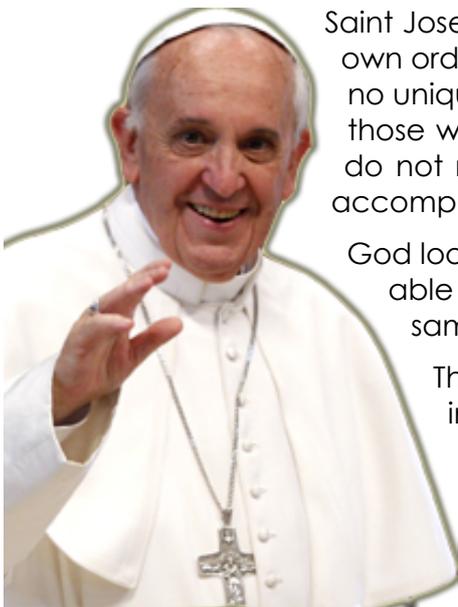


POPE FRANCIS' LETTER FOR VOCATIONS SUNDAY 2021 ADAPTED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Saint Joseph: The Dream of Vocation

Pope Francis has written to the world about Saint Joseph. In his letter, *Patris corde* (With a Father's Heart) the Pope has dedicated this year to Saint Joseph, marking the 150th anniversary of him being declared Patron of the Universal Church, with the aim "to increase our love for this great saint." In this letter for Vocations Sunday, he reflects further on Saint Joseph and vocation.



Saint Joseph is extraordinary, yet at the same time someone so close to our own ordinary human experiences. He did not do astonishing things, he had no unique charisms (spiritual gifts), nor did he appear special in the eyes of those who met him. He was not famous or even noteworthy: the Gospels do not report even a single word of his. Still, through his ordinary life, he accomplished something extraordinary in the eyes of God.

God looks on the heart, and in Joseph he recognised the heart of a father, able to be life-giving in the midst of daily routines. All vocations have this same goal: to give and renew life every day.

The Lord desires to shape hearts that are open, capable of great initiatives, generous in self-giving, compassionate in comforting anxieties and steadfast in strengthening hopes. Vocations such as the priesthood and consecrated life greatly need these qualities. In these uncertain times, with the sufferings of the pandemic, with fears about the future and the very meaning of life, Joseph comes to meet us in his gentle way as one of "the saints next door".

Saint Joseph's witness suggests to us **three key words for each individual's vocation**.

Dream

Everyone dreams of finding fulfilment in life – but goals like success, money and entertainment cannot truly satisfy. If we were to ask people to express in one idea their life's dream, it would be "to be loved". Love gives meaning to life, because it reveals life's mystery: we only have life if we give love; we only truly possess love if we generously give it away. Through the dreams that God inspired in him, Saint Joseph made his life a gift.

Saint Joseph's Four Dreams – Calls from God

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| Matthew 1:20-21 <i>"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife ... she will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus..."</i> | Matthew 2:13 <i>"Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt and stay there until I tell you..."</i> |
| Matthew 2:19 <i>"Get up, take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel..."</i> | Matthew 2:22 <i>Being warned in a dream he withdrew to the region of Galilee.</i> |

After each dream, Joseph had to change his plans and take a risk to follow God's plans. Why put so much trust in a dream? Because Joseph's heart was directed to God, he could recognise God's voice.

This also applies to our calling: God does not like to reveal himself spectacularly, pressuring us. He shares his plans gently, quietly speaking to the depths of our heart through our thoughts and feelings.

God's call to a vocation always urges us to have the courage to take a first step – there can be no faith without risk. Joseph's dreams upended his plans, but led him to experiences he would never

have imagined. Only by setting aside our own ideas and plans do we truly say “yes” to God’s grace. Every “yes” bears fruit because it becomes part of a larger design, of which we glimpse only details, but which the divine Artist knows and carries out, making a masterpiece of every life.

Saint Joseph is an outstanding example of proactive acceptance of God’s plans. May he help everyone – especially young people who are discerning – make God’s dreams for them come true. May he inspire in them the courage to say “yes” to the Lord who always surprises and never disappoints.

Service

The Gospels show how Joseph lived entirely for others and never for himself. Whatever our vocation - whether to marriage, apostolic celibacy, holy orders or religious life - it involves the gift of oneself.

For Joseph, service became a rule for daily life. He found and prepared a place where Jesus could be born, protected him from Herod with a hasty journey into Egypt, returned to Jerusalem when Jesus was lost and supported his family by his work (even in a foreign land). He adapted to these circumstances without being discouraged when life did not turn out as he wished; he showed the *willingness* typical of those who *live to serve* without complaining, ever ready to give a hand to help resolve situations. He acted as the *outstretched hand* of our heavenly Father reaching out to his Son on earth. Joseph cannot fail to be a model for all vocations; all are called to be the *ever-active hands of the Father*, outstretched to his children.

I like to think, then, of Saint Joseph, the protector of Jesus and of the Church, as the *protector of vocations*. The Gospel tells us that “Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night” (Mt 2:14). He wasted no time fretting over things he could not control; he gave full attention to those in his care. This concern is the sign of a true vocation, a life touched by the love of God. We give a beautiful example of Christian life when we refuse to pursue our ambitions or indulge in our illusions, but instead care for what the Lord has entrusted to us through the Church! God then pours out his Spirit and creativity upon us; he works wonders in us, as he did in Joseph.

Fidelity

The word *fidelity* means faithfulness – honest, lasting devotion.

Joseph is the “righteous man” (Mt 1:19) who each day quietly serves God and his plans. At every particularly difficult moment in his life, he thoughtfully considered how to act, pondering things patiently. He knew that success in life is built on constant fidelity to important decisions. He did this in his trade as a carpenter, and as a father. Any vocation matures only through daily fidelity.

Our fidelity is nurtured in the light of God’s own faithfulness. The first words that Saint Joseph heard in a dream were “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid” (Mt 1:20). We need not be afraid because God remains ever faithful to his promises. *Do not be afraid*: the Lord also addresses these words to you whenever you act on your desire to give your life to him. He repeats these words when you seek to follow his will every day. They are words you will hear anew at every step of your vocation; they accompany all those who – like Saint Joseph – say yes to God with their lives. This fidelity is the secret of joy experienced daily by those who care for what truly matters: faithful closeness to God and to our neighbour.

I pray that you will experience this same joy by having made God the *dream* of your lives, *servicing him* in your brothers and sisters through a *fidelity* that is a powerful testimony in an age of ephemeral choices and emotions that bring no lasting joy.

May Saint Joseph, protector of vocations, accompany you with his fatherly heart!

Franciscus