

“BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW” (Rev. 21:5)

LIVING THE NEW YEAR WITH ST. JOSEPH

2021 New Year Message of His Lordship, Most Rev. Peter Ebere Okpaleke, Bishop of Ekwulobia Diocese

2020 was a challenging year in every sense of that word. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted everything – the Easter celebrations and other religious activities, the school year, businesses, funerals, flights, etc. Before the onset of the pandemic, the killer herdsmen were on rampage and dominated news headlines. Now that people have adjusted to the pandemic, thanks to God who spared us the full brunt of the pandemic, the biting economic hardship in the land is the talk of the moment. The naira has lost more value in relation to other currencies. Prices of goods and services have skyrocketed. With the corona virus still wreaking havoc in other parts of the world, we can only be grateful for the fact that we made it through the year. Although the situation is bad enough, we take consolation in the thought that it could have been worse. We, therefore, thank God and congratulate ourselves for having survived 2020.

As we cross over into the new Year, we present before ourselves, God’s promise to make all things new. In the book of Revelation (21:1-8), the seer foresees the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared. In this new heaven and earth, God will wipe away all tears from people’s eyes; there will be no more death and no more mourning or sadness or pain. This is because in this new reality, God lives among human beings. He will make his home among them; they will be His people and He will be their God.

God’s promise of a new heaven and a new earth has not yet been realized and cannot be fully realized in this world – a vale of tears. We are however invited to align ourselves towards its realization. This is the commitment that I wish that we bring into the New Year as we work towards the renewal of relationships in our families and with one another. The centrality of family and healthy human relations are the twin lessons of the human condition forcefully presented to us recently. At the height of the scare about the COVID-19 pandemic, people were stuck with their families. The chips were down and the family was the only space left for refuge. Woe to those who did not have a supportive and conducive atmosphere in their families. Similarly, the face masks remind us of how much we are

connected to each other by, at least, the air we breathe in and out. We often take this for granted. But the invisible corona virus is forcefully reminding us of it. A new heaven and a new earth therefore entail not only the renewal of the nuclear family but also of the family of all human beings – rich and poor; old and young, men and women and children, etc.

God dwells among human beings. God brings about the new creation with and through human beings. God is looking for committed disciples; you and me! This is the greatest way to orient our lives this year. It is in this light that I find Pope Francis call for a year long celebration in honour of St. Joseph, providential. Although little is written about St. Joseph in the Scriptures, this little is profound; it speaks of a life totally committed to God and to the holy family. He was a good husband and companion to our Lady and a wonderful foster father to Jesus. He was a compassionate man. He did not want to shame our Blessed Mother Mary when he found out that she was with child before they came together. He decided to send her home quietly. He was open and obedient to God. He immediately reversed his plan when he was told that the child was of the Holy Spirit. Surely Joseph did not understand the meaning of the incarnation – that the child was of the Holy Spirit. He trusted God, surrendered to God's will and obeyed.

As we mark the year of St. Joseph, may we emulate him in his humility, his compassion, his commitment to the holy family and his total surrender to God. May the examination of conscience and the new year resolutions we make, focus on these virtues embodied by St. Joseph, a human being like all of us in all things. This will not only renew our families and other relationships but also contribute to the emergence of a new heaven and a new earth.

Happy new year and God's choicest blessings, and please, be safe.



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