

Ite ad Joseph (Go to Joseph)
Pastoral Letter Inaugurating the Year of St. Joseph

*To the Priests and Deacons, Members of Consecrated Life,
And Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Lafayette*

“Ite ad Joseph” (Gen. 41:55). In time of trial and distress, when all of Egypt and the entire world became hungry and cried out for food, Pharaoh told the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph, and do whatever he tells you” (Gen. 41:55). The Old Testament Joseph, the beloved son of the patriarch, is a type of St. Joseph. Exiled to Egypt, Joseph was entrusted with the king’s treasures and under his apt administration they were protected and increased. When famine struck, the whole world came to Joseph to receive food. In a much more sublime and supernatural way, St. Joseph found favor with his heavenly Father and was entrusted with the Father’s greatest treasures, Jesus and Mary (cf. *Quamquam pluries*). During turbulent times in the Church and world, this truth inspired Pope Pius IX to “go to Joseph” by proclaiming St. Joseph Patron of the Universal Church (*Quemadmodum Deus*). As we enter the 150th anniversary of that declaration, I too would like to “go to Joseph” by inaugurating a Year of St. Joseph in the Diocese of Lafayette, beginning March 19, 2020 and concluding March 19, 2021. It is my desire that in the difficult times we find ourselves today, we might *go to St. Joseph* for his help and protection and learn from his example how to become better disciples.

St. Matthew attests to the holiness of St. Joseph when he describes him as “a righteous man” (Mt. 1:19). This holiness accrues from the marriage of Joseph to Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God. Joseph is told “do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her” (Mt. 1:20). By “taking into his home” Mary and the divine child, Joseph embraced the mystery of Mary’s divine maternity and with it the mystery of the Incarnation. In freely assuming his dignity as husband of Mary, foster father of the Incarnate Word, and head of the holy family, Joseph was truly sanctified. St. Joseph’s unique share in the mystery of holiness was recognized by the Church and a greater devotion to St. Joseph developed with the passage of time. St. Teresa of Avila in the 16th century boasted never to have been refused anything through the intercession of St. Joseph. St. John XXIII inserted the name of St. Joseph in the Roman Canon immediately following the Blessed Virgin Mary and before the apostles Peter and Paul. Pope Francis did the same for the other Eucharistic Prayers. St. John Paul II affirms the unique

holiness of St. Joseph stating that he participated in the mystery of the Incarnation “like no other human being except Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word” (*Redemptoris Custos*, 1). We can thus have great confidence and “go to Joseph” with our needs and concerns.

The Year of St. Joseph will offer many opportunities for beseeching St. Joseph’s intercession and entrusting ourselves to his protection. There will be pilgrimages to the 13 churches of St. Joseph in our diocese. I am also asking these parishes to host conferences on the various titles and virtues of St. Joseph in order to increase our devotion. Various activities will be held at the level of the Diocese, deanery, parish, and family. The Year of St. Joseph will afford a wealth of reflection, prayer and study. Nonetheless, I would like to briefly highlight some qualities of St. Joseph’s life which I believe are relevant for our times.

St. Joseph is a man of deep prayer. As head of the Holy Family it would have been St. Joseph’s responsibility to lead common prayers in the family and before meals. He gathered the family for the Sabbath synagogue services and led the frequent pilgrimages on feasts to the temple in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:41). It was Joseph’s duty to name the child on the occasion of its circumcision and to redeem the first-born son 40 days after birth (Lk. 2:21-22). In addition to his liturgical and family prayer, Joseph is a model of personal prayer. His complete surrender to the will of God in silence can only be explained from a deep interior life. St. Joseph prayed in darkness as he contemplated a course of action when learning of Mary’s pregnancy (Mt. 1:19), when unable to find room in the inn for her to give birth (Lk. 2:7), when leaving by night for Egypt to escape Herod’s attempt on the child’s life (Mt. 2:14), and when searching helplessly for the lost child (Lk. 2:44-45). In this Year of St. Joseph, we *go to Joseph* to learn commitment to daily personal and family prayer. I would ask that if possible, we could all offer a daily prayer to St. Joseph. And let us ask St. Joseph to help all Catholics to return to Sunday Mass and the Sacraments.

