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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

As you are aware, our Holy Father Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* on 19 March 2018. This Papal document re-proposes the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time. In this circular letter, I want to give you a summary of the document. The Exhortation is important for each one of us. After all, the primary reason for our becoming Priests is to sanctify ourselves and become saints.

The Apostolic Exhortation consists of five chapters. The first chapter speaks about the need to be holy. There are many kinds of saints. Besides the Church's officially recognized saints, many more ordinary people have been hidden from history books; yet they have contributed decisively to the growth of the Church. They include many Christian witnesses whose martyrdom is a feature of our time. "Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel." Holiness is experiencing the mysteries of Christ's life, "constantly dying and rising anew with him," and reproducing aspects of his earthly life: his closeness to the outcast, his poverty, his self-sacrificing love. Hence the Pope writes: "Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world," in a mission to build the kingdom of love, justice and universal peace.

Holiness is as diverse as humanity. The Lord has in mind a particular path for each believer, not just the clergy, the consecrated, or those who live a contemplative life. We are all called to holiness, whatever be our role, "by living our lives with love and bearing witness." Among ways of bearing witness are "feminine styles of holiness," of famous women saints and the "unknown and forgotten" women who daily transform their communities. Not only through big challenges holiness grows but also through small gestures such as refusing to gossip, listening with patience and love, saying a kind word to a poor person.

Holiness keeps us faithful to our deepest self, free from every form of enslavement, and bearing fruit for our world. Holiness does not make us less human, since it is an encounter between our weakness and the power of God's grace. But we need moments of solitude and silence before God, to face our true selves and let the Lord enter.

In the second chapter, the Holy Father discusses two subtle enemies of holiness, namely, Gnosticism and Pelagianism. They are two "false forms of holiness" that arose in early Church history. They still lead people astray. These heresies propose "an anthropocentric immanentism disguised as Catholic truth" by exaggerating human perfection without grace.

Gnostics fail to realize that the depth of our charity measures our perfection. Neither information nor knowledge measures our perfection. By separating intellect from the flesh, the proponents of this heresy reduce Jesus's teaching to a cold and harsh logic that seeks to dominate everything. But doctrine "is not a closed system, devoid of the dynamic capacity to pose questions, doubts,

inquiries.” Christian experience is not a set of intellectual exercises. True Christian wisdom can never be separated from mercy towards our neighbour.

The same power that Gnosticism attributed to the intellect, Pelagianism attributed to the human will and to personal effort. Though modern Pelagians speak warmly of God’s grace, they suggest that human will is something pure, perfect and all-powerful, to which grace is then added. They fail to realize that in this life human weaknesses are not healed completely by grace.

Grace builds on nature. It does not make us superhuman but takes hold of us and transforms us progressively. If we reject this historical and progressive reality, we can actually refuse and block the grace of the Lord. His friendship infinitely transcends us. We cannot buy it with our works; it can only be a gift born of his loving initiative. Only this permits us to cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation.

When the Christians overvalue human will and its own abilities, they tend towards obsession with the law; an absorption with social and political advantages; punctilious concern for the Church’s liturgy, doctrine and prestige; vanity about the ability to manage practical matters; and, an excessive concern with programmes of self-help and personal fulfilment as well as certain rules, customs or ways of acting. The life of the Church can become a museum piece or the possession of a select few. This deprives the Gospel of its simplicity, allure and savour, and reduces it to a blueprint that leaves few openings for the working of grace.

The third chapter looks at the Beatitudes. For Pope Francis, they are Jesus’s portrayal of what it means to be holy in our daily lives. Here “happy” and “blessed” become synonymous with “holy.” We gain true happiness by the faithful practice of the Beatitudes. We can only practise them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, selfishness, complacency and pride.

Pope Francis describes each of the Beatitudes and stresses the various aspects of holiness. Being poor of heart is holiness; reacting with meekness and humility is holiness; knowing how to mourn with others is holiness; hungering and thirsting for righteousness is holiness; seeing and acting with mercy is holiness; keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love is holiness; sowing peace all around us is holiness; and, accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems, is holiness.

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel (vv. 31-46), Jesus expands on the Beatitude about mercy. “If we seek the holiness pleasing to God’s eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged.” When we recognize Christ in the poor and the suffering, we see into the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices. “Our Lord made it very clear that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands.”

Misleading ideologies can lead us to separate these Gospel demands from their personal relationship with the Lord, so that Christianity becomes a sort of NGO stripped of the luminous mysticism that is evident in the lives of saints. There are also those who dismiss the social engagement of others as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist. Their own particular ethical preoccupation outweighs all others.

