

He arranged, moreover, that a declaration to this effect be promulgated through the present decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites on this day sacred to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God [December 8, 1870], the most chaste Joseph's Spouse.⁴

Our Spiritual Father

Inspired by the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church from the earliest centuries stressed that just as St. Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ's upbringing, he likewise watches over and protects Christ's Mystical Body, that is, the Church.¹

— St. John Paul II

Have you ever thought of St. Joseph in a fatherly way? Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus wants you to have St. Joseph as your loving spiritual father? The Church has always understood Mary's spiritual maternity of the Church, but it hasn't always understood St. Joseph's spiritual fatherhood in relation to the Church. To understand why, we have to take a look at what the Church has understood and taught about St. Joseph's fatherhood of Jesus.

In the first few centuries of Christianity, there were people in the Church, including Fathers of the Church, who were uncertain if St. Joseph could truly be called the father of Jesus. Regardless of the fact that Scripture clearly calls St. Joseph the father of Jesus (see Lk 2:33, 48), many early Christians were of the opinion that St. Joseph could not be called the father of Jesus in any way. They were cautious about such a title because they didn't want people to think that St. Joseph was the biological father of Jesus. Essentially, they didn't want to taint belief in the virginity of Mary in any way. It wasn't until St. Augustine's preaching in the fourth century that St. Joseph's fatherhood of Jesus was clearly explained by the Church. In one of his sermons, St. Augustine states that St. Joseph, though not the biological father of Jesus, is nonetheless a real father to Jesus because he exercised a fatherhood toward Jesus that was authoritative, affectionate, and faithful. After St. Augustine cleared up the matter of St. Joseph's fatherhood of Jesus, it was never questioned again. And because St. Joseph is truly the father of the Head of the Mystical Body of Christ, he is necessarily the father of the rest of the members of the Body of

Christ. This understanding of St. Joseph's patronage and fatherhood over the Church slowly begin to find its way into the writings of saints and mystics.

From Scripture, we know that St. Joseph watched over and protected Jesus as his father. From tradition, we know that St. Joseph watches over and protects Christ's Mystical Body, the Church, as the spiritual father of the Church. But what does this mean for you personally? Well, you are a member of the Church. Doesn't Jesus want St. Joseph to watch over you with the same paternal love, authority, affection, and fidelity that he exercised toward Jesus? The answer is "Yes!"

In the 19th century, Jesus himself explicitly commanded the Servant of God Sr. Mary Martha Chambon to call St. Joseph "father." This holy nun received extraordinary graces from Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph, and is known as the "Mystic of the Holy Wounds." Jesus told Sr. Mary Martha the following:

You must call St. Joseph your father, for I have given him the title and the goodness of a father.²

Through Baptism, you became a child of God and a member of God's family. Jesus is your Lord, Savior, and brother. The Son of God became your brother for a very specific reason: He wants you to share in his filial relationship with the Heavenly Father. This is a fundamental Christian truth. It is also a truth that helps us understand the spiritual fatherhood that St. Joseph exercises toward you.

Here's what I mean.

If Jesus is your brother, his parents become your parents. Not physically, of course, but spiritually. Specifically, Jesus' mother becomes your mother. Jesus' father becomes your father. If Mary is your mother, and Jesus is your brother, St. Joseph has to be your father. Any man married to your mother is your father. Again, the filial relationship you have with St. Joseph is not biological; it wasn't biological for Jesus, either. Yet this does not mean that St. Joseph's fatherhood is not real. Saint Joseph's spiritual fatherhood is very real. Were spiritual fatherhood not real, calling *Jesus'* Heavenly Father *your* Heavenly Father would be meaningless.

To gain a deeper appreciation of St. Joseph's spiritual fatherhood, let's turn to St. Josemaría Escrivá, who offers a candid observation:

There is something I do not quite like in that title of foster father which is sometimes given to Joseph, because it might make us

think of the relationship between Joseph and Jesus as something cold and external. Certainly our faith tells us that he was not his father according to the flesh, but this is not the only kind of fatherhood.³

Now, there's nothing wrong with calling St. Joseph the foster father of Jesus. After all, "foster father" is one of the official titles used in the Litany of St. Joseph. Saint Josemaría knew that and accepted it. Nonetheless, St. Josemaría is absolutely correct that biological fatherhood is not the only kind of fatherhood.

