

Ref. No. Priests/GR/35/2014

27 November 2014

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

Affectionate greetings from Rome!

I reached here on 11th November to take part in the canonisation of Bl. Chavara and Bl. Euphrasia and also to meet our fathers and brothers who are doing higher studies at Rome.

CANONISATION OF BL. CHAVARA AND BL. EUPHRASIA

It was a proud moment for the Indian Church and especially for all of us in the Syro-Malabar Church when two of our members were raised to the glory of the altar as Saints of the Catholic Church on 23 November. I could personally be present and be a witness to such a great historic event for the Church in India, more especially to our Syro-Malabar church.

I am sure most of you had watched the entire program of the canonisation live on TV and also had special prayers and commemoration on that day. St. Peter's Square wore a festive look with thousands of people from all over the world who had come to witness the event. The Church in India was well represented by central and state Government representatives, Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Religious and the Faithful.

Besides our two saints from India, our beloved Pope Francis canonised also four Italians on that day. They were St. Giovanni Antonio Farina, and three Franciscans, St. Ludovico da Casoria, St. Nicola da Longobardi, and St. Amato Ronconi. About the newly declared saints the Pope said, "They responded with extraordinary creativity to the commandment of love of God and neighbour."

Our response to our own priestly calling is also the same. It is to fulfil this command of Christ with extraordinary creativity. We have responded because we love God and love our neighbour. *One who has love is necessarily creative!* We are priests with love; we are leaders with creativity and initiatives.

In this circular I would like to share some reflections on our priestly leadership.

PRIESTLY LEADERSHIP – LEADERSHIP WITH A DIFFERENCE

Whether we desire or not the very fact of becoming a Catholic priest demands of us leadership. It is a leadership that requires of us to build up, sustain, and contribute to the growth of Christian communities. Primarily these demands arise from our own membership of the Kingdom of God to

which everyone is invited. This reality in fact broadens the scope of our membership, our calling to the priesthood and leadership.

(i) One among the Disciples – Carrying the Cross

The fact of Jesus humbling himself (Phil 2:8) to become one among us (Jn 1:14) is both an example and the sure way of becoming a leader in a Christian community. This is the servant-leadership prophesied by Isaiah (Is 42:1-4) and modelled by Jesus. In this model Jesus becomes a servant even to the extent of washing the feet of others (Jn 13:1-17), and even if they called him ‘master,’ he calls them friends (Jn 15:15).

We share the priesthood of Christ. Sharing the priesthood of Christ necessitates imitation of Christ. The Christian community and others may consider us priests, as masters and leaders with power. In fact in our present context in our diocese we are looked upon as persons invested with power.

So it was with Christ. Christ performed miracles, healed, chased away demons, and taught with authority. He was recognized as the King (Jn 12:13). Yet, his way of restoring the Kingdom of Israel was by the cross, letting himself be captured by power-mongering Jewish priests, scribes and Pharisees. To be a disciple of Christ is to take up one’s cross and follow him (Mt 10:38; Lk 9:23) – he who was the suffering servant of Yahweh.

We priests are at first disciples before we are Apostles or Priests. As Disciples of Christ and his imitators we take up our daily cross and follow him. Our crosses might be our loneliness, our unfulfilled desires and wants, problems that arise from our apostolate, our relationships, and our personal problems and so on. But we can be comforted because the one who accompanies is Christ, who himself experienced hunger, denial, betrayal, rejection, suffering, crucifixion, and death.

(ii) Journeying together – Personal accompaniment

Our journey of course is not just with Christ alone but along with our fellow Christians – our brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus we priests can have the attitude of St. Augustine who said of himself: “For you I am a Bishop; but with you I am a Christian.”

Accompaniment of a Christian community would mean more than mere shepherding. It is to remember that we are His sheep before we are shepherds, His disciples before we are teachers (Lk 6:40), His servants before we are kings and princes or the Royal Priesthood! It is true that we are a committed group set apart, but only after obtaining the basic membership of the chosen race! (1Pet 2:9).

In the words of St. Josemaria Escrivá, “a priest doesn’t go to Heaven alone: he always goes in company with many more souls.” We are friends and neighbour who care for those who have been entrusted to us. We care for them primarily by enriching them with our lived-out spirituality. We bring them power and blessings of God through the sacramental signs and celebration, through our prayers for them, and in and through our pastoral charity.

'Charity,' here, we should note, is pastoral. Definitely it is not a charity born of condescension. It is a charity born by the experience of the sheep who himself is cared for and loved by the One Who called him. In our Christian parlance, only the true and good sheep can become a caring shepherd.

Having said these, then I wish to emphasise, that our priestly leadership is one of accompaniment. While we ourselves are being led by the Lord who is our Shepherd, we in turn learn to become worthy shepherds.

Without robbing the primary sense and truth of the words of the Psalm 23 can we make ourselves worthy enough for the words to be applied to us priests also? Can the people tell about us: This priest is my shepherd... there is nothing I shall want... he restores my soul... he heals me... and so on?

May I borrow the words of the philosopher Albert Camus who says, "Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend." This way of being friend will demand of us to be *with* those who are entrusted to us, our parishioners, the youth, and persons of particularised categories. How much of time do I spend *for* them? How much of time do I spend *with* them?

Soon we will celebrate the Solemn Feast of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Emmanuel, the 'God-with-us,' is also the one 'dwelt among us.' Jesus our Chief Shepherd has shown us the way of personal accompaniment and he humbled himself to be born among us. My wish and prayer for us priests as we prepare for Christmas is that we learn to be shepherds by imitating Christ, gentle and humble of heart.

Other News from Rome

Having come to Italy for the Canonisations, I also made use of the opportunity to make a personal visit to the colleges and universities where our fathers and brothers study. They are doing fine and send you their love and regards. On 22nd November the Thuckalay community of Rome had a special gathering; the Major Archbishop too was present for the lunch. It was a precious moment for all us as we gathered to remember and cherish our life and mission in our diocese and also to share some news and views regarding the diocese. I also visited Rev. Fr. Josy Puthenpurakal, who works in Rottenburg-Stuttgart diocese, Germany. He is keeping fine and engages himself in learning the language and carries out pastoral ministry in two parishes.

I will be reaching back to the diocese on 2nd morning after visiting a few benefactors.

Year of Consecrated Life / Year of the Religious 2015

Pope Francis has proclaimed 2015 a Year of Consecrated Life, starting on 30 November, 2014, and ending on 2 February, 2016, the World Day of Consecrated life. As Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, the Prefect for the Congregation for Consecrated Life says, "It's a great time to grow and deepen the faith. Part of this is driven by the hope and the certainty that consecrated life will never disappear from the Church." The goals of celebrating this Year of the Religious will include, reflecting on the

unique role religious men and women have in the Church, everything from their charisms to their challenges.

Our Deacons

We are happy that God has blessed our diocese with 7 more deacons this year. We welcome them all back to the diocese. They reached back our diocese on 10th November and are now in their respective parishes assigned to them from 11th November. We wish them a fruitful ministry in the parishes. Their ordinations will be held next year (2015) after Easter.

The deacons are assigned to the following parishes for their ministry from November 2014 to March 2015

Sl. No	NAME	PARISH
1	Dn. Kanakalil James (Vinod)	Malaicode
2	Dn. Kurias Joseph (Printo)	Manjalumoodu
3	Dn. Poovathumoottil Thomas (Ebin)	KKSSS
4	Dn. Puthenpurackal Abraham (Shoji)	Vayalinkarai
5	Dn. Valliamthadathil George (Sumesh)	Nithravilai
6	Dn. Vayalil Joseph (Jose)	Anamukham
7	Dn. Attiyil Thomas (Ajeesh)	Mukoottukal

During their diaconate ministry, on Fridays and Saturdays special programs are arranged for the Deacons at Sangamam. They have classes on various topics with immediate relevance to our mission in the Thuckalay diocese. The programme for the deacons is coordinated by very Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam, our VG.

