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Dear and Rev Fathers,

Greetings and prayers from Bishop's House, Thuckalay! On 3 July we shall celebrate Dukhrana, the feast of St Thomas. It is an important feast for those of us who belong to the Syro-Malabar Church. While celebrating this solemnity, let us, consider briefly the life of St Thomas for our edification and the message that he imparts to each one of us.

Little is recorded of the life of St Thomas, the Apostle in history books. Thomas was probably born in Galilee to a humble family, but there is no indication that he was a fisherman. He was a Jew, but there is no account of how he became an apostle to Christ. Nevertheless, thanks to the fourth Gospel, his personality is clearer to us than some of the other Twelve. Thomas' name occurs in Matthew (10:3), Mark (3:18), Luke (6:15) and Acts of the Apostles (1:13), but it is in the Gospel of John that he plays a particularly distinctive role.

We discover that St Thomas had an inquisitive mind. This made him doubt God's work in the world. However, he was eager to pursue answers to his questions, which ultimately led him to great faith. Thomas is known in popular culture as 'Doubting Thomas' because of the famous Bible story in which he demands to see physical proof of Jesus' resurrection before believing it, and Jesus appears, inviting Thomas to touch the scars of his wounds from the crucifixion.

After getting the physical proof he wanted of the resurrection miracle, Thomas' doubt turned to strong belief: Thomas said to him: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). The next verse reveals that Jesus blesses people who are willing to have faith in something that they can't see right now: "Then Jesus told him, 'because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:29). Thomas' encounter with Jesus shows how the right response to doubt - curiosity and searching - can lead to deep belief.

When Thomas believed, he could be quite courageous. The Gospel records in John chapter 11 that when the disciples were worried about accompanying Jesus to Judea (because the Jews had previously tried to stone Jesus there), Thomas encouraged them to stick with Jesus, who wanted to return to the area to help his friend Lazarus, even if that meant being attacked by Jewish leaders there. Thomas says in verse 16: "Let us also go, that we might die with him."

Thomas later asked Jesus a famous question when the disciples were eating the Last Supper with him. John 14:1-4 of the Bible records Jesus telling his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas' question comes next, revealing that he's thinking of physical directions rather than spiritual guidance:



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“Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’”

Thanks to Thomas’ question, Jesus clarified his point, uttering these famous words about his divinity in verse 6 and 7: “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’”

In his *Book of Thomas, the Doubter: Uncovering the Hidden Teachings*, George Augustus Tyrrell comments: “It may be that Thomas’ critical mind compelled Jesus to explain the teachings more deeply to him than to the credulous disciples. For the prologue in the *Gospel of Thomas* states: ‘These are the secret teachings the living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas wrote down.’”

After Jesus ascended into heaven, Thomas and the other disciples each travelled to various parts of the world to share the Gospel message with people. Thomas shared the Gospel with people in Syria, ancient Persia, and India. Today, we honour him as the Apostle of India. In his message given on 13 June 2013, His Beatitude Mar George Cardinal Alencherry wrote: “The feast of Dukharana demands us to find new vistas of activities, evaluating the individual, familial and societal dimensions of faith in the context of the modern world. We should also endeavour to achieve the proclamation of the Gospel and the formation of ecclesial communities as St Thomas did in the first century. Tradition speaks of St Thomas founding Seven and a half ecclesial communities. When we speak of founding of ecclesial communities, it includes also the formation of these communities based on Gospel values.”

In this silver jubilee year of the foundation of our Eparchy and in the context of the extended territories that we were granted by the Holy See, it is our primary responsibility to form ecclesial communities in those mission territories making them true images of Christian witness. On this feast of Dukhrana, let us re-dedicate ourselves to the rebuilding up of the Church and developing of the society according to the Christian values.

NEWS AND EVENTS

SCHOOL CORRESPONDENTS’ MEETING: For over one and half years our Schools and Colleges are not functioning properly. Children are not able to come to the Schools and all the classes are being conducted online. We are unable to pay the full salaries to the staff due to non-availability of funds. In order to plan and prepare for the academic year 2021-2022, we called a meeting of all the Correspondents of English and Tamil Medium Schools. All the Fathers shared their concerns. However, all our Schools are committed to organize online classes for the children. A number of our Schools have already conducted parents and teachers meeting online and are waiting for the inauguration of the academic year. It was also decided to postpone some of the action plans chalked out for the preparation for the Silver Jubilee of the Eparchy.



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CATECHISM TEACHERS' SEMINAR: The Syro-Malabar Church inaugurated the academic year for catechism students on 6 June 2021. In this context, I and the Vicar General had a meeting with the Director of Catechism Department in order to make plans and to prepare the programmes to begin the catechism classes in our Eparchy. Before beginning the classes, we felt the need for preparing our teachers. Hence, an online orientation programme was held on 2 June 2021 for all the catechism teachers of our Eparchy. Nearly 300 teachers attended the programme. The programme began with a prayer. There was a welcome address. I spoke to all the teachers about our commitment to sharing the Faith with our children. Rev. Fr Jinu Jacob took class for our teachers in which he spoke on the Gospel values that they should possess in order to give God to the children.

