

Pastoral Letter on St. Isidore, the Patron of Farmers (Feast - May 15)

Dear Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and my dear people,

Thy Kingdom Come!

As we observe 2021 as Harith Varsh - the Year of *Go Green Diocese Campaign*, I thought it is befitting to write a pastoral letter on the life of St. Isidore (1080-1130), who is the patron of farmers and whose feast is celebrated on 15th May. St. Isidore was born in a poor farmer's family in Madrid, Spain. Even as a young boy he was a great devotee of Holy Eucharist. He grew marvellous in his Christian faith. He took his fathers' job and became a farmer and worked as a tenant in a rich man's farm. It was said that he stood two meters (6.5 feet) tall. Isidore married Maria Torribia, known as Santa María de la Cabeza in Spain; she has never been canonized, pending confirmation by Pope Francis. Isidore and Maria had one son. On one occasion, their son fell into a deep well and, at the prayers of his parents, the water of the well is said to have risen miraculously to the level of the ground, bringing the child with it. In thanksgiving Isidore and Maria then vowed sexual abstinence and lived in separate houses. Their son later died in his youth.

Isidore was beatified in Rome on May 2, 1619, by Pope Paul V. He was canonized nearly three years later by Pope Gregory XV, along with Saints Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Ávila and Philip Neri, on March 12, 1622. In 1696, his relics were moved to the Royal Alcazar of Madrid to intervene on behalf of the health of Charles II of Spain. While there, the King's locksmith pulled a tooth from the body and gave it to the monarch, who slept with it under his pillow until his death. This was not the first, nor the last time his body was allegedly mutilated out of religious fervour. For example, it was reported one of the ladies in the court of Isabella I of Castile bit off one of his toes. In 1760, his body was brought to the Royal Palace of Madrid during the illness of Maria Amalia of Saxony. In 1769, Charles III of Spain had the remains of Saint Isidore and his wife Maria relocated to the San Isidro Church, Madrid. The sepulchre has nine locks and only the King of Spain has the master key. The opening of the sepulchre must be performed by the Archbishop of Madrid and authorized by the King himself. Consequently, it has not been opened since 1985.

Saint Isidore is often portrayed as a peasant holding a sickle and a sheaf of corn. He might also be shown with a sickle and staff; as an angel ploughs for him; or with an angel and white oxen near him. In Spanish art, his emblems are a spade or a plough.

Saint Isidore is widely venerated as the patron saint of farmers, peasants, day laborers and agriculture in general, as well as brick layers. His hometown of Madrid, the Spanish cities of Leon, Zaragoza, and Seville, and various locales in the former Spanish Empire honour him as their patron saint. The US National Catholic Rural Life Conference claims him as its patron. San Ysidro, California and San Ysidro, New Mexico were named after him.

Delightful legends about him include his employer seeing a second team of white oxen led by angels who ploughed alongside Isidore, who had been accused of arriving late for work. On another occasion, in deep mid-winter, Isidore saw a number of disconsolate hungry birds perching on a branch, while he was carrying a sack of corn. In spite of his companion's

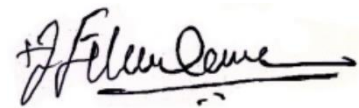
jeers he gave half the corn to the birds, while the remainder yielded a double amount of flour. (cf. *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5th ed., para. 2, p.265.)

Miracles and a cult followed his death, and his body was translated in 1170. In 1211 he is said to have guided King Alphonsus of Castile in a vision to an unknown path, which enabled him to make a successful surprise attack on the Moors. In about 1615 King Philip III of Spain was cured of a mortal fever through Isidore's relics being moved into the sick king's bedroom. This led to the Spanish king's petitioning the Holy See for Isidore's formal canonization. He is an interesting example of a lay saint of humble origin, who attained sanctity in life through humdrum occupations, but who posthumously became famous. His body is reputedly incorrupt.

The story of St. Isidore is a reminder of the dignity of work, and that ordinary life can lead to holiness. Legends about angel helpers and mysterious oxen indicate that his work was not neglected and his duties did not go unfulfilled. St. Isidore's life demonstrates that: If you have your spiritual self in order, your earthly commitments will fall into order also.

He was a saint who was faithful to his job and took pleasure in farming. He loved earth and nature as God's manifesting for humankind and seems to have responded to them generously in a splendid way. St. Isidore is a great example of farming and fidelity to one's own job. A legendary story connected to his life also expresses his love for the animal kingdom. He had great compassion for them. As we observe Harith Varsh in the diocese let us follow his example and become great in farming and to be compassionate towards animal kingdom. Let us resolve to keep the sanctity of the earth and nature saying 'No' to chemical fertilizers, pesticides etc. and turn to natural farming. Refrain from exploitation of nature, and contamination, so as to sustain nature as God wishes.

With warm wishes and prayers,
Yours devotedly in Christ Jesus



† Ephrem Nariculam
Bishop, Diocese of Chanda