be largely free of debt of punishment). This also surely gains for us many grateful ongoing intercessors whom, under God's grace, we will have been instrumental in releasing from purgatory into heaven. (We cannot guarantee that an indulgence will be applied to a *particular* deceased person, but we can still ask this of God.)

Someone who has made the Total Consecration to Mary has already given over to her the disposal of all indulgences gained. But even if you haven't made the Total Consecration, you can still express to God in advance that it is your normal habitual intention to offer your indulgences for the faithful departed (saving you from having to think about making this offering with every individual indulgence). For example, you might say to God, 'My God, I intend in my life to gain all the indulgences that are available to me for my actions, and I give

them to Mary, my heavenly Mother, to be used as she chooses, perhaps that they be applied to that soul who has the greatest claim on my love.’ (Those who are not in the commitment of the Total Consecration can leave open the possibility of making exceptions to this intention if they wish, and specifically apply an indulgence simply to themselves.)

One finds Catholics who are dismissive of indulgences; but the Ecumenical Council of Trent, while correcting the abuses of indulgences that had helped trigger the Protestant Reformation, condemned ‘with anathema those who assert that they are useless or who deny that the Church has the power to grant them.’ (*Decree on Indulgences* 4 December 1563 (DS 1835)) And after Vatican II, Pope St Paul VI quoted and reaffirmed those same words. (*Indulgentiarum Doctrina* 8 (1 January 1967); cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nn. 1471-79) This anathema given by an Ecumenical Council means that the usefulness of indulgences, and the Church’s power to grant them, are infallible teachings, denial of which would take us out of full communion with the Catholic Church. (cf. F. Sullivan *Creative Fidelity* pp. 49-55; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Commentary* (1998) 6)

That is all to reaffirm: indulgences are real and valuable. Those granted for the Year of St Joseph are unusually numerous, and enable plenary indulgences to be easily gained every single day for those who are fulfilling the usual conditions. Thus someone who goes to the maximum extent of receiving Communion daily and going to confession at least every forty days (so that they are always within twenty days of a confession) can quite easily perform every day one of the indulgenced works, along with praying for the Pope’s intentions – and so obtain for the souls in purgatory even 365 plenary indulgences over the course of the year. And priests in particular will be able to guide parishioners to take full advantage of what is offered, perhaps leading them in the indulgenced prayers after daily Mass. The words of St John Paul II encourage us all in this regard: ‘Thanks be to God that, wherever the Christian life is lived fervently, the faithful love indulgences and devoutly use them.’ (*Message*, 20 March 1998)

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Pope St Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* (1967)

Apostolic Penitentiary *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* (4th ed. 1999, English translation 2006)

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) nn. 1471-79

Edward Peters *A Modern Guide to Indulgences* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2008)

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## LITANY OF ST JOSEPH

Lord, have mercy	<i>Lord, have mercy</i>
Christ, have mercy	<i>Christ, have mercy</i>
Lord, have mercy	<i>Lord, have mercy</i>
God our Father in Heaven	<i>have mercy on us</i>
God the Son, Redeemer of the world	...
God the Holy Spirit	...
Holy Trinity, one God	...
Holy Mary	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Joseph	...
Noble son of the House of David	...
Light of patriarchs	...
Husband of the Mother of God	...
Guardian of the Virgin	...
Foster father of the Son of God	...
Faithful guardian of Christ	...
Head of the holy family	...
Joseph, chaste and just	...
Joseph, prudent and brave	...
Joseph, obedient and loyal	...
Pattern of patience	...
Lover of poverty	...
Model of workers	...
Example to parents	...
Guardian of virgins	...
Pillar of family life	...
Comfort of the troubled	...
Hope of the sick	...
Patron of the dying	...
Terror of evil spirits	...
Protector of the Church	...
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world	<i>have mercy on us</i>
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world	<i>have mercy on us</i>
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world	<i>have mercy on us</i>

God made him master of his household. **And put him in charge of all that he owned.**

*Let us pray.* **Almighty God, in your infinite wisdom and love you chose Joseph to be the husband of Mary, the mother of your Son. As we enjoy his protection on earth may we have the help of his prayers in heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

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*The Vatican News article referenced above explains that for the Year of St Joseph a plenary indulgence is granted under the usual conditions for reciting the 'Litany of St Joseph' for the intention: 'For the persecuted Church "ad intra" and "ad extra", and for the relief of all Christians suffering all forms of persecution'. This indulgence is easily gained daily if the usual conditions of Confession, Communion and prayers for the Pope's intentions are being fulfilled.*

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## **PRAYER TO ST JOSEPH**

To you, O blessed Joseph, do we come in our tribulation,  
and having implored the help of your most holy spouse,  
we confidently invoke your patronage also.  
Through that charity which bound you  
to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God  
and through the paternal love with which you embraced the Child Jesus,  
we humbly beg you graciously to regard the inheritance  
which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood,  
and with your power and strength to aid us in our necessities.  
O most watchful Guardian of the Holy Family,  
defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ;  
O most loving father, ward off from us  
every contagion of error and corrupting influence;  
O our most mighty protector, be kind to us and from heaven assist us  
in our struggle with the power of darkness.  
As once you rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril,  
so now protect God's Holy Church  
from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity;  
shield, too, each one of us by your constant protection,  
so that, supported by your example and your aid,  
we may be able to live piously, to die in holiness,  
and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven. Amen.

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*The Vatican News article referenced above explains that for the Year of St Joseph a plenary indulgence is granted under the usual conditions for reciting any approved prayer or act of piety in honour of St. Joseph, for example, 'To you, O blessed Joseph', especially on the Feast of St Joseph, 19 March; on St Joseph the Worker, 1 May; the Feast of the Holy Family; on the 19th of each month; and every Wednesday, traditionally dedicated to St Joseph.*