CATECHISM HEADMASTERS/HEADMISTRESSES' MEETING: Prior to the inauguration of academic programme for catechism children, a meeting of all the headmasters/headmistresses was organized on 4 June 2021. All of them were present for the meeting. The Director of Catechism welcomed the gathering. Rev. Fr Pawathuparampil, Vicar General, addressed the gathering. He spoke of their responsibilities as teachers of Faith. I encouraged everyone to become leaders who can motivate others, especially all the teachers and requested them to personally follow up all the teachers. The regular evaluation of the classes will help in achieving our targets. I could feel that everyone was committed to their tasks.

ONLINE RECOLLECTION FOR MAJOR SEMINARIANS: All our Major seminarians are at home these days and are preparing to go to their respective seminaries. A monthly recollection was arranged for them online on 5 June 2021 at 10.00 am. It was organized by Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, Rector of Minor Seminary. Fr Mijo Puthenpurayil preached the recollection talk. After the recollection talk, the brothers spent the rest of the day in reflection, prayer and spiritual reading. On the same day evening at 3.30 pm we had a meeting of all the brothers in the presence of Bishop, Vicar General and Rector. All the brothers were given a few minutes to share their holiday experiences. All of them were happy and thanked the Eparchy for giving much attention to their spiritual life even during the lockdown. We all spoke to the seminarians and encouraged them to listen to the call of God with care and love.

INAUGURATION OF CATECHISM CLASSES: On 6 June 2021, after the online Holy Qurbana, which was held at 10.00 am, a brief inauguration of Catechism classes was held at the Eparchial level. A pre-recorded video programme was sent to all the teachers and children in which the Catechism Director welcomed all the children and teachers. Rev Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil spoke to the children and finally I invited all the children and teachers to put in efforts to know and to love Jesus more and more. I am grateful to Fr Prince Maliyil, Director, Fr Abilalsh, Assistant Director and their entire team for organizing the programme. I am happy to note that the Pulari Communications is giving the technical support to the Catechism Department for preparing the online classes.

THANK YOU REV SR ANNI ARIKKATHIL: On 7 June 2021, Bishop's House community bid farewell to Rev Sr Anni Arikkathil, fondly known as Anniamma. Anniamma served the Bishop's House community for the last six years as its Manager. More than a Manager, she



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was a mother to everyone who come to the Bishop's House. She remained always committed to the tasks that were entrusted to her. Receiving and serving the guests was the daily routine which she did with great pride. In her every action, one could see the love and the dedication to the Eparchy. Though her mission was confined to the walls of Bishop's House, she was involved actively in all the programmes of the Eparchy. She gave more attention to the individual needs of the community members and to the guests who visited the Bishop's House. She was very prayerful and brought in a regular prayer culture to the Bishop's House. The farewell programme began with a thanksgiving Holy Qurbana. It was followed by a farewell gathering and lunch at noon. Since it was held during the lock down period, we limited the invitees to the inmates from Sangamam and SABS, Soosaipuram. On behalf of the Eparchy, I am grateful to Anniamma for the great service that she rendered. I also thank the Provincial and the Regional Superior of SABS Congregation for generously giving Anniamma for the last six years. Anniamma is appointed the Superior of Killiyoore SABS Convent.

WELCOME TO REV. SR DEEPTI FCC: On 8 June 2021, Rev. Sr Deepti FCC took charge as Manager of Bishop's House in the place of Anniamma. Sr Deepti accompanied by two Sisters from the Provincial House, Azhagiyamandapam, reached Bishop's House at 10.45 am. She was formally welcomed in the church and was entrusted with the responsibility. I offer God's blessings upon Sr Deepti and wish success and happiness in her new mission.

RECOLLECTION AND PRAYER: On 12 June 2021, an online recollection and prayer for catechism children was organized. A pre-recorded spiritual video talk was sent to all the children dividing them into three categories: Classes 1-4, 5-8 and 9-12 for both Malayalam and Tamil students. Everyone appreciated this initiative.

TAMIL MEDIUM SCHOOLS STAFF MEETINGS: In the month of May and June the Tamil medium schools Correspondent, Rev. Fr John Paul organised a series of online meetings for Headmasters and Teaching Staff of the Tamil Medium Schools collectively and also school wise, on 19 May, 22 May and 5 June onwards. Various issues affecting the Tamil medium schools were discussed; especially deployment and appointments of staff based on the Judgement dated March 31, 2021, regarding online classes to the children, activities of staff during the covid-19 period, sharing by individual staff members and their experiences and general instructions on increasing the admissions in all the schools etc. Rev. Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil, the manager of diocese run school schools was also present for the meeting which gave a new life and confidence to everyone.

