

**On March 17**, Catholics celebrate **St. Patrick**, the fifth century bishop and patron of Ireland, whose life of holiness set the example for many of the Church's future saints.

St. Patrick is said to have been born around 389 AD in Britain. Captured by Irish raiders when he was about 16, St. Patrick was taken as a slave to Ireland where lived for six years as a shepherd before escaping and returning to his home.

At home, he studied the Christian faith at monastic settlements in Italy and in what is now modern-day France. He was ordained a deacon by the Bishop of Auxerre, France around the year 418 AD and ordained a bishop in 432 AD.

It was around this time when he was assigned to minister to the small, Christian communities in Ireland who lacked a central authority and were isolated from one another.

When St. Patrick returned to Ireland, he was able to use his knowledge of Irish culture that he gained during his years of captivity. Using the traditions and symbols of the Celtic people, he explained Christianity in a way that made sense to the Irish and was thus very successful in converting the natives.



The shamrock, which St. Patrick used to explain the Holy Trinity, is a symbol that has become synonymous with Irish Catholic culture.

Although St. Patrick's Day is widely known and celebrated every March the world over, various folklore and legends that surround the saint can make it difficult to determine fact from fiction.

Legends falsely cite him as the man who drove away snakes during his ministry despite the climate and location of Ireland, which have never allowed snakes to inhabit the area.

St. Patrick is most revered not for what he drove away from Ireland, but for what he brought, and the foundation he built for the generations of Christians who followed him.

Although not the first missionary to the country, he is widely regarded as the most successful. The life of sacrifice, prayer and fasting has laid the foundation for the many saints that the small island was home to following his missionary work.

To this day, he continues to be revered as one of the most beloved Saints of Ireland.

In March of 2011, the Irish bishops' conference marked their patron's feast by remembering him as "pioneer in an inhospitable climate."

As the Church in Ireland faces her own recent difficulties following clerical sex abuse scandals and loss of members in the Faith, comfort can be found in the plight of St. Patrick, the bishops said.

They quoted The Confession of St. Patrick, which reads: ***"May it never befall me to be separated by my God from his people whom he has won in this most remote land. I pray God that he gives me perseverance, and that he will deign that I should be a faithful witness for his sake right up to the time of my passing."***



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The **Solemnity of St. Joseph** is usually celebrated on March 19, but has been transferred to March 20 since the liturgy of the Lenten Sundays take precedence.

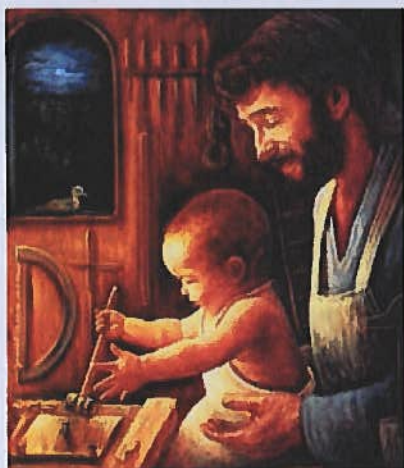
St. Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the foster-father of Jesus, was probably born in Bethlehem and probably died in Nazareth. His important mission in God's plan of salvation was "to legally insert Jesus Christ into the line of David from whom, according to the prophets, the Messiah would be born, and to act as his father and guardian" (*Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*). Most of our information about St. Joseph comes from the opening two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel. No words of his are recorded in the Gospels; he was the "silent" man. We find no devotion to St. Joseph in the early Church. It was the will of God that the Virgin Birth of Our Lord be first firmly impressed upon the minds of the faithful. He was later venerated by the great saints of the Middle Ages. Pius IX (1870) declared him patron and protector of the universal family of the Church.



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St. Joseph was an ordinary manual laborer although descended from the royal house of David. In the designs of Providence he was destined to become the spouse of the Mother of God. His high privilege is expressed in a single phrase, "Foster-father of Jesus." About him Sacred Scripture has little more to say than that he was a just man—an expression which indicates how faithfully he fulfilled his high trust of protecting and guarding God's greatest treasures upon earth, Jesus and Mary.

The darkest hours of his life may well have been those when he first learned of Mary's pregnancy; but precisely in this time of trial Joseph showed himself great. His suffering, which likewise formed a part of the work of the redemption, was not without great providential import: Joseph was to be, for all times, the trustworthy witness of the Messiah's virgin birth. After this, he modestly retires into the background of holy Scripture.



Of St. Joseph's death the Bible tells us nothing. There are indications, however, that he died before the beginning of Christ's public life. His was the most beautiful death that one could have, in the arms of Jesus and Mary. Humbly and unknown, he passed his years at Nazareth, silent and almost forgotten; he remained in the background through centuries of Church history. Only in more recent times has he been accorded greater honor. Liturgical veneration of St. Joseph began in the fifteenth century, fostered by Sts. Brigid of Sweden and Bernadine of Siena. St. Teresa, too, did much to further his cult.

At present there are two major feasts in his honor. On March 19 our veneration is directed to him personally and to his part in the work of redemption, while on May 1 we honor him as the patron of workmen throughout the world and as our guide in the difficult matter of establishing equitable norms regarding obligations and rights in the

social order.

—Excerpted from *The Church's Year of Grace*, Pius Parsch

**Patronage:** against doubt; against hesitation; accountants; attorneys; barristers; bursars; cabinetmakers; carpenters; cemetery workers; children; civil engineers; confectioners; craftsmen; dying; educators; emigrants; exiles; expectant mothers; families; fathers; furniture makers; grave diggers; happy death; holy death; house hunters; immigrants; interior souls; joiners; laborers; lawyers; married people; orphans; people in doubt; people who fight Communism; pioneers; pregnant women; social justice; solicitors; teachers; travelers; unborn children; wheelwrights; workers; working people

**Symbols and Representation:** bible; branch; carpenter's square; carpenter's tools; chalice; cross; hand tools; infant Jesus; ladder; lamb; lily; monstrance; man holding a lily and a carpenter's tool such as a square; man holding the infant Jesus; plane; rod

