

Year of St. Joseph, Patron of the China Missions since 1668

On 8 December, 2020, Pope Francis published the Apostolic Letter "*Patris corde*" ("With a father's heart"), 150 years after Pius IX, "moved by the grave and mournful circumstances in which a Church was beset by the hostility of men," declared Saint Joseph "Patron of the universal Church" in 1870. St. Joseph is an important figure today in this time of pandemic, where "ordinary people" live with "patience" and offer "hope."

With the Letter, Pope Francis announced a special year dedicated to St. Joseph starting from 8 December 2020 until 8 December 2021. At the same time, the Apostolic Penitentiary issued a decree establishing a special plenary indulgence for all who will celebrate the anniversary.

On 7 March, 2018 Agenzia Fides had published an article, "The Catholic community devoted to Saint Joseph, Patron of China," which gave the following account:

The fervent devotion to St. Joseph, Patron of China, which has been handed down for several generations among Chinese Catholics, is rediscovered every year with further enthusiasm in March, the month dedicated to the Saint. This special bond is made evident by the fact that in China many churches, ecclesiastical structures, seminaries, national and diocesan religious congregations, charitable institutions (orphanages, homes for the elderly), schools are dedicated to St. Joseph. Many Catholics have adopted Joseph as their baptismal name...

The Chinese are very devoted to the Saint not only because he is the putative father of Jesus and spouse of the Virgin Mary, but also because he is the Patron of China (the decision was approved during the first national council of Chinese ecclesial affairs in 1924) and of missions in China.

Other news agencies repeated the same date for the proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church in China. Indeed, Chinese Catholics have been very devoted to Saint Joseph long before the First National Council of the Catholic Church held in Shanghai from 15 May to 12 June 1924. On reading the Document of the Council, we find Title XIV on *Consecration of China to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, followed by no. 514 specifying that such a consecration should be done in front of the Blessed Sacrament possibly in all churches either at Assumption or Immaculate Conception feasts. No. 17 of the *Vota et Postulata*, reports the indulgences attached to this consecration. Moreover, at the close of the 1924 Shanghai National Council, Archbishop Celso Costantini (1876-1958), the Apostolic Delegate in China, along with all the bishops, consecrated the Chinese people to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Donglü, Our Lady of China. However, no mention of St. Joseph can be found.

The proposal of the protection of St. Joseph in fact dates back much earlier—during the forced internment of 23 missionaries (19 Jesuits, 3 Dominicans and 1 Franciscan) in Canton from September 1665 to October 1669. They held a special conference beginning on 18 December, 1667 with the aim of resolving various conflicts about Rites (42 motions were approved). On 26 January, 1668 they approved unanimously "the only non-controversial proposal that St. Joseph be chosen as the patron of the China Missions." The information was

reported by the Spanish Fr. Domingo Fernandez Navarrete (1610–1689), one of the Dominican friars who attended the conference.¹

The webpage (<http://printmaking1101.blog.sohu.com/185371000.html>) provides other information (see Chinese text below):

The decision to dedicate the Church in China to the protection of St. Joseph was brought to Rome by the Italian Jesuit, Fr. Prospero Intorcetta (殷铎泽, 1625-1696), for the official approval by the Holy See. From then on, Chinese Catholics started to venerate St. Joseph in a special way and to dedicate churches to him. In 1721, an Austrian Jesuit missionary, Fr. Xavier-Ehrenbert Fridelli (1673-1743), rector of the convent of St. Joseph in Beijing, wanted to build a beautiful church and dedicate it to St. Joseph. The engraving on the commemorative stone read: “Jesuits in Beijing dedicate to St. Joseph, Patron of China, 24 July 1721, in perpetual memory.” The construction of the church was entrusted to the architect Bro. Ferdinando-Bonaventura Moggi (1684–1761), while the court painter, Bro. Giuseppe Castiglioni (郎世寧, 1688-1766), decorated it with marvelous paintings. The central altar was comparable to the altar of St. Louis of Gongaza in the church of St. Ignatius in Rome. It was the first church dedicated to St. Joseph.

In 1861, 140 years later, another famous church dedicated to St. Joseph was built in the French Concession at Shanghai, South Sichuan Road. In 2002 a St. Joseph Church was built on Mount Emei, Sichuan.

The writer of the above blog also gives three reasons for the special devotion to St. Joseph among Chinese Catholics:

1. He is a symbol of humility, simplicity, authenticity, diligence and obedience, all virtues that Chinese culture and tradition hold supremely important.
2. The Scriptures provide only very few details about his actions and life: this fits with the Daoist principle “no action, yet all gets done” (*Daodejing* 48).
3. As on earth, he lived in full dedication and service to Mary and the Child Jesus, so we hope that in heaven he continues to care for the life of the Church in China.

The above-mentioned blog website also publishes several pictures of the book *The Sacred Month of St. Joseph, Great Patron of China*, printed in 1862.

¹ See J.S. Cummins (ed.) *The Travels of Navarrete*, Hakluyt Society, 1962, p. 414.
https://archive.org/stream/travelscontrover02fern/travelscontrover02fern_djvu.txt



圣若瑟为什么是中国的主保？

1668年1月（清康熙八年），天主教广州会议召开。由葡萄牙籍成际理神父主持，各修会的传教士23人参加并签名。会议拟定了举行弥撒圣祭、施行终付圣事、婚配圣等有关规定42条。在1月26日的闭幕会上，全体神父一致选择了童贞的净配，救主耶稣的鞠养父亲、荣福大圣若瑟为中国大主保。这一选择，由殷铎泽神父带往罗马，经圣座认可并郑重地予以批准。清代天主教广州会议，是中国天主教历史上第二次代表会议，意义十分重大。从这时开始，全国各地出现了以圣若瑟命名的教堂，我国教友开始敬大圣若瑟，3月19日，为大圣若瑟节。1721年（清康熙六十年），奥地利籍费隐神父时任北京圣若瑟住院院长，为大圣若瑟兴建了一座华丽的圣堂，基石上刻有“在北京的耶稣会会士敬献于中国大主保圣若瑟，1721年7月24日勒石永志纪念。”

这座圣堂由利博明修士担任造堂建筑师，宫廷画师郎世宁修士以绚丽多彩的绘画装饰了圣堂。中间正祭台式样堪与罗马圣类思公撒格祭台比美。圆顶建筑和内部装饰均按透视原理布局，吸引了满汉各族广大参观者，有两位从罗马新来北京的奥斯定会神父称这座圣堂真不愧为“国都之堂”。这是中国天主教历史上第一座圣若瑟堂。位于上海四川南路36号的圣若瑟堂，是法国天主教会于1861年创建的，比北京圣若瑟堂要晚140年。位于四川省峨眉山天主堂，即峨眉若瑟堂，是中国天主教会于2002年建成的，比北京若瑟堂要晚281年。峨眉山若瑟堂可容纳150人，中西结合建筑的风格，该堂有500位教友，是中国天主教峨眉山接待中心。

至于为什么选择圣若瑟为中国教会的主保，我们认为大概有以下一种原因：第一、圣若瑟为人谦逊、诚朴、勤谨，这一美德正好是中国人的传统美德。

第二、圣若瑟生平不为人知，圣经所记载的关于圣若瑟的事迹也寥寥无几。这也正是道教所主张的“无为而有为”的境界。

第三、就如大圣若瑟在世时曾经照顾了圣母和耶稣，也希望大圣若瑟在天上也照顾新生的中国教会。

(<http://printmaking1101.blog.sohu.com/185371000.html>; accessed 16 December, 2020)