

St. Joseph



Sixteenth Festival Letter of
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BISHOP OF PEORIA

Saint Joseph

Sixteenth Festival Letter - AD 2018

The name Joseph, in Hebrew *josep*, means *Let God add*, or *God will give more*, or perhaps *Let God gather*. Joseph was the personal name of the son of Jacob and Rachel who was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. (cf Genesis 50:15-18) It was also the tribal name given to his descendants. The *House of Joseph* sometimes also designates the tribes of Ephraim, Manassah, and Benjamin and in other places in the Scriptures can indicate all of Israel. When Joseph was held in prison in Egypt, he accurately interpreted the dreams of two of Pharaoh's officials and later the dream of Pharaoh himself. He came to have authority over all the subjects of Pharaoh and so later was providentially able to save his own people from famine.

At the time of Christ, Joseph was among the most common names given to male Jews living in Palestine. Scholars say that the traditions contained in the so called *Infancy Narratives* of Matthew and Luke actually preexist the final composition of their respective gospels. These two portraits of Saint Joseph are complementary but obviously describe the same person. Joseph's family origin was from Bethlehem (Luke 2:4), but he lived in Nazareth for most of his life. (cf Matt 2:19-23) According to Luke (2:16), Joseph was in a direct line of descent from King David. He made his living as a carpenter or a *tekton*. (cf Matt 13:55 and Mk 6:3) His craft would have involved both the manufacture of tools and simple furniture, as well as building construction. This kind of work required both technical skill and muscle, and placed Joseph economically above the status of a simple laborer.

Joseph of Nazareth is presented in the Gospels as *a just man*. (Matt 1:19) To call Joseph *just* was to express the highest possible praise for his piety. He demonstrated a reverential fear of the Lord as well as receptivity to mystery. He was what the Jewish tradition would call a *zaddik*, someone who had an innate openness to God, and whose understanding of the Law came from within his own heart. The Gospel of Matthew draws a deliberate correlation between the fidelity of Joseph the spouse of Mary and the fidelity of Joseph of Genesis. Both are sons of Jacob, both are chosen by God for a special mission, both are inspired by dreams, both spend time in Egypt, and both act as instruments of salvation.

Joseph's personal journey of faith was certainly tested by Mary's pregnancy, which seemed to go against ordinary human experience. In a dream, an angel explains to Joseph that he was being called by God to do something no one else could do, namely to take Mary into his household (Matt 1:24) and so establish the legal basis for Jesus later to be acclaimed with the messianic title *Son of David*. Joseph responds to this and subsequent holy dreams with intrepid faith. He simply does whatever God asks. He had come to realize that Mary was with child through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 1:18) All his strength and ability was then placed at the service of the promised Messiah who would call him *father*. Joseph thus became the provident caretaker of God's two most precious treasures, namely Jesus and Mary.

Joseph experienced the wonder of the Incarnation like no other human being except for Mary. He and Mary were the first to know Jesus, as they witnessed the birth of the Savior of the world. Joseph observed the humble thanksgiving of the shepherds and the adoration of the Magi. Although we have no record of any other words spoken by Joseph, he would have personally named the child Jesus on the occasion of his circumcision. At the Presentation in the Temple, he heard the prophetic announcement from Simeon that the child would be a *light of revelation* and *the glory of Israel*, but also the fearful prediction that Jesus would be *opposed* and that *a sword of sorrow would pierce Mary's heart*. (Lk 2:34-35) In order to save Jesus from the murderous plans of Herod, Joseph led his family into exile in Egypt, and some years later when it was safe, back to the familiar town of Nazareth. When as a teenager, Jesus disappeared for three days in Jerusalem, Joseph shared with Mary both intense anxiety at his loss and incomprehension at his explanation. The Gospel of Luke makes clear that subsequently, Jesus remained *subject to them*. (2:51)

