



Bishop George Rajendran SDB
Diocese of Thuckalay

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Dear and Rev Fathers,

As you are well aware, our lives have been affected in so many ways by the corona virus pandemic that has been raging for the past two years. Following public policy toward mitigation of this dreaded illness has turned our lives upside down. We have been struggling to find ways to tolerate stay at home orders. To learn new routines within our social isolation and for many to incorporate the education of their children during the day while schools remain closed. And above all, our stress and anxieties are peaked by the fear of contracting corona virus as we see each day the numbers of confirmed positive cases and deaths from COVID-19. Our sorrows run especially deep as we experience the reality of death or the struggling for survival of friends or family members as a result of this disease. We see many around us, if not even ourselves, who have lost jobs. Jobs that have sustained them and their families just disappeared literally overnight as our economy had to shut down in order to curtail the spread of the virus. And furthering these emotions, people of faith are experiencing a great suffering of their spirit through the ongoing inability to worship as a church community. We are finding it especially painful as our people hunger and thirst for the Eucharist, now that our attendance at Mass is limited to live-streaming video broadcasts on our televisions and computers.

We see and experience so much suffering on many levels for so many people, and we pray prayers of thanksgiving if we have been spared from this illness and the devastating turbulent side effects from it. And through this experience we have come to realize a deep sense of gratitude for those who are continuing the frontline battle against this disease. Those doctors and nurses, all hospital workers, who are putting their lives on the line to save others. And for all those who continue to leave their homes each day, endangering their own health, to keep us fed and sustained with life essential things. Grocery store clerks, delivery drivers, postal workers, truck drivers, food service and supply warehouse workers, all doing their part to help us endure and survive within our new isolated realities.

During the course of all of this, we have witnessed a tremendous rise in charitable acts and volunteerism within our communities. Everything from making protective masks, preparing food for hospital and nursing home workers, to fund raising for many people who need help due to the collateral damage being done by COVID-19.

As we so often come to discover during and after a crisis passes, there are silver linings and often beautiful by-products that emerge through the sorrow and pain. This crisis should be no different. There is something that we can all learn and carry with us through and beyond this experience. We of all ages have now come to know better the pain and sorrow, as well as the heartbreak, of true isolation. We have experienced the frustration that comes from being stuck in our homes. We have now lived with the anguish of the loneliness of not being in the daily presence of friends and neighbours. Of not being able to be with children or grandchildren and feel their precious hugs and experience that tender touch of another human person.



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As we feel these longings and experience these emotions, we can come to fully embrace them as we realize the reality of what so many of our elderly brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, grandparents and neighbours, feel each day in their lives. In lives that certainly now are being threatened by this pandemic and in lives that will go on after it is controlled and behind us. We now know first-hand these feelings of loneliness that isolation brings them. Isolation from friends as safe physical mobility diminishes. Loneliness and social distancing as circles of friends get smaller or disappear completely due to death. And the resultant feelings of despair and frustration that begin to take over in our elderly loved ones who were once vibrant and joyful people. Our social distancing and isolation of today is only temporary and will end soon. But for many in our communities, it will go on way beyond this pandemic.

Our living sense of compassion can and must be enhanced by the internalization of these feelings that we are experiencing these days. As a people of faith, we can and must emerge from this pandemic more empathetic than ever to the reality of loneliness that so many experience each day throughout their twilight years. What we now feel must serve as the spark needed to light the flame of desire to do more to be present to those among us who suffer the inability to move beyond their homes or their nursing home rooms. To create in us a burning desire to visit the homebound sick, the residents of nursing homes, and those whose physical disabilities cause them to remain virtually prisoners within their homes, isolated in so many ways from the world around them.

We need to find purpose behind this dark cloud that can bring new life to the elderly among us. We need to store away these feelings of today. Lock them in our brain centres of emotion and in our heart chambers of compassion and unleash them through the power of the Holy Spirit once this all ends. To find that precious element of time to spend with those who feel lonely each and every day. We can and must be motivated by our own awareness of the terrible feelings of isolation and loneliness now known first-hand. And let us be moved into action as we recall in sacred Scripture John 10:10: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." Let us not allow anyone among us to live short of that abundance while in our midst. Let's be sure to bring life to all, and bring it to the fullest.

