



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb

Diocese of Thuckalay

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,
Kanya kumari Dt- 629 175, Tamil Nadu, India

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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

Quoting the letter of Pope Francis that he wrote to the faithful for the month of May, let me begin this letter. "The month of May is approaching, a time when the People of God express with particular intensity their love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is traditional in this month to pray the Rosary at home within the family. The restrictions of the pandemic have made us come to appreciate all the more this "family" aspect, also from a spiritual point of view. For this reason, I want to encourage everyone to rediscover the beauty of praying the Rosary at home in the month of May. This can be done either as a group or individually; you can decide according to your own situations, making the most of both opportunities. The key to doing this is always simplicity, and it is easy also on the internet to find good models of prayers to follow. I am also providing two prayers to Our Lady that you can recite at the end of the Rosary, and that I myself will pray in the month of May, in spiritual union with all of you. I include them with this letter so that they are available to everyone. Dear brothers and sisters, contemplating the face of Christ with the heart of Mary our Mother will make us even more united as a spiritual family and will help us overcome this time of trial." The prayers that the Pope has provided are given at the end of this circular.

Mary, as you all are aware, has a unique role in salvation history as the Mother of God, conceived without sin, who by her own free will agreed to bring the "Word made flesh," (John 1:14) our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into the world. She is prefigured as the one who would crush the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 through her Divine Son. Still she in no way overshadows him, nor would she ever wish to. Her life in the Gospel years was one of service and great devotion to Jesus, from the cave in Bethlehem where she gave birth to him, to Calvary in Jerusalem where she stood by his cross in his Crucifixion, from Crib to Cross, as it were.

We read when she gives her famous assent to becoming Jesus' mother: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (Lk 1:38). A short time later she proclaims with joy in the Magnificat when visiting Elizabeth, her relative, that "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk.1:46-47). The final words of Mother Mary in scriptures are: "Do whatever he [Jesus] tells you" (John 2:5). While she has a somewhat low profile in the Gospels, her words there still resonate with us today and challenge us to follow her example of humility, obedience, and service to God.

This paucity of references to Mary in the Gospels has made many Evangelicals and other Protestants to think of Catholic devotion to her as something pagan, as if we were somehow deifying an ordinary woman, turning her into some kind of interloper hindering our worship of Christ.

Yet in creating Mary to be the only human being without the stain of Original Sin, God nonetheless chose Mary specifically to play a vital role in our salvation. Mary's Immaculate Conception enabled her to bear her Divine Son in a womb free from any taint of sin and enabled her to devote her life to Jesus in the most loving and devoted manner possible. Further, Jesus, as he was dying on the Cross, gave us his mother to be our Mother when he entrusted her to St John's care (Jn 19:26-27).

Mary was conceived and lived a life "full of Grace" (Lk. 1:28). And she wishes very much to share the graces given her by God on our behalf. St Bernardine of Siena once said: "Every grace that is communicated to this world has a threefold course. For by excellent order, it is dispensed from God to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin [Mary], from the Virgin to us." Pope Pius XII was by no means alone when he said "Whenever we speak of Mary or speak to her, let us not forget that she is really our Mother, for through her we received divine life. She gave us Jesus himself, the source of grace. Mary is a Mediatrix and Dispenser of Graces."

Many non-Catholic Christians may take issue with this notion, referring to the famous quote from St Paul in his letter to Timothy that "there is one mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). Yet it is important to note that 'one' here means 'first' not 'only.'

Mary, as the beloved Mother of God, makes a powerful intercessor for us indeed! Think of Mary's many church-approved apparitions on behalf of her Son serve to further reinforce our faith that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity functioning on a dazzling supernatural plane. His earthly ministry was not just that of some philosopher or some wise teacher! Our Blessed Mother has shown us some amazing miracles on his behalf that can strengthen our faith. In these and other such apparitions she has urged all of us "banished children of Eve" to adopt greater piety and devotion to God and neighbour.

Mary has also given us a great weapon in our Spiritual arsenal in the Rosary. St Francis de Sales called it "the greatest method of praying." Blessed Alan de la Roche said this prayer is "the storehouse of countless blessing." And St Padre Pio once remarked that "the Rosary is the weapon given us by Mary to use against the tricks of the infernal enemy." It not only brings us graces, but also is a great way to meditate on the lives of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother! Mary herself once told Blessed Alan that "when you say your Rosary, the angels rejoice, the Blessed Trinity delights in it, my Son finds joy in it too, and I myself am happier than you can possibly guess. After the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, there is nothing in the Church that I love as much as the Rosary." Mary, thus, always seeks to be a bridge not a barrier to her Divine Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

During this month of May, let us contemplate on the virtues of Mother Mary and inculcate various forms of devotions to Mary among our people. Kindly follow the notification that I have already passed on to you regarding devotional practices.

INFORMATION

The information that I had already passed on to you about the Marian devotional practices to be undertaken during the month of May, I am re-producing once more:

- Join hands with our Holy Father who calls us to seek refuge in Our Lady during this month of May.
- Heeding to the call of our Holy Father and in keeping with the instructions of the President of TNBC, let us consecrate our country especially the State of Tamil Nadu to Our Lady by praying daily either of the prayers that our Holy Father has provided after the Rosary.
- During the time of Corona Pandemic, let us use the special Rosary services prepared by *Namvazhvu*.