ONLINE QUIZ COMPETITION: During the lockdown period, the Mather Jyothis Department organised a number of online programmes for mothers. One of the programmes was Quiz competition. The final round of the quiz was held from 17 June onwards. Nearly 50 mothers took part in the final round of competition in which every competitor was given five minutes each to answer 20 questions. The competition was held through WhatsApp video call. I appreciate the Family Apostolate Department for taking up this initiative.



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OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19: The second wave of Covid-19 took away many lives and brought much sufferings to the people. The normal life of the poor was badly affected. Our Eparchy was able to share some of its human and financial resources with the poor and the needy families. All these charitable works were organized through KKSSS. The main focus this time was to give dry ration to the families of our people in the parishes. All the Parish Priests were asked to identify the needy people and at their requests Fr Abin Poovathumoottil, Director of KKSSS, with his team distributed food packets to them.

Another concern was to give food to the Covid-19 patients admitted at Asaripallam Medical College Hospital. Every day nearly 400 food packets were packed and distributed to the patients and bystanders at the Hospital. It was heartening to see many of our parishes coming forward to sponsor a day's food. Some parishes with its volunteers cooked the food and KKSSS with its volunteers distributed it in the Hospital. I was happy to join the team on 25 June and to visit the patients at Asaripallam Hospital to distribute food. There was a harmonious co-ordination among the four Catholic Dioceses in our District in helping the affected victims. I place on record the generosity of the Fathers and the faithful of our Eparchy for taking initiatives. In a special way, Fr Abin and his team deserve our applause.

The members of the TCYM and the Family Apostolate played a major role in alleviating the pain of people and in giving food to the hungry and the needy. Thank you, dear Fathers and friends. I am grateful to our benefactors and friends who supported financially in carrying out this Samaritan work in the Eparchy.

MISSIONARY MEET: On 29 June we invited the Priests who are working in the extended territories of our Eparchy for a day of prayer and reflection. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil, Fr Peter Kizhakeyil, Fr Anil Raj and Fr Ginoy Thottiyil participated in this meet. The meeting began with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at 5.00 pm in the Bishop's House. There was time for sharing of experiences from different Centres. The Vicar General chaired the meeting. All the Fathers shared their experiences, plans and projects for their respective missions. It was felt that all the efforts should not be spent only in building up institutions in the mission areas. Instead, it is important to form communities of believers by making use of the social outreach programmes. The members appreciated the efforts taken by the Eparchy in bringing more clarity to the missionary work. I thank Fr Thomas Pawathuparambil and all the Fathers, who attended the meeting. I acknowledge and appreciate the hard work of our missionaries in the extended territories.

INFORMATION

- On 12 June 2021, Solemnity of Sacred Heart of Jesus was celebrated. On that day, I entrusted our Eparchy and its various ministries to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
- On 21 and 22 June 2021 the *Vinn Pathayil* Hymn Book Committee met for the final selection and correction of the liturgical hymns.
- During the lock down period, many parishes held online spiritual activities such as Rosary, Bible related studies, etc. for the faithful. I had the opportunity to participate in some of them. Thank you, dear Fathers, for inviting me.



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- An online Condolence meeting was held to mourn the demise of Mrs Nirmala Joy, one of the Headmistresses of Catechism from Kunnuvilai Mission, on 23 June 2021
- From 27 June onwards our Vicar General began his visits to all the Fathers and the Sisters in our parishes in order to distribute the newly printed OUR FATHER prayer cards and Irai-arul. It was a noble gesture on his part. I am grateful to him. I also thank Br Bibin, who helped him.
- On 28 June Mrs Thressiamma Varghese (89), beloved mother of late Fr Philip Kodianthara, passed away. The funeral was held on 29 June at 3.00 pm. Along with some Fathers, I attended the funeral service at Kayalpuram. I offer my heart felt condolences to the bereaved family members.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

05 July 2021	-	On-going formation program for Junior Priests
06 July 2021	-	Recollection and Priests conference
23 July 2021	-	St Alphonsa Shrine Church Feast begins
28 July 2021	-	Feast day of St Alphonsa

CONCLUSION

The month of July is a significant month for us in our Syro-Malabar Church. On 3 July, we keep the solemnity of St Thomas. On 28 July we celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa. On St Thomas we have already reflected in the introductory part of this circular. Regarding St Alphonsa, we have a shrine dedicated to her at Nagercoil and it attracts large number devotees during her feast. Unfortunately, like last year, the Covid-19 lock down is still continuing. Hence, we may not be able to have all the usual festivities associated with the celebration. However, we can reflect upon her spirituality, which lies in her relationship to Jesus Christ and her experience of his presence in her daily life. She was a person who loved and invited lovingly sufferings in her life. She is called the 'Little Flower' of India. As we are going to celebrate the feast of this great saint from own land, let us learn the redemptive value that suffering has in own lives and live our lives as St Alphonsa did.

May St Thomas and St Alphonsa intercede for each one of us that we may live our Christian and Priestly lives after the model of the Crucified Saviour, whose heart was pierced for our sake especially in these days of the pandemic!

Yours in Christ Jesus,

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