

# YEAR of SAINT JOSEPH



*“Show yourself a father, and guide us in the path of life”*

REFLECTION - NOVEMBER 2021

## St Joseph – A Powerful Intercessor

*By Fr Paul Nulley*

Parents are the best intercessors. Perhaps your most fervent prayers have been offered for a child in trouble, or perhaps you have encountered one of the many modern-day St Monicas who can be found in your parish. The very powerful reality of parents' prayer can help us understand St Joseph's role as intercessor.

Joseph is invoked as the head of the Holy Family in the Litany of St Joseph; God the Father chose to entrust Jesus and Mary to St Joseph's care and protection.

If we think that the Holy Family didn't really experience hardship and difficulty because of their special status, then we have misunderstood the Gospel. The Holy Family was not immune from daily difficulties and human suffering.

The Holy Family understands what it is like to be driven from their homeland, to experience poverty and hunger. It fell to Joseph to protect, provide and lead. Together, the Holy Family trusted in the promises of God when everything seemed to indicate the very contrary and opposite.

One of the reasons we call them the Holy Family is because they had to exercise the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.



Their holiness is what makes them relevant and accessible to every family. They relate to us especially in our struggles; their witness gives us hope; their intercession gives us sure support.

But just think of the fervent and constant prayers St Joseph must have offered for Jesus and Mary – prayers for their safety and wellbeing, prayers for Jesus to grow into the man God wanted him to be, to fulfil his mission, to be happy.

Joseph loved Jesus. Joseph cared for him, provided for him, protected him. Joseph conversed with Jesus, knew his mannerisms, taught him his trade. The special relationship Joseph has with Jesus continues in heaven, which is why those who invoke St Joseph and rely on him have experienced the power of his intercession.

For example, St Teresa of Avila wrote:

*I cannot call to mind that I have ever asked him at any time for anything which he has not granted; and I am filled with amazement when I consider the great favours which God hath given me through this blessed Saint; the dangers from which he hath delivered me, both of body and of soul.*

*Would that I could persuade all men to be devout to this glorious Saint; for I know by long experience what blessings he can obtain for us from God. I have never known anyone who was really devout to him, and who honoured him by particular services, who did not visibly grow more and more in virtue; for he helps in a special way those souls who commend themselves to him.*

*But I ask, for the love of God, that he who does not believe me will make the trial for himself—when he will see by experience the great good that results from commending oneself to this glorious patriarch, and being devout to him (Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, chapter 6).*

We are all called to be disciples of Christ. Perhaps few of us contemplate becoming a disciple of the child Jesus. One saint who did is Therese of Lisieux. She was struck by how vulnerable God became as a babe at Bethlehem. She realised that Jesus took on the dependency of childhood for her sake.

Far from being discouraged by her weaknesses, when she contemplated the infant Jesus, she realised that she could depend on God for everything. St Therese’s absolute trust and dependence on God characterise her Little Way. This teaching is in great harmony with the Gospel: “Unless you become like little children, you can never enter the Kingdom of God” (Mt 18:3).

We can follow in the footsteps of St Therese. We can imitate Jesus during his earthly life by entrusting ourselves to Joseph and Mary. Many of the saints did it. They have recognised the spiritual parenthood of Mary and Joseph in their lives.

Devotion to Mary and Joseph is, in fact, a sign of a call to greater holiness and intimacy with God. The more childlike we become, the more we can rely on the care and protection of Jesus’ parents.

St Joseph continues to exercise his care and concern for the mystical body of Christ interceding for all who entrust themselves to him, as Pope Pius IX highlighted when he declared St Joseph patron of the universal Church.

St Joseph loves you, cares for you and intercedes for you. For our part, may we trust in his intercession and daily make him part of our lives.

*Fr Paul Nulley is a priest of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. He has been parish priest of St Joseph’s, O’Connor, since 2017 and serves as archdiocesan vocations director and chaplain of Australian Catholic University’s Canberra campus.*

