

Ref. No. Priest| 27|2014

Dated 30 July 2014

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

On 4 August, we celebrate the feast of Saint John-Mary Vianney, the patron of all the Priests and more especially of the Diocesan Priests. On this day, I am sure you will all gather together to celebrate your priestly ministry in an attitude of prayer and reflection. When we read the life of this humble saint, we get abundant material for our Priestly spirituality. I would like to highlight some of these important aspects for our reflection.

i. Instructing Souls is the Sacred Duty of a Priest

Saint John-Mary Vianney was very conscious of his duty to instruct the souls of his parish. For him, there was no doubt that the ministry of preaching was to be considered first among his priestly duties. Cardinal Claudio Hummes, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy in 2009 during the Jubilee Year of Priests said that instructing souls was at the heart of Saint John-Mary Vianney's pastoral charity. He said: "The people of Ars were awestruck to see the dedication that their new parish priest had for the ministry of the Word by teaching his parishioners at length. He taught the children their catechism, and even when he was able to share the task with his newly-appointed curate, he continued to give his daily 'eleven o'clock' lesson at the school he had founded, '*La Providence*', where the parents could also attend. We are reminded not only of his sermons, but also of his visits to families, all the meetings that he had with various people, the spiritual advice that he would give in confession : every occasion was a real opportunity to speak about his favourite subject: the Love of God.... The Curé of Ars was so conscious of the urgent necessity of preaching that he volunteered to participate in parish missions in the neighbouring villages."

The teaching of souls was all that more urgent in the time of the Curé of Ars as a result of the French Revolution which had profoundly de-Christianised society. The worship of the goddess Reason had soon replaced the worship of the one true God. From this point of view, we are confronted with the same challenges as the Curé of Ars. This very point was explained by Pope Benedict XVI in his general audience given at Castel Gandolfo on the 5 August of this year: "If in his time the 'dictatorship of rationalism' existed, in the current epoch a sort of 'dictatorship of relativism' is evident in many contexts. Both seem inadequate responses to the human being's justifiable request to use his reason as a distinctive and constitutive element of his own identity. .. Today however, as in that time, man, 'a beggar for meaning and fulfilment,' is constantly in quest of exhaustive answers to the basic questions that he never ceases to ask himself." According to Benedict XVI, it is in response to this quest for Truth that it is incumbent upon the priest to be 'an educator of Faith.' Saint John Vianney tirelessly dedicated himself to this very task.

"Because, as is recorded, he was always ready to care for the needs of souls," remarks St John XXIII in his encyclical *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*. He continues: "St. John Mary Vianney, good shepherd that he was, was also outstanding in offering his sheep an abundant supply of the food of Christian truth. Throughout his life, he preached and taught Catechism. The Council of Trent pronounced this to be a

Parish Priest's first and greatest duty and everyone knows what immense and constant labour John Vianney expended in order to be equal to carrying out this task. For he began his course of studies when he was already along in years, and he had great difficulty with it; and his first sermons to the people kept him up for whole nights on end. How much the ministers of the word of God can find here to imitate! ... Would that all pastors of souls would exert as much effort as the Curé of Ars did to overcome difficulties and obstacles in learning, to strengthen memory through practice, and especially to draw knowledge from the Cross of Our Lord, which is the greatest of all books. This is why his Bishop made this reply to some of his critics: "I do not know whether he is learned; but a heavenly light shines in him.""

Pius XII was perfectly right in not hesitating to offer this country Curé as a model for the preachers of the Holy City. He wrote: "The holy Curé of Ars had none of the natural gifts of a speaker that stand out in men like P. Segneri or B. Bossuet. But the clear, lofty, living thoughts of his mind were reflected in the sound of his voice and shone forth from his glance, and they came out in the form of ideas and images that were so apt and so well fitted to the thoughts and feelings of his listeners and so full of wit and charm that even St Francis de Sales would have been struck with admiration. This is the kind of speaker who wins the souls of the faithful. A man who is filled with Christ will not find it hard to discover ways and means of bringing others to Christ." These words give a wonderful picture of the Curé of Ars as a catechism teacher and as a preacher. And when, towards the end of his life on earth, his voice was too weak to carry to his listeners, the sparkle and gleam of his eyes, his tears, his sighs of divine love, the bitter sorrow he evidenced when the mere concept of sin came to his mind, were enough to convert to a better way of life the faithful who surrounded his pulpit. How could anyone help being moved deeply with a life so completely dedicated to Christ shining so clearly there before him?"

In his conference at the 'Priestly Days' event, which marked the centenary of the Saint's death, Bishop Alfred Ancel (Auxiliary Bishop of Lyons) pointed out four main characteristics of Saint John-Mary Vianney's preaching:

- His attitude when preaching was wholly ministerial;
- He always told the whole truth;
- As demanding as he was, he was not harsh;
- His preaching was the echo of his spiritual life.

ii. A Priest is a Minister of the Word of God

Regarding his attitude when preaching, Bishop Ancel insists on the constant concern of the Curé of Ars: "*Fidelity in passing on the word of God.*" The Curé of Ars had a very lofty idea of preaching. Conscious of the fact that he bore witness of God and that he spoke in His name, as a minister of Jesus Christ the High Priest; our Saint spoke with a force that seemed to come from God Himself. Fr Bernard Nodet, a biographer of the Saint, points out that "he, who hardly had the strength to speak, seemed to have a thunderous strength when it came to speaking of the things of God." In the first years of his priesthood, the Saint prepared his sermons through stubborn work; he found an aid in various collections of sermons and sought inspiration from copied sermons, which he adapted to the needs of his parishioners. As the number of pilgrims increased, the Curé saw that the time at his disposal to prepare his sermons was significantly reduced; soon he was forced to speak "without any preparation apart from his sustaining and persevering attention to God." The saintly Curé entrusted himself to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, speaking freely and with great ease. He demanded that his parishioners should also display a holy and pious interest: "Our Lord, who is Truth Himself, does not consider His Word less than His Body. I do not know if it is worse to be distracted during Mass or during the sermon: frankly, I do not see any difference. During Mass, we allow the merits of the Passion and death of Our Lord to slip away; whereas during the sermon, we let slip away His Word, which He Himself is."

iii. A Priest is the Preacher of the whole Truth

The preaching of the Curé of Ars was sharp like the sword of the word of God in the sense that it was out of the question for our Saint to diminish in some way, out of human respect or mere subjectivism, the great truths revealed in Scripture or the sane doctrine taught by the Church. Bishop Ancel explains that “the Curé of Ars never hesitated to tell the whole Truth and to dispel errors even if, in doing so, he somewhat upset his listeners.” Saint John-Mary Vianney was rather fond of saying that “the sun does not refuse to hide itself, for fear of upsetting the birds of the night!”

iv. A Priest Demands from his Flock without being Harsh

If the Curé of Ars never hesitated to preach loud and strong those truths that some find upsetting: such as salvation, the Last Things, mortal sin, the necessity to do penance and the conversion of souls; he never showed himself to be overly harsh or nasty to his parishioners. He avoided hurting people. “I have never got angry with my parishioners,” said the Saint. “I don’t even think that I have ever criticised them.” This goodness of the Curé and this care for souls on the part of one who was ‘meek and humble of heart’ like our Lord, made his preaching even more efficacious. The secret to the extraordinary impact of his humble preaching consists in the ardent charity that inspired his words. Saint John-Mary Vianney would often end his sermon with these words: “To be loved by God, to be united to God; to live in the presence of God, to live for God: O what a beautiful life and beautiful death!”

v. A Priest is a Witness to Truth by his Life

The Curé of Ars certainly did not resemble those who do not ‘practice what they preach’. That which he preached found its root in his inner spiritual life and was the echo of the daily reality of his own Christian living. Saint Jean-Marie Vianney offers us a coherent example precisely because he lived that which he preached; and because the Love of God was the overabundant source of his words, which burned with desire to convert souls. When he was still a young curate in the Parish of Ecully, they would flock to the church to listen to him when it was his turn to preach. In that time, Saint John-Mary Vianney was far from being an experienced preacher but the people were not mistaken: “Through him, it was God whom we heard.”

