

ASIAN
HORIZONS

Special Issue 2, March 2022

Pages: 7-21

**MAGISTERIAL DOCUMENTS AND OTHER
CHURCH DOCUMENTS ON ST JOSEPH:
AN HISTORICAL SURVEY**

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Abstract

The present article is an attempt to bring to light the timely interventions of the popes through the centuries, which highlight the unique role of St Joseph in the life of the Church. The author is well aware of the limitations of the presentation and the scope for further research and study in the field of Josephology. The year dedicated to St Joseph is a great challenge to all of us to develop Josephology, as we already have a well-developed Mariology, a branch in theology. Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) was the first Pope to introduce the Feast of St Joseph in Rome in 1479. Whenever the Church faced some critical moments in her history, the popes immediately sought the intercession of St Joseph and the protector of the infant Church of Bethlehem was there to overcome the difficult situations. From the time of Pope Pius IX till to date all popes have taken special attention to give due importance to the role of St Joseph in the life of the Church. Credit goes to Pope Leo XIII to publish

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an encyclical in 1889 in honour of St Joseph. Pope Francis, being a Jesuit, had the inspiration to declare a year dedicated to St Joseph.

Keywords: Benedict XIII; Benedict XV; Benedict XVI; Clement XI; Devotion to St Joseph; Francis (Pope); Gregory XV; Innocent XI; John Paul II; John XXIII; Leo XIII; Pius IX; Pius X; Pius XI; Pius XII; Paul VI; Pope Sixtus IV; St Joseph; Second Vatican Council; Urban VIII

Introduction¹

The Year dedicated to St Joseph on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the official declaration of St Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church is an occasion to do researches on the role of St Joseph in the life of the Church, the continuation of the mission begun by Our Lord Jesus Christ, the foster Son of St Joseph. The veneration of St Joseph goes back to earlier times in the Eastern Churches, but in the West began only in the Late Middle Ages. As in the Gospels, St Joseph was practically a silent spectator all through the two thousand years of the history of the Church, although there are few exceptions. It is surprising to note that many leading books on Church History hardly have any reference to St Joseph. Mother Mary got prominence in the early centuries of the history of the Church, especially in the context of the controversy over the Divine Motherhood of Mary and the Council of Ephesus in 431 which defined the Divine Motherhood of Mary. Many churches were dedicated in honour of Mary. Popular icons, especially in the East, beautifully depict Jesus in the bosom of Mary, showing the intimate connection between Jesus and Mary in the salvation history. During the Medieval period, when popular devotions got multiplied, Mary received an eminent position in the forms of devotions, pilgrimages, churches, various names and many religious orders promoted popular devotions to Mary through Scapular, rosary, etc. However, St Joseph remained behind the curtain, again with a few exceptions.

The present paper is an attempt to bring to light the timely interventions of the popes through the centuries, which highlight the unique role of St Joseph in the life of the Church. The author is well aware of the limitations of the presentation and the scope for further research and study in the field of Josephology. The year dedicated to St Joseph is a great challenge to all of us to develop Josephology as we already have a well-developed Mariology, a branch in theology.

¹In writing this article I depended much on Francis L. Filas, SJ, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, Boston: St Paul Editions, 1962.

St Joseph and Papal Teachings

The first Pope to introduce the feast of St Joseph in Rome was Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) in 1479. He was a Franciscan and interestingly he was famous for promoting Renaissance and Humanist culture in the Roman Curia and the Sistine Chapel is named after him. Pope never meant to be extended it to the entire Roman Catholic Church. He merely desired it to be included in missals and breviaries as a feast to be celebrated at Rome. "The Pope's action had the most far-reaching consequences. Apparently, Rome's example led the world, for the Italian dioceses explicitly followed Roman usage and we find that missals and breviaries from other countries began to list masses and offices in honour of St Joseph after 1480."² With this introduction of the feast, it was given a minor classification in the liturgy.

The next Pope who took the cause of St Joseph was Pope Gregory XV (1621-1623) who ordered that the Feast of St Joseph (March 19) to be observed throughout the world as a holyday of obligation.³ With the intention of regulating the number of feasts, Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644) issued a Bull on September 24, 1642, that retained the feast of St Joseph mentioned above, which had been widely celebrated for a long time.

