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31 January 2020

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

As Pope Francis marked 50 years of his priesthood last year, I want to present you some of his reflections on priesthood in this circular, which I thought would be of great help to you in deepening your priesthood. His reflections range from a sense of humour, to a readiness to give one's life, from weariness offered as incense, to a healing heart attentive to the wounds of his flock.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1969, just four days before he turned 33 years old. His vocation dates back to 21 September 1953, Feast of St Matthew, the tax collector converted by Jesus. It was during a confession that day, that the future pope had a profound experience of God's mercy. Divine Mercy has characterized his entire priestly life. Pope Francis speaks of priests as quietly leaving everything to engage in the daily life of communities, giving others their own lives, moved, like Jesus, when he sees people exhausted and "like sheep without a shepherd."

Addressing parish priests in Rome on 6 March 2014, the Pope said: "In the image of the Good Shepherd, the priest is a man of mercy and compassion, close to his people and a servant to all ... Whoever is wounded in life, in whatever way, can find in a priest attention and a sympathetic ear ... Wounds need to be treated We, priests must be there, close to these people. Mercy first means treating the wounds."

Priest and the Eucharist

In his homily during the Jubilee for Priests on 3 June 2016, he said: "In the Eucharistic celebration we rediscover each day our identity as shepherds. In every Mass, may we truly make our own Christ's words: "This is my Body, which is given up for you.' This is the meaning of our life: with these words, in a real way we can daily renew the promises we made at our priestly ordination."

Priest and the confessional

The priest plays an important part of his service to God and His people in the confessional, where he can become an expression of God's mercy. Addressing parish priests in Rome on 6 March 2014, Pope Francis said: "It is normal that there be differences in the style of confessors, but these differences cannot regard the essential, that is, sound moral doctrine and mercy. Neither the laziest nor the rigorist bears witness to Jesus Christ, for neither the one nor the other takes care of the person he encounters. The rigorist washes his hands of them: in fact, he nails the person to the law, understood in a cold and rigid way; and the laxist also washes his hands of them: he is only apparently merciful, but in reality he does not take

seriously the problems of that conscience, by minimizing the sin. True mercy takes the person into one's care, listens to them attentively, approaches the situation with respect and truth, and accompanies them on the journey of reconciliation."

Priest and Prayer

Pope Francis has always said that the priest needs to be, above all, a man of prayer. It is union with God, he says, that overcomes the countless temptations of evil. In his Letter to Priests marking the 160th anniversary of the death of the Cure of Ars, the pope suggests reciting the Rosary every day. "To contemplate Mary," he writes, "is to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves."

Priest and the poor

According to Pope Francis, a priest's spirituality is embodied in the reality of everyday life. His is a prophetic voice in the face of the oppression that tramples on the poor and the weak. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, 183, he writes of how the Church "cannot and must not remain on the side-lines of the struggle for justice." The Kingdom of God begins here on earth and it is already here that we encounter Jesus: the last judgment will focus precisely on what we have done to Christ in the poor, the sick, strangers, prisoners. We will be judged on how we have loved. But, as St John Paul II said, there can be no love without justice."

Priests risking their lives

In his Letter to Priests for the 160th anniversary of the death of the Cure of Ars, Pope Francis thanks those priests "who make their lives a work of mercy in regions or situations often inhospitable, distant or situations often inhospitable, distant or abandoned, even at the risk of their own lives." He thanks them "for their courageous and constant example" and invites them not to be discouraged, because "the Lord is purifying His Bride and is converting all of us to Himself." In the same Letter, Pope Francis addresses the question of abuse. While confirming his closeness to the victims, he expresses his gratitude "to all those priests who faithfully and generously spend their lives in the service of others."

