

Observing the Parish Feast Day

Kathy Kuczka

Much like individual names, the title of a parish church is something held dear. Saying, “I belong to St. Peter Claver Parish,” or “I attend Holy Guardian Angels,” expresses a connection not only with the community but also with the patron saint or the title for which the parish is named. According to the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Order of the Dedication of a Church*, every church that is dedicated is to have a specific name or title. Some churches have titles associated with Jesus, such as Christ the King, or with the mother of Jesus, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Others reflect special days in the liturgical calendar, such as Immaculate Conception, or devotions, such as the Sacred Heart, while still others may have a more abstract title, such as Christ Our Savior. Most parishes are named after saints, a practice that goes all the way back to the Roman Empire.

In the first centuries of Christianity, churches were built over the graves of martyrs. The church was then named for that particular martyr, who was believed to intercede for those who worshiped in that space. Other churches may have been named for a saint who lived, taught, preached, or died nearby, or for one whose relics were housed in that building. In the United States, the names of new parishes were often determined by immigrants. St. Patrick, for example, was a popular name for parishes made up largely of persons who migrated from Ireland. Today there are a number of multi-parish communities, also called “cluster” or “family” parishes, that have been combined to form one new parish, often under an entirely new name. The name of a new church is typically chosen by the clergy and the faithful with the approval of the diocesan bishop.

Parishioners are encouraged to mark their patron saint’s feast day or the celebration associated with their particular title in ways that are memorable. Churches named for days ranked as solemnities on the liturgical calendar, such as “Assumption,” “Annunciation,” and “St. Joseph” are already celebrated as such by the universal Church. But according to the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, the title of every church is also celebrated as a solemnity, which allows the parish to make certain liturgical adaptations. If a titular feast falls on a weekday, it may be moved to a Sunday in accordance with the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, allowing more people the opportunity to mark the occasion.

Here are a few other ways that families or individuals can celebrate a parish patron saint or feast day at home:

Learn About the Parish Patron

- Learn about the life of the parish patron.
- Share what you have learned with family or friends.



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Many parishes celebrate their patronal feast day with special liturgies, processions, and social events that the whole community is invited to participate in.

Pray

- Join the celebration of the Mass on your patron’s feast day.
- Pray, asking for the intercession of your parish patron saint.
- If your parish name derives from a person or event mentioned in Scripture, read and meditate on the passages related to your parish’s namesake.
- Reflect on how the teachings and examples of the patron saint can inspire and guide your own life.

Celebrate at Home

- Place an icon or a picture of your parish patron in your home.
- Prepare a special meal that might incorporate foods that are traditional to the patron saint.

Engage in Acts of Charity

- Participate in or organize a service project in honor of your parish patron saint, especially if the saint is known for specific works of charity.
- Donate to a cause or organization associated with the values and mission of your patron saint.

Share with Others

- Share the story of your parish patron saint on social media to spread awareness and invite others to join in the celebration.

Activities such as those above can help one connect to someone who lived long ago and can inspire one to emulate the prophetic witness the saint offered during their lifetime.

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