

Saint Joseph



Novena and Prayers



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What Is a Novena?



The Catholic tradition of praying novenas has its roots in the earliest days of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that after the ascension of Jesus, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, to the upper room, where “They all devoted themselves single-mindedly to prayer, along with some women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). Jesus had instructed his disciples to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of the Lord came to them. This prayer of the first Christian community was the first “novena.” Based on this, Christians have always prayed for various needs, trusting that God both hears and answers prayer.

The word “novena” is derived from the Latin term *novem*, meaning nine. In biblical times numbers held deep symbolism for people. The number “three,” for example, symbolized perfection, fullness, completeness. The number nine—three times

three—symbolized perfection times perfection. Novenas developed because it was thought that—symbolically speaking—nine days represented the perfect amount of time to pray. The ancient Greeks and Romans had the custom of mourning for nine days after a death. The early Christian Church offered Mass for the deceased for nine consecutive days. During the Middle Ages novenas in preparation for solemn feasts became popular, as did novenas to particular saints.

Whether a novena is made solemnly—in a parish church in preparation for a feastday—or in the privacy of one’s home, as Christians we never really pray alone. Through the waters of Baptism we have become members of the Body of Christ and are thereby united to every other member of Christ’s Mystical Body. When we pray, we are spiritually united with all the other members.

Just as we pray for each other while here on earth, those who have gone before us and are united with God in heaven can pray for us and intercede for us as well. We Catholics use the term “communion of saints” to refer to this exchange of spiritual help among the members of the Church on earth, those who have died and are being purified, and the saints in heaven.

While nothing can replace the celebration of Mass and the sacraments as the Church’s highest form of prayer, devotions have a special place in

Catholic life. Devotions such as the Stations of the Cross can help us enter into the sufferings of Jesus and give us an understanding of his personal love for us. The mysteries of the rosary can draw us into meditating on the lives of Jesus and Mary. Devotions to the saints can help us witness to our faith and encourage us in our commitment to lead lives of holiness and service as they did.



How to use this booklet

The morning and evening prayers are modeled on the Liturgy of the Hours, following its pattern of psalms, scripture readings, and intercessions.

We suggest that during the novena you make time in your schedule to pray the morning prayer and evening prayer. If you are able, try to also set aside a time during the day when you can pray the novena and any other particular prayer(s) you have chosen. Or you can recite the devotional prayers at the conclusion of the morning or evening prayer. What is important is to pray with expectant faith and confidence in a loving God who will answer our prayers in the way that will most benefit us. The Lord “satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things” (Ps 107:9).



St. Joseph



The Gospels do not tell us much about Joseph—just enough to help us realize his special place in God’s plan of salvation. Although none of his words are recorded, we learn that Joseph “*did* as the angel of the Lord had commanded him” (Mt 1:24). His faith and willing cooperation with God’s plan make him a model for all Christians.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Guardian of the Redeemer*, Pope John Paul II has given a comprehensive teaching on the person and mission of St. Joseph in the life of the Church. The pope calls him the “guardian of the mystery of God,” referring to Joseph’s special role as the foster father of Jesus. Quoting St. Augustine, the pope notes that, “By reason of their faithful marriage *both of them* deserve to be called Christ’s parents, not only his mother, but also his father, who was a parent in the same way that he was the mother’s spouse: *in mind*, not in the flesh.” Although not his biological fa-

ther, Joseph exercised a true fatherhood with regard to Jesus in every other way. He cared for him, taught him a trade, and formed him in the religious traditions of Israel. Through Joseph, Jesus experienced the love of a human father.

Joseph was also the husband of Mary. The news about Mary's pregnancy evidently confused and disturbed him to the point that he decided not to go ahead with their plans for marriage. But an angelic messenger reassured him: "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take your wife Mary into your house—the child who has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:20). Joseph's marriage to Mary was an important part of God's plan. It was unique in that they remained virginal out of respect for the mystery that God had worked in Mary. Church teaching on Mary's perpetual virginity, however, is not intended to imply a negative attitude toward conjugal love, which is a great good. As Pope John Paul II explains: "There are really two kinds of love here, both of which together represent the mystery of the Church—virgin and spouse—as symbolized in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. 'Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes and confirms it. Marriage and virginity are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the Covenant of God with his people,' the Covenant which is a com-

munion of love between God and human beings” (*Guardian of the Redeemern.* 20, quoting *Role of the Christian Family*n. 16).

As husband and father, Joseph faithfully lived out God’s plan for his life. He gave Mary and Jesus the gift of his love, sacrificing himself through hard work and dedication. The Gospel tells us that he was a carpenter. He taught Jesus his trade, showing us the value of work done out of love. For this reason, the Church venerates Joseph as the patron of workers, celebrating a feast of Joseph the Worker on May 1.

Joseph also shows us the importance of prayer and the value of a deep spiritual life. Living with Mary, who “kept all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51), and with Jesus, God Incarnate, Joseph certainly had the opportunity to reflect on these mysteries in prayer. As devout Jews, the Holy Family attended the religious services of their people and heard the Scriptures proclaimed. The Gospel notes that Jesus attended the synagogue, “as was his custom” (Lk 4:16), a custom he learned, no doubt, from Joseph. When St. Teresa of Avila set out to renew the Carmelite Order, she put her work under the protection of St. Joseph, seeing in him a model of prayer and contemplation.

In 1870, Pope Pius IX proclaimed Joseph patron of the universal Church. Just as he protected and watched over the Holy Family, he watches over

the Church from heaven. The Church asks for his help and follows his example as it carries out its mission in the world. Joseph is also venerated as a model for laborers, the saint of divine providence, and the patron of a holy death. His feastday is March 19.

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