Priest and Weariness

During the Chrism Mass in St Peter's Basilica, on Holy Thursday 2015, Pope Francis spoke openly about "the tiredness of priests," saying it was frequently on his mind. "I think about it and I pray about it often," he said, "especially when I am tired myself. I pray for you as you labour amid the people of God entrusted to your care, many of you in lonely and dangerous places. Our weariness, dear priests, is like incense, which silently rises up to heaven. Our weariness goes straight to the heart of the Father." The pope described this weariness as something positive, because it comes from being in the midst of people: "It is the tiredness of the priest with the smell of sheep."

Priest and humour

Pope Francis often reminds priests "the saint is capable of living with joy and a sense of humour." This joy comes from union with Jesus, he says, adding that he himself prays for a sense of humour every day.

In a November 2016 interview with Italy's TV 2000, the pope described how "a sense of humour lifts you up." It is something very human, he said, but it is also close to the grace of God.

Support priests

Pope Francis asks priests to be always close to the people, but at the same time, he asks the faithful to support their priests. During his homily at the Chrism Mass on 28 March 2013, he said: "Dear lay faithful, be close to your priests with affection and with your prayers, that they may always be shepherds according to God's heart."

Conscious of sharing in the work of Christ, the head and Shepherd of the Church, let us continue to seek to bring the faithful together into a unified family. Let us come closer to God in prayer, close to our Church, close to the presbytery, to other priests, as brothers, without speaking ill of each other, and close to the People of God. Let us always keep in mind the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve and to seek out and rescue those who were lost.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Syro-Malabar Synod: It was held from 7-15 January 2020 at St Thomas Mount, Kakkanadu. The first three days all the Bishops had the retreat animated by Rev. Fr Ivan CSsR, from Mumbai. It was great blessing indeed for all the bishops to spent time together in prayer, surrendering all the burden unto Him. The formal Synodal sitting had begun on 11 January 2020. There were 57 Bishops attended the synod. Many issues concerning the Syro-Malabar church was discussed especially the issues on Love Jihad, Farmers' woes, revision of the text of Holy Qurbana and the pastoral work in the extended territory of the Eparchy of Samshabad. I thank all the Priests, Religious and Faithful who prayed for the success of the Synod and for the wellbeing of Syro-Malabar Church. After the synod, new bishop of Kanjirapalli and the new Auxiliary Bishop of Palakkad were announced.

Blessing of new SABS Community at Madurai: The SABS province of Idukki has taken up residence at Madurai near Kamaraj University. The formal blessing of the convent, a rented house, was held on 16 January 2020 at 2.30pm along with Holy Qurbana. The name of the religious community is St Patrick Adoration Convent, Madurai, c/o J. Christopher Pillai, 4/102B, ELGI Nagar, Nagamalai, Puthukottai, Madurai - 19. Two Sisters, Sr Anupa SABS and Sr Anchu SABS are residing now and they will be visiting the nearby villages and study the possibility of beginning a Mission Centre. I am grateful SABS Provincial of Idukki for taking up the Madurai Mission.

Elevation of New Forane: For pastoral effectiveness, the Manjalumoodu Forane is divided into two Foranes, namely, Manjalumoodu and Kaliyal. The decree was read on the Diocesan Day Celebration on 10 November 2019. The official inauguration of St Mary's Forane Church, Kaliyal was held on 19 January 2020 along with the Holy Qurbana at 5.00 pm. The following parishes will include in the new Forane: Kaliyal, Marappady, Karode, Pallikonam, Chenamcode, Kulasekaram, Valiyatumugam. All the parish priests and selected parishioners were present on the occasion. Rev. Fr Tinu CMI was felicitated and wished God's blessing as he has taken charge as Forane Vicar.