Our defence of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate. What is at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. But equally sacred are the lives of the poor, the

destitute, the abandoned and underprivileged; the infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia; victims of human trafficking and new forms of slavery. Nor should the situation of migrants be a lesser issue compared to grave bioethical questions. For a Christian “the only proper attitude is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children.”

The fourth chapter discusses the signs of holiness that we can notice in today’s world. The Pope speaks about certain aspects of the call to holiness. He speaks about five great expressions of love for God and neighbour that he considers of particular importance in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today’s culture.

Perseverance, patience and meekness describe the inner strength, grounded in God, that makes it possible to give a witness of constancy in doing good. We need to recognize and combat our aggressive and selfish inclinations. Christians “can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and the various forums of digital communication.” Even in Catholic media, limits can be overstepped, defamation and slander can become commonplace. “It is striking that at times, in claiming to uphold the other commandments, they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying, and ruthlessly vilify others.”

It is not good when we look down on others like heartless judges lording it over people and always trying to teach them lessons. That is itself a subtle form of violence.

Being on the path to holiness means enduring the daily humiliations. Some examples of these are “those who keep silent to save their families, who prefer to praise others rather than boast about themselves, or who choose the less welcome tasks, at times even choosing to bear an injustice so as to offer it to the Lord.” To act in this way “presumes a heart set at peace by Christ, freed from the aggressiveness born of overweening egotism.”

Joy and a sense of humour are the hallmarks of holiness. The saints are joyful and full of good humour. They radiate a positive and hopeful spirit, even in hard times. Ill humour is no sign of holiness. Sadness can be a sign of ingratitude for God’s gifts. Today’s individualistic and consumerist culture does not dispense real joy; consumerism only bloats the heart.

Boldness and passion are signs of holiness. Holiness is boldness that sparks an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world. “Boldness and apostolic courage are an essential part of mission.” If we dare to go to the fringes, we will find Jesus already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, their troubles and their profound desolation.

More than bureaucrats and functionaries, the Church needs passionate missionaries, who are enthusiastic about sharing true life. The saints surprise us and confound us. This is because by their lives they urge us to abandon a dull and dreary mediocrity. The Holy Spirit allows us to contemplate history in the light of the risen Jesus. In this way, the Church will not stand still, but constantly welcome the Lord’s surprises.

Growth in holiness is a journey of **living and working in communities with others**. Sharing the Word and celebrating the Eucharist together foster fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community. It also gives rise to authentic and shared mystical experiences.

Such experiences, however, are less frequent and important than small everyday things. Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to small details: wine running out at a party, a missing sheep, a widow’s

two small coins, etc. Sometimes we are granted, amid these little details, consoling experiences of God.

Trust-filled prayer of any length is a response of a heart open to encountering God face to face, where the quiet voice of the Lord can be heard. In that silence, we can discern the paths of holiness to which the Lord is calling us. For each disciple, it is essential to spend time with the Master, to listen to his words, and to learn from him always. God enters our history, and so our prayer is interwoven with memories. We need to think of our own history when we pray, and there we will find much mercy.

Prayer of supplication is an expression of a heart that trusts in God and realizes that it can do nothing of itself. Prayer of petition often calms our hearts and helps us persevere in hope. Prayer of intercession is an act of trust in God and, at the same time, an expression of love for our neighbour. In the Eucharist, the written word attains its greatest efficacy, for there the living Word is truly present.

In the final chapter, Pope deals with the need to combat evil that exists in the world. He also speaks about discernment. Evil is present from the very first pages of the Scriptures. We should not dismiss the devil as a myth, a figure of speech or an idea, lest we let down our guard and end up more vulnerable.

Our path towards holiness is a constant battle for which the Lord equips us with prayer, the Word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacrament of Reconciliation, works of charity, etc.

The path of holiness is a source of peace and joy, given to us by the Spirit. How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit, not from the spirit of the world or the devil? By discernment, which differs from intelligence and common sense. The gift of discernment is all the more necessary today because contemporary life proclaims so many distractions as equally valid and good.

Discernment is a grace. It is not only for the more intelligent or better educated. It requires no special abilities, but it does require listening to the Lord, to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways. Listening frees us to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual ways of seeing things. We need to discern God's timetable, lest we disregard his invitation to grow. For this reason, the Pope asks all Christians to examine their conscience daily in sincere dialogue with the Lord.

We need the silence of prolonged prayer to better perceive God's language, interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, calm our anxieties and see the whole of our existence afresh in God's own light.

Our attentive discernment entails obedience to the Gospel as the ultimate standard, but also to the Magisterium that guards it, as we seek in the treasury of the Church for whatever is most fruitful for the 'today' of salvation; for rigidity has no place before the perennial 'today' of the risen Lord.

