



# Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

**Bishop George Rajendran sdb**  
**Diocese of Thuckalay**

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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

We are entering into the Holy Season of Lent, which begins on 4 March 2019. There are occasions in the Christian calendar, when we are called upon to reflect on transformational change. Lent indeed is such an occasion. It normally occurs during spring. The springtime is lush with rebirth, new beginning and new growth. Too often, however, we want to race to the Easter without fully embracing the Lenten process that leads there. Lent reflects the days that Jesus wandered in the wilderness - tempted by Satan - in readiness for a ministry destined to end in tragedy. Few of us can relate to the level of sacrifice and commitment that Jesus displayed in his days of fast; yet Lent provides us with an opportunity to deepen our spirituality by engaging in regular discipline from Ash Monday to Easter Sunday. The wilderness - the desert days of Lent - is the true path towards spiritual transformation.

There is a compelling metaphor that helps us to embrace the wilderness and prevents us from racing to Easter. It is the metaphor of the seed. Jesus began his teaching ministry with the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13) and referred to seeds and trees, fruit and branches throughout his ministry. To see the metaphor of Christian growth and spiritual development contained in a seed is to learn valuable lessons about change and transformation.

**A Seed needs Rich Environment.** A seed that lacks appropriate soil may sprout, but will quickly wither and die. Even in the best soil, without water and nutrients, growth will be limited. Without sun and proper cultivation, plants will decay and spoil. Seeds require a rich, healthy environment to grow. This applies to the Spiritual environment in which we grow as Christian disciples. There must be an ongoing flow of comfort and security, challenge and inspiration, learning and service. Without such an environment, the growth in discipleship is stunted, stagnant, worse and even dead. We create an environment for our spiritual formation through prayer, meditation, study, worship, fellowship and service.

**Seeds cannot be Rushed.** When seeds do not sprout, do not take root or do not grow, we have to be patient. No one would ever think that they could somehow rush the normal growing process. Seeds require the amount of time that they require. According to God's plan, the time of God is the right time.

However, people get impatient. Our culture and life style puts pressure on us to rush through everything. We live in an age of instant gratification. Seeds teach us that we need to learn to wait and to develop patience. Christian formation is a process of seed like growth. Patience is the key ingredient to transformational growth.

**All Seeds Grow at Different Rates.** Plant a package of seeds, and immediately you see diversity in the rate of growth. Some sprout almost immediately and begin a steady rate of growth. Late sprouters often become early bloomers. Some normal beginners end up stunted and sickly. Growth is even rarer, and it is often chaotic. Nothing we do can change this diversity. Where seeds are concerned, we are comfortable with different rates of development. This is not always true with our attitudes about Christian believers. We often adopt a 'cookie-cutter' approach to disciple making that makes some seed advanced, while others lag behind. The seed teaches us that to mature in different ways at different times is very normal.

**Change Happens in Stages.** Examine any plant as it grows from seed to maturity, and you will find that it is hard to believe you are looking at the same plant. While the growth follows a smooth process, it proceeds through distinct stages. These stages are marked by unique characteristics and are measured for the relative health and well-being of the plant at any given time. Our spiritual development progresses through stages as well. Belief and inquiry deepen to devotion and discipleship. Learning and following evolve into teaching and leading. Growth within the community of faith matures to a life of service in the world. We move through ages and stages of faith development as we grow from seed to sapling to fruit-bearing tree.

**Seeds Contain the Past and the Future.** Each seed is the product of previous generations and contains within it all the genetic code for the future. Seeds are filled with the information that yields transformation. Each generation builds upon the last and lays the foundation for the next generation. The Word of God is the information we contain - passed down throughout the ages and preserved in us for the future - that holds the power to transform us. When we give ourselves time to grow, we unleash the God-given power to become mature Christian disciples.