Throughout this crisis you have remained active in your efforts of Coordination for the elderly, the disabled, the poor and the needy helping them with their healthcare concerns through these stormy times. Doing it via phone calls and drop off of key resources as needed. You have remained a presence within your parishes even though limited by strict non-visitation policies of COVID-19. You have prayed on the phone with patients, prayed with and consoled family members who are also unable to see their loved ones during these critical times. Even at the time of death for many. And you have been a source of strength and comfort for doctors and nurses who are feeling the spiritual, emotional and physical strains of caring for the victims and bearing the heartbreak of death and suffering of so many. Let us continue to pray for all caregivers that God will bless their heroic efforts with His peace and love. Let us especially pray for our State of Tamil Nadu that is going through this crisis and continue with all the charitable works that will alleviate the sufferings of our people.



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NEWS AND EVENTS

DEPARTMENT MEETINGS: During this period of the lockdown, we are compelled to close all our churches and to stop all the public display of spiritual activities. In order to continue the spiritual care for the people, we had a two-day online meeting of the heads of Departments and Pious Associations. These meetings were held on 11 and 12 May 2021. Together with Rev. Fr Thomas Pawathuparambil, I met all the members of Departments and Pious Associations individually. Both of us listened to their projects and plans during the lockdown in order to keep alive the faith of our people. Every Department and Pious Association actively took part in the meeting. They were instructed to keep in touch with children, youth and all the faithful online in order to continue with the various activities associated with the preparation for the Jubilee.

PRIESTS' CONFERENCE: During the Priests' meeting held on 14 and 21 May 2021, various issues discussed with the Departments and Pious Associations were taken up. In the first meeting Archbishop Mar Joseph Perunthottam was the special guest. He gave a key note address on how to utilize the lockdown time effectively. Rev. Fr Tomy Padinjareveetil and Rev. Fr Sony Mundunadackal also joined the meeting and they talked about Lourdes Matha Education Society and its admission processes. The heads of various Departments and Pious Associations shared their action plans to take forward the various activities connected with the preparations for the jubilee during this period of lockdown. As a special venture of the Eparchy during this pandemic, both KKSSS and TCYM have formed different teams of volunteers to help the poor and the needy in meeting their basic needs both physical and spiritual. A team of Priests and young people have committed themselves to conduct funeral ceremonies of Covid patients whenever necessary. The ambulance service of the KKSSS is completely free of cost. During the meeting, I instructed the Priests on how to look after both the spiritual and the physical needs of the flock during lockdown period through a power point presentation. I reminded the Priests that our service must be inclusive. I also advised them to form a health care team in each parish to help the people around.

VISUVASA PAYIRCHI VIZHA (VPV): Initially it was decided to conduct the VPV, the summer vacation Bible Class, in all the parishes physically. However, due to the lock down, we had to switch over the VPV programme to online mode. The Catechism Department headed by Rev. Fr Prince Maliyil with his team prepared the classes online within a short notice for the four categories of students: Sub-Juniors, Juniors, Seniors and Super-Seniors. The classes were activity-based and pre-recorded with the help of talented teachers and they were uploaded in the YouTube channel of *Narcheithinilayam*. These online classes were held from 17-24 May. A special meeting was convened for Catechism Forane Directors and Headmasters in view of these special classes and they were told to encourage all the teachers to monitor the children to attend the classes and to send the activities by 6.00 pm every day to the concerned teachers. I could see that a large number of students participated in these classes. I am grateful to Fr Prince, Fr Abilash, Fr Robins, Br Liju and the team of teachers for making this event possible despite all the hurdles.