It was one-hundred and fifty five years ago that Saint Vianney commended his soul to God, and yet the resounding echo of his sermons and teaching have been handed down to us, continuing to lead many souls to conversion, particularly the souls of Priests. On this auspicious day, let us pray to God that He may give us holy Priests, faithful in their teaching of souls and who through their ardent words show themselves capable of enkindling the burning flame of God’s love in the hearts of the faithful.

NEWS FROM UNITED STATES

My mission appeal in the United States is coming to an end. I have just one more mission appeal left at St. Mary’s Church, Morten Grows, Chicago. These days I was able to meet some of the Syro-Malabar communities in Chicago and to celebrate masses for them. I celebrated the feast of St Alphonsa by presiding over a Eucharist on 27 July at St Thomas Cathedral Church in Chicago. The Parish has more than 1500 families. Here most of the people are aware of our mission Diocese and some are already helping us. They were very eager to know something more about our mission and I was happy to share with them the different ministries that we are undertaking in our Diocese. We thank Rev. Fr Joy Alappatt, the recently announced Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, the Parish Priest and all the parishioners for their full support and cooperation. There were also some friends who arranged fund raising meetings in their families by inviting their friends.

I will be reaching the Diocese on 7 August 2014 morning. I want thank in advance Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, our VG and all the Fathers for their prayerful support that they extended to me during the last two months. You have been very kind and understanding towards me. Thank you very much dear Fathers!

SYRO-MALABAR DIOCESE OF CHICAGO GETS NEW AUXILIARY BISHOP

The Holy Father Pope Francis has appointed Rev. Fr Joy Alappatt, Parish Priest of Cathedral Parish as the Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago. This happy news was made public on 24 July 2014. We congratulate the newly appointed Bishop and thank God for His constant benevolence towards our Church. The Episcopal Ordination will be held in the last week of September.

NEWS FROM THE DIOCESE

THE YEAR OF THE FAMILY RETREAT

As planned earlier, a three-day Retreat cum Bible Convention was organized at Aaseer Auditorium, Kalluvilai on 18, 19 and 20 July. It was jointly organized by Vanthuparungal Prayer Group and *Kudumba Aandu Panikkuzhu* (family year working committee). The main focus of the programme was on how to foster love and other Christian values in families through prayer. Rev. Fr Antony Payappilly and his team from Divine Retreat Centre, Coimbatore animated it. I was told that many of our people attended the programme and benefited from it. I am grateful to Rev. Fr Joseph Nedumpuram, Rev. Fr Antony Chirakal VC, *Vanthuparungal* Prayer Group and *Kudumba Aandu Panikkuzhu* for organizing this Retreat cum Bible Convention. I also thank all the Fathers for cooperating with them in making it a prayer experience for many of our people.

IRAIVAAKINAR- ONE-ACT PLAY ON FAMILY

Under the able guidance of Rev. Fr Joseph Nedumpuram, Director of the Year of the Family Working Committee a one-act play is prepared. It was first staged at St. Thomas Church, Pathukani during the annual feast of its patron saint. The name of the play is *Iraivaakinar* (the prophet). It is directed by Rev. Fr. Nedumpuram and coordinated by Mr. Selvam from Manjalumoodu Parish. All the actors are from the Manchalumoodu Parish. It is an inspiring programme for promoting family values especially on the occasion of Year of the Family in our Diocese. I am grateful to everyone who chipped in their share in making it a success. The play will be staged at St Alphonsa Church, Nagarcoil on 2 August and at St Joseph Church, Karode on 15 August. I earnestly recommend that this programme be staged in all our Parishes and Institutions in the Diocese for promoting family values. The duration of the play is only 40 minutes.