**Seeds have a purpose larger than themselves.** Growth is not the purpose of a seed, but a means to an end. Unless seeds give rise to new seeds, they fail to fulfil their purpose. Transformation never happens for its own sake. Change happens to lead us to a new place. Growth occurs that we might not only know more, but that we might do more. Seeds are judged, ultimately, on the fruit that they bear. Christians may never content themselves with growing in their knowledge and love of God. Growth that fails to lead to a change in behaviour is cancerous, not healthy. We grow for a reason, and that reason is something much larger than any individual's needs.

The lessons of the seed help us to see Lent, not as a time of sacrifice and denial, but as a time of preparation and anticipation - preparation for the work to which God calls us and anticipation for the fullness of life that God promises. The Gospels speak of three practices that can help us to reach God as well as our neighbour. They are prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

First is the most obvious one, prayer. Prayer is an ongoing dialogue of intimate communion with God. Through prayer darkness is dispelled and the path of progress is illuminated. Through prayer we begin to understand why this communion seems so elusive at times; as we struggle with our own disordered appetites, and live in a manner at odds with the beauty and order of the creation within which we dwell only to find a new beginning whenever we confess our sin and return to our first love. Prayer opens us

up to Revelation, expands our capacity to comprehend truth and equips us a change. There are moments of prayer like the celebrations of the sacraments, adoration of the blessed sacrament, taking part in popular devotions like reciting the holy rosary, etc. Let us encourage and help our people to make use these moments fruitfully to come closer to God during this season of Lent.

Second is fasting. Humanity's 'Fall' away from God and into sin began with eating. God had proclaimed a fast from the fruit of only one tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17), and Adam and Eve broke it. Fasting, hence, is connected with the very mystery of life and death, of salvation and damnation. Food perpetuates life in this physical world, which is subject to decay and death. But God "created no death" (Wis 1:13). Humanity, in Adam and Eve, rejected a life dependent on God alone for one that was dependent rather on "bread alone" (Dt 8:3; Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4). The whole world was given to humans as a kind of food, as a means to life, but 'life' is meant as communion with God, not as food ("Their God is their belly" Phil 3:19). The tragedy is not so much that Adam ate food, but that he ate the food for its own sake, 'apart' from God and to be independent of Him. He believed that food had life in itself and thus he could be 'like God.' He put his faith in food. This kind of existence seems to be built on the principle that humans indeed live "by bread alone." Christ, however, is the new Adam. At the beginning of his ministry in the Gospel of Matthew, we read, "When he had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, he became hungry." Hunger is that state in which we realize our dependence on something else - when we face the ultimate question: "on what does my life depend?" Satan tempted both Adam and Christ, saying: Eat, for your hunger is proof that you depend entirely on food, which your life is in food. Adam believed and ate. Christ said, "Man does not live by bread alone" (Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4). This liberates us from total dependence on food, matter and the world. Thus, for the Christian, fasting is the only means by which humans recover their true spiritual nature. For fasting to be effective, then, the spirit must be a part of it. Christian fasting is not concerned with losing weight. It is a matter of prayer and meditation. True fasting may lead to temptation, to weakness, to doubt and to irritation. In other words, it will be a real fight between good and evil, and very likely we shall fail many times in these battles. But the very discovery of the Christian life as 'fight' and 'effort' is an essential aspect of fasting.

Third is almsgiving. Almsgiving has a transforming power. "Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness ... It is better to give alms than to store up gold; for almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin. Those who regularly give alms shall enjoy a full life" (Tob 12:8-9). Why almsgiving is better than prayer and fasting? Almsgiving is a form of prayer because it is 'giving to God' and not mere philanthropy. It is a form of fasting because it demands sacrificial giving, not just giving something, but giving up something, giving till it hurts. In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus teaches on almsgiving as a necessary part of Christian life: "When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, to win praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Mt 6:2-3). Jesus does not say if you give alms, but when you give alms. Like fasting and prayer, almsgiving is non-negotiable. The first Christians knew the importance of almsgiving. "There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need" (Acts 4:34-35). That was the living embodiment of a basic principle of Catholic social teaching, what tradition calls "the universal destination of goods." The Catechism of the Catholic Church(CCC) puts it succinctly: "The goods of creation are destined for the entire human race."