TNBC Meeting at Sangamam: The half-yearly meeting of Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council (TNBC) was held on 21-22 January 2020 at Sangamam, Thuckalay. It was a great blessing for our Eparchy to host this important event. All the Bishops of Tamil Nadu except Most Rev. Antony Anandarayar, Archbishop of

Cuddalore-Pondicherry, participated in the TNBC and stayed at Sangamam. Participants were: Most Rev. George Antonysamy - Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore; Most Rev. P. Antony Pappusamy - Archbishop of Madurai; Most Rev. Nazarene Susai - Bishop of Kottar; Most Rev. Devadass Ambrose - Bishop of Thanjavur; Most Rev. Thomas Aquinas - Bishop of Coimbatore; Most Rev. S. Singaroyan - Bishop of Salem; Most Rev. A. Neethinathan - Bishop of Chengleput; Most Rev. Lawrence Pius - Bishop of Dharmapuri; Most Rev. A. Amalraj - Bishop of Ootacamund; Most Rev. Susaimanickam - Bishop of Sivagangai; Most Rev. P. Soundararaju - Bishop of Vellore; Most Rev. F. Anthonisamy - Bishop of Kumbakonam; Most Rev. Jerome Dhass Varuvel - Bishop of Kuzhithurai; Most Rev. Thomas Paulsamy - Bishop of Dindigul; Most Rev. Stephen Antony - Bishop of Tuticorin; Most Rev. Antonysamy Savarimuthu - Bishop of Palayamkottai; Most Rev. Peter Remigius - Bishop Emeritus of Kottar; Most Rev. Vincent Mar Paulos - Bishop of Marthandam; Most Rev. George Rajendran - Bishop of Thuckalay; Most Rev. Paul Alappat - Bishop of Ramanathapuram; Most Rev. Sebastian Pozholiaparambil - Bishop of Hosur; and, Rev. Fr L. Sahayaraj, Deputy Secretary, TNBC/TNLBC.

Most of the Bishops reached Sangamam on 20 January 2020 and some of them came on the morning of 21 January 2020. The TNBC meeting started on 21 January at 9.00am. In order to hold the TNBC meeting, we renovated Mathew Kavukatt Conference Hall. It was blessed by Archbishop Antony Paappusamy, President of TNBC and Archbishop of Madurai prior to the meeting. I welcomed all the Bishops to our Eparchy in the presence of some of our priests, sisters and seminarians. The session started at 9.30am and meeting ended on 22 January at 1.30pm.

Jubilee Holy Qurbana by TNBC Bishops: On 21 January we organized a solemn Holy Qurbana at St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil. All the TNBC Bishops took part in it. The Shrine community accorded a solemn reception to all the Bishops at 5.45pm. The Holy Qurbana was celebrated in Syro-Malabar rite. All the Bishops concelebrated along with me in the Holy Qurbana. Around 5,00,000 people gathered in the campus and took part in the ceremonies. After the Holy Qurbana, the Bishops were felicitated and were given mementos as the tokens of gratitude. During the felicitation meeting, Archbishop Antony Pappuswamy released the Silver Jubilee Action Plan of the Eparchy. Most Rev. George Anthonisami, Archbishop of Madras-Mylapur handed over the keys of two vehicles to Mother Teresa Palliative Care Unit, Thittanganavilai and the Palliative Care Unit, Tirunelveli. They are part of the charity works that the Eparchy is undertaking during the Jubilee Year. The meeting concluded at 8.45pm.

I take this opportunity to thank all Priests, Sisters and Faithful of our Eparchy. They worked very hard. We had nearly 30 Fathers in various committees in order to prepare for the meeting. I wish to mention their names and thank them: **Food committee:** Fr Sanil, Fr Ajin Jose, Fr Tobin, Fr Tinu CMI and Fr Augustine Thalodil. **Liturgy committee:** Fr Antony Jose, Fr Dency, Fr Mijo and Fr Subin. **Reception committee:** Fr Joshy, Fr Saji SDB, Fr Santhosh, Fr Prince, Fr Jomon, Fr Sajan, Fr Jabanesh, Fr Ajeesh, Fr Printo and Fr Abilash. **Media committee:** Fr Robins and Fr Jose Muttathupadam. **Food and Accommodation committee:** Fr Johsilal, Fr Geo, Fr Toji, Fr Sathianesan, Fr Thomas Thekkethala CMI, Fr Alex and Fr Abin. **Choir:** Fr Toji and Fr Ajin. Besides these committees, a number of people were involved in the preparation for food and accommodation for the Bishops at Sangamam. Our sisters from CMC, FCC and SABS congregations and our deacons and regency brothers worked very hard along with the priests. I extend my gratitude to all the Fathers, Sisters and Brothers who have supported for the success of the events both at Sangamam and Nagercoil. Rev Fr Thomas Powathuparampil needs a special mention for coordinating all the committees and giving a good leadership. I am grateful to him for making these events historic and memorable.

College Day and Convocation Day at St Alphonsa College: St Alphonsa Arts and Science College celebrated its 6th Annual Day on 23 January 2020 and its Third Graduation Day on 24 January 2020. I presided over the College Day. Mr M. Rajasekharan Parameswaran, Director, Indian Art & Two Guinness award holder, as guest of honour delivered a motivational speech. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Manager, delivered a felicitation speech and Rev. Fr Antony Jose, Correspondent, welcome speech. Dr S. Isaias, Principal, presented the annual report while the members of the staff proposed a vote of thanks. The students entertained the audience with a variety of items.

On the Day of Graduation, 24 January 2020, Dr K. Pitchumani, D.Sc., Honourable Vice Chancellor of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli, was the Chief Guest and I presided over ceremony. Dr K. Pitchumani appreciated the growth of the College and gave an inspiring speech. He gave away the certificates to the graduation students and awarded the rank holders of the year. I am proud to present the result that in the UG section 196 students appeared exams and 167 passed for all the subjects and our percentage of passed students is 85.2. On the same day first batch of PG students were also certified. 53 PG students appeared examinations and 42 were passed for all the subjects. The total percentage of passed students is 79.24. I congratulate all the staff and management for having rendered their hard work for the success and the development of the college. In a special way I thank Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Manager, Fr Antony Jose, Correspondent and Dr S. Isaias, Principal, for their dedication.

Home Day of Minor Seminary: St Mary's Minor Seminary celebrated its home day on 25 January 2020. I was present as the chief guest. Rev. Fr Juphy Varuvelil, Vicar of Kesavathasapuram, TVM and Mr Benny, representative of parents, were guests of honour. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal welcomed all and presented the programmes in the seminary. During the meeting, I launched the Seminary Emblem and awarded the winners in the sports. The seminarians presented a variety entertaining items. I thank and congratulate all the seminary formatters and the seminarians for organising the day well.

INFORMATION

- ❖ **Blessing of Puliyarai church:** It's nearly an year the Puliyarai Church, Senkottai, was undergoing renovation work. Since the space was small for the growing church, Fr Seby, the parish priest with the help of some benefactors and his parishioners began the renovation work with some more extension of the building. Now the work is completed and ready for blessing. It will be blessed on 1 March, 2020. We wish Fr Seby and the parish community God's blessing and lets be present for the blessing to encourage the community.
- ❖ **Blessing of Amboor CMC Convent:** As you know the CMC sisters of Thuckalay province, began the mission work a few months ago at Amboor, Thenkasi district. With prayers and hard work of Mother Viji CMC and her community a new convent along with an old age home is ready for blessing on 29 February, 2020. We wish the sisters God's blessing
- ❖ **Welcome to Fr Shoji:** Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurackal came home for holidays on 16 January. He was in the Eparchy from 18 to 22 January 2020. He will be retuning on 10 February. We wish him a happy and fruitful ministry in England.
- ❖ **Fr Justin Cheruvelil's visit:** Rev. Fr Justin came home on 3 January in order to attend his Father's first death anniversary Holy Qurbana on 7 January. After that he came to the Eparchy during the TNBC meetings and took part in the Eparchial programmes. He went back to Rome on 5 February 2020. We assure our prayers for his studies.
- ❖ **Syro-Malabar Mission Week:** The Syro-Malabar Mission week was observed from 6-12 January 2020 all over the world. The Mission League observed the Mission Week in our Eparchy on 11-12

January 2020. Kindly send this amount to the Bishop's House in order to send to the Syro-Malabar Church.