With absolute certainty we can assert that the first time the Baby Jesus looked up to St. Joseph and spoke to him, Jesus did not exclaim: "Foster father!" No, the divine Infant would have joyfully cried out (in Aramaic) "Father!" or even "Daddy!" Again, there's nothing wrong with the term foster father, but it must be acknowledged that the New Testament never refers to St. Joseph as the "foster father" of Jesus.

Here's a concrete example: On one occasion, Mary and St. Joseph lost the Child Jesus for three days. Jesus' parents searched for him anxiously and, when they finally found him, his mother said to him, "Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety" (Lk 2:48). Mary did not say to Jesus: "Your foster father and I have been looking for you." Saint Joseph's fatherhood was more than a legal guardianship. His paternal relationship with Jesus was personal, authoritative, affectionate, moral, and loving. This is the kind of fatherhood that St. Joseph wants to have with you, too.

Saint Joseph is the best of fathers. His spiritual fatherhood was planned from all eternity.

There is but one fatherhood, that of God the Father, the one Creator of the world, of all that is seen and unseen. Yet man, created in the image of God, has been granted a share in this one paternity of God (Eph 3:15). Saint Joseph is a striking case of this, since he is a father, without fatherhood according to the flesh. He is not the biological father of Jesus, whose Father is God alone, and yet he lives his fatherhood fully and completely. To be a father means above all to be at the service of life and growth. Saint Joseph, in this sense, gave proof of great devotion.⁴

— Pope Benedict XVI

Perhaps you are wondering, "Why did Jesus need the fatherhood of St. Joseph at all since God is Jesus' Father?" It's a good question. Essentially, Jesus needed St. Joseph as a father because the human

nature of Jesus required it. When the Son of God became incarnate, he placed himself under the anthropological (human) requirements of needing a human father to love, feed, educate, shelter, clothe, and protect him. Jesus, the Incarnate Word, is not a pure spiritual being. He is the God-Man. He has a divine nature and a human nature.

In his human nature, Jesus had physical, emotional, and psychological needs. God the Father doesn't have a body, emotions, or passions because he never became incarnate like his Son. The Heavenly Father can't physically touch, walk with, or embrace his Incarnate Son. Therefore, God the Father entrusts his Son to the watchful, loving care of a human father. Saint Joseph stands in the place of the Heavenly Father. He has been entrusted with taking care of the human nature, growth, and development of Jesus. Through the fatherhood of St. Joseph, Jesus grew into the fullness of his manhood.

The growth of Jesus "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Lk 2:52) took place within the Holy Family under the eyes of Joseph, who had the important task of "raising" Jesus, that is, feeding, clothing, and educating him in the Law and in a trade, in keeping with the duties of a father.⁵

— St. John Paul II

The divine nature of Jesus did not need anything from St. Joseph, but the human nature of Jesus did require the fatherhood of St. Joseph. When the Son of God humbled himself and took on human nature, he placed himself under the laws of human growth and development. In order to grow into the fullness of his manhood, Jesus required a mother, a father, and time. All children require this.

Venerable Fulton Sheen provides an interesting statistic related to this topic. He states:

Let those who think that the Church pays too much attention to Mary give heed to the fact that Our Blessed Lord himself gave ten times as much of his life to her as he gave to his apostles.⁶

In other words, the apostles spent three years with Jesus, but Mary spent more than 30 years with him! Why is this important? It's important because the human nature of Jesus needed to learn certain things from the maternal love and example of his mother. Our Savior is not a robot or an angel. In his human nature, he needed a mother to teach him about human life. But his mother was not the only one who taught him. As important as a mother is in the human

development of a child, there is only so much a mother can teach a child, especially a boy.

Jesus is a male. As a male, he needed a father to teach him what it is to be a man. Jesus needed the fatherhood of St. Joseph as a model of masculinity for him to imitate. Only a father can do this for a son. How did Jesus learn to sacrifice as a man? He witnessed the daily example of his father. Where did Jesus learn to work as a man? He learned it in his father's carpentry shop. How did Jesus learn to pray and acquire the manners of a gentleman? Jesus learned all these things from his father, St. Joseph.

According to the divine plan, an earthly, human father was absolutely necessary in the life of Jesus. You've no doubt heard the adage, "Like father, like son." Well, it's true. In his preaching, Jesus himself spoke of the exemplary power of a good father. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says: "Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also" (Jn 5:19). Our Lord spoke these words in reference to his Heavenly Father, but they also apply to those aspects of Jesus' human nature that would be strengthened by the example of St. Joseph.