Let us fruitfully spend this season of Lent to help our people and each other to reach God. May our acts of prayer, penance and almsgiving bear much fruit not only in our lives but in the lives of our people for whom we have dedicated and committed our lives.

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Prakash Bhavan, Kaliyal Turns Gold.** Prakash Bhavan, the first CMC convent in the region, Kaliyal celebrates its golden Jubilee and the grant concluding function was held on February 2, 2019. The celebration began with the thanks giving Holy Qurbana followed by a public meeting. It was in June 1, 1969 the CMC convent, Kaliyal had its humble beginning in a very simple house within a 7 cents of land. Six Sisters from Holy Queen's Province Changanacherry reached Kaliyal with missionary zeal. They were Sr. Benija (Superior), Sr. Joselin, Sr. Gracious, Sr. Caroline, Sr. Basil (Late), and Sr. Christeena (Late). We remember with gratitude Mother Gonzaga, the Provincial and her Council who took the initiative to start this venture. The CMC Congregation is indebted to the CMI fathers of St. Joseph Province, Trivandrum for their great support to begin this first Convent *Prakash Bhavan* and truly we can say it was a joint venture of CMI Fathers and CMC Sisters to spread the good news in Kaliyal, Netta, Muzhucode, Pallickonam etc... After two years of its existence Sr. Agnetta, Sr. Lillit, Sr. Betty (Late) joined this community. Sr. Julitta, the homeo doctor, started a dispensary and Sr. Ritty took the initiative for a Nursery school in 1975. In 1980 *Deepthy* girls home was established for the Christian formation of girls. I would like to congratulate and thank all the members of the Thuckalay Vice Province together with Rev. Mother Viji, Provincial, for their services to the Thuckalay Eparchy.

**Blessing of Kuttaicode Mission Centre:** We have inaugurated and blessed another mission station at Kuttaicode in Malicode region on 2 February 2019. In fact, the mission work began four years ago in a family in order to bring the people of the area together for prayer. Let us thank God that now we have a Centre there, I sincerely thank and congratulate Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadackal and Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal for their initiative and completion of the works.

**Orientation Programme for Priests:** Priests' Orientation Programme was held on 11 and 12 February 2019. The programme began at 9.45 am on 11 February 2019. Thomas Mar Eusebius, Bishop of Parassala was the resource person for the first day. In the evening, there was the priests' conference which began at 5.00 pm with the Adoration of Blessed Sacrament and Confession. On 12 February, a workshop on the Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on "Young People: Faith and Vocational Discernment" was organized. Rev. Fr Amos SDB from Trichy was the resource person. For this programme, besides the priests, the religious sisters also took part. The whole programme ended at 3.30 pm.

**Inter-Eparchial Meeting:** The Inter-Eparchial meeting at the province level was held in our Eparchy at Padanthlumoodu on 19 February 2019. Archbishop Mar Joseph Perumthottam and Auxiliary Bishop Mar Thomas Tharayil from Arch Eparchy of Changanassery, Bishop Mar Mathew Arackal and Auxiliary Bishop Mar Jose Pulickal from the Eparchy of Kanjirapally, Bishop Mar Joseph Kallarangattu and Auxiliary Bishop Mar Jacob Murickan from the Eparchy of Pala along with the Curia members and Directors of various departments participated in the meeting. The Directors of all the departments of our Eparchy also took part in the meeting. There were 50 participants. The meeting was held at Padanthalumoodu School. Mission work at the extended area of our Eparchy was the main theme. The meeting discussed about the possibility of expanding the mission work to Madurai-Theni. The bishops wholeheartedly took a decision to gather again at Changanassery on 25 March 2019 to

discuss further about the sharing of mission territory at the extended area. I am grateful to Fr. Robins and his team for preparing the venue for the meeting.

