

St. Joseph, a man for our times....

March 19 – remembered in some places for the smell of pasta Milanese and mouth-watering plates of cookies. The occasion: the Feast Day of St. Joseph. Of course, there won't be crowded St. Joseph Tables this year. These celebrations will have to wait because of Covid.

That's not all bad. Maybe this "break" gives us a chance to absorb a little more of the person and life of Joseph. My first awareness of St. Joseph came through Holy Family Sisters. This small religious congregation taught "CCD" ("religious education" to the currently enlightened) at parishes and in rented public buildings. They were on the go all the time, not unlike St. Joseph – the man of the household of the Holy Family.

I was not yet baptized when I first encountered St. Joseph. Close to seven years of age, I had decided to be baptized a Catholic. The local priest asked what my baptismal name would be. I already had two given names, one of which was of an apostle. But for *some* reason, Joseph tugged at my heart, and Father and my parents agreed that Joseph would be added to my names.

Here we are in 2021. Pope Francis has decreed that this year should be the Year of Saint Joseph! Now, that was a surprise, at least to me. But I see in Joseph some traits and qualities that are really appropriate to consider nowadays. We don't have much historical data about Joseph, but there is enough in the gospels to show us some important things about him. (Matthew 1:16-25; 2:13-15; 19-23, Luke 1:1-7; 2:15-51)

For myself, I have always thought of Joseph as a "man around." You don't hear much from him, but you know he's there when you need him. Think of his times of courtship of Mary, of his sticking with her when he found out that she was pregnant, of his presence at the side of Mary as she gave birth in an animal's stable, of his difficult trek with Mary and the child Jesus through what's now the Gaza Strip to find a safe place to stay in Egypt.... and more.

I think of Joseph as a caring husband and father, "come what may." Joseph was a carpenter, and finding work to support Mary and Jesus in places far from his shop in Nazareth may have been a heavy concern for him. But it is clear that he made it happen. And the gospels note that his work was recognized: Jesus became known as "the carpenter's son." (We celebrate St. Joseph as a worker on May 1.)

In today's world I think of Joseph in terms of migrant peoples – on our southern borders, in Africa and the Middle East, and so on. Joseph was a migrant with his family for a few years. What great concern must St. Joseph have for the millions of migrants and refugees fleeing oppressive conditions and regimes around the world!

Finally, in all that pertains to Joseph, I sense a "willing ear." Joseph listened and responded to Mary, to the angel, to Jesus, and in the final analysis, to God within his heart. Maybe this is the most important reason that St. Joseph is the Patron of the Universal Church.

I am forever grateful that somehow I was inspired to choose Joseph as my baptismal patron. I am still learning from him. And when my time comes, he will be with me, too, as the "patron of a happy death."

*Submitted by a St. James parishioner who wishes to remain anonymous.*