Another initiative that we are implementing during the Year of the Family is publication of pamphlets on family. The second pamphlet is already ready. Its main focus is on the responsibility of parents towards their school-going children. The pamphlets are available with Rev. Fr Joseph Nedumpuram.

YOUTH PRISON MINISTRY

The Youth Department headed by Rev Fr Felix sdb and Rev. Fr Johns lal visited the Youth Prison at Nangunari. It is a new initiative of the Diocese meant to extend its help and support to the unfortunate youth in the prison. Over 90 youngsters aged between 18 and 22 are kept in the prison for various crimes that they committed. The prison authorities have given us permission to meet the youth once a month. The Youth Department plans to give regular counselling and animation programmes for these youngsters. We congratulate and thank Rev. Fr Felix sdb and Rev. Fr Johns lal for taking this initiative.

YOUTH PILGRIMAGE TO ALPHONSA

The Diocesan level youth *nadaipayanam* to St Alphonsa Church, Nagarcoil will be held on 2 August 2014. The Youth Department under the guidance of Rev. Fr Felix is preparing very seriously for this event. According to CCC and our Holy Father, pilgrimage is prayer. One discovers God as one walks along in prayer and reflect on the virtues of great saints. The starting points of our pilgrimage are Bishop's House, Thuckalay and Ammandivillai, Kolachal. I request as many Fathers as possible to take part in the pilgrimage and give witness value to our youngsters.

VIANNEY DAY

As our custom, the Annual Vianney Day will be celebrated in the Diocese on 4 August in our Minor Seminary at Mukkoottukal. Rev. Fr Tom Kunnumpuram and the community will organize the programme. I invite all the Fathers to take part in the programme without fail.

Date: 4 August 2014

Venue: Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal

Programme

09.45 am	-	Arrival
10.00 am	-	Prayer Service
10.45 am	-	Coffee Break
11.00 am	-	Out-door Games Matches
12.00 pm	-	Wash/Bath
12.30 pm	-	Lunch
02.00 pm	-	Cultural programme
03.00 pm	-	Tea
		Departure

GRATITUDE DAY - JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

We are keeping 15 August 2014 as GRATITUDE DAY during which we are also celebrating the Silver and Golden Jubilees of Fathers and Sisters working in our Diocese. This is also an occasion to experience the oneness of our Diocese and to meet everyone together. Last year it was held at Padanthalumoodu and this year it will be organized at Soosaipuram. I do hope that by now all of you have received the formal invitation cards that mention the programme. This will be also a golden opportunity to visit our new College Campus. I request every one of you to be present at Soosaipuram on 15 August.

FEAST OF ST ALPHONSA

As we all know, St Alphonsa Church, Nagarcoil celebrates its silver jubilee this year. The annual feast day celebrations have already begun and will be concluded on 3 August with a solemn Eucharistic celebration. I know many of you Fathers are involved in the celebrations. Please arrange pilgrimages from your respective Centres to the St Alphonsa Shrine. I wish every one of you a Happy Feast of St Alphonsa. I also remember and thank Rev. Fr Thomas Pawathuparambil and the Committee Members at Nagarcoil for their hard work. May St Alphonsa intercede for each one of us with good health of mind and body!

ST ALPHONSA COLLEGE

Activities in our new College are going on smoothly under the stewardship of Rev. Fr Tom Kunnumpuram, the Principal. We have a well-qualified, experienced and committed group of staff. 155 students have enrolled in the different courses that we are offering this year. Happy to note that of these, 50 students are from our own Diocese. I want thank all the Fathers for recommending students to our College. The classes are going on these days in a temporary building and we need to make the permanent building as quickly as possible. As the College is still in its initial stages, a number of formalities are still to be completed. Let us keep our College and its works in our prayers and get ourselves involved in its activities as much as possible.

