



Lenten Day of Recollection  
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## How can St Joseph help you this Lent?

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### **Introduction**

Is there any saint both more familiar and yet more unknown than St Joseph? His likeness appears in statues, nativity scenes and Christmas cards. So many little ones around the world are baptized with his name. Yet we know next to nothing about him – his up-bringing, how he met Mary, or even his age. The gospels are silent about all of this, and Joseph himself never utters a word. He is effectively the silent partner in the Holy Family: a person who works, dreams, and cares for his wife and son, then vanished from the New Testament. As a result, one of Christianity's most iconic figures is also a mystery – a mystery who is nonetheless intimately connected to our modern challenges. The Church officially reveres him as the patron saint of workers, of fathers, and of a happy death. In many ways Joseph conveys the same message carried to him by the angel: *Do not be afraid* (Matthew 1.20). We can learn so much from this 'silent' man ... who was in-tune to the will of God!



We rarely think of St Joseph as a man who suffered from anxiety. But from what we know of his life he is a man who knew worry and uncertainty. Joseph found himself unexpectedly about to become a father, under mysterious circumstances no less. He must have wondered how he would support this suddenly growing family, as well as how he would explain what had happened to a doubting, judgmental world. His concerns are familiar to anyone who ever felt that the world's burdens were too heavy to bear. This is why we can all relate to him. In moments of worry and uncertainty, St Joseph holds onto faith, hope, and trust. His example shows us how to do the same.

As we strive and struggle during this Lenten season with how to do God's will or trust in his plan, let us take a closer look at this man; he shows us the way how to do this and live a holy and blessed Lent. Joseph knew and believed that by following the angel's call not to fear, he had God helping him navigate his burdens. God did not take Joseph's burdens and struggles away, but he showed him that he was trustworthy. And Joseph listened to God's promptings and with great courage followed them. He trusted God and stayed faithful in prayer even when his work and home life were turned upside down. His love for Jesus and Mary compelled him to keep trying, to keep going even in the face of trouble and danger. In the end, his courage, trust, and steadfast love became the foundation for Jesus to grow up and fulfill the will of the Father. Today, as we struggle with living a good Christian life fulfilling the will of God this Lenten time, St Joseph is encouraging us to hold on to the words of the angel: *Do not be afraid*.

### **Simplicity**

In John 6, when Jesus boldly declares: *"I am the bread of life,"* his hearers murmur among themselves and ask, *"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?"* (Jn 6.41). Apparently, they

considered Joseph to be just a regular, law-abiding Jew ... an average Joe, if you will. By implication, Joseph didn't go around Nazareth working miracles and polishing his halo; rather, he lived his holiness wrapped in simplicity.

Every year on Ash Wednesday, we hear: "*Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them*" (Mt 6.1). Our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving should be kept for God's eyes only. Yet we should also remember Jesus' words earlier in the Sermon on the Mount: "*Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father*" (Mt 5.16).

The key difference is **simplicity**. When we act simply, we take no heed of our glory, but seek God's alone. Such simplicity is a modesty of soul, guarding the intimacy we have with God through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

### **Work**

On May 1, we celebrate the feast of St Joseph the Worker. He is a saint who knows how to roll up his sleeves and put in a hard day's work. Joseph reminds us of the dignity of work, beautifully captured in **Gaudium et Spes**:

*Through labour offered to God man is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, Who conferred an eminent dignity on labour when at Nazareth He worked with His own hands. (GS 67)*

Lent is a good time to live out this dignity of work by imitating St Joseph. God draws us to Himself through the ordinary means of simply fulfilling our tasks. We need not search for extraordinary acts of penance or lengthy prayers, especially if these detract from our normal duties. So before we add on extra practices, we should redouble our attentiveness to the work already before us.

### **Rest**

While Joseph shows us the dignity of work, he had some of his best moments as he slept. It was here that God spoke to him repeatedly through dreams. We can distinguish two types of rest: physical sleep and spiritual abandonment to God. Both are critical for holiness.

**Sleep** renews us for another day of work and love. Just ask a mother of a newborn about the importance of sleep! **Abandonment** increases our hope in God's loving providence, strengthening our faith in times of trials and creating room for love to grow. By both **sleep and abandonment**, we recognize our limits: we need sleep and we need God. We can see this pairing in the beginning of Psalm 127:

*If the Lord does not build the house,  
in vain do its builders labor;  
if the Lord does not watch over the city,  
in vain does the watchman keep vigil.  
In vain is your earlier rising,  
your going later to rest,  
you who toil for the bread you eat,*

*when he pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber.*

This psalm proclaims the futility of all-nighters and the emptiness of self-made saints. Psalm 127 is a good reminder during Lent, as we up the ante with prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These are not exercises of our sheer will-power. Our practices, on-their-own, do not make us holy. God makes us holy. And sometimes, God bids us to rest.

Remember the words of Moses to the Israelites as Pharaoh pursued them: “*The LORD will fight for you; you have only to keep still*” (Ex 14.14), as well as the words of Isaiah: “*By waiting and by calm you shall be saved; in quiet and in trust shall be your strength*” (Is 30.15).

### ***Family***

Joseph was a great man, but where would he be without his family, without Jesus and Mary? I doubt he would make many appearances in 21st-century blog posts; most 1st-century Jewish carpenters don't!

Joseph's holiness came through Jesus and Mary, by serving them and receiving from them. Similarly, God draws us to Himself through those around us. We do not become saints as isolated individuals, but as members of a family or a community.

With their parents leading the way by example and family prayer, children [and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth] will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation and holiness. (GS 48)

Lent is a good opportunity to examine our closest relationships. Is there a need to forgive? Is there love that needs rekindling? Is there gratitude missing? These are excellent ways of giving alms.

### ***Jesus and Mary***

Of course, Joseph's family isn't your normal family. There's a special grace about Jesus and Mary [understatement of the year]! If we compare our families to the Holy Family, we might be tempted to discouragement. But by God's goodness, Jesus and Mary are not distant, but rather intimately close to us: Jesus is our savior and brother, and Mary is our tender mother. Joseph, for his part, can help us stay close to Jesus and Mary, just as he did. He even manifested this 100 years ago when during the Virgin Mary's last apparition to the shepherd children at Fatima [on October 13, 1917] he joined Jesus and together they were seen blessing the crowd, just before the children saw another vision of Mary this time as Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Ultimately, all of our Lenten practices are simply saying “yes” to God, just as Mary first did at the Annunciation. May Mary pray for us, and may Jesus bring us to the Father.