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MEETING OF HEALTH COMMISSION: During this second wave of the corona virus, the death rate in our district became a matter of grave concern. A number people in our parishes too were affected by this virus and some even died. In this situation the Diocesan Health Commission came forward to help the affected people. In order to carry out the various activities, we called an online meeting of all the Nurse-Sisters of the Eparchy along with Rev. Fr Abin Poovathumoottil, Director of Health Commission on 13 May. It was decided that the Sisters would monitor the patients region-wise. Every day they would call them via phone and enquire about their health, give them counselling and pray with them. The Director of Health Commission will closely monitor the health care of the families through the Parish Priests and give the needed help and support to the Nurse-Sisters and to the affected families.

MEETING OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS: After making a meticulous COVID Action plan for the Eparchy with the help of Priests and Health Commission of the Eparchy, we had an online meeting of all the women religious on 22 May. Prior to this meeting, on 21 May together with the Vicar General, I had a discussion with all the Provincial Superiors and they welcomed the plan that the Eparchy had prepared. All the women religious joined the meeting. Fr Abin, Director of KKSSS, presented the COVID action plan to the Sisters and asked for their suggestions in implementing them. It was also an opportunity for us to meet all the women religious on a single platform. We decided to open a Quarantine Centre at SABS Convent, Soosaipuram for the care of affected Sisters during this pandemic. The Sisters agreed to offer their whole hearted co-operation and support to families affected by this virus.

UCC BISHOPS' MEETING WITH MINISTER: All the Bishops belonging to the various Churches of Kanyakumari had a meeting with the newly elected Minister Mr Mano Thankaraj on 25 May. The meeting was meant to find out ways and means to reduce the spread of the disease and to help the Covid-19 victims. All the Bishops were concerned about the dangerous situation prevailing in Kanyakumari district and came forward to help the Government. The minister was very happy and appreciated the generosity of the Bishops and requested the Bishops to form volunteer groups to distribute food to the homeless and to help of Government Hospitals, to start Quarantine Centres, etc. The Bishops have taken up these requests very seriously and promised maximum support to the Government.

MARIAN MONTH: Month of May is dedicated to our Blessed Mother and usually it is celebrated with much devotion and prayer in all the parishes. But this year due to lock down people could not come to the churches for spiritual activities. They were asked to remain at home and observe the month with special prayers and devotions. Some of the devotions our families took up during this month were:

- Families prepared altars in their homes for our Blessed Mother placing her statue or image.
- The families prayed the Rosary at home regularly.
- Some families visited the churches and prayed the Rosary in front of the statue of Our Lady.
- Parishes organised online (Zoom) Rosary services for the families



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- Some priests sent specially prepared Marian tasks
- All the parishes organised **family-wise chain Rosary on 16 May**.

These spiritual exercises were well-appreciated and all the families faithfully spent time fruitfully praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary and prayed for the people who are suffering the Corona virus.

The Eparchy organized the chain Rosary **parish-wise on 23 May 2021**. All the parishes without fail followed the instructions and conducted the chain Rosary. In some parishes some families were invited to pray the Rosary in the churches while other parishes held online Rosary services.

WEBINAR ON EVANGELISATION: The Eparchy of Thuckalay during the year of its Silver Jubilee organized a two-day webinar on evangelization on 28-29 May 2021 from 5.00 pm to 6.30 pm, in collaboration with the Syro Malabar Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral care of the Migrants and Syro Malabar mission. There was a very positive response to the webinar. A number of participants registered from the various parts of the world. On the first day, 28 May 2021, His Beatitude George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro Malabar Church, inaugurated the webinar. During his talk, he emphasized on the missionary nature of the Church. We are called to be witnesses of the amazing love of God. Rev. Fr (Dr) Biju Kalezhathu from the Eparchy of Jagadapur made a detailed presentation on the topic '*Ad Gentes* Mission of the Syro Malabar Church.' Mar Prince Antony Panangadan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Adilabad, shared his experiences on the various missionary methods that we can use in order to preach the Gospel.