The feast of "Joseph the Carpenter" was entered on 20 July, in one of the old Coptic Calendars, most probably in the eighth or ninth century⁴ and the celebration of this feast was forbidden on November 25, 1660, during the reign of Pope Alexander VII (1655-1667).⁵ On December 6, 1670, Pope Clement X (1670-1676) granted the Feast of St Joseph the rank of a double of the second class.⁶

Pope Innocent XI (1676-1689) who promoted missions⁷ with an Apostolic Letter dated August 17, 1678, declared St Joseph as Patron and Protector of the Chinese missions. On February 4, 1714, Pope Clement XI (1700-1721) approved a Proper Mass and Office for the Feast of St Joseph and extended to the whole Church. The Pope

²Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 537.

³Karl Bihlmeyer-Hermann Tuechle, *Church History, Vol. III*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 145.

⁴<https://www.newadvent.org>> Catherin, accessed on October 21, 2021.

⁵Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 634; unfortunately, we do not have much details about the prohibition.

⁶Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 634.

⁷Cf., Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, Volume XXXII, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1957, 458-465.

himself composed the Office.⁸ Pope Benedict XIII (1724-1730), a great promoter of the veneration to saints, ordered the name of St Joseph to be inserted in the Litany of the Saints, on December 19, 1726.⁹

St Joseph and Modern Popes

From the nineteenth century onwards, one notices greater interests from the part of the popes to promote the role of St Joseph in the life of the Church.

Pope Pius IX (1846-1878)

The reign of Pope Pius IX was one of the most turbulent times in the history of the Church. He began his reign as a moderate and a progressive pope. But the political intricacies and social changes of Europe forced him to identify himself wholeheartedly with ultramontanism, i.e. the tendency to centralize authority in church government and doctrine in the Holy See, with its triumph at Vatican I. The consequences of the Industrial Revolution, the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, the Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1848 by German philosophers Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, the publication of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx in 1867 and the occupation of Rome by the forces of United Italy in 1870 and the definition of the infallibility of the Pope in 1870 during the First Vatican Council, the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary on December 8, 1854 and the publication of the *Syllabus of Errors* on December 8, 1864, which renounced liberalism and modern civilization, etc. are the summary of the socio-political, ecclesial scenario of the nineteenth century Italy. After the occupation of Rome Pope practically remained as a prisoner in Vatican.

Anti-papal tendency was very strong and at the same time devotional dimensions of the Catholic life was also not missing. One notices drastic changes in the practice of piety in the second part of the nineteenth century and there emerged a religiosity which was more sentimental and less rigoristic. This new trend in piety emphasized a more frequent reception of the sacraments and a greater exercise of external forms of piety. Added to that, Pope Pius IX in 1870 proclaimed St Joseph as the patron of the Church. Pope Pius IX played a key role in promoting devotions. On September 10, 1847, Pope Pius IX extended the Feast of the Patronage of St Joseph to

⁸von Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, Volume XXXIII, 344.

⁹Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 634.

the whole Church. On March 9, 1870, when the First Vatican Council was in progress, 43 Generals of Religious Orders submitted a petition to the Council Fathers, requesting St Joseph to be declared Patron of the Universal Church. Besides, two other petitions were signed by 255 and 118 Fathers respectively.¹⁰ The first of the great modern pronouncement on the sanctity and role of St Joseph in the Universal Church was on December 8, 1870, when Pope Pius IX declared St Joseph the Patron of the Universal Church¹¹ and by this Pope placed the entire Catholic Church under the patronage of St Joseph. The papal Decree *Quemadmodum Deus* begins with the age-old comparison between Joseph of Egypt and Joseph of Nazareth. It is worth quoting a passage from the Decree, which clearly sheds light on the intercessory power of St Joseph during the times of tension in the Church.

“Accordingly, it has now pleased our most holy sovereign, Pius IX, Pope, deeply affected by the recent deplorable events, to comply with the desires of the prelates and to commit to St Joseph’s most powerful patronage himself and all the faithful. He therefore has declared St Joseph Patron of the Universal Church...”¹² On the declaration some authors have aptly commented that Joseph’s position as head of the Holy Family already gave him the duty of protecting the infant Church at Nazareth and the Pope’s declaration was more of an official proclamation and recognition of the fact.

