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Dear Fathers/Brothers/Sisters

Pope Francis has released an Apostolic Letter on December 8, 2020, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, on St. Joseph with the title *Patris Corde* which means, 'with a Father's Heart'. The Apostolic letter comes on the 150th anniversary of the declaration of St. Joseph as the patron of the universal Church by Pope Pius IX.

During the last 200 years successive popes have been fostering devotion to St. Joseph and writing extensively on him delving deeper into the few mentions we have of him in the Gospels. Their writings are the external expression of their own deep appreciation for the saint. Pope Sextus V in the 15th century fixed 19 March as the feast of St. Joseph. His name was inserted into the Roman Canon of the Eucharistic celebration in 1962 and into canons II, III and IV in 2013. Pope Pius XII established the Feast of St. Joseph the worker while Pope John Paul II prayed to St. Joseph intensely all through the 26 years of his pontificate. He said that in St. Joseph we find 'the grace of living together the charism of virginity and the gift of matrimony.' Pope Francis has spoken publicly of his special devotion to St. Joseph after being elected Pope especially when he is faced with serious concerns. He writes a note and places it under the statue of sleeping St. Joseph the Pope has on his study table. By next morning the pope receives clarifications on how to proceed.

Still, it is interesting to note that till date we have no one called Pope Joseph though several of the popes had Joseph as their baptismal names. It looks as though he does not want to be in the lime light even in the person of a pope. He likes to be anonymous as we see him in the Gospels.

The Apostolic Letter speaks of the courage of St. Joseph to accept the role of the legal father of Jesus, first by accepting Mary as his wife and then protecting the mother and child from every danger and then providing for them as long as God allowed him to do. The Pope then goes on to describe, in seven paragraphs, St. Joseph as a father who is beloved, tender, loving, obedient, accepting, creative and courageous, working and in the shadow. It is preceded by an introduction and ends with a prayer to St. Joseph.

The Apostolic Letter is written in simple language and on reading it one is drawn to St. Joseph as to an affectionate father. The year of St. Joseph began on 8th December, 2020 and will conclude on the same date in 2021. The Pope has at the same time declared 2021 as the year of families. May St. Joseph be a father to each one of us and a protector and guardian of our families and of the archdiocese!

As a follow up of the Apostolic Letter, the Archdiocese has chalked out some programmes to promote love and devotion to St. Joseph.

1. A prayer card with the picture of St. Joseph on the reverse side is printed in English, Assamese and Garo, and is distributed in every parish and institution. In case it has not reached you please contact the secretary. Please see that the prayer is recited every day in the parish Church, institutions and families.
2. We propose that the statue of St. Joseph is decorated and placed in a prominent place in our churches, chapels and families so that we are constantly reminded of his great role in the history of salvation especially in the life of Jesus and Mary. We will also try to emulate his virtues after a careful reading of relevant passages in the Bible.
3. Each parish shall inaugurate the year of St. Joseph with flag hoisting on 19th March this year after the Holy Mass. Flags will be distributed to you in advance. We shall conclude the year of St. Joseph with zonal celebrations as is decided by the zonal parishes.
4. The Archdiocese will send around the statue of the sleeping St. Joseph to every parish for a few days each. The Catholics can honour the saint in appropriate ways in the parish centre and the village communities within the allotted days with appropriate paraliturgical services so that they can venerate the saint in a special way. The parish can keep a day when the statue is in their midst as St. Joseph's day. The parish priests will work out the details. St. Joseph Sodality will supervise the itinerary of the movement of the statue from parish to parish. The itinerary is attached.
5. Read the Apostolic Letter well that we understand what the Pope teaches us about St. Joseph and explain it to your community. It can easily be downloaded or a copy can be purchased from St. Paul's book stall.

We know that St. Joseph is a powerful intercessor with God due to his close proximity with Jesus as his son. Let us go to him with filial trust and we can be sure our prayers will be heard. May his humility make us humble and his silence lead us to interior recollection!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+John Moolachira
Archbishop of Guwahati