Joseph fulfilled every aspect of his paternal role. He must certainly have taught Jesus to pray, together with Mary. In particular Joseph himself must have taken Jesus to the Synagogue for the rites of the Sabbath, as well as to Jerusalem for the great feasts of the people of Israel. Joseph, in accordance with the Jewish tradition, would have led the prayers at home both every day — in the morning, in the evening, at meals — and on the principal religious feasts. In the rhythm of the days he spent at Nazareth, in the simple home and in Joseph's workshop, Jesus learned to alternate prayer and work, as well as to offer God his labor in earning the bread the family needed.⁷

— Pope Benedict XVI

Jesus spent decades learning the virtues of manhood from his father. Jesus wanted to be like his father, St. Joseph. Jesus thinks so highly of his earthly father that he wants you to be a child of St. Joseph, too. Jesus wants you to resemble St. Joseph.

But why do we need the fatherhood of St. Joseph if we already have a biological father who shares our nature and is supposed to take care of us? Allow me to provide the answer by asking you several other questions:

- Is your biological father the Spouse of the Mother of God and father of Jesus Christ?
- Does your biological father have the superlative of every virtue?
- Is your biological father the Head of the Holy Family, the Patron of the Universal Church, and the Terror of Demons?

Jesus wants you to have the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph because there is no man more capable of modeling true fatherhood for you than St. Joseph. His loving spiritual fatherhood has the power to draw you extremely close to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, increase your virtue, protect you from Satan, and help you reach heaven.

Now, having stated that, I need to also make clear that the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph is not intended to take the place of the paternity of your biological father any more than the spiritual motherhood of Mary is meant to take the place of your biological mother. The spiritual parentage of St. Joseph and Mary is meant to supplement the witness and love of your earthly parents, helping you grow in the spiritual life, especially in virtue and holiness.

Hopefully, your biological parents have done their best at loving, educating, feeding, sheltering, clothing, protecting, and correcting you. If your parents have been virtuous and saintly, you should consider yourself extremely blessed. Today, sadly, many people have not had this experience. We live in a fallen world, and the majority of people have seen and experienced the flaws and imperfections of their parents. However, with St. Joseph and Mary as your spiritual parents, you are blessed with perfect parents and perfect models.

We are undoubtedly children of Mary, and this is our glory and our consolation. But we are also adopted children of St. Joseph and this is no small reason for the confidence that we have in him.⁸

— Blessed William Joseph Chaminade

Jesus wants you to accept St. Joseph as your spiritual father. This is true whether you have had a saintly or a sinful biological father. Saint Joseph is the greatest, most loving, and holiest of all fathers. He is the father of Christians and the perfect model of paternal love.

He [St. Joseph] is the father of Christians, since he is the depository of the seed of grace which begot Christians. Now if St. Joseph is our father, let us imitate his deeds.⁹

— Blessed William Joseph Chaminade

If the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph is so important, why didn't Jesus make us aware of St. Joseph's spiritual fatherhood 2,000 years ago? The simple answer is because it would have led to confusion. When Jesus spoke of the Father to his disciples, it would have been very confusing to them if he also spoke about the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph. This is most likely the reason why Jesus did not initiate his public ministry until after the death of St. Joseph. Jesus wants his disciples to know about the virtues, wonders, and spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph, but for the sake of his mission, he had to leave the revealing of this mystery to the Holy Spirit and the Church.

That Jesus did not speak to his disciples about St. Joseph should in no way indicate to us that Jesus thought little of his father. On the contrary, the silence of Jesus regarding St. Joseph reveals the extreme holiness of St. Joseph. Jesus understood St. Joseph so well that he knew that his father would be more than willing to step aside so that Jesus could give priority to doing the Heavenly Father's will. For love of Jesus, St. Joseph was more than willing to step out of the picture and appear to be of no importance. Saint Joseph desires only one thing: that Jesus accomplish the mission that he was sent to do by his Heavenly Father. It doesn't matter to St. Joseph if he isn't center stage. Jesus loves this about St. Joseph. The humility of St. Joseph is a witness to his greatness!