On July 7, 1871, Pope issued a companion Decree *Inclytum Patriarcham*, by which he summarized the past history of the Feast of St Joseph and laid down rules for its more worthy celebration in the liturgy and elevated the rite of his feast of March 19 to a double of first class.¹³ The Decree taught that: i. St Joseph is granted extremely high honors among the saints; ii. God predestined him for a unique vocation in preference to all other saints; iii. He was the genuine, virginial husband of Mary; iv. He fulfilled a fatherly position with respect to Jesus, being thought publicly to be Christ’s natural father and acting with a father’s rights; v. his position is entirely unique; and vi. he carried out his duties with perfect fidelity to God’s grace.¹⁴

¹⁰Cf. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 634.

¹¹*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol. 6, 193.

¹²*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol. 6, 193; for the English translation, Cf. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 580-581.

¹³*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol.6, 324.

¹⁴Cf. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 582.

Other Church intervention on St Joseph is on June 14, 1873, in which the Holy See did not approve of the *cultus* of the “Heart of St Joseph.”

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903)

Pope Leo XIII was one of the most brilliant figures of modern papal history and through his encyclicals explained the importance of Christian life in the family, in society and in the state and promoted Christian piety. Leo XIII gave great impetus to the Christian devotion in eight documents in which he called upon Christian families to imitate the holy family of Nazareth. His first and chief document is the encyclical *Quamquam Pluries*. Nowhere else can we find a more profound exposition of the doctrine of St Joseph, from the foundations of his exalted dignity and glory to his singular privilege of being proclaimed patron of the entire Church, as well as the model and advocate of Christian homes and families.

The major developments during the reign of Pope Leo XIII include the following. On May 11, 1878, if statue of St Joseph is not on altar, it may be left uncovered in Passiontide. On September 19, 1883, Pope Leo XIII made the Feast of St Joseph an occasion when bishops are reminded of their duty to officiate as solemn pontifical function.¹⁵ On January 6, 1884, Pope Leo XIII adds the oration and other prayers after Mass, in which St Joseph is invoked.¹⁶ On August 15, 1889, Pope Leo XIII issued *Quamquam Pluries*, encyclical letter on devotion to St Joseph. Together with it the prayer, “Unto thee, O Blessed Joseph,” is approved and recommended to be said in October after the recitation of the Rosary.¹⁷ It is the lengthiest Church pronouncement ever made regarding the promotion of the devotion to St Joseph. This encyclical strongly urges that devotion to Mary should be linked with the devotion to St Joseph. The connection lies in the fact that devotion to St Joseph is ultimately devotion to our Lady, because Joseph is all he is, because of and through Mary. In the encyclical we read:

Thus, in giving Joseph the Blessed Virgin as spouse, God appointed him to be not only her life’s companion, the witness of her maidenhood, the protector of her honour, but also, by virtue of the conjugal tie, a participator in her sublime dignity. And Joseph shines among all mankind by the most august dignity, since by divine will, he was the guardian of the Son of God and reputed as His father among men. Hence

¹⁵*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol. 16, 205.

¹⁶*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol. 16, 239.

¹⁷*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol. 22, 65; for the English translation of the encyclical, Cf. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 584-595.

it came about that the Word of God was humbly subject to Joseph, that He obeyed him, and that He rendered to him all those offices that children are bound to render to their parents. From this two-fold dignity flowed the obligation which nature lays upon the head of families, so that Joseph became the guardian, the administrator, and the legal defender of the divine house whose chief he was. And during the whole course of his life, he fulfilled those charges and those duties.¹⁸

There are also concerns and differences of opinion about the role model of St Joseph as the ideal labourer in the era of post-Industrial Revolution as we observe below. The Pope labeled St Joseph as the model of a good husband, father and a consolation to “the proletariat, the workers, and all people in modest circumstances.” The Pope emphasized that they had the right “to strive for an improvement of their situation with all legitimate means,” but they had no right “to overturn the order ordained by divine providence.” As popular as the devotion to Saint Joseph was in all levels of society, this manual labourer of a patriarchal period of history could not be made a model to be realized in an industrial society.¹⁹