On the second day, 29 May 2021, Mar Raphael Thattil, Chairman for the Syro Malabar Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral care for the Migrants, delivered the felicitation address. In his talk, he pointed out the importance of prayer and the need for spiritual preparation for mission works. Rev. Fr (Dr) Joshy Kulathumkal gave a detailed presentation on the topic '*Ad Gentes* mission of the Eparchy of Thuckalay in the Context of the Extended Territories.' Rev. Sr Mareena SH, President of CRI, shared about the missionary works in Ujjain and Mr Ceetly George, Founder of Fiat Mission, shared about the types of mission work that lay people carry out in the Church. Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal and Rev. Fr Joseph Santhosh coordinated the proceedings while Rev. Fr Robin Jose and Rev. Fr Shijo Aikkarakunnel carried out the groundwork for the webinar. The technical support was given by Br Albert Longley SDB, Principal of St Antony's College, Shillong along with Mr Nathaniel and Dr Isaias. The Eparchy of Thuckalay is grateful to all the participants and organizers in making the webinar informative and inspirational.

INFORMATION

- **Promotion of Vocations:** Let us continue to pray for more vocations to priesthood and religious life
- **Good Friday Collection:** Kindly submit the Good Friday collection to the Eparchial Procurator at the earliest.



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- **Major Seminarians:** All the major seminarians have gone to their homes and are waiting for the Colleges to open in order to begin their classes
- **Liturgy Commission:** We have officially published the revised version of the prayers “OUR FATHER” and “HAIL MARY” in Tamil. I have sent the revised prayers to you through emails. I thank our Liturgical Commission that revised the prayers and our Major Archbishop for his approval after making some corrections. He has also graciously given the Imprimatur for us to use these prayers in our official liturgy. I request you to get familiarised with this version of the prayers during these days when you celebrate the Holy Qurbana in private and pray the Holy Rosary. When we open our churches to the public, I shall send you an official circular announcing the date on which we could begin their use in our Eparchy for all liturgical and para-liturgical services.
- **COVID Relief Work:** KKSSS is undertaking Covid-19 related relief works in the Eparchy. All those who need any information or support, kindly contact Fr Abin, Director.
- **COVID Burial Team:** Under the leadership of Fr Santhosh, 8 youth have come forward to take up the task of burial of those who die of Covid-19 related issues in our Eparchy. They are officially trained and well-equipped to handle the situation. If anyone requires their help, kindly contact either Fr Santhosh or Fr Abin. We appreciate the generosity of these young people.
- **Blessing of New Convent:** The Mary Mediatrix (MMM) Sisters are in our Eparchy for more than 10 years now. They were staying all these years in a rented house. Now they have built a house of their own at Padanthalumoodu. Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadakal blessed the House on 31 May and the Sisters have shifted to their new residence. Since it was lockdown no guests were invited for the blessing. They will keep a solemn blessing of the chapel another day. We congratulate the Sisters.
- **Inauguration of Catechism Classes:** The Eparchy is going to inaugurate the academic year for catechism on 6 June 2021. Prior to that on 2 June 2021 there will be an online orientation programme for all the Catechism teachers at 5.30 pm. Dear Fathers, kindly make sure that all the teachers attend this programme. We shall begin the classes from 13 June 2021. The Malayalam students can follow the classes that Shalom TV, Divine TV and Shakina TV televise.
- **Online Message:** I am available to meet and to give a short message to the families where the parish is organising Online Rosary service in the evening time.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

02 June 2021	-	Catechism Teachers' Orientation Talk
05 June 2021	-	Catechism Headmasters/Headmistress meeting
06 June 2021	-	Inauguration of Catechism Classes



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CONCLUSION

We are in the month of June – a month dedicated to the Heart of Jesus. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is devotion to Jesus Christ himself, but in the particular ways of meditating on his interior life and on his threefold love – his divine love, his burning love that fed his human will and his sensible love that affects his interior life. It is a symbol of that divine love which he shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit but which he, the Word made Flesh, alone manifests through a weak and perishable body, since, “in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Let us inculcate devotion to the Heart of Jesus among our people in ways that are possible during these times of the pandemic. May the Heart of Jesus forgive the sins of the humanity and bring an end to this end that has devastated the world!

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,

+George Rajendran SDB
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