R.I.P

Mrs. Eliamma Phillipose, the mother of Fr Peter Kizhakkeyil, passed away on 12 July. She fell ill suddenly and was rushed to Chethipuzha hospital. A few hours later she left for her eternal reward. Let us be close to Rev. Fr Peter and his family during these days of bereavement and pray for the departed soul. The funeral was held on July 14 at his parish church, Aruvikuzhi. Many Fathers, Sisters and some Parishioners from Manjalumoodu Parish attended the funeral. Let me offer my heart-felt condolences to Rev. Fr. Peter.

Mr. Ephraim, father of Sr. Annet FCC (Switzerland) & Sr. Joseena FCC (Chenamkode) passed away on June 29, 2014, he was 86. The funeral was held on July 2, 2014.

Mrs Lilly Kutty Joseph, the mother of Sr. Joseena FCC passed away on July 7 at the age of 75. The funeral was held on July 10 at their parish church, Thekkekara.

Lets keep the above-mentioned sisters and their families in our prayers.

INFORMATION

- A team of Fathers and Sisters headed by Rev. Fr Saji Elambaserry db animated the catechism teachers and students of Neyattinkara Diocese on 28 July 2014
- The Youth Department conducted workshops on leadership and effective communication skills to the students of John Paul II College of Teacher Education, Mulakumood and Malangara B. Ed College.
- A meeting of all the Tamil medium Headmasters was held on 25 July to assess the school situation. Rev. Fr John Lal, the Correspondent of Tamil Medium Schools, headed the meeting.
- The Home Mission at Jayamatha Parish, Nithravailai is over. The final conclusion together with the convention will be on 10 August.
- The Pastoral Visit of St Thomas Church, Palukal will be on 10 August 2014
- The KKSSS is planning to begin a tuition centre for coaching the weaker children of the neighbourhood.
- Syro-Malabar Bishops' Synod will be held from 18 August to 30 August 2014 at St Thomas Mount, Kakkanad
- Since we will be meeting twice in the Month of August (4 August and 15 August) we shall cancel the Forane level Priests' Conference which is scheduled for 12 August 2014.
- The blessing of the Foundation Stone for a new Church at Mezhacode will be held on 17 August 2014.
- The Blessing and Inauguration of newly built library in the Minor Seminary will be held on 17 August 2014.
- Rev. Fr Josy Puthenpurakal is sent to Rottenburg-Stuttgart Diocese, Germany to carry out the pastoral ministry. He left for Germany on 7 July. At present he is attending a language course. In the

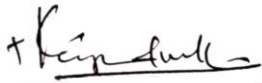
meantime, he is also assigned to a Parish as the Associate Pastor. His contact detail: josyputhen1982@gmail.com Phone: 004915210289993.

- Inter department Meeting will be held on 3 August 2014 at 2.30 pm in the Bishop's House.
- Renovation work at Thettiyode Presbytery is in progress.

Conclusion

The month of August is dear to all of us. Besides the feast of our Patron Saint John-Mary Vianney, we also mark the twin events – Assumption of our Blessed Mother into Heaven and the Independence of our Nation. Both these events celebrate freedom. While Virgin Mary experienced freedom from her earthly sojourn to enjoy the beatific vision with her son, our country won freedom from the British in order to decide her destiny by her own citizens. Freedom is such that it could be easily misused. We need to enjoy freedom with great care. True freedom consists in being able to choose by ourselves, under no compulsion from any external authority, to do what we know is the right thing to do. May the Virgin Assumed into Heaven intercede with her Son to give us a taste of that true freedom which He alone can give!

Yours in Christ,



+ George Rajendran sdb
Bishop of Thuckalay