Other major interventions during the reign of Pope Leo XIII are: on June 14, 1889, with an Apostolic Brief *Neminem Fugit*, Pope called on the Catholic world to honor and imitate the virtues of the Holy Family, often referring to St Joseph as intimately related to Jesus and Mary.²⁰ Here Pope underlines the role of Holy Family as an example of virtue and perfection for every Catholic. Pope writes: “In Joseph, therefore, heads of the household are blessed with the unsurpassed model of a fatherly watchfulness and care.” Joseph and Mary lead the way in exemplifying the spirit of unity and oneness in the families.

On August 15, 1982, the Congregation of Sacred Rites issued a Decree denying higher liturgical *cultus* for St Joseph. This action of the Congregation of Sacred Rites indicates that the Holy See wishes no change at that time. This Decree does not criticize the soundness of the theological doctrine on which the petitions for St Joseph’s advancement rested. There is only the question whether or not a change at that time is expedient.²¹

¹⁸*Quamquam Pluries*, No. 3.

¹⁹Hubert Jedin, ed., *History of the Church*, Volume IX, London: Burns & Oates, 1981, 265.

²⁰*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Vol. 23, 318; for the English translation, Cf. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 596-600.

²¹Cf. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 454.

Pope Pius X (1903-1914)

Pope Pius X was one of the most constructive reforming popes of contemporary time. On March 18, 1909 he approved and indulgenced the Litany of St Joseph.²² On July 2, 1911, it was decided that the Feast of St Joseph may be celebrated on the first Sunday after March 19. On July 24, 1911, it was decided that the Feast of March 19 to be celebrated under the title, "The Solemn Commemoration of St Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary," and as a double of the first class; the feast of the Patronage, as the "Solemnity of St Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Confessor, Patron of the Universal Church," on the third Sunday after Easter as a double of the first class with a common octave.²³

On December 6, 1912, it was decided that the titular Feast of St Joseph is to be celebrated on the third Sunday after Easter.²⁴ On October 28, 1913, the Solemnity of St Joseph was advanced from the third Sunday after Easter to the third Wednesday; March 19 was correspondingly reduced in rank to a double rite of the second class, although it is retained as a primary feast.²⁵

Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922)

Pope Benedict XV popularly known as the Pope of missions also was a greater promoter of the devotion to St Joseph. On December 12, 1917, Benedict XV re-elevated March 19 to a high rank as a double of the first class.²⁶ On April 9, 1919, the Preface of St Joseph was approved and was assigned for use in all Masses of St Joseph.²⁷ On the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation, naming St Joseph Patron of the Universal Church, Benedict XV made a new appeal in his *Motu Proprio, Bonum Sane*, recalling the necessity and efficacy of the devotion to St Joseph and recommending his virtues especially to the poor and the working class, so beset by the evils of the times.²⁸ In the *Motu Proprio* the Pope singled out St Joseph as the patron saint of the working class. "In it he called attention to the fact that fifty years have elapsed since St Joseph had been declared Patron of the

²²*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 1, 290.

²³*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 3, 306, 351; Cf. also, Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 635.

²⁴*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 4, 728.

²⁵*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 5, 458.

²⁶*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 10, 26.

²⁷*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 11, 191.

²⁸Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 12, 313.

Universal Church. While deploring the great damage to moral conduct which resulted from the First World War, the Pope urged devotion to St Joseph as a remedy for the problems which were beginning to assume startling proportions at the time.²⁹ On February 23, 1921, "Blessed be St Joseph, her most chaste spouse," was ordered to be inserted in the Divine Praises.³⁰

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939)

The glorious Pope of the missions, Pope Pius XI was a vigorous champion of Christian life. By the Lateran Treaty on June 7, 1929, he achieved the creation of the Vatican City as a Sovereign State. A great devotee of St Joseph, Pope Pius XI on August 9, 1922 ordered the invocation of St Joseph to be included in the special prayer for the moment of death.³¹ Several discourses of Pius XI present tributes to St Joseph, all of these were delivered on feasts of St Joseph. The first was given on April 21, 1926, the feast of the Solemnity of St Joseph. This allocution stressed that 'the Church was already in existence, although in seedling form, at the time that Joseph was head of the Holy Family; hence, his title of Patron of the Universal Church fundamentally belonged to him already then.'³² The second allocution was on March 19, 1928, on the occasion of the publication of the decree of heroicity of virtues of Jeanne-Elizabeth Bichier des Ages, co-foundress of the Sisters of the Cross. Here he called attention to St Joseph's superiority over St John the Baptist and St Peter.³³ These two allocutions added to the exaltation of the holy Patriarch St Joseph.³⁴ Another allocution was on March 19, 1935, which was on St Joseph's connection with the hypostatic union, whereby the divine and human nature of our Lord were linked in one divine Person of the Second Person of the Trinity.³⁵

Another title of St Joseph is his position as patron of the Church's struggle against atheistic communism. This is a logical development of his position as Patron of the Universal Church and the Patron of

²⁹ Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 600.

³⁰ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 13, 158.

³¹ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 14, 506.

³² Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 605-606; Cf. also, *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 22-23, 1926.

³³ Cf., Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 606-607; Cf. also, *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 20-21, 1928.

³⁴ Boniface Llamera, OP, *Saint Joseph*, St. Louis 2, Mo.: B. Herder Book Co., 15 & 17 South Broadway, 1962, 8-9.

³⁵ Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 607.

labour. This declaration was made by Pope Pius XI at the conclusion of his encyclical on atheistic communism, *Divini Redemptoris*, which was published on March 19, 1937.³⁶ In the last years of his life, Pope alluded to the “omnipotent intercession” of St Joseph, which is clear from his allocution of March 19, 1938, given to a group of young married folk.³⁷

Pope Pius XII (1939-1958)

The encyclicals of the Pope shed light on the interest he took in reforming the Church. Friendly in nature, he made a profound impression on the millions who flocked to Rome for the Holy Year of 1950 and the Marian Year of 1954. The outstanding event of the pontificate of Pius XII as far as the devotion to St Joseph was concerned was his institution of the feast of St Joseph the Worker. The announcement was made on May 1, 1955, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Christian Association of Italian Workers. Pope concludes this announcement thus:

We are happy to announce to you Our determination to institute—as in fact We do now institute—the liturgical feast of St Joseph the Worker, assigning it to the first day of May... We are certain that you are (pleased), because the humble workmen of Nazareth not only personifies before God and the Church the dignity of the man who works with his hands, but he is always the provident guardian of you and of your families.³⁸

This declaration has twofold meanings: recognizing the dignity of St Joseph as a worker and the dignity of labour as personified in St Joseph. The feast replaced the former Solemnity of St Joseph, which had been celebrated since 1913 on the third Wednesday after Easter. Another sign of the great devotion of the Pope to St Joseph is the prayer which he composed in honour of St Joseph the Worker, to be said by workmen, and on March 11, 1958, attached to it a partial indulgence of three years.³⁹ On February 19, 1958, Pope made a Radio cast to American Schoolchildren on the virtues of St Joseph. “St Joseph.... was a holy man. More than that, the Eternal Father confided to the care of St Joseph His own only begotten Son, become man on earth, Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰

³⁶*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 29, 106; Cf., Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 605.

³⁷*L'Osservatore Romano*, March 21–22, 1938.

³⁸*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 47, 402; Cf., Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 610.

³⁹Cf., Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 614–615.

⁴⁰*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 50, 174; Cf., Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 616.

Pope John XXIII (1958-1963)

Pope John XXIII, a great devotee of St Joseph, took the prophetic step to convoke an ecumenical Council to bring renewal in the Church, to have dialogue with the modern world and to have dialogue with the separated brethren of the Christian religion. On March 19, 1959, Pope recalled the basic reasons why St Joseph is honoured. The occasion was a discourse before a large meeting of Roman workers. St Joseph is a shining example of all virtues. St Joseph is the outstanding protector of the family, along with other two persons whose incomparable guardian he was.⁴¹

On March 19, 1961, Pope John XXIII published an Apostolic Letter, *Le Voci*, addressed to the bishops and the faithful of the entire world, announcing the selection of St Joseph as heavenly protector of the Second Vatican Council.⁴² This Letter summarized the acts of earlier popes in honour of St Joseph and Pope adds: "Oh! The invocation of St Joseph! Oh! Devotion to St Joseph for the protection of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican." Pope continues:

Venerable brethren and sons of Rome, brethren and well-beloved children of the entire world! This is what We wanted to lead up to and this is why We are sending this apostolic letter on March 19th. We wanted the celebration of the feast of St Joseph, the Patron of the Universal Church, to bring your souls the inspiration for an extraordinary renewal of fervour that will come from a more lively, more ardent, and more constant prayerful participation in the cares of Holy Church, your teacher and mother, your instructor and guide for this extraordinary event – the Twenty-first Ecumenical Council and the Second of the Vatican – to which the public press of the whole world has been devoting lively interest and respectful attention.⁴³

On the same day that the Apostolic Letter was officially released, Pope John XXIII addressed various religious communities and Catholic organizations at Rome, in an allocution containing several outstanding tributes to St Joseph.⁴⁴ On November 13, 1962, Pope John XXIII announced to the Second Vatican Council in its eighteenth

⁴¹L'Osservatore Romano, March 20-21, 1961; Cf., Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 619.

⁴²L'Osservatore Romano, March 20-21, 1961; Cf. also, Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 619-629.

⁴³Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 627.

⁴⁴L'Osservatore Romano, March 20 -21, 1961.

session that the name of St Joseph was to be inserted into the prayer of the First Canon of the Mass.⁴⁵

Pope Paul VI (1963–1978)

Pope Paul VI preached on the person of St Joseph and his many virtues in his homily on the Feast of St Joseph on March 27, 1969. Pope invited us to invoke Joseph's patronage "as the Church has been wont to do in these recent times, for herself in the first place, with a spontaneous theological reflection on the marriage of divine and human action in the great economy of the Redemption, in which economy the first-the divine one-is wholly sufficient unto itself, while the second-the human action which is ours-though capable of nothing (cf. Jn 15:5), is never dispensed from a humble but conditional and ennobling collaboration. The Church also calls upon Joseph as her protector because of a profound and ever-present desire to reinvigorate her ancient life with true evangelical virtues, such as shine forth in St Joseph."⁴⁶

St Joseph and the Second Vatican Council

There are a number of indirect references to St Joseph in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and these indirect references are mainly in the context of the life of Jesus in Nazareth, in the Holy Family and in the context of the Christian family life. It is true that there are no direct references to St Joseph in the Council documents. In the history of redemption the silent role of St Joseph is vividly hinted at while referring to the life of Jesus in Nazareth. These indirect references we come across in the narration of the sacramental life and family life of a Christian (LG 11). Again, while discussing the role of Mary in the life of Church, there are references to St Joseph (LG 58, 63). Again, in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, (*Dei Verbum*) numbers 2 and 5 one could come across indirect references to St Joseph while narrating the salvation history.⁴⁷

Pope John Paul II (1978-2005)

Pope John Paul II in his official pronouncements and teachings refer St Joseph very frequently. For example, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* while stressing the importance of family he gives the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

⁴⁵Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus*, 636.

⁴⁶Paul VI, Discourse (March 27, 1969), *Insegnamenti*, VII (1969), Vatican, 1269.

⁴⁷Some examples are *Lumen Gentium*, numbers 11, 58, 63, *Dei Verbum*, numbers 2 and 5.

“Through God’s mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It, therefore, is the prototype and example for all Christian families. It was unique in the world. Its life was passed in anonymity and silence in a little town in Palestine. It underwent trials of poverty, persecution and exile. It glorified God in an incomparably exalted and pure way. And it will not fail to help Christian families-indeed, all the families in the world-to be faithful to their day-to-day duties, to bear the cares and tribulations of life, to be open and generous to the needs of others, and to fulfill with joy the plan of God in their regard. St. Joseph was "a just man," a tireless worker, the upright guardian of those entrusted to his care. May he always guard, protect and enlighten families.”⁴⁸