## INFORMATION

- ❖ **Train to Velankanni:** Kindly announce the following information in the parish and encourage our people to make use of this train service. The train service to Velankanni is an initiative of the various dioceses together with Tamil Nadu Southern Districts Train Passengers' Catholic Association. After persistent requests, the Southern Railway has allotted a weekly train to Velankanni from Nagercoil.
  - Saturdays: Nagercoil- Velankanni (06093):** The train leaves Nagercoil on Saturdays at 5.00 pm and arrives at Velankanni on Sundays at 3.30am.
  - Sundays: Velankanni-Tirunelveli-Kollam (06095):** The train leaves Velankanni on Sundays at 5.15pm and arrives at Tirunelveli on Monday at 4.00 am, and then proceeds to Kollam.
  - Mondays: Kollam-Tirunelveli-Velankanni (06096):** The train leaves Kollam on Mondays at 4.00 pm, arrives at Tirunelveli on Mondays at 11.30 pm and then proceeds to Velankanni.
  - Tuesdays: Velankanni-Nagercoil (06094):** The train leaves Velankanni on Tuesdays at 8.15pm and arrives at Nagercoil on Wednesdays at 8.30 am.
- ❖ **Nithravailai Forane Bible convention:** Nithravailai Forane is going to begin the monthly Bible convention for the first time from 9 March, 2019 onwards, every second Saturday. I request all the Forane fathers to encourage our faithful to take part in the Bible convention.
- ❖ **Vocation Month:** In order to encourage Priestly and Religious vocation from our Eparchy we are going to observe the month of April as “**VOCATION MONTH**”. The Vocation commission of our diocese has prepared a series of program for the month of April, which will be informed you during the Departmental Meeting and Priests' Conference. The solemn inauguration of the Vocation Month will be on 31 March, 2019.
- ❖ **Mission Work in Ireland:** Rev. Fr. Shoji will be leaving for overseas mission to Ireland on 7 March 2019. He will be doing pastoral ministry in the Diocese of Limerick together with Fr Robin Koorumullil. We wish Fr Shoji happy journey and God's blessing in his new place.
- ❖ **Treatment:** Rev. Fr. Anilraj is undergoing treatment at Gurupatham Spine Care Centre at Chellamkonam. Requesting your valuable prayers for him.
- ❖ **RIP:** Rev. Sr. Vimala FCC has lost her father on 1 March, 2019 and Rev Sr. Lincy FCC has lost her father on 22 Feb, 2019. We extend our heartfelt condolences and prayers to our dear sisters and their bereaved family members.
- ❖ **Media Room at Minor seminary:** In order to make the teaching and learning more effective by using technology, we have prepared a media room at Minor seminary. It contains an interactive board with good sound system, sound proof room, language lab facility etc. We are grateful to Rev. Fr. Joshy, the Rector, for finding sponsors to get this project ready for the seminarians.
- ❖ **Parish Hall:** Mukkoottukal parish is constructing a parish hall and its foundation stone was blessed on 27 Feb, 2019.
- ❖ **Final Exams:** Our children are going to write the final examinations soon, the class 12 students begin the exams from 1 March onwards. We bless and pray for all our children.
- ❖ **Welcome:** I am happy to welcome Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakkeyil to our Eparchy after a short period of two years. He will be pioneering the mission activities at the extended territory of our eparchy.

### Appointments:

- ❖ **Rev. Fr. Sajan Nettaponghu** is appointed as the Parish Priest of Lourdes Matha Church Chenamcode and St. John Paul II Church Kulasekharam with effect from 3 March 2019.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr. Thankachan Kollappallyil SDB** is appointed as the Acting Parish Priest of St. Mary's Church Thuckalay from 28 February 2019 to 30 April 2019.

### FORTHCOMING PROGRAMME

02 March 2019	- Inauguration of Syro-Malabar Mobile Application
04 March 2019	- Ash Monday
07 March 2019	- Inter Departmental Meeting at 2.00 pm at Bishop's House
12 March 2019	- Priests' Conference
29 March 2019	- Graduation Day at St Alphonsa College

### CONCLUSION

We are coming towards the end of the academic year. Soon our students will begin their examinations. The holiday season will start soon. Let us help our children in whatever way possible to end the academic year on a happy note. I am sure you will plan some programme, besides course the ones that the Eparchy has planned, during the holidays to keep our young boys and girls usefully occupied.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