St. Joseph is a “doer of the word” (cf. James 1:23). Three times in Sacred Scripture we hear that Joseph heard the word of the Lord in a dream (Mt. 1:20, 2: 13, 22) and each time Joseph arose and “did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him” (Mt. 1:24). Despite his own plans and the difficulty that the will of God entailed, Joseph surrendered his entire life to God’s will and fully embraced his

privileged but arduous role as husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus. No words of Joseph are recorded in the Bible. We are simply told that Joseph heard, rose, and did what God asked. The way of Joseph is the way of listening in prayer and doing in action. St. Joseph harmonized the life of prayer and action (cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 26). During the Year of St. Joseph, let us *go to Joseph* and learn how to surrender ourselves to God's loving plan for us. Let us, like him, listen attentively in prayer and then with God's grace rise and become doers of the word.

St. Joseph is the provider for the Holy Family. Jesus and Mary needed housing, food, and clothing and it was Joseph who provided for these necessities. The Gospel of Matthew identifies Joseph's trade when it recounts Jesus' return to his native place and the offense that his own people took at him: "Is he not the carpenter's son?" (Mt. 13:55). We can rightly assume that many of Jesus' hidden years in Nazareth were spent at St. Joseph's side in his carpenter shop. Joseph taught Jesus his trade and Jesus himself was referred to as a carpenter, "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mk. 6:3). The Son of God labored alongside St. Joseph with hammer and chisel. In such fashion work was redeemed and its dignity elevated. With confidence then we can *go to Joseph* for help in finding work to obtain an honest living. Like St. Joseph let us spend time with our young, teaching them how to work, and giving them an appreciation for its redemptive value.

St. Joseph is protector of Mary and the Child Jesus. When the angry Herod ordered the massacre of all male children two years old and younger, it was to St. Joseph that the angel of the Lord was sent. Joseph took the child and His mother and fled into Egypt and thus thwarted the attempt on Jesus' life (Mt. 2:13-15). We too *go to Joseph* for protection for our families and for our Diocese. Additionally, let us imitate St. Joseph in our efforts to protect the vulnerable, the unborn, the young, the sick and the elderly from all harm – physical, spiritual, and emotional. Jesus was safe under the protection of St. Joseph. May all those entrusted to our care be safe as well.

St. Joseph is a model of chastity. The Church invokes St. Joseph in the Litany of St. Joseph as "Joseph Most Chaste" and in the Divine Praises as Mary's "Most Chaste Spouse." Joseph was called to give Mary a husband's tender love and yet to be the guardian of her divine maternity and virginity. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit he was able to surrender his life and place it at the service of a love that was both spousal and virginal. He "took Mary into his home, while respecting

the fact that she belonged exclusively to God" (*Redemptoris Custos*, 20). This was possible because of the purity of his love. In our present time of sexual promiscuity and unchastity, addiction to pornography and marital infidelity, let us *go to Joseph* to learn and obtain the courage to be chaste. I encourage all to turn to Joseph in their struggles. During this Year of St. Joseph, let us pray to him for a return of the great Christian virtue of chastity.

Our situation in the Church and world today is not unlike the situation of God's people during the great famine in Egypt. We need heavenly power to safeguard and steer us through the many trials of our day. It is my fervent hope that during this Year of St. Joseph every Catholic in the Diocese of Lafayette may fervently and confidently "Go to Joseph" for his intercession, his protection, and his example.

O St. Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in you all my interests and desires.

O St. Joseph, assist me by your powerful intercession and obtain for me all spiritual blessings through your foster Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord, so that, having engaged here below your heavenly power, I may offer you my thanksgiving and homage.

O St. Joseph, I never weary contemplating you and Jesus asleep in your arms. I dare not approach while He reposes near your heart.

Press Him in my name and kiss His fine head for me, and ask Him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath. Amen (Ancient Prayer to St. Joseph).

My sincere thanks to Reverend Michael Champagne, CJC, for his assistance in preparing this pastoral.

St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, pray for us and pray for the Diocese of Lafayette!

With every good wish, I am
Faithfully yours in Christ



Most Reverend J. Douglas Deshotel, D.D.
Bishop of Lafayette