The omniscient God certainly chose the best possible man to be the foster father of Jesus. In the culture of those days, all authority in the family was assigned to the father, and obedience to Joseph would have been expected of both Jesus and Mary. It would be from the lips of Joseph that Jesus would have first learned his prayers, the prescriptions of the *Torah*, the spiritual treasury of the psalms, the customs of worship at the local synagogue, and the festival rituals of the Jerusalem Temple. Evidence of formal religious education in the life of Jesus is shown by his knowledge of biblical Hebrew (rather than just the commonly spoken Aramaic), and the fact that as an adult he was accorded the respectful title of *rabbi*. Only the devout and devoted Joseph could have made this more intensive instruction

possible. It would be beyond the scope of this letter to speculate on the distinction between the Lord's infused knowledge and that which was the result of his human study.

It was certainly from Joseph that Jesus learned the carpenter's craft. Except on the Sabbath, they would have daily worked together, sometimes with conversation but sometimes in the comfortable quiet of men working side by side at a common task. In what has been called the *hidden years* of Nazareth, Mary and Joseph must have lived in a kind of amazed wonderment over the mystery of the life entrusted to their care. What did they say to each other about Jesus, and what prayers did they offer on his behalf? They obviously shared all the joys and the anxieties of parenthood, but in the unprecedented circumstances of their God-given vocations. Like Mary, Joseph clearly loved and treasured Jesus. In the Jewish tradition, God was sometimes called *Father*, but it was Jesus who would introduce the more familial word *Abba* or *Pappa* into the language of faith. It could at least be speculated that to some degree it was the Lord's experience of Joseph as a strong but gentle *abba* that helped give human articulation to his full revelation of God as his *Abba* and our *Abba*.

According to the testimony of the New Testament, Jesus grew up surrounded by relatives. The presumption that Joseph like Mary was a lifelong virgin only came to be widely accepted in the medieval Church of the West. In the ancient churches of Palestine, Syria, and other communities of the East, it was held that before he married the Ever Virgin Mary and became the foster father of Jesus, he had an earlier wife and children. The Gospels of Matthew (13:55-56) and Mark (6:3) record that *the brothers of the Lord* included James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, and that there were also two sisters that extra biblical sources name as Mary and Salome. In this close and interconnected family, Joseph's brother was Clopas, whose wife was most likely Mary of Clopas (cf John 19:25), either the sister-in-law or perhaps even the blood sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. It should be noted that the Aramaic language (from which oral Gospel narratives were later translated into New Testament Greek) used the words *brother* and *sister* to also indicate close relatives such as cousins. The churches of Palestine and Asia evidently did have living memories of the direct descendants of the family of Joseph serving for several generations as local bishops. These family traditions were later recorded by some of the Fathers of the Church as well as historians such as Epiphanius, Hegesippus, and Eusebius. In any event, Jesus lived and grew up in an extended family, with some of his relations eventually becoming his disciples.

The individual life of Joseph, like that of most people, was basically one of hiddenness. His goodness was known by God and experienced by Jesus and Mary but not known beyond his circle of family and friends. The so called *silence* of Saint Joseph may indeed capture something of the strength of his personality. Amid all the noise of this world, he apparently possessed an interior silence which allowed him to hear the truth of the Scriptures and even perceive the guiding message of angels. Saint Jerome once commented that Joseph, “concealed in silence the mystery he could not fathom.” Very obviously he was also a determined, prudent, and resourceful man. Joseph had to work hard for his family’s sustenance and protection. He lived in a country occupied by a brutal foreign power, where taxes were heavy, and harsh economic disparities the norm. Judaism itself was riven by competing religious factions. The town of Nazareth was considered to be a backwater, and Galilee was called the *Galilee of the Gentiles* because of the large number of pagans who lived there.

