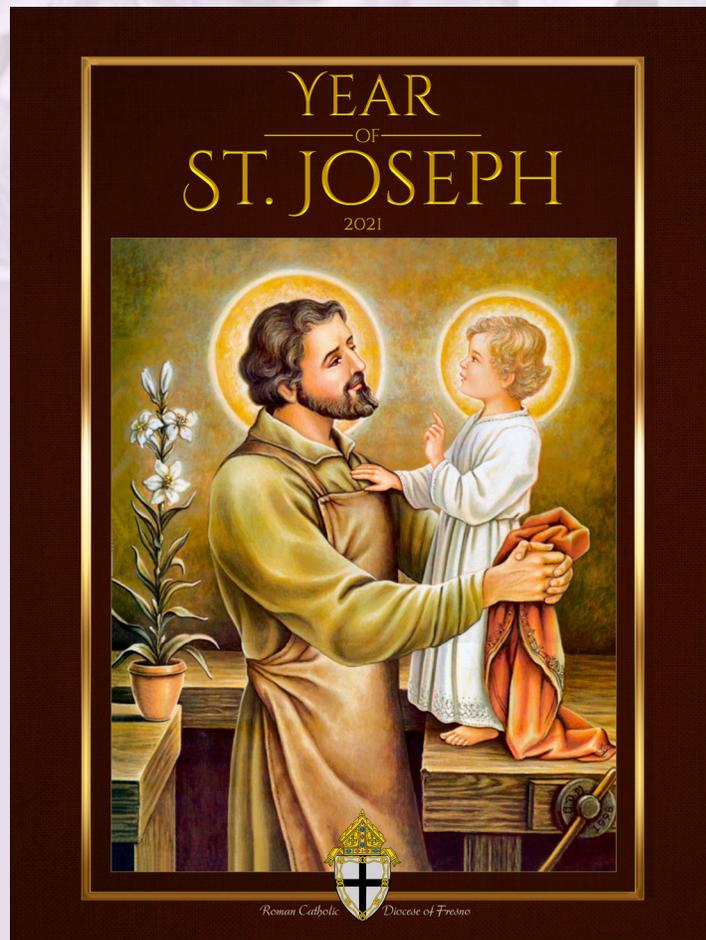


Pastoral Letter on the Year of St. Joseph

Conventional wisdom would say that the year 2021 did not get off to a good start. Let me propose to you that the new year actually got off to a great start! Yes, I know, we have dealt with the ongoing challenge of the pandemic, racial strife is with us still and political infighting and division have been the order of the day at the beginning of this new year. However, we Catholics began the year with the celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. No doubt about it, that was a very good way to start the new year. Her title as 'Mother of God' says as much about her son, Jesus, as it does about her. It is another way for us to affirm and celebrate that core belief that fairly leaps off the page of our Profession of Faith and our Angelus prayer: 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.' God has become one of us. The Lord has entered our world and our history, and it has made all the difference in the world. St. Joseph would have been quite pleased by all of this; happy for the Christ child entrusted to him and happy for that child's Mother, Joseph's beautiful wife, Mary.

St. Joseph, obviously, has been a prominent figure in my life. I am beyond grateful to my Mother and Father for bestowing the name 'Joseph' upon me on the day of my Baptism. Of course, I should mention that someone else was baptized that day right along with me, my twin brother, Terry. It would be helpful to know his full given name which was Terrance Patrick and that we were born on March the 20th. Being very good Catholics, my Mom and Dad knew that March 17th was the Feast of St. Patrick and March 19th, the Feast of St. Joseph. Aware of those Saints and aware of the timing, our parents gave us names to live up to. From that point forward, my twin and I were very popular indeed, at least with our brothers and sisters. You see, as Irish Catholics we were 'obliged' to celebrate the Feast of St. Patrick in a very big way. So that I would not feel left out, we had to celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph with just as much gusto. The following day, of course, we absolutely had to celebrate our birth. Think about it; three major parties all in the same week and celebrated every year. Keep in mind that those



days always fell during the Lenten season and you can see why my twin and I were so popular. On those 3 days Mom and Dad dispensed all of us from whatever we promised to give up for Lent! Chocolate cake all around! God bless you, St. Joseph! You too, St. Patrick!

God bless you indeed, St. Joseph. God bless you for being such a fine and decent man. God bless you for not wanting to expose Mary to violence and abuse. God bless you for listening to the angel's message in your dream. God bless you for leaving your fears behind and taking Mary as your wife. God bless you for protecting the Christ child and teaching him everything he needed to know about being a real man. God bless you for providing for Jesus and Mary. God bless you for teaching Jesus how to read from the Torah. God bless you and his Mother, Mary, for teaching him



the 'Shemá Israel'. God bless you for helping him to learn how to lift up his heart in quiet prayer every day.

One hundred and fifty years ago, on December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX declared St. Joseph to be the 'Patron of the Catholic Church'. As many of you know, Pope Francis proclaimed a special 'Year of St. Joseph' on December 8, 2020, in a beautiful Apostolic Letter entitled 'Patris Corde', that is, 'WITH A FATHER'S HEART'. Pope Francis reminds us that St. Joseph's heart was definitely a very courageous and creative heart. Joseph's courage and creativity would come into play from the very start of his life as part of God's plan and as part of the Holy Family. As Pope Francis himself writes in his Apostolic Letter about those beginnings, "As we read the infancy narratives, we may often wonder why God did not act in a more direct and clear way. Yet God acts through events and people. Joseph was the man chosen by God to guide the beginnings of the history of redemption. He was the true 'miracle' by which God saves the child and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph's creative courage. Arriving in Bethlehem and finding no lodging where Mary could give birth, Joseph took a stable and, as best he could, turned it into a welcoming home for the Son of God come into the world (cf. Lk 2:13-14)." You see, St. Joseph faced life as it was and as it came to him. He neither got upset nor threw a tantrum because life was hard or because it was not turning out the way he thought it would or should. He did not grumble and complain about how unfair, unjust and impossible it all was. He accepted his situation in life and the circumstances he found himself and his family in, and by God's grace transformed them. He implicitly trusted in God's plan and in God's Word. Somehow, I believe that he knew that the 'Word made flesh' had been entrusted to him. He took that calling seriously and so must we.

I mentioned at the beginning of this short letter that St. Joseph would be quite pleased about the Feast of Mary, Mother of God. In fact, I am sure he is somehow pleased by all of our Marian feasts and the beautiful attention and love thus being directed toward

his precious wife. I have a hunch that he would be less pleased about the dedication of a whole year in his honor and memory. He might even be a little embarrassed by all the attention. Perhaps he is thinking that he 'only' listened to God's voice or that he 'just' did what God asked him to do. Maybe he is assuming that he was 'simply' a man who was at the right place at the right time. I am thinking, however, that this world would be a far better place and that evangelization would be light years ahead of where it is now if you and I would 'only' listen to God's word and 'just' do what God would have us do.

Brothers and sisters, we have some very simple, courageous and humble footsteps to follow in. We have already marked this Year of St. Joseph with celebration, prayer and works of charity and we will continue to do so. This year's Lenten journey, fast approaching its climax, has helped us to do precisely that. Through it all we will thank God for the man who, like Mary, said his own "yes" to God. Finally, we will hope and pray that our "yes" to God, like theirs, will make all the difference in the world.

May this Year of St. Joseph continue to be filled with every grace and blessing for you and those you love.

Given on the Feast of St. Joseph, March 19th, 2021

In Christ,
Bishop Joseph Brennan