

“WITH A FATHER’S HEART”: SAINT JOSEPH’S INDISPENSABLE ROLE

The Mass honoring the Blessed Mother on her Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 is always special. It was made even more so by the inclusion of the inauguration of the **Year of St. Joseph** within the liturgy by Archbishop Hebda. Little could he know that at 5:00 a.m. on the morning of December 8 (Roman “Noon”), our local shepherd’s declaration would be “upstaged” by Pope Francis himself! He did **the exact same thing** for the universal Church. As a result, a second column on the topic seems warranted. The Holy Father wrote an Apostolic letter entitled *Patris Corde* and I encourage you to [read](#) it here. My interest in Saint Joseph was piqued as a newly ordained priest assigned to the Church of Saint Joseph for my first assignment. Barely there two months, then Pope John Paul II released an Apostolic Exhortation entitled “Guardian of the Redeemer.” (August 15, 1989) View it [here](#). The Pope pondered some aspects of his life I had not previously considered.

For example, St. John Paul II wrote: “And while it is important for the Church to profess the virginal conception of Jesus, it is no less important to uphold Mary’s marriage to Joseph, because juridically Joseph’s fatherhood depends on it.” In other words, Joseph’s fatherhood is 100% real, the **marriage** was an **authentic** one, even though conjugal relations were excluded for obvious reasons. I recall seeing a contemporary litany for Mary that invoked her as “unwed mother.” Such an invocation is, of course, utterly erroneous. Luke’s Gospel records the angel saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.” (Luke 1:20) **Betrothal** was considered a **legally binding** marriage, explaining why Joseph simply couldn’t walk away. The early Church Fathers knew this. Augustine wrote in his treatise on marriage: “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.” (*De Nuptiis*, I, 11, 12)

This year, we are privileged to have been granted a special gift by our Archbishop to obtain a *partial* indulgence by means of special prayers this year. Recall, partial indulgences remove some of the temporal punishment due on account of the effects of our sins. These are prayers or works that bring us closer to God and show our willingness to repair some of the lingering **effects of sins**, whose guilt has already been forgiven, but whose effects remain. Archbishop Hebda’s decree (see page 11) expresses his desire to encourage our devotion. We are invited to pray the Archdiocesan Synod Prayer to St. Joseph before any image of St. Joseph. Those prayer cards are located appropriately in our Chapel of St. Joseph, so beautifully decorated, with more decorations to unfold over the following months.

Accompanying Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter was a decree from the Vatican Apostolic Penitentiary granting the possibility of obtaining a **plenary indulgence**. It may be fulfilled by: (1) meditating for 30 minutes on the Lord’s Prayer, take part in a spiritual retreat that includes a meditation on St. Joseph; (2) following St. Joseph’s example, perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy; (3) the recitation of the Holy Rosary in families and among engaged couples, in order that all Christian families may be stimulated to recreate the same atmosphere of intimate communion, love and prayer that was in the Holy Family; (4) everyone who entrusts their daily activity to the protection of St. Joseph, and every faithful who invokes the intercession of St. Joseph so that those seeking work can find dignifying work; (5) reciting the Litany to St. Joseph (for the Latin tradition) for the persecuted Church.

But there’s more! The faithful may also recite any legitimately approved prayer or act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, for example, “To you, O blessed Joseph” especially on “19 March, on 1 May, the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, on St. Joseph’s Sunday (according to the Byzantine tradition) on the 19th of each month and **every Wednesday**, a day dedicated to the memory of the saint according to the Latin tradition.” Originating at the end of the 17th century, I was previously unaware of this **connection with Wednesdays**. I’ll pay more attention now! In 1914, Pope Pius X granted the Pious Union of St. Joseph formal approval. They spread the devotion of the **Nine First Wednesdays** in honor of St. Joseph for a happy death, for yourself and your loved ones. In this time of pandemic, such a mission is quite timely and valuable.

As we celebrate Christmas and honor the Holy Family in rapid succession this year, I extend my promise of

prayers for a happy, holy and **healthy** Christmas season. We are so blessed here. The Christmas **decorations** are as spectacular as ever, and I hope those joining us on livestream can gain the proper sense of the grandeur of the flowers and the sounds of the **Schola** put together for Christmas. The second camera has been a godsend as it provides a better viewing experience. We are doing our best to pivot. Our **staff** has worked extra hours to set up both the indoor and outdoor crèches, for safety reasons absent the usual large group of generous volunteers. Thank you for joining us in person or via livestream. May the Holy Family inspire us all to greater holiness and charity.

- While this may be my 32nd Christmas as a priest, I must say it stands out over all others! **Surreal, subdued**, a bit **stressful** and yet, God willing, **sanctified**. Advent provided increased opportunities for quiet reflection, absent the usual bevy of events that typically take place leading up to Christmas. That may just be the **silver lining** amidst a dark cloud. But this day, the light has broken into the world and we rejoice. I am humbled that you are joining us today—a **Blessed Christmas** to you and your family.
- A **Villanova University** study predicts that Catholic parishes in the US will see a **24% decline** in collections this fiscal year. Much of it is pandemic related, though collections had been slipping by 7% before the pandemic struck. It will take a concerted effort to bring people back to the pews when the dust settles from all that we have been through this year!
- Unsolicited Christmas advice...pick up the **phone** and call an out of town **relative** this Christmas with whom perhaps you have not spoken in some time. It does wonders for the soul for both of you!
- Though carefully watching our finances, we sprang for a **second camera** to improve our livestream experience. It's working well. We soon discovered that we really needed a second laptop for the entire system to work most efficiently. Cha-ching! That very same day, I received an e-mail inquiring as to whether we have use for a new laptop at the parish. Talk about **Divine Providence**. Turns out it is **precisely** what we needed. The parishioner wishes to remain anonymous. To Anonymous- you know who you are. Bless you!
- There are still a few days in which to make an end of the year gift to the Cathedral. The CARES Act provides some unique opportunities for charitable giving in 2020. I remain deeply grateful for your continued support.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector