



BISHOP'S CIRCULAR LETTER

BP/CL4/2021 May 1, 2021

Year of St. Joseph

Dear Priests/Brothers/Sisters & Lay Faithful in the Diocese:

1. Marian month of May

The month of May has been traditionally dedicated to our Blessed Mother and it is with intensity and piety that people express their love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary. During this month people in church and in the privacy of their homes offer to Mary a loving homage of prayer and veneration by praying the Rosary. The present crisis caused by the surge in the pandemic has sent many to Mother Mary to intercede with her for healing. The restrictions due to the lockdown last year have made people to appreciate all the more the family aspect of praying the rosary. Pope Francis said last year, "I want to encourage everyone to rediscover the beauty of praying the Rosary at home in the month of May. This can be done either as a group or individually; you can decide according to your own situations, making the most of both opportunities. The key to doing this is always simplicity, and it is easy also on the internet to find good models of prayers to follow."

Pope Francis had composed this prayer last year which I think we could recite daily after reciting the Rosary:

"Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them.

Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana, so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.

Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency, and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health. Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone."

2. May 7th Day of Prayer and Fasting

Heeding the call of our CBCI President Cardinal Oswald Gracias to "observe Friday, May 7, as a Day of Prayer and Fasting for the relief from the Covid-19 pandemic that has hit us like a tsunami", I ask everyone in our Diocese to observe the day and plead to the Divine Healer for Healing and Mercy upon the whole world. I propose that we refrain from eating one meal that day and that we spend one hour of Adoration during which we could recite Psalm 91, Psalm 23 and Psalm 50; pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the Marian Rosary; and Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel. You are free to use any other prayers. Being the first Friday of the month, we could offer Holy Mass to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

3. St. Joseph the Worker

On the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of St. Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church Pope Francis wrote an Apostolic Letter PATRIS CORDE = WITH A FATHER'S HEART, dedicating the year to St. Joseph. In that Apostolic Letter the Pope had suggested that we celebrate 1st May as St. Joseph's day. He calls him a working father. Pope Francis writes, "An aspect of Saint Joseph that has been emphasized is his relation to work. Saint Joseph was a carpenter who earned an honest living to provide for his family. From him, Jesus learned the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one's own labour. In our own day, when employment has once more become a burning social issue, and unemployment at times reaches record levels even in nations that for decades have enjoyed a certain degree of prosperity, there is a renewed need to appreciate the importance of dignified work, of which Saint Joseph is an exemplary patron.

Work is a means of participating in the work of salvation, an opportunity to hasten the coming of the Kingdom, to develop our talents and abilities, and to put them at the service of society and fraternal communion. It becomes an opportunity for the fulfillment not only of oneself, but also of that primary cell of society which is the family. A family without work is particularly vulnerable to difficulties, tensions, estrangement, and even break-up. How can we speak of human dignity without working to ensure that everyone is able to earn a decent living? Working persons, whatever their job may be, are cooperating with God himself, and in some way become creators of the world around us. The crisis of

our time, which is economic, social, cultural and spiritual, can serve as a summons for all of us to rediscover the value, the importance and necessity of work for bringing about a new "normal" from which no one is excluded. Saint Joseph's work reminds us that God himself, in becoming man, did not disdain work. The loss of employment that affects so many of our brothers and sisters, and has increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, should serve as a summons to review our priorities. Let us implore Saint Joseph the Worker to help us find ways to express our firm conviction that no young person, no person at all, no family should be without work!"

4. Pentecost Sunday 2021

This year the great feast of the Pentecost is on 23rd May. Pentecost is the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles and the Virgin Mary in the form of fiery tongues, an event that took place fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost was the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the eleven timorous and largely uneducated men and strengthened them to be fearless evangelists, ready and able to spread the Gospel far and wide. As we know all the disciples except John were martyred for boldly preaching the Gospel. What made this transformation possible? The Holy Spirit with his variety of powers which the Church calls 'gifts of the Holy Spirit'. These include wisdom, knowledge, understanding, fortitude, counsel, piety and fear of the Lord. We receive these gifts on our Confirmation day and it is imperative to note that these gifts are given not primarily to the recipient alone but for spreading the message far and wide. Thus the confirmed also becomes an evangelizer. Pentecost is then the day when we are sent forth with fire and zeal to continue the mission of Jesus.

Lumen Gentium #4 says, "When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church." The Holy Spirit who descended on the Apostles and set them on fire precisely that they in turn would set the world on fire is the same Spirit who sends us forth to be missionaries. This Pentecost Sunday while we pray for our Diocese on its twenty fifth Anniversary, let us beg the Spirit to give all of us the spiritual gift of fortitude especially in this time of the pandemic.

5. World Day of Vocations on 25th April

The fourth Sunday of Easter is World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Pope Francis released his Message entitled "**Saint Joseph: The Dream of Vocation**". Pope Francis held up the husband of the Virgin Mary and foster-father of Jesus as a model for all members of the clergy and

religious men and women. He said that St. Joseph is an extraordinary figure, not because of any astonishing charism or special status, but because he accomplished extraordinary acts of service in his daily life. "God looks on the heart," he said, "and in Saint Joseph He recognized the heart of a father, able to give and generate life in the midst of daily routines." He said that "Vocations have the same goal of begetting and renewing the lives of others.

The priesthood and consecrated life require men and women with open hearts, who are "capable of great initiatives, generous in self-giving, compassionate in comforting anxieties and steadfast in strengthening hopes." He further added that he likes to think of St. Joseph as the "protector of vocations," since his willingness to serve fills him with a "concern to protect." "Such a thoughtful concern is the sign of a true vocation," he said. The Pope concluded his Message by urging the Church's ministers to fill their homes with this same "simple and radiant, sober and hopeful joy."

Fr. Antony Balan of our Diocese is in charge of Vocation promotion. Kindly help him in this work by encouraging students and giving him names of boys who are interested.

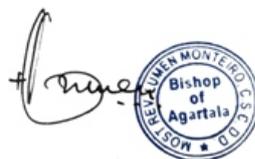
6. Silver Jubilee 'Grand Finale' Postponed

Taking into account the grim situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and in solidarity with the suffering millions, I do not feel it right that we should gather in celebration. So the Jubilee celebrations are indefinitely postponed. However, we will continue to praise and thank God because, as I have been saying, celebrating the Jubilee is not celebrating an accomplishment, but an act of gratitude to God for the past 25 years.

7. Conclusion

The Book of Leviticus 25,8-12 speaks of how a Jubilee Year is to be celebrated "sound the trumpet...and proclaim liberty throughout the land...for it is a jubilee." Likewise, we in the Diocese of Agartala raise our hearts and voices to God in jubilation and gratitude for the numerous blessings bestowed on us. Personally I thank God for His guidance, especially for the years of my Episcopal ministry, which has spanned a quarter of a century. Life in these 25 years has been a mixed bag of struggles and accomplishments--every struggle I went through made me stronger and determined while every accomplishment made me humbler and energetic. All Praise to God!

Yours in the Good Shepherd.



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Bishop of Agartala