



Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we begin this Season of Lent, I would like to highlight once again the importance of deepening our spiritual lives through the means of renewal that we have at our disposal. Our renewal occurs through fasting, prayer and almsgiving and in a special way, through the listening and pondering more deeply the Word of God. This year dedicated to St. Joseph, I would like to invite all of us to grow in our devotion to St. Joseph.

On December 8, 2020, Pope Francis decreed a Year of St. Joseph, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as patron of the universal Church. This special year began on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception 2020 and will continue until the same feast in 2021. In his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde (A Father's Heart)*, Pope Francis states that: "Each of us can discover in Joseph - the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence - an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble." I would like to propose that during the Season of Lent, we use this time to re-discover in Joseph, one who loved Jesus with a Father's heart. The Solemnity of St. Joseph falls during Lent and gives us a wonderful opportunity to take up these devotions as a Lenten practice.

We might review the passages in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke which tell us about Joseph and come to know Joseph in a deeper way. There we see that Joseph was a lowly carpenter (cf. Mt 13:55), betrothed to Mary (cf. Mt 1:18; Lk 1:27), a "just man" (Mt 1:19), ready to carry out God's will (cf. Lk 2:22). He was present at the birth of Jesus (cf. Lk 2:7), and witnessed the adoration of the shepherds (cf. Lk 2:8-20) and the Magi (cf. Mt 2:1-12), who represented respectively the people of Israel and the pagan peoples. Joseph had the courage to become the legal father of Jesus, to whom he gave the name revealed by the angel: "You shall call his name Jesus" (Mt 1:21). In the Temple, forty days after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary offered their child to the Lord (cf. Lk 2:22-35). To protect Jesus from Herod, Joseph dwelt as a foreigner in Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-18). After returning to his own country, he led a hidden life in the tiny village of Nazareth in Galilee. When, during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary lost track of the twelve-year-old Jesus, they anxiously sought him out and they found him in the Temple, in discussion with the doctors of the Law (cf. Lk 2:41-50).

Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as "a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows." *The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* also highlights the following virtues of St. Joseph: faith, with which he fully accepted God's salvific plan; prompt and silent obedience to the will of God; love for and fulfilment of the law, true piety, fortitude in time of trial; chaste love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, a dutiful exercise of his paternal authority, and fruitful reticence (n. 219). All of these characteristics make St. Joseph a wonderful saint to imitate.

During this Season of Lent, we might follow St. Joseph and become conscious of being a more loving father or parent; or we might acknowledge our relationship with our own father and grow in appreciation or healing of that relationship. Perhaps following the example of Joseph, we can grow in our obedient listening to God in our lives. Or we might grow in the virtue of acceptance as we accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak. Or like St. Joseph, we might accept our personal history, embrace even the things in life that we did not choose, as we grow in courage. Or we might consider the relationship we have with our work: are we able to see our work, whatever it is, as a way to cooperate with God as we become creators of the world around us? Perhaps we can rediscover the value, the importance and necessity of work for bringing about a society where everyone has employment. Or we might consider how we care for others, for St. Joseph teaches us that a father is one who takes responsibility to care for his child. Or we might realize that St. Joseph is the patron of a happy death, for tradition holds that he was assisted by Mary and Jesus in his last agony.

To assist us in growing in our appreciation of St. Joseph, our website provides a collection of prayers and activities that can help us deepen our faith during this Lenten season and throughout this year. I ask that all parishes highlight the example of St. Joseph on a monthly basis as outlined on the website. I have also added some information on the consecration to St. Joseph that people might like to consider.

Furthermore, to facilitate devotion to St. Joseph and provide the opportunity to obtain comfort and relief from any difficulties that we experience, the Holy Father has granted special indulgences to be obtained during this year. In addition to the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the pope's intentions), indulgences will be granted to those who participate in the Year of St. Joseph by saying the rosary as a family, reciting the litany of St. Joseph, and performing the spiritual or corporal works of mercy.

As we enter into this Season of Lent, let us take this opportunity to increase our love for St. Joseph, to seek his intercession and to imitate his virtues and zeal as we grow as missionary disciples. St. Peter Julian Eymard said, "When God wishes to raise a soul to greater heights, he unites it to St. Joseph by giving it a strong love for the good saint." Let us journey together during this Year of St. Joseph fully open to all the graces God wishes to bestow on us in our new parishes.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "† Brian J. Dunn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

†Brian Joseph Dunn
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth