

McKeon: St. Joseph the Worker is part of our conversation about the COVID-19 frontline

St Joseph has increasingly taken on a higher profile in the faith life of Catholics in Canada and around the world.

Back in the 1600s, St. Joseph was named the patron saint of Canada. We see the name of St. Joseph frequently in Edmonton with the seminary, the college on the University of Alberta campus, the Cathedral (Basilica) church, a high school, and a hospital. Many of us have encountered the Sisters of St. Joseph at work in the archdiocese.



Bob McKeon

This year, Pope Francis has raised up the life and witness of St Joseph to the global church in a special way. He has declared the 2021 as the Year of St. Joseph, and written a special Apostolic Letter, *Patris Corde*, presenting St. Joseph as a model for our challenging times.

In the Archdiocese of Edmonton, the Year of St. Joseph will be commemorated with a series of special Masses, videos and prayers. This will include Mass on May 1 celebrating St. Joseph the Worker and dedicating St. Joseph's Basilica. The 11 a.m. Mass will be livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube.

Patris Corde is relatively short, and is easy for us to read. Pope Francis starts with a reflection about what scripture tells us about St. Joseph. Significantly, scripture does not record any of his words, but does describe his actions which are courageous, decisive, faithful and loving

One way we connect to St. Joseph today is through prayer and liturgical worship. There are two days celebrating St. Joseph in our liturgical calendar. The first is March 19. This special day has been observed consistently for several hundred years. It is designated as a Solemnity, the highest order of a liturgical feast. This day has a special liturgical priority. For example, this year March 19 fell on a Friday during Lent, but the usual Lenten Friday practices of fasting and abstinence were relaxed, so that the St. Joseph could be joyously celebrated by the church community on his special day.

However, St. Joseph also has a second day on the liturgical calendar. In 1955, Pope Pius XII proclaimed the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, which was to be celebrated each year on May 1. The date was carefully chosen. May 1 (May Day) is International Workers Day, a special day for public assemblies, parades and speeches by labour unions, socialists and communists going back to 1889.

International Workers Day remembers a deadly riot in Chicago that came out of a national workers' campaign for an eight-hour work day in the U.S. in the 1880s. By instituting May 1 as the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, Pope Pius XII was presenting St. Joseph, a labourer, a carpenter in the small town of Nazareth, as a model for engaging contemporary issues of work and economic justice.

In fact, Pope Francis, in his letter, explicitly links St. Joseph to the message of respect for human dignity of workers contained in the documents of contemporary Catholic social teaching going back to Pope Leo XIII.

Saint

Joseph



St. Joseph the Worker is the patron saint of the Edmonton Archdiocese. Archdiocese of Edmonton file photo

The patron saint of the Archdiocese of Edmonton is St. Joseph, but more specifically St. Joseph the Worker. When the fully constructed St. Joseph Cathedral was formally blessed and dedicated in 1963 by Archbishop Anthony Jordan, the date chosen was May 1, the recently established liturgical day for St. Joseph the Worker.

When the Archdiocese of Edmonton celebrated its 100th anniversary, a special icon of St. Joseph the Worker was commissioned. St. Joseph is pictured in his working clothes with a carpentry tool. Many of us likely have not participated in a liturgical celebration for St. Joseph the Worker. It is listed in the Liturgical Calendar as an "optional memorial," a low liturgical priority.

Significantly, this year, as part of the Year of St. Joseph, the Edmonton Archdiocese is planning a special, high-profile archdiocesan celebration for St. Joseph the Worker on Saturday, May 1 at St. Joseph's Basilica, with Archbishop Richard Smith presiding.

Pope Francis intentionally puts St. Joseph the Worker into conversation with the situation of workers today. He points to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic with increased unemployment, and the health risks experienced by front-line workers.

In Canada, we have seen how the work situations of low-income workers, women, and young adults, have been most negatively impacted by the pandemic. Pope Francis has called us to work for a "new normal" coming out of the pandemic where living wage employment is available to all.

This year is a special opportunity for all of us in the Edmonton Archdiocese to celebrate St. Joseph the Worker on May 1: in prayer and liturgical celebration, to read *Patris Corde* by Pope Francis and to (re)commit ourselves to work to protect the human dignity of all workers in our workplaces and community today.

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