God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us. He does not want to enter our lives to diminish them but to bring them to fulfilment. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God's greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us.

This Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis has come at a providential time. It contains ample materials for our Priestly life. I invite everyone of your to procure a copy of the Apostolic Exhortation and read it. I am sure you will find abundant spiritual resources for your sanctification.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Priestly Ordinations: Three of our Deacons were ordained Priests in the month of April. Two of them are for our Eparchy and one belongs to the Camaldolese Congregation of the Order of Saint Benedict (O.S.B. Cam.). Deacon Subin Scaria Puthenpurayil was ordained on 2 April 2018 at Thuruthy, Changanassery. Deacon Thomas Jebanesh was ordained on 7 April 2018 at Soosaipuram and Deacon Dorathik Rajan O.S.B. Cam. was ordained on 6 April at Kalluvilai. He is already appointed as the superior of the O.S.B. Cam. community at Trichy. Our new Priests will be given their appointments in the month of May. I congratulate and wish them God's blessings for their future ministry. I thank the Priests, Religious and lay people who worked hard for the success of the ordinations, which were held in their own respective parishes.

Meeting of 12 Class Students: Career Guidance classes were held on 9 April 2018 at St Alphonsa Arts and Science College Soosaipuram for the twelfth class students of the Eparchy. The children were familiarised with the various courses of study that they can pursue. They were also acquainted with the courses that are available in our College. The Catechetical Department along with Education team organized this programme. It was also an opportunity to invite the students from Eparchy to make use of our College for their higher education. More than hundred students took part in the programme. I sincerely thank everyone who organised it.

Pastoral Visit to St. Alphonsa College: To evaluate the all-round development and growth, I made a pastoral visit to St Alphonsa Arts and Science College, Soosaipuram on 13 April 2018. The College prepared well for the day. At the outset, I addressed the student community. Then, I met the student representatives according to departments. Meeting with the Staff members department-wise followed. The faculty members were very open and receptive to the comments and suggestions that I put forward for the development of the College. Due to lack of time, I had to conclude the pastoral visit on 19 April with a common staff meeting. I am grateful to Rev. Fr Antony Jose, the Principal, Staff and students for their cooperation.

Inauguration of Madurai Mission: The inauguration of Madurai Mission and the establishment of St. Chavara Mission Parish were held on 15 April 2018 at Madurai. On 14 April 2018, the Priests and the Religious had a one-day Eucharistic Adoration from 6.00 am to 6.00 pm in the Bishop's House chapel for the fruitfulness of Madurai Mission. The inaugural programme started with Holy Qurbana at 5pm. I presided over the Eucharist. Among those concelebrated with me include Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor of the Eparchy, Rev. Fr Davis Thattil CMI, Financial Councillor of the CMI Coimbatore Province, Rev. Fr Anish Cheruparampil CMI, Parish Priest, Rev. Fr Nimish Chundankuzhyil CMI, former Priest in-charge and Rev. Fr. Alex Puthettu. During the Holy Qurbana, the St. Chavara Eucharistic Community was elevated to the status of a Parish. Rev. Fr. Anish Cheruparampil CMI was installed as the Parish Priest.

After the Holy Qurbana, a public meeting was held. Rev. Fr. Davis Thattil CMI, Financial Councillor of the CMI Coimbatore Province, presided over the meeting. Rev. Fr. J. Jayaraj, Vicar General of Madurai Archdiocese, was present as the Chief Guest. Many Priests from the Madurai Archdiocese took part in the event. Mr John (Kumarithozhan), Joint Secretary of Pastoral Council, delivered the felicitation speech on behalf of the Eparchy. During the Inaugural programme, Mr Jomichan from Madurai donated 17 cents of land for the construction of the Church and the

document was read during the public meeting. I sincerely thank all the Diocesan representatives, Priests, Religious and lay people, who attended this historic event. I also thank Rev. Fr Anish CMI and the parishioners of St Chavara Mission Parish for the meticulous organisation of the programme.

Work Camp for Major Seminarians: Our 16 major seminarians are in the Eparchy for their annual vacation. They gathered at Kamarajnagar for their work camp. It was held on 20-25 April 2018. We began this annual meet of the Brothers with Holy Qurbana. The fourth *uravium* of Padanthalumoodu parish participated in the Holy Qurbana. The Brothers also went for a picnic to Wonderla, Kochi. They will be in the eparchy till 15 May 2018. They will animate the VBS programme of the Catechism children. They will return to their respective seminaries towards the end of May or at beginning of June.

