

THE YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH: OUR CHURCH IS A SPECIAL SHRINE!

We are now in the year of St. Joseph! Pope Francis announced this special year of devotion to St. Joseph, beginning December 8th, 2020, and continuing through December 8th, 2021 (It began and will end on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.). Because St. Joseph is the patron saint of this parish, Father Angelo asked the Archbishop to designate our church as a shrine of St. Joseph for this year (Two other St. Joseph churches in the archdiocese, one in North Bend (near Cincinnati) and one in the far north, Wapakoneta, have also been thus designated.).

What does this mean, to be a temporary shrine? It means that this year, if someone makes a pious visit to our church in honor of St. Joseph, it is an occasion for receiving a plenary indulgence (along with the fulfillment of the other requirements for obtaining an indulgence prayer for the Holy Father, sacramental confession, and reception of Holy Communion).

How do I get the special plenary indulgence? A *plenary* indulgence means that *all* the temporal punishment due for our sins (or the sins of the soul for whom we are trying obtain the indulgence) is remitted. A *partial* indulgence means that *some* of the punishment is remitted. The conditions for a plenary indulgence are rather strict; the person obtaining the indulgence must be **free from any attachment to sin, even venial sin**. (Good news: if you try to get a plenary indulgence, but don't meet all the conditions, you almost certainly will get a partial indulgence!) For even a partial indulgence you must be in a state of grace at the time you perform the act that is an occasion for the indulgence. There are many acts that the church has designated as a occasions for plenary indulgences (*for example, a half hour of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a half hour of pious reading of Holy Scripture, etc.—these are listed in a document from the Vatican entitled Enchiridion indulgentiarum*). So much for the conditions. Here are the requirements to receive this indulgence:

- Visit St. Joseph Church with the pious intention of honoring St. Joseph and receiving the indulgence.
- Reverently recite the Creed and pray an Our Father.
- Pray for the intentions of the Holy Father (*another Our Father and a Hail Mary would be good*).
- Receive the Sacrament of Penance and the Holy Eucharist within 3 weeks of visiting the shrine.

A Theology of Indulgences: by Father Andrew J. Umberg, STL

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross to make the perfect sacrifice to God the Father for the forgiveness of our sins. We receive this merciful remission/ forgiveness of our sins when we are committed to Christ in Baptism as his faithful disciples. Unfortunately, sometimes we break this commitment to Christ by our sins in thought, word, action and omission. In the Sacrament of Penance, we recommit to being faithful followers of Christ and are given the gift of forgiveness again. However, we may still have some lingering attachment to our sins, and in justice, we may owe reparation to the people we have sinned against. Our will needs to be disciplined to completely reject our sinful actions and whatever we gained by them, and we need to pay our debts. This painful process is what we call temporal punishment for sin. To say this is not to deny God's love or His mercy or His forgiveness of sins. For example, if a boy is told not to play baseball facing Mrs. Smith's house, but he does, and the ball breaks Mrs. Smith's window, he is probably in trouble. It may be that when dad gets home he does not ground him or otherwise punish him. However, there is still the question of who is paying for Mrs. Smith's window. In justice, it should be the disobedient boy who pays. In a similar way, God can forgive our sins, and we are going to heaven, but we cannot bear to see Him face to face in His perfection while still having some attachment to our sins (that is, still being a little bit glad that we committed them because of whatever earthly advantage we received from them) or being crassly indifferent to repairing or restoring what we have damaged or taken by our sins. So, we do penance for our sins on earth to discipline our will and fulfill justice. We can make up for what is not done after we die, before we see the face of God. This is good news because it gives us great cause for hope for the salvation of ourselves and others in the face of our weakness and our sins. It is bad news because discipline and reparation can be painful.

The Ancient Church grappled with these issues in its practice of the Sacrament of Penance. During that time, the practice began of people asking Christians who were imprisoned for their faith to offer their sufferings for them. This was sometimes recognized by the Church as a factor in reducing the penitential acts required of sinners, that is, **an indulgence**. Because all the martyrs belong to the Church, as does the grace of Christ Himself, the Church claims the authority to dispense the grace received through the holiness of Christ and the saints. This is done by the authority of the pope, and it is done to encourage the faithful to perform certain pious actions to help stimulate the practice of their faith. This is like an indulgent parent who promises to give their child a bribe to go and sit still at the dentist's office or to improve their grades. The Church wants her children to be freed from their maladies and to grow in the knowledge and love of God.