It seems to me that the good example of Joseph should be an inspiration to men living in our own challenging era, particularly in the face of current culture wars. In these days, any evidence of masculinity is often disparaged, and both men and boys have very few positive role models. Our popular media frequently depicts men as bumbling losers, undisciplined, promiscuous, and either unwilling or incapable of making commitments. There are schools that discourage competition, denounce manhood as fundamentally sexist, and deny the distinctions of gender. In recent years, some educational theorists are basically trying to make boys more like girls. Young men consuming this relentless message may fear to embrace maleness, and are sometime encouraged to be ambiguous in the expression of their sexuality. Boys, as evidenced by almost all the indices of educational testing and charts of emotional development are in fact increasingly failing, and more grown men seem less prepared to assume adult responsibilities, much less to become faithful husbands and good fathers. Our Catholic Faith clearly holds that both men and woman share in a common humanity and both genders are equally called to salvation in Christ. Providentially, however, masculinity and femininity are not interchangeable realities. Despite the misguided enthusiasms of some elements of our culture, it is simply evident that men are not women, and women are not men. In the Divine plan, the genders are intended to be complementary. Like Saint Joseph, men should be encouraged to embrace the virtues of their God given masculinity.

The life of Saint Joseph certainly reminds us of a sacred role for males. Men will always need vision, challenge, and purpose. They will only find mature meaning when they turn aside from selfishness and surrender to something which is transcendent. To be a man is ideally to grow into a blended figure of son, father, and grandfather. Joseph the son of Jacob, possibly the father of both sons and daughters, and certainly the foster father of Jesus, demonstrated enormous courage, great generosity, determined discipline, but most especially a vigorous and sustaining life of faith. Joseph cherished and protected those entrusted to his care, and he fulfilled the unique vocation to which he had been called. This holy man is a role model both for fathers of families as well as for the spiritual fatherhood of priests. In a very real sense, Joseph serves in the Communion of Saints as an icon of God the Father's own steadfast love.

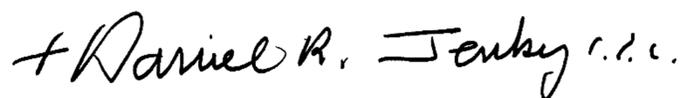
Saint Joseph, because he stands at the hinge of the two Testaments, has been entitled the Last and Greatest of the Patriarchs. Because he protected and sustained the Holy Family, he is called the Patron of the Universal Church. Because he was a working man, he is honored as Joseph the Worker. Because of his closeness to Jesus and Mary, his awesome power in prayer is invoked as the Terror of Demons. Joseph is also most appropriately called the Patron of a Happy Death. The Gospels imply that Joseph died before the start of the public life of Jesus. Tradition portrays him as an example of hope, dying safely in the arms of Jesus and Mary. Saint Francis de Sales imagines Joseph on his deathbed whispering to Jesus: "O my Child, as your Heavenly Father placed your tender body in my hands on the day of your birth, so do I now place my spirit in your hands on this day of my departure from this world." Saint Ephrem, the incomparable poet of the ancient Church, in one of his hymns gave moving expression to the deep grief of Mary at the death of Joseph: "No one shared more closely with me the wonder of Jesus." The Venerable Pius XII encouraged all the faithful: "If you wish to be near to Christ, *Ite ad Joseph - Go to Joseph.*" Saint John XXIII in his old age candidly observed: "The thought of death, perhaps very near, certainly not far away, brings me back to my beloved Saint Joseph."

I would like to conclude this, my *Sixteenth Festival Letter* with a few personal words about this great saint. In this Diocese of Peoria, our first bishop, John Lancaster Spalding proclaimed Saint Joseph the Worker to be our heavenly patron, second only in honor to Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception. He wisely entrusted all working people and all the works of this Local Church to the prayerful care of Saint Joseph. In my community, the Congregation of Holy Cross,

our founder Blessed Basil Moreau urged his religious to discover in the loving union of the Hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph a model for living the consecrated life. Saint Andre Bessette, often called the Apostle of Saint Joseph and the Miracle Worker of Montreal, built his famous Oratory and attributed his many miracles of healing to the intercession of Saint Joseph. More than once, at times of personal challenge, praying at that holy place of pilgrimage, truly strengthened my own faith and deepened my desire to serve God more generously. Today as your bishop, I continue to find in Saint Joseph enormous inspiration and great reassurance. I encourage all of you my fellow believers to confidently turn to Saint Joseph in all your needs.

Prayer to Saint Joseph is certainly grounded both in Catholic liturgy and devotion. At the Commemoration of the Saints in our Eucharistic Prayers, the name of Joseph is invoked just after the name of Mary. In the liturgical calendar of the Universal Church, March the 19th is observed as the Feast of Saint Joseph. In the particular calendar of the Diocese of Peoria, on May the 1st, Joseph the Worker is also celebrated as a feast. And just as a Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary may be offered on ferial Saturdays throughout the year, it is also traditional that a Votive Mass of Saint Joseph be celebrated on those Wednesdays which have no other observance. In every parish church, chapel, convent, hospital, and school, sacred images of Joseph are intentionally prominent and much revered. There are also inspiring devotions, meditations, novenas, and prayerful aspirations directed to this wonderful saint. It has been the lived experience of canonized saints and many of the faithful that Saint Joseph always strengthens our prayer and teaches us how to better love and serve our Savior Jesus Christ.

United in prayer with the entire Catholic Church and especially in this the Church of Peoria, may we with great assurance cry out: Good Saint Joseph, Joseph the Just, Joseph Most Strong, Joseph Most Faithful, Joseph Most Chaste, you lived by faith and died in faith, pray always for all of us!



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BISHOP OF PEORIA

Festival Letter 2018 – Calendar

In the early centuries of Catholic Christianity, when calendars were uncommon and often imprecise, a bishop would send out an annual “Festival Letter” to announce the proper dates for observing the fasts and feasts of the Liturgical Year. It was not uncommon to also use such a letter as a means of instruction for the faithful. I have established this custom in our Diocese both to foster a greater love for the liturgy and to afford myself an additional opportunity for teaching.

Dear brothers and sisters, the glory of the Lord has shone upon us and shall ever be manifest among us, until the day of His return. Through the rhythms of times and seasons, let us celebrate the mysteries of our salvation.

Let us recall the year’s culmination, the Sacred Easter Triduum of the Lord: His Last Supper, His Crucifixion, His Burial, and His Rising, celebrated between the evening of Thursday, March 29th, and the evening of Sunday, April 1st.

Each Easter, as on each Sunday, Holy Mother Church makes present the great and saving deed by which Christ has conquered sin and death.

From Easter are reckoned all the days we keep holy:

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, in the Year of Our Lord 2018, will occur on the 14th of February.

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. In commemoration of the Lord’s death on the cross, all Fridays of Lent are days of obligatory abstinence. Abstinence from meat is also recommended on all the Fridays of the year.

The annual Chrism Mass, during which the priests renew their ministerial commitment, will be celebrated in the Cathedral on Tuesday of Holy Week, March 27th.

No other activities or pastoral responsibilities, except the need to tend to the dying, should keep a priest from attending the Chrism Mass. I also invite the faithful of our diocese to join us for this celebration as they keep their priests in prayer.

The Church will keep her most solemn night of vigil and prayer to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Saturday, the 31st of March. According to the ancient and universal practice of the Church, the Easter Vigil may not begin until after nightfall. In Central Illinois, sunset is estimated to begin at 7:22 P.M. CDT in Peoria (7:14 P.M. CDT in Danville and 7:26 P.M. CDT in Moline). The Easter Vigil at the Cathedral will be celebrated at 8:15 P.M.

On Divine Mercy Sunday on the Second Sunday of Easter, the 8th of April I encourage my Vicars Forane to work with the clergy, religious, and laity in their area to prepare a common celebration at a central location for the conclusion of the Novena of Divine Mercy which will begin on Good Friday, the 30th of March.

The Ascension of the Lord will be commemorated on Sunday, the 13th of May, according to the decision of the bishops of the Illinois Province. Pentecost, the joyful conclusion of the Great Fifty Days of Easter, will be celebrated on Sunday, the 20th of May.