By emphasizing St Joseph the Worker, Pope John Paul II noted in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, “The truth that by means of work man participates in the activity of God himself, his Creator, was given particular prominence by Jesus Christ-the Jesus at whom many of his first listeners in Nazareth ‘were astonished, saying, Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? Is not this the carpenter?’” For Jesus not only proclaimed but first and foremost fulfilled by his deeds the “gospel,” the word of eternal Wisdom, that had been entrusted to him. Therefore, this was also "the gospel of work," because he who proclaimed it was himself a man of work, a craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth.”⁴⁹

Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos on the person and mission of St Joseph in the life of Christ and of the Church* focusses six points with an introduction. These points are: the Gospel portrait, the Guardian of the mystery of God, a just man a husband, work as an expression of love, the primacy of interior life, and the Patron of the Church in our day. Quoting the prayer of Pope Leo XIII, Pope John Paul II says the following:

Even today we have many reasons to pray in a similar way: "Most beloved father, dispel the evil of falsehood and sin...graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness...and just as once you saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend God's holy Church from the snares of her enemies and from all adversity." Today we still have good reason to commend everyone to St. Joseph.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Number 86, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981.

⁴⁹Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, Number 26, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981.

⁵⁰Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, Number 31, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989.

Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013)

In his Angelus Address on the third Sunday of the Lent, March 19, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI has the following to say:

From the example of St Joseph, we all receive a strong invitation to carry out with fidelity, simplicity and modesty the task that Providence has entrusted to us. I think especially of fathers and mothers of families, and I pray that they will always be able to appreciate the beauty of a simple and industrious life, cultivating the conjugal relationship with care and fulfilling with enthusiasm the great and difficult educational mission.⁵¹

The Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI on March 19, 2006 considered the importance of the person of St Joseph.

Pope Francis (2013-)

Jesuits are great promoters of the devotion to St Joseph. The first Jesuit Pope Francis took keen interest in promoting the cause of St Joseph and on May 1, 2013, he inserted the name of St Joseph into Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV of the Roman Liturgy with the Decree *Paternas vices*. The Decree regarding the mention of the Divine Name of St Joseph in the Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV was issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, of course with the approval of the Pope. The addition reads as follows –with blessed St Joseph, her spouse.

The culmination of the devotion to St Joseph is the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*⁵² of Pope Francis on December 8, 2020, on the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. With this Apostolic Letter Pope also declared a Year of St Joseph from December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021. The aim of the Apostolic Letter is to increase our love St Joseph, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal. This Apostolic Letter deals with seven points and concludes with a beautiful prayer to St Joseph. All the seven points beautifully explain the qualities of St Joseph, a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a working father, and a father in the shadows.

⁵¹Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, March 19, 2006, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

⁵²Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, December 8, 2020, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

The greatness of Saint Joseph is that he was the spouse of Mary and the father of Jesus. In this way, he placed himself, in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, “at the service of the entire plan of salvation”.⁵³

Conclusion

In the history of the Church, we observe the unique role of St Joseph during the times of crises. Popes as supreme head of the Church from time to time took keen interest in bringing the Church under the patronage of St Joseph. Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) was the first Pope to introduce the Feast of St Joseph in Rome in 1479. It is interesting to note that Rome was in the climax of its Renaissance and Humanist culture at that time. Whenever the Church faced some critical moments in her history, the popes immediately sought the intercession of St Joseph and the protector of the infant Church of Bethlehem was there to overcome the difficult situations. From the time of Pope Pius IX till to date all popes have taken special attention to give due importance to the role of St Joseph in the life of the Church. The credit goes to Pope Leo XIII to publish an encyclical in 1889 in honour of St Joseph. Pope Francis, being a Jesuit, had the inspiration to declare a year dedicated to St Joseph.

The central theme of the teaching of Pope Francis is the welfare of the families, especially Christian families, as is clear from the two synods, one on marriage and another on family in 2014 and 2015 respectively. *Amoris Laetitia*, the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, clearly indicates the interest of the Pope on families. It was published on March 19, 2016, which speaks about the role of St Joseph in the renewal of the Church. The encyclicals of the Pope include *Laudato Si*, on May 24, 2015, *Lumen Fidei* on June 29, 2019 and *Fratelli Tutti* on October 3, 2020, all speak about the well-being of the human family. St Joseph is an ideal set before us.

⁵³Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, December 8, 2020, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.