

The Roman Canon

[Saint] Pope John XXIII, who had a great devotion to St. Joseph, directed that Joseph's name be inserted in the Roman Canon of Mass — which is the perpetual memorial of redemption — after the name of Mary and before the apostles, popes and martyrs.¹

— St. John Paul II

Saint Joseph's name was inserted in the Roman Canon of Mass? What does that mean? Is St. Joseph a weapon?

Well, yes, St. Joseph is an extremely powerful weapon for Christianity, but what St. John Paul II is referring to is the Roman Canon, not a Roman cannon. "What's the Roman Canon?" you wonder. The Roman Canon is the ancient Eucharistic Prayer used by the priest at Mass. For centuries, there was only one Eucharistic Prayer in the Roman Rite. After the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Church started to use four Eucharistic Prayers, with Eucharistic Prayer I retaining the name of "Roman Canon." It was into the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I) that St. Pope John XXIII inserted the name of St. Joseph.

To be honest, it's hard to believe that St. Joseph's name did not appear in the prayers of the Mass until the 20th century. Saint Joseph is, indeed, the Mirror of Patience! Nevertheless, the manner in which St. Joseph's name came to be included in the Mass is very inspiring.

Here's the story.

In 1958, a bishop with a great devotion to St. Joseph was elected to the papacy: Angelo Roncalli. He loved St. Joseph so much that he had contemplated taking the papal name Joseph (Pope Joseph). Out of respect for his earthly father, however, he decided to take the name John. Since there had already been many previous popes named John, he was known as John XXIII.

In 1962, Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council, entrusting the entire endeavor to St. Joseph. On November 10, 1962, at one of the sessions of the Council, a bishop named Petar Cule offered a presentation on St. Joseph to the other bishops. In his lengthy presentation, Bishop Cule requested that the name of Joseph be included in the Canon of the Mass (the Roman Canon). Unfortunately, Bishop Cule was not well-known, and due to his long, repetitious presentation, as well as his nervousness and inability to articulate things well, many of the cardinals and bishops at the

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presentation began to murmur and ridicule him for his pious and lengthy speech. At one point, the moderator of the session requested that Bishop Cule end his “eloquent and holy sermon” about St. Joseph. The moderator’s belittling words caused many of the cardinals and bishops to laugh, resulting in Bishop Cule shuffling his aged body back to his seat, seemingly defeated.

Listening in on the speech via closed circuit television was Pope John XXIII. He was not amused by the treatment given to Bishop Cule. Pope John XXIII knew Bishop Cule personally. He knew that Bishop Cule had suffered greatly under the Communists in Yugoslavia. Bishop Cule had been frequently interrogated by the Communists in cruel ways, eventually being sentenced to 11 years of hard labor in a concentration camp in Yugoslavia. The Communists even attempted to kill the bishop by placing him on a train that was deliberately wrecked in order to kill everyone on board. As a result of the wreck, the bishop’s hips were shattered. After he was finally released from the concentration camp, the bishop suffered bouts of anxiety and nervousness, making it hard for him to speak without repeating himself. John XXIII knew that the bishop’s presence at the Council had taken much effort, and that the good bishop wanted to be there to testify that he had been spared from death through the intercession of St. Joseph.

Bishop Cule’s speech on St. Joseph nearly brought Pope John XXIII to tears, and caused the pope to act. On November 13, three days after Bishop Cule gave his presentation on St. Joseph, Pope John XXIII decreed that the name of St. Joseph would be included in the Roman Canon of the Mass! The decree went into effect on December 8, 1962.

Today, the name of St. Joseph appears in all four Eucharistic prayers. This came about during the pontificates of Benedict XVI and Francis. Pope Benedict XVI intended to insert St. Joseph’s name into the three other Eucharistic Prayers, but was not able to accomplish it before his abdication of the papacy on February 28, 2013. Pope Francis, fulfilling the intentions of Pope Benedict XVI, officially placed the name of St. Joseph in all the Eucharistic Prayers on May 1, 2013.

The next time you attend Holy Mass, listen attentively to the priest as he prays the Eucharistic Prayer. Listen to hear the name of your spiritual father.

In communion with those whose memory we venerate,
 especially the glorious **ever-Virgin Mary**,
Mother of our God and **Lord**, Jesus **Christ**,
 and blessed Joseph, her **Spouse**

— Eucharistic Prayer I (The Roman Canon)

Have mercy on us all, we pray,
 that with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
 with blessed Joseph, her Spouse

— Eucharistic Prayer II

May he make of us
 an eternal offering to you,
 so that we may obtain an inheritance with your elect,
 especially with the most Blessed Virgin Mary,
 Mother of God,
 with blessed Joseph, her Spouse

— Eucharistic Prayer III

To all of us, your children,
 grant, O merciful Father,
 that we may enter into a heavenly inheritance
 with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
 with blessed Joseph, her Spouse

— Eucharistic Prayer IV

When Pope John XXIII closed the first session of Vatican Council II and announced that the name of St. Joseph was going to be included in the canon of the Mass, a very important churchman telephoned me to say, "Congratulations! Listening to the pope's announcement, I thought immediately of you and how happy you'd be." And indeed I was happy, for in that conciliar gathering, which represented the whole Church brought together in the Holy Spirit, there was proclaimed the great supernatural value of St. Joseph's life.²

— St. Josemaría Escrivá