

# Another feast for St. Joseph?

Maybe you remember we celebrated the feast of St. Joseph on March 19. Today, May 1, we celebrate another feast dedicated to Jesus' earthly father, that of St. Joseph the Worker. Why two feasts?

The early years of the Church were occupied with debates concerning the nature of Christ, so although St. Joseph was commemorated in Eastern liturgies during the Christmas season, he received little special attention until the seventh century. By the ninth century his feast was observed on March 11 in some places in Europe. During the Middle Ages the March 19 feast became popular when promoted by Servite and Franciscan preachers. Pope Sixtus IV (a Franciscan elected pope in 1471) extended the March 19 feast to the church in Rome, and it became a universal feast in the 16th century when the Council of Trent revised the Breviary and Missal.

Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878-1903) described St. Joseph as patron of the whole Church: "This is his numberless family ... because he is the husband of Mary and the father of Jesus." The Carmelites observed a feast to honor the Patronage of St. Joseph on the third Wednesday after Easter. In 1955, Pope Pius XII replaced that feast with the May 1 celebration that honors Joseph the Worker. Pope Pius intended this feast to challenge communist May Day observances, acknowledge Christian workers' value and pay tribute to the nobility of human labor.