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FEATURE

A typical St. Joseph's Day includes offerings of bread, fruit, and other meatless foods. People gathering for the table pray to St. Joseph and give thanks for prayers answered. File photo

## St. Joseph's Day

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table ever since. "As long as we can do it, we'll do it," said Peter.

"It's always in thanksgiving that our prayer was answered," added Dolores.

Not only do the Latonas continue St. Joseph's Tables in their home, but they will assist with the 10th annual table at Webster's Holy Trinity Church on March 20 from 1-3 p.m. In addition, the Latonas will stage a 13th annual table on March 26 at St. Joseph's House, a shelter and soup kitchen located in downtown Rochester.

Another longstanding St. Joseph's Table in Rochester will take place this coming Sunday, March 13, at Holy Cross Church from 1-3 p.m. This year marks the parish's 13th annual table.

Fraser, meanwhile, is preparing with several fellow parishioners from St. Patrick Church in Mount Morris for an inaugural St. Joseph's Table to be held on March 19.

The celebration will begin with an 11 a.m. Mass at St. Patrick, and the afternoon-long St. Joseph's Table will then



The feast of St. Joseph is marked by many activities around the diocese.

take place in the village's Veterans of Foreign War building. Italian music, with dancing as well as accordion and guitar playing, are included in the day's planned festivities.

Fraser expects more than 600 participants for the St. Joseph's Table, which is being held in conjunction with Mount Morris' bicentennial celebration.

Response to the table has been so strong, Fraser said, that "there's talk of having it again."

"Everybody's been enthusiastic and excited about it," she said.

Fraser added that members of the village's Protestant churches have also lent their help for the March 19 event.

Dolores Latona noted that St. Joseph's Tables are most commonly initiated by lay people, either at a parish facility or in a parishioner's house.

"This is sort of like a lay ministry. We never would have had it at our church if we had not started it in our home," she observed.

The feast of St. Joseph first led to widespread celebration in Europe in the late 1400s. In 1870, Pope Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. More recently, Pope John

XXIII designated St. Joseph as heavenly protector of the Second Vatican Council on March 19, 1961.

Devotion to St. Joseph was limited early in church history due to ongoing debate about his importance in the Holy Family. New Testament information focuses extensively on the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception of Jesus Christ, but there are only scant details about the life of Mary's husband, Joseph the carpenter.

Following Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Joseph led Mary and a young Jesus into Egypt to escape King Herod. However, there is no further Biblical documentation of Joseph's actions.

Sister St. Luke asserted that St. Joseph quietly accepted all that was happening — including the fact that his wife had conceived a child without their having consummated their marriage.

"When you really think about that, that he was able to allow himself to be an instrument of God and allow himself to trust — he was a powerful, powerful person. That was some heavy stuff he was dealing with," Sister St. Luke commented. "He was just a very silent, powerful figure who cared for the whole family."

## Scholars honor saint for exercising role with humility

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — He was the strong, silent type.

Men today have much to learn from the example of St. Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth who became Mary's husband and Jesus' guardian, said participants at an international symposium last fall.

"St. Joseph really teaches us men that our value is not in how much money we earn, how much prestige we have or in machismo," said Father Larry Toschi, California provincial superior for the Oblates of St. Joseph.

Father Toschi was one of 80 scholars and students of St. Joseph from 17 countries who spent a week in Rome discussing the saint whose biblical mentions come only in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke.

While the symposium focused on scholarship and devotion to the saint in the 19th century, in interviews participants spoke about St. Joseph as a model for Christian living today.

The Gospel shows St. Joseph "to be a just man, called with Mary to undertake a difficult faith pilgrimage" in a situa-

tion not easy to understand and lacking any point of security except his faith in God, Pope John Paul II said in a message to participants.

"St. Joseph appears to us as a model of a man of faith, a man of work and as a husband and father," the papal message said.

Greeting the symposium participants at his Sept. 15, 1993 general audience, the pope said, St. Joseph "remained faithful to the special vocation entrusted to him as guardian of the beginnings of redemption, even in the midst of the obscurity of events, becoming along with Mary a sublime model of faith for believers."

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican secretary of state and the pope's envoy to the meeting, called the saint "a model of life, hard work, silence and generous obedience to the will of God."

But most people in the church have ignored St. Joseph as a model for living their Christian lives and they ignore most of the other saints as well, said Father Mario Carrera, a member of the Servants of Charity.

"One must seek inspiration from this great saint who had a special relationship with Jesus the Redeemer," Father Carrera said.

"In a society in which everyone has parents, but few have the experience of a father, the faith of St. Joseph can be a model of paternity lived with intensity and passion," he said.

And in societies marked by confusion and even conflict about the roles of men and women, the priest said, "it seems to me St. Joseph is a model of wholeness in which Joseph plays a complementary role to that of the Madonna."

"It's not a question of staking a claim, but of knowing how to live one's own mission looking toward a unique objective which is Jesus Christ, the redeemer of humanity," he said.

Although devotion to St. Joseph developed late in the church's history, Father Toschi said, until the time of the Second Vatican Council Catholics saw him not just as someone to pray to for help, but as someone to imitate.

"People think that with Vatican II devotion to saints became antiquated," he said. But what the council tried to do was to help Catholics see their devotion to the saints as part of a spiritual life concentrated on following Jesus.

"Knowing St. Joseph is essential to knowing Jesus; he's part of the mystery of Christ," Father Toschi said.

The "hiddenness" and "ordinariness" of Joseph the carpenter, working in Nazareth and raising his son, can help people appreciate how their seemingly normal lives are part of God's plan.

"Sanctity involves doing the ordinary every day, trusting and cooperating in God's providence," the priest said. "That is the source of peace in life."

Father Toschi said it appears that one of the reasons for the Bible's silence about St. Joseph once Jesus has grown is that "he has to fade from the scene for Jesus to start his public ministry and his reference to his father in heaven."

Even without Joseph hovering at the edge of the crowds, people in the Bible kept asking about Jesus, "Isn't he the carpenter's son?"

The little documentation of Joseph's life and actions — from his acceptance of a pregnant Mary, leading his new family into Egypt to escape Herod, his fading from the scene — show him to be "a self-possessed man, but one who relies on God," Father Toschi said.

"He leads the Holy Family with great respect. He knows Christ is greater than he is. He knows Mary is greater. Yet he is the head of the family, exercising his role with humility."