- ❖ **Mather Jyothis Anniversary:** It will be held on 2 February 2020 at Kalluvilai. Dear Fathers, I request you to be present and encourage the members of the Mather Jyothis.
- ❖ **Orientation Programme for Priests:** The Orientation Programme for the Priests will be organized on 11 and 12 February 2020 at Sangamam. It starts at 9.30am on 11 February. Dear Fathers, please be present for the programme without fail and come prepared to spend the night at Sangamam. Adoration and Confession will be held on the first day. On 12 February the programme will be conducted by the Doctrinal Commission of Syro-Malabar Church. Those Diocesan priests, who have not yet submitted the Last Will and the Testament, are requested to bring them when you come for the orientation programme.

Appointments

- ❖ **Fr Shijo Jose Aikkarakunnel:** The new priest, Fr Sebastian (Shijo Jose) Aikkarakunnel, after his ordination came to the Eparchy on 20 January 2020. He is now appointed Assistant Parish Priest of St Joseph's Forane Church, Soosaipuram and Assistant Correspondent of St Alphonsa Arts and Science College, Soosaipuram. He will be a teacher at St Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal and will take classes once in a week. His appointments take effect from 25 January 2020. We welcome him to the priestly *koinonia* and wish him God's blessings and assure our prayers.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Jimmy Thekkethalackal:** After his studies in Rome, Fr Jimmy has returned to India on 20 January 2020. He is appointed Director of Family Apostolate and Counselling, and Director of Drugs and Alcoholic Apostolate at Kalluvilai with effect from 8 February 2020. We wish him God's blessings and assure him of our prayers.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Ajeesh Attiyil:** He is relieved from the office as Director of Family Apostolate and with effect from 8 February 2020. I gratefully acknowledge Fr Ajeesh for efficiently carrying out the ministry in the Department of Family Apostolate. Along with members of the Department, he was able bring God's love and peace to numerous families and couples. He helped many at the de-addiction Centre and prepared many young people for good and happy married life.

Special Information:

- ❖ Rev. Fr Anthony Balthasar, Priest of Diocese of Thanjavur, is canonically suspended from every act Power of Order and Governance of priestly ministry, including private celebration of the Holy Eucharist and other liturgical functions (CIC c. 1333 § 1 nn. 1,2,3). Hence Dear Fathers, beware of it and do not permit him to celebrate any Sacraments and Sacramentals in our Eparchy.

UPCOMING EVENTS

02 February 2020	-	Annual Day of Mather Jyothis
05-06 February 2020	-	Picnic of Priests in the Diocese
09 February 2020	-	Death Anniversary of Msgr Philip Kodiyanthara
10 February 2020	-	Holy Qurbana at Kayalpuram for Msgr Philip Kodiyanthara
11-12 February 2020	-	Orientation Programme for Priests at Sangamam
12-21 February 2020	-	CBCI Meeting in Bangalore
22 February 2020	-	Pastoral Council at Sangamam
24 February 2020	-	Ash Monday
29 February 2020	-	CMC Convent Blessing at Amboor
1 March 2020	-	Blessing of Little Flower Church, Puliয়ারai

CONCLUSION

We are already in the month of February. The celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany have concluded. All of us have benefitted spiritually from these celebrations. In three-week's time we enter the holy season of Lent in preparation for the commemoration of the paschal mysteries of Jesus Christ. During this period, let us prepare our people spiritually to enter into the most important days of our Church. I also want to thank you sincerely for your collaboration and hard work in realising great things in your respective Centres as well as in the Eparchy.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

