

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“Go to Joseph”

What a difference a year can make! If I had asked you last January about your plans for the upcoming year, you probably would have told me about expectations that were very different than what, in fact, actually took place in 2020. The pandemic has wreaked havoc on our normal routine and changed our plans for work, school, travel, shopping, holiday celebrations, socializing, vacation, and so many other areas of our lives. The challenges of 2020 were grave and many of the same stressors have spilled over into the new year.

Very providential then was the publication of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter *“Patris Corde”* (“With a Father’s Heart”), on December 8, 2020, with the announcement that the upcoming year would be specially dedicated to Saint Joseph. Through December 8, 2021, the Universal Church will focus on the holy example of Saint Joseph and seek his heavenly paternal intercession.

Saint Joseph certainly knew what a difference a year could make. After his betrothal to Mary, he had certain expectations for what would unfold in the upcoming months. We can imagine plans being made for a wedding celebration and plans to prepare a home to share with Mary after their

wedding. As a carpenter, Joseph would have made plans for work projects to complete in the months ahead as well.

And then over the course of a year, everything changed. Mary was found with child by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then a government mandate forced Joseph and Mary to make the arduous journey to Bethlehem at a most inconvenient time. Then Mary gave birth in a stable, because there was no room in the inn. Then they were forced to flee to Egypt for the safety of their child.

One year prior, Saint Joseph could not have imagined any of these events unfolding in his life. Yet, with deep faith and courage, Joseph let go of his own plans and expectations. He did his best to accept God’s will, diligently served the people God had entrusted to him, and prayerfully pondered what more God was asking of him.

There is much we can learn from Saint Joseph this year. His patience, his work ethic, his willingness to make sacrifices, his contemplative spirit, and his decisive action all have something to teach us. Most of all, his selfless dedication to Jesus, in the midst of turbulent times,

stressful situations, and an uncertain future, provides a roadmap to guide us through the troubling times in which we are living.

During this year, I encourage everyone in the Diocese of Toledo to turn to Joseph in his role as foster father of Jesus; to pray each day for our local Church the simplest of prayers: "Saint Joseph, pray for us;" and to integrate Saint Joseph into your prayer habits and spiritual life. I invite you to participate in our diocesan novena to Saint Joseph from March 10-18, 2021, and in our diocesan celebration of the Solemnity of Saint Joseph on March 19th. To those who are able to do so safely, I suggest pilgrimage visits throughout the year to parishes in our diocese dedicated to Saint Joseph. Please pray with me that our spiritual practices will lead to many acts of charity in honor of Saint Joseph, especially towards unemployed workers, engaged couples, spouses, fathers, foster children, the unborn and their parents, refugees, the homeless, the dying, and all persons in need.

At the bottom the splendid stone statue depicting a strong and fatherly Saint Joseph at his shrine in our Rosary Cathedral, three simple words appear in Latin: *Ite ad Ioseph*, "Go to Joseph." These were the words of Pharaoh to the people of Egypt during the years of famine (Gen 41:55), and for centuries the same phrase

has been used to encourage devotion to Saint Joseph. This is what we do together this year, we go to Joseph, confident that he will accompany us, and that we will know and experience his fatherly care as individuals and as members of the family of the Church.



Trusting in the graces being offered to us this year, we look forward to a deepening of our relationship with Jesus under Saint Joseph's fatherly care. Thanks to our renewed devotion to Saint Joseph and his loving paternal guidance, we can anticipate much spiritual fruit in the upcoming months. We will learn what

a difference a year can make!

The Apostolic Letter "*Patris Corde*" of the Holy Father Pope Francis may be found here: bit.ly/2YAJ2Ny

For diocesan resources please visit our Year of Saint Joseph website: yearofstjoseph.toledo.org

+ *Daniel E. Thomas*

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