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“...as Pope Francis tells us again, ‘St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.’ Whatever our occupation might be, we can dedicate it to God and allow him to work through us to sanctify the world.” – Bishop John Folda

The Year of St. Joseph

On Dec. 8, 2020, Pope Francis surprised the world and gave us a special gift by declaring a Year of St. Joseph, a time to grow in our love and devotion for the foster father of Jesus and the spouse of Mary. Our Holy Father often speaks of his own personal devotion to St. Joseph, and he called this Year of St. Joseph to mark the 150th anniversary since Pope Pius IX declared Joseph to be the Patron of the Universal Catholic Church. Even now there is much we can learn from Joseph.

Aside from Mary, no one was closer to Jesus during his years on earth than Joseph. God entrusted Mary and Jesus into his care, and he cherished them as a loving husband and father. But his was no ordinary family. This humble man was called to be the guardian and protector of the Son of God and his Immaculate Mother, the Holy Family. From the moment that he said yes to the angel’s message, Joseph has held an essential place in the life of the Church. He continues to watch over and protect the family of God, and because we are all members of Christ as his mystical Body, I have no doubt that Joseph looks on each of us with a father’s love. He has the same care and tenderness toward the Church that he had for Jesus and Mary, because we as a Church are a continuation, a spiritual extension of Jesus and his mother in the world. Just as Joseph protected and provided for Jesus and Mary, he now protects and provides for us, wanting only to bring us closer to Jesus, whom he loved as a son.

Joseph is the quiet man of the New Testament. No words of Joseph are recorded in the Scriptures, but his silence speaks volumes and conveys a sense of awe before the presence of God. In his stillness he is able to listen intently and hear the voice of God. Luke tells us that Mary pondered the events of our Lord’s birth in her heart, but I think it’s safe to say that Joseph pondered these mysteries too. In this way, he is a model of contemplation. We can see Joseph looking with wonder on the Christ child in the manger of Bethlehem and in the home of Nazareth. He teaches us to gaze on the face of Jesus and to listen when he speaks to our hearts.

Joseph is also a model of discipleship. Like Mary, Joseph received the message of God that he was to be a father to Jesus, and he believed. He accepted God’s plan for him, and put aside whatever plans he already had. Joseph teaches us that God has a plan for each one of us, and we should always be willing to forego our own plans and ambitions so that God can bring his plan to completion within us. Each one of us is called to discipleship, a stance of listening, and learning, and following—going where Christ goes, and abiding with him.

In a special way, Joseph is a patron for all husbands and fathers. He took Mary as his wife, even after hearing the stunning news of her pregnancy. He accepted and raised Jesus as his own son, guarding and preserving him from harm. Joseph gave the fullness of his love to Mary and Jesus, caring for them as a family and creating a home for them. To quote Pope Francis, “Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift.” The men of our time can learn much from Joseph, who faced extraordinary challenges but put the needs of his loved ones ahead of his own.

Joseph was known to be a carpenter, a man who worked for a living to support his family and his household. He demonstrates the dignity of those who work, who participate in the unfolding of God’s plan for creation and for the redemption of the world. He no doubt lived a humble and hidden life in Nazareth, and could have easily remained anonymous to the world. But as Pope Francis tells us again, “St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.” Whatever our occupation might be, we can dedicate it to God and allow him to work through us to sanctify the world.

Joseph was certainly a man of faith and courage. He put his trust in God and allowed himself to become part of the great plan for our salvation. Especially at the time of Jesus’ birth, Joseph faced the

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dangers of travel, homelessness, and exile in Egypt. He shows all followers of Jesus that, come what may, we must be docile to God's grace in the events that unfold before us. With the fortitude of Joseph, we are invited to be courageous before the many obstacles to living our Catholic faith and holding fast to God's word in our daily lives.

March 19 is the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In union with Pope Francis and joined by all the priests of our diocese, I will consecrate the Diocese of Fargo to St. Joseph on that day, asking him to intercede and protect us as we journey through this life toward the eternal life to come. I invite all of you to join in this consecration as well. Look to St. Joseph as a foster father, a companion on the journey, a guide and protector. Entrust your cares and worries, as well as your prayers to him, and he will join them to his own. "Hail, guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust; with you Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen."