

Sicilian Flair in New Orleans: St. Joseph's Day!

Alex Catti (March 15, 2017)



March 19th marks a significant day for both Catholics and non-Catholic in New Orleans. It is the feast of St. Joseph—a patron saint of Sicily who helped provide relief to the Sicilian people during a famine. NOLA residents certainly do not miss out on their chance to celebrate the saint.

[St. Joseph](#) [2] is a significant figure in the Catholic Church. He is the foster father of [Jesus Christ](#) [3] and the husband of the [Blessed Virgin Mary](#) [4]. Every year on March 19th, New Orleans celebrates the saint in its own special way.

These celebrations began in the late 1800s when Sicilian immigrants began settling in NOLA (New Orleans, Louisiana). St. Joseph is particularly revered among Sicilians for the relief that he brought to them during a famine.

The main component of St. Joseph's Day celebrations is the building of elaborate St. Joseph's Day altars. The altars represent the Holy Trinity and are divided into three sections with a statue of St. Joseph at the head. Candles, figurines, flowers, and medals are often placed around the altars,



which are built in both churches and homes.

As with any Italian celebration, food is always sure to be present. Cookies, cakes, and breads are commonly used to decorate altars. [Fava beans](#) [5] are another staple of St. Joseph's Day celebrations because they helped to support the Sicilians during the famine. In some cases, the food displayed on the altars is acquired through begging, representative of what the poor in Sicily needed to do in order to survive. Children sometimes portray the members of the Holy Family (Jesus, Mary, and Joseph), and they take apart the altar "looking" for food.

In 2015, the president of the [National Italian American Foundation \(NIAF\)](#) [6], John Viola, took a trip to New Orleans in order to celebrate St. Joseph's weekend with the Italian American Marching Club. He assisted longtime NIAF partner David Greco from [Mike's Deli](#) [7] in the Bronx in making 500 pounds of pasta con le sarde (pasta Milanese in the New Orleans Sicilian-American community).

The Celebration of St. Joseph's Day has become a tradition for more than just Italians, however. Many non-Italian residents of the city participate in the altar tradition because it is believed to bring good luck. The [Mardi Gras Indians](#) [8] also hold their [Super Sunday](#) [9] parade every year around the same time as St. Joseph's Day.

In fact, this year the two events will be on the same day. The parade is an important event in the city, and people come out to enjoy the Indians' elaborate regalia.

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[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/maschereneworleansjpg-0>

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Joseph

[3] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus>

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary,_mother_of_Jesus

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vicia_faba

[6] <http://www.niaf.org/>

[7] <http://www.arthuravenue.com/>

[8] <http://www.mardigrasneworleans.com/mardigrasindians.html>

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<http://www.neworleansonline.com/neworleans/multicultural/multiculturaltraditions/supersunday.html>