Any Catholic in a state of serious sin is obligated to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once between Ash Wednesday and Pentecost Sunday. All Catholics are especially urged to confess their sins during the penitential season of Lent, during Advent, before the great festivals, and regularly throughout the year.

In a special way our Divine Savior gave the Church the gift of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to make present the Paschal Mystery for all people of every time and place. This year, the Diocese of Peoria will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Orders in several ways.

On Pentecost Sunday, the 20th of May at 10:30 in the morning in the Cathedral, I will a new transitional deacon for the Diocese of Peoria. On Saturday, the 26th of May at 10:30 in the morning, I rejoice to ordain 2 new priests for service to our Diocese.

I invite and encourage the clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay-faithful to join with me at these great celebrations. All priests serving in the Diocese of Peoria are expected to participate in the Ordination of Priests. Except the need to tend to the dying, no other pastoral duty or personal obligation is of greater importance than welcoming our new brother to our presbyterate.

Likewise, the Pilgrim Church proclaims the Passover of the Lord in the feasts of the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles, and the Saints, and in the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed for the Year of Our Lord 2018.

In the Year of Our Lord 2018, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will be transferred to Monday, March 19th.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord will be celebrated on Monday, the 9th of April due to the precedence of Holy Week and the Paschal Octave.

The Dedication of the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated on the 15th of May and is a Solemnity in the Cathedral and a Feast in the Diocese.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is celebrated on Wednesday, the 15th of August, and is a holy day of obligation this year.

The Feast of Saint Crescent, whose relics are solemnly enshrined in Corpus Christi Church, Galesburg, is celebrated on Monday, the 27th of August, as a solemnity in the Shrine-Church.

The Feast of St. Therese of Lisieux, patroness of our diocesan vocations program, will be celebrated on Monday, the 1st of October. Prayers and activities in support of priestly vocations are encouraged to take place. The Diocesan Novena for Vocations in her honor will begin on the 23rd of September.

The Solemnity of All Saints, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated on Thursday, the 1st of November. The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed is observed on Friday, the 2nd of November.

The Solemnity of Christ the King will be celebrated on Sunday, the 25th of November.

The Church will celebrate the beginning of the new liturgical year of grace and prayer on the First Sunday of Advent, the 2nd of December, in the Year of Our Lord 2018.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary will be celebrated on Saturday, the 8th of December; this is always a holy day of obligation as well as the Patronal Feast of the Diocese of Peoria.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas, is celebrated on Wednesday, the 12th of December.

Christmas will be on Tuesday, the 25th of December.

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is celebrated on Tuesday, the 1st of January in the Year of Our Lord 2019.

To better enjoy the infinite treasury of merit won by our Divine Saviour, in accord with the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* and the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, “the diocesan bishop in his own diocese may bestow the papal blessing with the plenary indulgence, using the proper formulary, three times a year on solemn feasts, which he will designate....”

As Bishop of Peoria, I am happy to bestow such blessing with the plenary indulgence during the Year of Our Lord 2018 at the end of Holy Mass for the great Solemnities of Easter Vigil, Pentecost Day, and Christmas Eve.

Further, to enhance the devotional life of the faithful and the liturgical life of our parishes, I have encouraged a return to the practice of Rogation Days to mark the change of seasons. I have requested the Holy See to confirm these days as part of the official calendar of our local Church. Pending their confirmation, I encourage pastors to observe these Rogation Days in the Diocese of Peoria:

The 22nd of January to coincide with the national day of prayer and fasting for the dignity of human life.

The 23rd of June to pray for healthy growth and good weather, associated with the Nativity of St. John the Baptist.

The 13th of September to highlight the fruits of the harvest, associated with the Triumph of the Cross.

The 7th of December to highlight the family, associated with our patronal feast of the Immaculate Conception.

To Jesus Christ, who is, was, and who is to come, the Lord of all time and history, be endless praise, for ever and ever. Amen.