

Sheedy: St. Joseph is a guide to being an everyday saint

If you're anything like me, you might find it a bit tough to relate to St. Joseph. Not only did he live 2,000 years ago on the other side of the planet, but we know next to nothing about him. Not a single word he said has been recorded and the Gospels give us only scant information about his actions.

So why should we be dedicating an entire year to him? What are we supposed to learn from him and how?



Andrew Sheedy

Recently, I consecrated myself to St. Joseph along with several other seminarians, entrusting myself to his care so that he can lead me closer to Jesus.

I could never have seen myself doing this a few years ago. Yet St. Joseph has been with me my whole life. I was born on his feast day; given his name as my middle name; was baptized and received my first communion in St. Joseph's Church in my hometown, Derwent (about 200 kilometres east of Edmonton); attended Holy Family Parish when I moved to St. Albert; and have now spent the last four years at St. Joseph Seminary. But it was hard for me to see St. Joseph as a model I could imitate even if I did eventually desire to grow in devotion to him. He seemed too unknowable to have any impact on my life.

But as I have come to appreciate more recently (partly thanks to Pope Francis's apostolic letter, *Patris Corde*), I think this is exactly one of the things that

makes St. Joseph such a great model for us.

What do I mean by this? Well, chances are that most of us will never become famous. We won't work miracles or receive the stigmata. We won't establish religious orders or preach the Gospel in foreign countries. Most of us will live relatively quiet lives, working to support our families and dealing with the day-to-day realities of life.

After we die, we will no doubt be remembered by our families, but the likelihood of us getting a mention in the history books is pretty slim. St. Joseph lived a largely ordinary life of manual labour, living in a small town and attracting no particular attention to himself, to the extent that people would later be shocked that his son was not ordinary: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matthew 13:55).



Andrew Sheedy is seen after his Confirmation in 2011 with his friend Joseph Marsiglio outside Holy Family Parish in St. Albert. Courtesy of Andrew Sheedy

Joseph's example can remind us that we can be great saints even if we live seemingly mundane lives. You might object at this point that St. Joseph's life doesn't really count as ordinary. None of us will be asked to raise the Son of God either, never mind being married to a perfectly sinless human being!

I would suggest that we are closer to St. Joseph than we might think. We may not have the same kind of relationship with Jesus and Mary that Joseph did, but we often forget what we do have. Every time we attend Mass, we have the opportunity to receive Jesus. Every time we enter a church, He is just as present as He was to St. Joseph.

Even in the ordinary moments of our everyday lives, the Trinity dwells within our souls. Christ is present in us, in our family members, our friends, our coworkers, and the people we meet on the street.

By meditating on what St. Joseph would have felt and how he would have responded to the presence of Jesus in his home, we can begin to appreciate what we should feel and do, knowing that the people in our lives carry Christ within them.

Joseph also teaches us about true fatherhood. We often think of fatherhood primarily in biological terms. But who is more a father: a man who unexpectedly fathers a child and abandons the mother, or St. Joseph, who fully embraced his paternal role even amidst great trials, like failing to provide for his family when there was no room at the inn, being forced to flee to Egypt, and losing Jesus for three days in Jerusalem?

When it comes down to it, fatherhood is the consequence of a gift from God. A man becomes a father when God entrusts a child into his care, with the great responsibility of ensuring his children's physical and spiritual wellbeing, providing for them, guiding them, and helping them to get to heaven. That is what fatherhood is all about, and that is what St. Joseph did to the best of his ability – even when he wished that he could offer his family so much more than a stable.

St. Joseph may seem distant from our reality. He might lack the charismatic appeal of saints like Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa, or John Paul II. But he nonetheless has much to teach us: about how great holiness can be achieved in our day-to-day lives, about how we can serve Jesus in the people around us, about what it means to be a good father, and so much more.

St. Joseph, pray for us.

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