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The Solemnity of Saint Joseph

To: The Faithful of the Diocese of London

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Pope Francis has announced that during 2021 the Church will observe a Year of Saint Joseph to mark the 150th anniversary of the saint's proclamation as Patron of the Universal Church.

Saint Joseph is a figure well-known to Catholics. His name has been attached to churches throughout the world, including six at present in our own diocese, as well as to schools and health care facilities. In addition to being the Patron of the Universal Church, Saint Joseph has been designated as the Patron of Canada and the Patron of Workers. He has been invoked in connection to a number of intentions, notably as the patron of a happy death.

Remarkably, this reverence for this central figure in the canon of saints and the invocation of his intercession in so many instances is for a man about whom we know very little in terms of the details of his life. He is mentioned in the infancy narratives in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Yet nothing of what he said during these episodes in the early life of Jesus is even recorded. All that is given us in these accounts tells of an ordinary working man from the town of Nazareth who is clearly a person of righteousness and of compassion and, particularly, a man of faith, who was open to God's will for him and who was willing to believe, to trust, that the events that overtook him were, somehow, a part of God's overall plan.

Saint Joseph was a man who listened for God's voice in his life and who sought to respond to it as fully as possible even when it was difficult and demanding, requiring him to set aside his own hopes and dreams. Perhaps in what we see of Saint Joseph in the Gospels, it is this fact that stands out most of all: that he let go of his plans, his expectations for himself and his future in order to serve the Lord.

The path set out for him entailed being a stranger among strangers when the promised child was born; of being hunted by a tyrant and fleeing from his homeland, living as a refugee in a foreign country with the poverty and insecurity that occasioned; and of eventually returning home to pick up the pieces of his life. And throughout all these trials, there was the constant and anxious concern for the child and its mother entrusted to his care and protection.

The story of Saint Joseph echoes the lives of so many believers throughout the ages. It is for this reason, I believe, that the commemoration of Saint Joseph in this moment when we and the entire world are struggling through a pandemic that has caused untold distress, sickness and death is especially apt. At a time when the threat of a deadly virus has caused millions to live away, alone and in isolation, Saint Joseph is the model of a hidden life endured in confidence and hope. In a global event that has brought about immense suffering and loss, Saint Joseph is a figure who has likewise shared in the pain and loss so many are experiencing. And in the unseen death of Saint Joseph in the years before Jesus' public ministry, and the sorrow it undoubtedly provoked in Mary and the young Jesus, we have a link to the grief of multitudes of families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19, often away or at a distance from them. In a mysterious yet, nevertheless, unique way, Saint Joseph may also be the unofficial, the undeclared "patron of a struggling humanity in the present time".

In these days when we are unsure of what may come next, or where what is happening will lead, or, most importantly, where God is to be found in the tumultuous events we are presently living, we have the example of Saint Joseph and his humble, unflinching trust in the Lord's goodness, care and compassion for all his people.

Saint Joseph, pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London

Diocese of London: Being a mission-oriented Church that forms disciples of Jesus