**Exodus 290**

A great way to celebrate the Year of St. Joseph

BY FATHER MICHAEL CHAMPAGNE, CJC

Now that the state of Louisiana’s COVID-19 stay-at-home order has been lifted, let’s celebrate the Year of St. Joseph with Exodus 290!

One hundred fifty years ago, Pope Pius IX declared St. Joseph to be the Patron of the Universal Church. Joseph protected and provided for the Father’s most precious treasures—His eternal Son and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Joseph and Mary had to travel much during Mary’s pregnancy and during the early years of Jesus. First, they traveled some 90 miles from their native Nazareth to Bethlehem due to the census. Then, 40 days after the birth of Jesus, the Holy Family embarked on about a 10-mile roundtrip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and back for His presentation in the Temple. After that, because of the wrath of Herod and a revelation from an angel, Joseph took the Child and His mother into Egypt, which required yet another journey of at least 50 miles to get out of Herod’s reach. Once Herod died, however, the Holy Family traveled those same 50 miles back to Bethlehem, and then another 90 miles back to Nazareth.

Altogether, Joseph’s exodus to and from Egypt during these early years of Jesus’ life added up to a foot journey of about 290 miles!

As the Diocese of Lafayette celebrates the Year of St. Joseph as declared by Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel, it is unique to note that 13 of the diocese’s 121 church parishes bear the name St. Joseph. In fact, early sacramental records show that the diocese’s oldest church—the Mother Church of the Acadians in St. Martinville—was also first referred to as St. Joseph at the Attakapas. It was not until 1765, when the church parish was officially erected, that the name was changed to that of the present-day St. Martin de Tours.

As part of the diocese’s celebration of the Year of St. Joseph, Bishop Deshotel has designated each of the 13 St. Joseph parishes to serve as pilgrimage sites, encouraging individuals to visit these locations and offer certain prayers for the opportunity to gain a plenary indulgence. However, if one were to map out their pilgrimage journey to these parishes to begin at St. Martin de Tours Church in St. Martinville—the site of the first originally named St. Joseph Church in the diocese—and conclude at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Lafayette, their overall journey would add up to approximately the same amount of travel experienced by St. Joseph throughout his Exodus—290 miles!

This pilgrimage journey would also be an excellent spiritual exercise in reflecting upon the Stations of the Cross along the way:

**Station 1:** Pilate condemns Jesus to die. (St. Martin de Tours Church, St. Martinville)

**Station 2:** Jesus accepts His cross. (St. Joseph Church, Parks)

**Station 3:** Jesus falls for the first time. (St. Joseph Church, Loreauville)

**Station 4:** Jesus meets His mother. (St. Joseph Church, Centerville)

**Station 5:** Simon helps Jesus carry the cross. (St. Joseph Church, Patterson)

**Station 6:** Veronica offers her veil to Jesus. (St. Joseph Church, Broussard)

**Station 7:** Jesus falls for the second time. (St. Joseph Church, Milton)

**Station 8:** Jesus speaks to the women. (St. Joseph Church, Maurice)

**Station 9:** Jesus falls for the third time. (St. Joseph Church, Rayne)

**Station 10:** Jesus is stripped of His garments. (St. Joseph Church, Iota)

**Station 11:** Jesus is nailed to the cross. (St. Joseph Church, Evangeline)

**Station 12:** Jesus dies upon the cross. (St. Joseph Church, Ville Platte)

**Station 13:** Jesus is taken down from the cross. (St. Joseph Church, Plaisance)

**Station 14:** Jesus is laid in the tomb. (St. Joseph Church, Cecilia)

**Last stop:** Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, Lafayette

As we all slowly and safely readjust to the changes brought about by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, let us embrace the celebration of the Year of St. Joseph by embarking on this Exodus 290 journey, asking for the powerful intercession of St. Joseph to protect and provide for all of us throughout the Diocese of Lafayette. ♫

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