



Introduction

By Patrick E. Kelly, Supreme Knight

Flowing from the Year of St. Joseph declared by Pope Francis, and inspired by his apostolic letter *Patris Corde*, comes our new Pilgrim Icon Program in honor of St. Joseph.

Devotion to St. Joseph was understandably slow to develop in the history of the Church. The "just man," whom God chose to protect, defend and raise the most precious of his gifts to humanity had not a word of his recorded in Scripture. Tradition tells us that our Lord's foster father died- likely with Jesus and Mary at his side - even prior to Jesus beginning his public ministry.

St. Joseph carried out his mission of raising, guarding and preparing Christ quietly, courageously and faithfully. For that faithful work, St. Joseph was rewarded - not with seeing the fruits of his labor in this life, but with the incomparable prize of glory in heaven.

This beautiful icon is housed at St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal, Canada's preeminent Shrine to St. Joseph, founded by St. André Bessette. The original is written (prayerfully painted) by Elizabeth Bergeron, from a drawing by

famed iconographer Alexandre Sobolev. In the image, St. Joseph stands with his eyes cast humbly down, but with a determined strength in his face. In his covered arm he bears the Child Jesus, whose own hand is raised, blessing the world. In his right arm, St. Joseph holds a flowering staff, a sign that he was chosen by God. The white lilies of the staff signify his purity and chastity.

Taken together, the icon provides a window into the life and mission of this courageous father, a man who was one of us and yet called to a mission of incomparable significance. Our world desperately needs men and women of courage. But in a particular way, it needs courageous fathers - men willing to stand up and to carry out their own mission of protecting, defending and raising future generations. It needs men willing to risk it all, in order to offer the world Jesus. In short, our world needs men in the model of St. Joseph.

Since its inception in 1979, the Knights of Columbus Pilgrim Icon Program has held more than 174,800 local council and parish prayer services with some 22 million participants. Featured images have included Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Czestochowa, Our Lady of Pochaiv, Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of Charity,

Our Lady of Persecuted Christians and the Holy Family.

In the first year of his pontificate, Pope Francis received the Order's Board of Directors in a private audience, during which the Holy Father said "I commend all of you in a special way to the intercession of St. Joseph, the protector of the Holy Family of Nazareth, who is an admirable model of those manly virtues of quiet strength, integrity and fidelity which the Knights of Columbus are committed to preserving, cultivating and passing on to future generations of Catholic men.

Bearing those words in mind, I chose to entrust my service as Supreme Knight to St. Joseph, and through this Pilgrim Icon Program, we can all turn in prayer to St. Joseph. We give thanks to God for the gift of his fatherly example, and we ask St. Joseph to be a father to us. Along the way, may we also grow in our own imitation of St. Joseph's quiet strength, integrity and fidelity.