



THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PARMA

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

2020/193

December 27, 2020

Pastoral Letter on the Sunday After Christmas – Commemoration of the Holy King David, Saint Joseph the Betrothed, and James the Brother of the Lord

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Dear Brothers and Sisters, this Christmas of 2020 is different for many of us. We still have limitations and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, many of us were sick or we knew somebody who was sick or even died from this coronavirus. Many of us are scared and we do not know what to expect in the future. We do not understand what is happening; we do not know what to do. But Jesus Christ and the season of Christmas are here and we need to listen to His message of hope and peace. It is the message which God is giving to us through His Word, through His only-begotten Son.

On December 8, 2020, Pope Francis declared 2021 as the Year of Saint Joseph, patron of the entire universal Church. In the Eparchy of Parma, we will also commemorate this Year of Saint Joseph in union with the whole Catholic Church. I encourage all priests, deacons, nuns, and believers to be involved in the celebration of services, sermons, retreats, and catechesis throughout this upcoming year of 2021 dedicated to Saint Joseph.

Saint Joseph was an important person in the story of the nativity of Jesus Christ, and that is why the Byzantine Catholic Church commemorates him, along with the Holy King David and St. James, the Brother of the Lord, on the Sunday after Christmas. Saint Joseph was betrothed to Mary, the Mother of God. We do not have any of his spoken words in the Gospel, but we can certainly find his concrete action there. When Joseph finds out that the Virgin Mary is pregnant, God says to him: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” (Mt. 1:20-21)

The Almighty God wanted to save us from the power of sin and evil. For His plan of salvation, He chose Saint Joseph to be the father and the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, to be the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Saint Joseph remained perplexed. I think any husband would remain perplexed if he knew that his wife was pregnant without knowing by whom. Can you imagine the situation? It was even more serious back then, because a woman who was found pregnant outside of matrimony would be killed because she had violated the law of Moses. For us this is strange, but it wasn't strange two-thousand years ago for such a thing to happen to an unfaithful spouse. In this situation, Joseph receives the message from God: “Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.” (Mt 1:20) This was the message of God to Joseph, because Joseph was the head of the family; he was responsible for Mary. And what does Saint Joseph do? He was a great man, a hero. Do you know why? Because he was obedient to God. He followed the word of God and he believed the word of God. He could have had a thousand explanations and arguments for why he should not do what God told him, but he did do it; he accepted Mary into his house.



Each one of us is also invited to follow the example of Saint Joseph as a model of hidden life, because even today, on this Christmas in the midst of COVID-19, God is personally saying to you: “Don’t be afraid to take Mary into your life.” She wants to be your mother. Many of you might say: “I don’t need Mary for my salvation”. In one sense you are right, for Jesus Christ alone is the source of our salvation. But God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of His Son Jesus Christ, and she accepted it. Thus, our salvation in Jesus comes to us through Mary.

Which one of us chose our biological mother? None of us did, for we received our mother as a gift from God. Everyone is grateful for his own mother, even Jesus. Sometimes we forget this and think our mother was given to us by accident. But nothing is by accident for Christians for everything is directed by the will of God. What is the will of God and what do we need to do with the will of God? We need to fulfill the will of God. Dear brothers and sisters, this is the most important thing: to follow the will of God, even if we are not perfect. It is good that it is not comfortable for us. Saint Joseph and the Most Holy Theotokos are examples for us on how to fulfill the will of God.

Do you know what has happened with Christianity here in the United States? We think that Christianity is similar to going to the supermarket or the mall and we choose this and that. Christianity is not a supermarket, Christianity is not what you want to choose for yourself. Christianity means accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, with His poverty in the cave at Bethlehem, with persecutions, and to accept the whole Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you and your families to meditate on the figure of Saint Joseph and his role as a father within your own families. We need men and women who do not escape their responsibilities but choose the will of God freely, making themselves available to God's plan with simplicity, humility, and charity. During this time of Christmas, do not be afraid to accept the Mother of God, Mary, into your life as did Saint Joseph. We ask Saint Joseph to help us follow his example of leading a hidden life and to protect our families during this pandemic.

I wish you and your relatives a blessed Christmas and a joyous New Year!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Milan Lach'.

The Most Rev. Milan Lach, S.J.
Bishop of the Eparchy of Parma