

## **“ITE AD IOSEPH”: BEGINNING A YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH**

It began 150 years ago this coming Tuesday. On **December 8, 1870**, the Sacred Congregation for Rites issued a decree. In itself, a Roman congregation's decree a century and a half ago isn't exactly "breaking news." But this was different. It communicated Pope Pius IX's **intention** to proclaim St. Joseph as **Patron of the Universal Church**. To say that this was a long-overdue recognition of the saint is an understatement! Some background is needed here. On July 19, 1870, just a day after the bishops at Vatican I approved *Pastor Aeternus*, the dogmatic teaching on *ex cathedra* papal infallibility, the Franco-Prussian War broke out. This had huge implications for the Vatican. The council fathers left hastily. Eventually, Pius IX (who served as pope for 31.6 years!) formally **adjourned** the proceedings indefinitely. Vatican I went down in history as an "unfinished" council until Vatican II elaborated on the teaching nearly a century later.

The timing of that decree was anything but coincidental. Garibaldi's troops had entered Rome on September 20, annexing it to the Kingdom of Italy. It's complicated— but explains why you see a road in countless Italian cities named *Via XX Settembre*. Garibaldi effectively isolated the pope as a prisoner in the Vatican and the **Papal States** were effectively caput. It would take until the **1929 Lateran Treaty** to iron out the details of what was called the "Roman Question." The Church's authority had been dealt a crushing blow, making this decree even more **significant**. The Vatican Council I fathers had "earnestly renewed" earlier calls for this patronage to be formalized. This was **no mere** liturgical adjustment, raising the rank of his feast day, though it did that too. It was effectively a **declaration** of the Church's **heavenly protection**, never subject to worldly powers.

The decree reads in part (my **emphasis** added): "And now therefore, when in these most **troublesome times** the Church is beset by **enemies on every side**, and is weighed down by calamities so heavy that ungodly men assert that the gates of hell have at length prevailed against her, the venerable prelates of the whole Catholic world have presented to the Sovereign Pontiff their own petitions and those of the faithful committed to their charge, praying that he would deign to constitute St. Joseph Patron of the Church." Comparatively, St. Joseph received **much less attention** from ecclesiastical writers in the early Church and beyond. Frankly, it took **centuries** for devotion to St. Joseph to spread. Joseph is mentioned **only 15 times** in the Gospels and speaks **not a single word** in Scripture. Had he nothing to say? Far from it.

Curiously, the figure of Joseph never figured prominently in the works of the Church Fathers. Mostly they shed light on the confusion surrounding the phrase "brethren of Jesus" and defended the validity of the marriage of Mary and Joseph. St. Joseph **led by example**, his actions serving as a catechism for instilling in Jesus the life lessons of servant leadership and acceptance of God's plan. Joseph was a **protector**. His strength flowed not from the bravado of words, but from the **silent strength** of his witness. For example, even amidst the Marian apparition at Knock, Ireland (1879), Joseph appears and yet said nothing. It took until 1479 for his Feast day to be fixed on March 19, and 1729 for his name to be added to the Litany of Saints! In 1624, French explorer **Samuel de Champlain** proclaimed St. Joseph as the patron for New France, present day **Quebec, Canada**.

One of the most revered figures in the Book of **Genesis** is that of Joseph. Sprinkled throughout chapters 37-50, we read in chapter 41 the account of the famine that closely followed seven years of plenty. Joseph had wisely **stored grain**, all of which became the source of sustenance during the **time of need**. When the famine spread and the people cried for food, Pharaoh said to the Egyptians, "**Go to Joseph** and do whatever he tells you." (Genesis 41:55) Then, Joseph opened the granaries and rationed the contents to keep the people alive. The biblical Joseph of the Old Testament may be seen as the **pre-figurement of Christ**. The comparisons between Joseph and Jesus are obvious: Joseph was also betrayed (by his brothers); he was stripped out of his colorful coat (Genesis 37:23), just as Jesus was stripped of his garments; both were sold for silver (20 pieces vs. 30 pieces), to name but three.

There are also connections with St. Joseph, husband of Mary. Both Joseph's had fathers named Jacob and

were considered in a line of royalty. Both suffered difficulties—not of their own making—without complaint. Both fled to Egypt and were materially poor at times in their lives. The phrase “**Go to Joseph**” (in Latin *Ite ad Ioseph*) is as fitting for the husband of Mary as it was for the Egyptians in their time of need. We ought to go to St. Joseph in our time of need. And for the next year, we shall all have a unique opportunity to do just that. Archbishop Hebda will celebrate Mass here on **December 8 at 7:00 p.m.**, during which he will inaugurate a special **Year of St. Joseph**, consecrating this Archdiocese to his powerful intercession. I hope you can join us, either in person or via livestream, as we entrust this local Church to the powerful intercession of St. Joseph.

- I had struggled mightily with my 8+ year-old computer, sluggish as honey out of a jar. Recently, when saving the Sunday petitions on my new computer, the prompt inquired if I wanted the new copy (of the petitions) to replace the old of the same name. I clicked “Yes” only to realize that what it was **replacing** was my **brand-new homily**. By the grace of God, I uttered **nary a naughty** word. No, I just stared into my screen, incredulous that I had erased an afternoon of work, just minutes before Saturday confessions began.
- Catholics are asking good questions about the new Covid-19 vaccines, specifically about their origins. A memo from the USCCB clarifies that, “Neither the **Pfizer** nor the **Moderna** vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in fetal tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development, or production.”
- On the evenings of **December 17-19, 2020** Cathedral Heritage Foundation is sponsoring “**Cathedral Illuminated: The Manger**”. It is a **free** drive-along event, using the Cathedral as a canvas on which to tell the story of Christmas by means of light murals. The 12-minute show will be run on a continuous loop. People will remain in their cars and traffic will be directed one-way heading north on Summit Ave. The show is the generous gift of the CHF to the city in these challenging times.
- A **parish mailing** went out with the **Christmas Mass/Confession** schedule, along with a **small gift** for each household. You should receive it soon. Our **online sign-up** serves to spread out attendance among the six Masses. It should be operative by December 8.
- Did you know? When the Cathedral opened, it fell within the boundaries of the **Church of Saint Joseph** (1875-1915), at the corner of Carroll and Virginia, behind the old St. Joseph’s Academy. That parish closed and was subsumed into the new Cathedral parish.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector