

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Joseph

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: March 19

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IN BRIEF

Saint Joseph

Husband of the Virgin Mary, foster father of Jesus and patron of the universal Church.

Feast day	March 19, May 1
Canonized	Venerated since ancient times; proclaimed patron of the universal Church in 1870
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	universal Church, fathers, workers, a happy death, families, carpenters, Canada

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Joseph by Leo XIII: "To You, O Blessed Joseph"

Novena to Saint Joseph

Saint Joseph Sanctuary at Bessillon

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Joseph

Saint Joseph is the husband of the Virgin Mary and the foster father of Jesus, the man who raised him in Nazareth and taught him his trade. The Gospels record not a single word spoken by him, yet they show a just man, attentive to God even in his dreams, who protected his family at the cost of exile. Patron of the universal Church since 1870, he is honored on March 19 and, as Saint Joseph the Worker, on May 1. He is one of the most widely invoked saints in the world, especially by fathers, workers and those who ask for a happy death.

Who was Saint Joseph?

Everything we know for certain about Joseph comes from the first two chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,. A devout Jew descended from King David, he lived in Nazareth, in Galilee, and worked with his hands. He was betrothed to a young woman of the village, Mary. The Gospels give neither his birth date, his age nor the date of his death.

Apocryphal writings such as the *Protoevangelium of James*, from the 2nd century, imagined Joseph as a very old widower chosen by a miraculous sign. These texts shaped Christian art, which often shows him as an old man, but the Church does not regard them as historical.

Key dates

- **c. 7-6 BC**: After a dream, he takes Mary into his home, then travels to Bethlehem for the census, where Jesus is born.
- **When Jesus is twelve**: Joseph and Mary find him in the Temple after three days of searching (Luke 2:41-52).
- **Before the public ministry of Jesus**: According to tradition, Joseph dies with Jesus and Mary at his side.

- **15th century**: His March 19 feast spreads in the West, encouraged especially by the Franciscans, and enters the Roman calendar under Sixtus IV.
- **December 8, 1870**: Pius IX proclaims him patron of the universal Church.
- **August 15, 1889**: Encyclical *Quamquam pluries* of Leo XIII and the prayer "To you, O blessed Joseph."
- **1955**: Pius XII institutes the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker on May 1.
- **1962**: Saint John XXIII has his name inserted into the Roman Canon of the Mass.
- **August 15, 1989**: Apostolic exhortation *Redemptoris custos* of Saint John Paul II.
- **December 8, 2020**: Apostolic letter *Patris corde* of Pope Francis, opening a Year of Saint Joseph.

Joseph in the Gospels

Matthew calls Joseph "a righteous man" (Matthew 1:19). Learning that Mary is expecting a child who is not his, he decides to divorce her quietly, to spare her public shame. An angel then appears to him in a dream and tells him to take Mary into his home, because the child is from the Holy Spirit. When he wakes, he obeys. It is Joseph who gives the child the name Jesus, meaning "God saves," and by naming him he places him in the line of David.

Three more dreams mark Matthew's account: the command to flee into Egypt to escape the massacre ordered by Herod, the announcement that the family may return, and the instruction to settle in Galilee, at Nazareth. Each time, Joseph rises and goes. Luke, for his part, shows him in Bethlehem at the birth, in the Temple at the presentation of Jesus, and in Jerusalem when the twelve-year-old boy stays behind among the teachers of the Law. Mary then says to Jesus: "Your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."



Saint Joseph at Bessillon, monastery entrance. FERNANDES Gilbert, October 20, 2025. CC0. Resized and converted to WebP. Source · License

The carpenter of Nazareth

The people of Nazareth call Jesus "the carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55). The Greek word *tekton* refers to a craftsman who worked with wood and probably with stone as well. Joseph earned a modest living for his family and passed his skills on to Jesus, whom Mark himself calls "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3). For some thirty years, the Son of God grew up in an ordinary home, shaped by work and Jewish prayer.

This is why the Church sees Joseph as the model and patron of workers. In 1955, Pope Pius XII wanted to give Labor Day a Christian meaning and instituted the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker on May 1. Joseph reminds us

that the humblest work has dignity and that holiness is lived out in everyday faithfulness.

A devotion that grew over the centuries

The early centuries say little about Joseph. Devotion to him developed in the Middle Ages, promoted by writers such as Jean Gerson and by the Franciscans, including Saint Bernardine of Siena. In the 16th century, Saint Teresa of Avila credited him with her healing and wrote in her *Life* (chapter 6) that she could not remember ever asking him for anything without receiving it. She dedicated many Carmelite convents to him and spread his devotion across Europe.

In the 19th century, at a time of heavy trials for the Church, Blessed Pius IX proclaimed him patron of the universal Church: the one who had protected the Holy Family was asked to protect the Church. In 1889, Leo XIII devoted an encyclical to him and asked that the prayer "To you, O blessed Joseph" be said in October. More recently, Saint John XXIII, Saint John Paul II and Pope Francis wrote major texts about him, and his name was added to the Eucharistic Prayers in 2013. The month of March is traditionally dedicated to him, as is Wednesday of each week.

In the English-speaking world, his feast is celebrated with particular warmth by Italian-American communities, who prepare Saint Joseph's Day tables, or altars, laden with bread and food to share with the poor.

Why is Saint Joseph the patron saint of a happy death and of families?

According to tradition, Joseph died in Nazareth before the public ministry of Jesus. He no longer appears at Cana or at the Passion, where Jesus entrusts his mother to Saint John. Christians picture him dying in the arms of Jesus and Mary, which made him the patron of a happy death, invoked for the dying.

Because he protected and provided for the Holy Family, he is also the patron of fathers, husbands, carpenters and craftsmen, and of several countries, including Canada.

What his holiness teaches

His holiness lies in his actions: welcoming, protecting, working, getting up in the night to set out. He shows that one can be a father without possessing, and that obeying God often means accepting what we do not understand right away. In *Patris corde*, Pope Francis describes him as a beloved, tender, obedient, accepting and courageous father, who remains in the shadows.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Joseph by Leo XIII, or follow the novena to Saint Joseph, from March 10 to 18 so that it ends on the eve of his feast, or from April 22 to 30 before May 1.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Joseph in art

Saint Joseph is usually shown holding the Child Jesus in his arms. His most common attribute is a flowering staff, often topped with lilies, a sign of purity drawn from the apocryphal story of his betrothal. Carpenter's tools, such as a saw, a plane or a square, recall his trade.

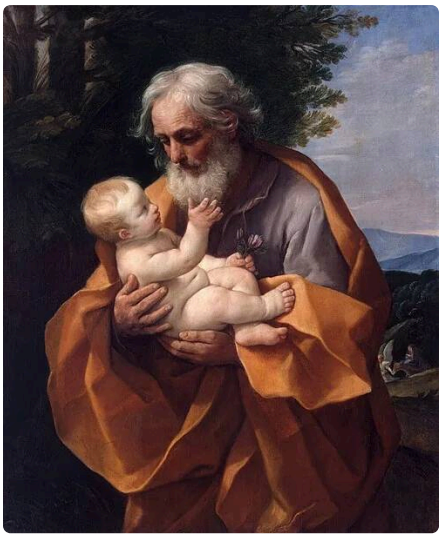
Where to pray to Saint Joseph

- **Montreal** (Canada): Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal, founded by Saint André Bessette, one of the largest shrines in the world dedicated to Saint Joseph.
- **Nazareth** (Israel): the Church of Saint Joseph, next to the Basilica of the Annunciation, built over remains that tradition links to the home of the Holy Family.
- **Cotignac** (Provence, France): the shrine of Saint Joseph at Bessillon, site of an apparition reported in 1660, with its spring.

- **Espaly-Saint-Marcel** (France): the shrine of Saint Joseph de Bon-Espoir, near Le Puy-en-Velay, crowned by a large statue of the saint.
- **Avila** (Spain): the Monastery of Saint Joseph, the first Carmel founded by Saint Teresa in 1562.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Joseph by Leo XIII: "To You, O Blessed Joseph"



"To you, O blessed Joseph" is the best-known prayer to Saint Joseph. Pope Leo XIII composed it and published it with his encyclical *Quamquam pluries* on August 15, 1889, asking that it be said during the month of October, after the Rosary. Below is the full text in its traditional English translation, followed by a short history and suggestions for when to pray it.

Prayer to Saint Joseph by Pope Leo XIII

The Latin original begins with the words *Ad te, beate Ioseph*. The English version below has been in common use for generations and is in the public domain.

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.

Source: Leo XIII, prayer *Ad te, beate Ioseph*, attached to the encyclical *Quamquam pluries* on devotion to Saint Joseph (August 15, 1889). The encyclical is available on the Holy See's website, vatican.va.

A prayer born in difficult times

Leo XIII wrote this prayer at a time when the Church felt under threat: the loss of the Papal States, hostile laws in several countries and widespread poverty among workers. He recalled that Joseph had protected Jesus from Herod and

asked him to protect the Church, the "inheritance" won by Christ. This is why the prayer speaks of struggle and deliverance, but also of daily life and of a holy death, two graces traditionally asked of Saint Joseph.

A short invocation

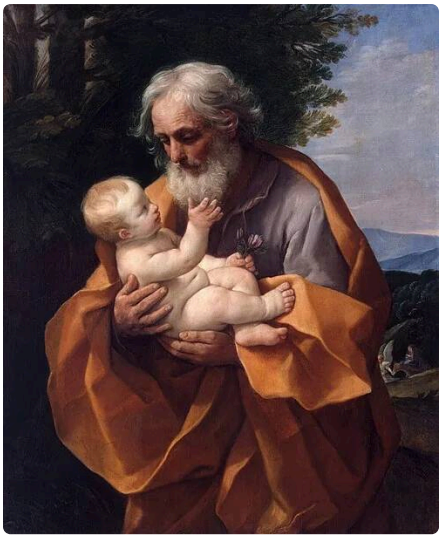
Many Catholics simply entrust their worries to him in a few words, at any time of day: "Saint Joseph, patron of the universal Church, pray for us." You can also pray the Litany of Saint Joseph, approved by Saint Pius X in 1909, to which the Holy See added seven new invocations in 2021.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Joseph is honored on March 19 and, as Saint Joseph the Worker, on May 1. The month of March and every Wednesday are traditionally dedicated to him, and Leo XIII asked that this prayer be said in October, after the Rosary. Catholics turn to him for their families, when looking for work or a home, when facing a hard decision, and for those who are dying. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Joseph, and read the life of Saint Joseph.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Joseph



This novena to Saint Joseph is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on March 10: the novena ends on March 18, and March 19 becomes a day of thanksgiving. You can also pray it from April 22 to 30, before the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker on May 1, or at any time of the year for a particular intention.

How to pray this novena

Each day, take a few quiet minutes. Entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and the invocation "Saint Joseph, pray for us." You may add the prayer of Leo XIII, "To you, O blessed Joseph". The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up again the next day.

Day 1: The just man

Matthew tells us only one thing about Joseph's character: he was "a righteous man." Faced with a situation he did not understand, he refused to humiliate Mary and looked for a discreet way out. In Joseph, justice is already a form of kindness.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, just man, teach me to judge without harshness and to protect the good name of others. I entrust to you the intention of this novena.

Today: Hold back a criticism or a piece of gossip about someone.

Day 2: Listening to God in the night

Four times God speaks to Joseph in a dream, and each time he gets up and obeys. He did not understand everything, but he trusted. Faith often begins with a step taken before the explanations come.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, make me attentive to what God asks of me, even in silence and in darkness.

Today: Take ten minutes of silence before going to sleep to look back over your day.

Day 3: Welcoming Mary and the Child

"Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife into your home." Joseph welcomes into his house a plan that is not his own. To welcome is to make room for others as they are.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, open my heart and my home. Help me to accept what I did not choose, and the people God places on my path.

Today: Visit or call someone who lives alone.

Day 4: The birth in Bethlehem

Joseph looks for shelter for Mary and finds only a stable. He does what he can with what he has. God is content with this poor welcome to come into the world.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, you know the anxiety of those looking for a roof over their heads. Pray for families in poor housing and for all who have no home.

Today: Support a charity that helps homeless people.

Day 5: The flight into Egypt

To save the child threatened by Herod, Joseph leaves by night for a foreign land. The Holy Family knew exile and the insecurity of refugees. Sometimes protecting others means leaving everything behind.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, protector of Jesus, watch over children in danger and over families fleeing war or poverty.

Today: Pray by name for a country at war, or help a refugee family.

Day 6: Work in the workshop

In Nazareth, Joseph works with his hands and teaches his trade to Jesus. The hidden years in Nazareth show that ordinary work, done with care, can become a prayer.

Prayer: Saint Joseph the Worker, bless my work and give work to those who are looking for it. Keep me from impatience and from laziness.

Today: Do a task you usually neglect with special care.

Day 7: Searching for Jesus

When the twelve-year-old Jesus stays behind in the Temple, Joseph and Mary search for him for three days "in great anxiety." Even the Holy Family knew worry and incomprehension. Joseph never stops searching.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, I entrust to you the people I love who seem lost, or far from God. Help me to seek them out without weighing them down.

Today: Get back in touch with a relative or friend you have drifted away from.

Day 8: Faithful silence

The Gospels record no words from Joseph. His faithfulness is made of presence and action. He is a father who does not seek to shine, leaving all the room to Jesus and Mary.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, teach me the humility of serving without being noticed, and the joy of helping others grow.

Today: Do someone a quiet favor without mentioning it.

Day 9: A holy death

According to tradition, Joseph fell asleep in peace with Jesus and Mary at his side. This is why Catholics pray to him for the dying and for themselves, so as to live each day in trust.

Prayer: Saint Joseph, patron of a happy death, pray for all who will die today. At the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Amen.

Today: Pray for the sick who are near the end of life, or visit an elderly person.

Closing prayer

Saint Joseph, guardian of Jesus and husband of Mary, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. You who protected the Holy Family, protect my family and the Church. Obtain for me the grace to live my work and my responsibilities faithfully, and one day to die in the peace of the Lord. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Joseph and the prayer to Saint Joseph by Leo XIII.

PILGRIMAGE

Saint Joseph Sanctuary at Bessillon



At the foot of the Bessillon near Cotignac in Provence, this sanctuary is a pilgrimage destination dedicated to Saint Joseph. Its chapel and spring are central to a local tradition of prayer for families and everyday responsibilities.

History and connection with the saint

The sanctuary's account relates that on 7 June 1660 the shepherd Gaspard Ricard encountered Saint Joseph and found water beneath a rock. This is the apparition tradition transmitted at the site, distinct from the Gospel accounts of Joseph's life. A larger chapel was consecrated in 1663; religious communities and pilgrims have continued the site's prayer life.

A place for prayer

A visit can be a time to entrust a family, a search for work or a decision. Joseph's silence in the Gospels invites listening and service. Pilgrimage promises no automatic answer; it can support trust and responsible action.

Related reading

- Read the life of Saint Joseph
- Associated prayer
- Nine-day novena

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