Demise of Rev. Fr Chaco Basil Varampathuchira CMI: Rev. Fr Chaco Basil CMI, one of the pioneer missionaries of the Eparchy, passed away on 19 March 2020 and the funeral ceremony was held on 21 March 2020 at CMI Monastery at Chethipuzha. Since it was on Lockdown day due to COVID-19, I along with five priests, some CMI Fathers, CMC Sisters and around 10 lay people from the Eparchy participated in the funeral ceremonies. Rev. Fr Chacko Basil CMI, was born on 7 January 1938 at Chennamkary, in the Archdiocese of Changanacherry. He was ordained priest on 1 December 1964 for the CMI Congregation. He came to Kanyakumari Mission in 1976 and worked in our Eparchy about 42 years. He served in the mission stations and parishes of Pilankalai, Kattathurai, Paraicode, Muzhucode, Kaliyal, Netta, Penu, Mekkamandapam, Pallikonam and Kanniyakumary. Due to serious ill health Fr Chacko Basil returned to CMI Priests home in Changanserry, Kerala on 11 November 2018. The Eparchy remains indebted to him for the dedicated ministry in the region.

Thank you Fathers: More than forty days our people are spending their lives indoors due to lockdown. All of you, dear Fathers, have been very vigilant and active in looking after the people both spiritually and materially. Many of you are constantly in touch with them and keeping their faith alive by organising spiritual activities through social media apps. I am grateful to you for all your initiatives. Thank you for supporting our poor people by providing them with food and other essential materials.

Kanyakumari Social Service Society: Under the leadership of Rev. Fr Saji Elambasseril, Director and Rev. Fr Abin Poovathumootil, Assistant Director, KSSS has played a stellar role in supplying food items to many of our faithful in the parishes. I gratefully acknowledge their generous service.

VPV in Homes: Since we are unable to organise this year VPV in the parishes, the Catechism Department, with the help of Mission League and KII, has come out with a novel idea of organising this programme for the catechism children in their own homes. Many tasks related to Faith, Bible, Church History, etc. are given to the children through social media apps. Our children are actively taking part in these competitions. I am glad that all the parish priests along with the Catechism headmasters and the teachers are creating enthusiasm among the children.

Family Apostolate: Rev. Fr Jimmy, Director, has undertaken the task of animating the *Mathiru Jyothis* Mothers in all the parishes. We welcome the initiatives of Fr Jimmy and his collaborators.

Lock Down News: During these lockdown days the curia members along with some of our Fathers are busy with the translation of liturgical texts, preparation for Eparchial Statutes, etc. through Zoom Video conference facility.

These days I am taking time to contact all our benefactors and friends abroad, especially those who are suffering from COVID-19. I request your valuable prayers for them.

During the lockdown period all our religious communities are engaged in special prayers, adoration services and retreats. I thank them for extending humanitarian help to the needy

Rev. Sr Missy Maria SJSM and Rev. Sr Elseena SJSM at Madurai Mission are doing active ministry during this time of Corona pandemic. With the support of Rev. Fr Aneesh CMI and Mr Jomichen, they are preparing and distributing thousands of masks to the Governments officials and the public.

Rev. Fr. Thomas Sathianesan is appointed as the Director of Sinai Theological Institute Thuckalay with effect from 10 March 2020

Obituary: We received the sad news of the passing away of **Mar Mathew Anikuzhikattil**, Bishop Emeritus of Idukki on 1 May 2020 at 1.30 am. He was a good shepherd with the smell of the sheep. He lived a simple life and loved the people entrusted to his care. His preferential ministry was always for the needy, the suffering and the farmers of his Eparchy. He stood for the rights of the farmers, especially for the rights of the migrants, in the High Ranges with great courage and commitment. As a human person, he was very sincere, dedicated, affectionate and friendly. He will be remembered as the architect of the Eparchy of Idukki.

In our Eparchy, we have some priests and candidates to priesthood from Idukki who will miss him much. My condolences to them. During this moment of bereavement, we offer our prayers and condolences to Bishop Mar John Nellikunnel, priests, religious and faithful of the Eparchy. The funeral is scheduled to be held on 5 May 2020. Let us continue to pray for the departed soul.

Rev. Sr Rosit CMC lost her mother Mrs Thressiamma Mathew on 20 April 2020. We express our condolences to Sr Rosit and to her family members.

CONCLUSION

We are in the Easter season. Easter is the most joyful time of celebration of the church year. Celebrated against the background of the shadows and darkness of Lent and Holy Week, this season truly becomes a living expression of the hope that God has brought into the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Since this hope of renewal and new life, both present and future, is at the heart of the Good News that the Church is commissioned to proclaim and live in the world, every possible avenue of proclaiming that Good News should be utilized. Let us make use of the various aspects of worship that this season offers and especially the Marian month that we are beginning today to become vehicles for God's grace and transforming work in the world, and among our people.

May our Blessed Mother intercede for each one of us!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay



First Prayer

O Mary,
You shine continuously on our journey
as a sign of salvation and hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who, at the foot of the cross,
were united with Jesus' suffering,
and persevered in your faith.

“Protectress of the Roman people,”
you know our needs,
and we know that you will provide,
so that, as at Cana in Galilee,
joy and celebration may return
after this time of trial.
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform ourselves to the will of the Father
and to do what Jesus tells us.
For he took upon himself our suffering,
and burdened himself with our sorrows
to bring us, through the cross,
to the joy of the Resurrection.
Amen.

We fly to your protection,
O Holy Mother of God;
Do not despise our petitions
in our necessities,
but deliver us always
from every danger,
O Glorious and Blessed Virgin.

Second Prayer

“We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God.”

In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our Mother, and seek refuge under your protection.

Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.

Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana, so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.

Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency, and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health.

Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone.

Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus.

Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life and may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity.

Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

Beloved Mother, help us realize that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer.

Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course.

To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary. Amen.