Today, however, the time has come when, for the good of mankind, the Holy Spirit desires to fully reveal the virtues, wonders, and spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph to the nations. This great mystery has been reserved for a time when the Church and the world would need it most.

Now is the time of St. Joseph!

In our day, Jesus wants the Church to know, love, honor, and seek refuge in the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph. There has never been a time in history when God's people have needed St. Joseph more. Why? Simply put, the majority of men no longer know or understand what it means to be a gentleman, let alone what it means to be a good father. Children have grown up with poor examples of fatherhood, if they have grown up with a father at all. Contraception, pornography, abortion, gender confusion, moral depravity, empty churches, morally corrupt clergy, and cultural chaos are only a few of the fruits of a society that lacks real men and fathers. Jesus wants to draw our attention to the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph in order to right these wrongs and bring order back to the Church and the world.

What, then, should we expect from the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph? What will he do for us? Saint Joseph loves us and so will joyfully do the exact same things that a biological father does for his children, only on a spiritual level. He will spiritually feed, shelter, clothe, educate, protect, and correct us. This is his role as father. With the exception of correction, St. Joseph did all these things for Jesus, our brother. Of course, St. Joseph also provided for all Jesus' physical needs for many years.

If Joseph was so engaged, heart and soul, in protecting and providing for that little family at Nazareth, don't you think that now in heaven he is the same loving father and guardian of the whole Church, of all its members, as he was of its Head on earth?¹⁰

— Venerable Pope Pius XII

From the same fact that the most holy Virgin is the mother of Jesus Christ is she the mother of all Christians whom she bore on Mount Calvary amid the supreme throes of the Redemption: Jesus Christ is, in a manner, the first-born of Christians, who by the adoption and Redemption are his brothers. And for such reasons the Blessed Patriarch [St. Joseph] looks upon the multitude of Christians who make up the Church as confided especially to his trust.¹¹

— Pope Leo XIII

As the best and most loving of fathers, St. Joseph stands ready to shelter you in the safety of the Sacraments and teachings of the Catholic Church, clothe you with virtue, educate you in the interior life, protect you under his fatherly cloak, and correct you should you go astray.

If anyone cannot find a master to teach him how to pray, let him take this glorious saint [Joseph] as his master, and he will not go astray.¹²

— St. Bernadette Soubirous

Placing yourself under the fatherly cloak of St. Joseph is a great blessing in the spiritual life. In the Carmelite tradition, the cloak of St. Joseph is a very prominent theme in artistic depictions of St. Joseph. His cloak is a symbol of safety and fatherly protection. Similar to Mary shielding her children under her maternal mantle, St. Joseph lovingly protects his children under his fatherly cloak. In Catholic devotion, those who love St. Joseph will sometimes pray the Holy

Cloak Novena (see page 245). Novenas are normally nine days long, but the Holy Cloak Novena consists of 30 days of prayer in honor of the 30 years St. Joseph lived with Jesus. The Holy Cloak Novena is considered one of the most efficacious novenas in the treasury of the Church.

Place yourself under the paternal cloak of St. Joseph. Open your heart to the spiritual fatherhood of St. Joseph and experience the love of the best of fathers.

It is natural and worthy that as the Blessed Joseph ministered to all the needs of the family of Nazareth and girt it about with his protection, he should now cover with the cloak of his heavenly patronage and defend the Church of Jesus Christ.¹³

— Pope Leo XIII

Glorious St. Joseph, spouse of the Virgin Mary, we beseech you through the heart of Jesus Christ, grant to us your fatherly protection.¹⁴

— St. Francis de Sales

Ite ad Ioseph!

If you wish to be close to Christ, we again today repeat, “Go to Joseph.”¹

— Venerable Pope Pius XII

What is the closest possible union you can have with Jesus in this life? The answer is easy: your reception of Jesus in Holy Communion. There is no greater intimacy with Jesus possible in this life than when you receive the Eucharist at Holy Mass. The Blessed Sacrament is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

Did you know that, without St. Joseph’s earthly paternity of Jesus, you would not now be able to receive the Bread of Life? Saint Joseph was given the role of maintaining and protecting the sacred bread for you.

Let me explain.

You are probably familiar with the story in the Book of Genesis about the sons of Israel selling one of their brothers into slavery. The brother sold into slavery was named Joseph. Joseph ended up being taken by his owners to Egypt, far away from all his other kin. What