Transfers: As I had mentioned to you during the priest conference, I have made a few transfers this year and some are given additional charges. I am grateful to you dear fathers for accepting this new responsibility with faith and obedience to the Lord. Especially I am grateful to Rev. Fr. Alex Puthettu and Rev. Fr. Ginoy Thottiyil for accepting to be the missionaries to Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi mission. May God reward for their generosity. I have given below the transfer list.

TRANSFERS 2018

No	NAMES	Transfers FROM	TRANSFERED TO
1	Fr. Ajeesh Attiyil		Addl: Drug and Alcohol Ministry
2	Fr. Ajin Jose	Thadikkarakonam	Vattakottai Mission
3	Fr. Alex Puthettu	Mankarai	Thirunelveli Mission/ Student
4	Fr. Anil Raj	Kattathurai	Director of Pulari Press Parish Priest of St. Mary's Chapel Thuckalay and Maria College
5	Fr. Ginoy Thottiyil	Press	Thirunelveli Mission – Coordinator
6	Fr. John (Subin Scaria) Puthenpurayil	New Priest	Assistant parish priest of Padanthalumoodu Priest In-Charge of Kunnuvilai Helping for Holy Mass at Kuzhithurai (Weekdays)
7	Fr. John Joseph	Mathapuram	Parish Priest of Kattathurai and Valiattumugam Director of Mission League and Sub-Editor of Sirumalar
8	Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal		Addl: Kuttaicode Mission
9	Fr. Mathew Thekkekkutt	Spiritual Father at Minor Seminary	-
10	Fr. Prince Maliyil	Padanthalumoodu	Parish Priest of Mankarai and Mathapuram Local Administrator of St. James School, Valiyavilai
11	Fr. Ritto Thoompunkal	Minor Seminary	Higher Studies

12	Fr. Robins Kuzhikodil		Addl: Director of Pulari Enterprises
13	Fr. Sanil Panthichirackal		Addl: Director of Catechism and Pulari Matrimony
14	Fr. Shoji Puthenpurackal	Sangamam	Parish Priest of Chenamcode / Kulaseharam Office Secretary at Bishop's House
14	Fr. Shoji Erupathanchilchira	Director of CML	-
16	Fr. Sumesh Valiyamthadathil	Chenamcode / Kulaseharam	Dean of Studies and Procurator of Minor Seminary Parish Priest of Bengiri
17	Fr. Thomas Jebanesh	New Priest	Assistant Parish Priest of Vayalinkarai and Cheenivilai Teacher at Christurajapuram School Assistant Director of <i>Uravium</i>
18	Fr. Thomas Thuckalay	Vattacottai	Addl: Priest In-charge of Kuzhithurai (Sundays) and Kodukkachivilai Mission at Malaicode (Tuesdays) Eparchial Coordinator of Matha TV
19	Fr. Vinu Joseph	Vayalinkarai	Assistant Director of KKSSS Addl: Parish Priest of Thadikkarakonam and Vellambi Mission Stay at KKSSS

INFORMATION

- This year we have 8 Brothers doing their Regency. They are assigned to the following Centres: Br Albin Jose – Bishop's House; Br Shijin Dev – Sangamam; Br Aju P. Xavier – Minor Seminary; Br Ajin C. R. – KKSSS; Br Liju Mathew – Thettiyoode; Br Prince George – Nithravilai; Br Jinu Joseph – Karode; Br Georgekutty – Killiyoore.
- I went to Kuwait to be with the Syro-Malabar community. I administered the Sacrament of Confirmation and distributed First Holy Communion to the children. I returned on 30 April 2018.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

01 May 2018	- Pastoral Council
08 -10 May 2018	- AIDACT National Meeting at Sangamam
12 May 2018	- Inauguration of SINAI Theological Faculty
15 May 2018	- Teachers' Seminar
16-17 May 2018	- Seminar on Education Policy
24 May 2018	- Priest Conference
17 May- 03 July 2018	-Visit to theUSA

CONCLUSION

The month of May, that we are in, is celebrated as the month of Our Blessed Mother. We celebrate three important feasts of Mary during this month. On 13 May, we keep the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. On 24 May, we celebrate the solemnity of Mary Help of Christians. On 31 May, we commemorate the Visitation of Our Blessed Lady to St Elizabeth. I invite you, dear Fathers, to recognize the important role that Our Blessed Mother plays in the lives of Priests. We need to make ourselves worthy of receiving the protection and guidance of the heavenly mother through our commitment to our Priestly ministry. Let us not pass by this month of Mary without reflecting upon her motherly intervention in the lives of Priests. Let us also help our people to come closer to our heavenly Mother by organising various Marian devotions. May we become worthy sons of our heavenly mother!

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+George Rajendran SDB
Bishop of Thuckalay