The Date of Ordinations of Deacons in the Diocese of Thuckalay - 2015

Name	Parish	Place	Date of Ordination	Diocese
Dn.Abraham Puthenpurackal (Shoji)	Lourdes Matha Church	Pacha-Chekkidikadu	6-4- 2015 (9.15 AM)	Archdiocese of Changanacherry
Dn.Thomas Attiyil (Ajeesh)	Lourdes Matha Church	Kulipura	6-4-2015 (2.00 PM)	Archdiocese of Changanacherry
Dn.Jose Vayalil	St.George Church	Pooyamkutty	7-4-2015 (9.15 AM)	Diocese of Kothamangalam
Dn.Joseph Kurias (Printo)	St.Mary's Church	Mankulam	8-4-2015 (9.15 AM)	Diocese of Idukki
Dn.James Kanakalil (Vinod)	St.Thomas' Church	Mavady	9-4-2015 (9.15 AM)	Diocese of Idukki
Dn.Thomas Poovathummotttil (Abin)	St.Mary's Church	Manjapety	9-4-2015 (2.00 PM)	Diocese of Idukki
Dn. George Valliyamthadathil (Sumesh)	St.Mary's Church	Kanayankavayal	10-4-2015 (9.15 AM)	Diocese of Kanjirapally

Spiritual Fathers in our Seminary

Rev. Fr. Joseph Aruviyil CMI has gone back to his province, Kottayam, due to ill-health and other personal reasons. We thank him for the years of dedicated service to the diocese in the capacities as Parish Priest and Spiritual Father of the seminary. Now Rev. Fr. Thomas Urumbickal from Changancherry diocese has joined the Seminary as Spiritual Father. We welcome Fr. Urumbickal to the diocese.

Our New Website

I am glad to see that many of our fathers and friends are visiting the newly designed website of our diocese. You can get to know all the recent happenings and news of the diocese from our website.

Some things are yet to be updated. A team of staff from the bishop's house including Fr. K.J. Antony SDB, Bro. Abilash, and Sr. Philo Kurian OMMI are working hard to update the website.

Our website: www.thuckalaydiocese.org; Our Facebook page: www.facebook/thuckalaydiocese

Higher Studies

Fr. Dency has successfully completed his first semester MBA examinations. We offer him our Hearty congratulations. Fr. Toji is completing his 3rd semester of MA studies. We pray for him and wish him all the best.

18th Diocesan day celebrations

We the members of the Thuckalay Diocese as a single family gathered on 8th November at the Kanyakumari Social Service Society, Kalluvilai for the 18th Diocesan Day Programme. This year the Sevai Chemmal (Dedicated Missionary) awards were presented for the first time. The recipients were Rev. Fr. Chacko Basil CMI, Rev. Sr. Mercy ASMI, Rev. Sr. Anila FCC, Rev. Sr. Alphonse SABS, Rev. Sr. Sophy Rose SH, Rev. Sr. Mercita SH, Rev. Sr. Maria SDS, Rev. Sr. Joshia, Mr. Mariadoss, Mr. Soundar Raj, Mr. Devaraj, Mr. Sukumaran, Mr. Viswanathan, Mr. Paul Padmanabhan, Mr. Lukose Angel, and Mrs. Sasikala Vijayakumari. Those who had contributed significantly towards education were also felicitated. They were Mr. Aiyadurai, and Mr. Samraj. For his literary excellence Mr. John Kumaritthozhan was felicitated.

Other pieces of News

1. The Letter of the Major Archbishop regarding Marriage courses in Arabia is attached. Kindly follow the directive by our Major Archbishop.
2. A letter instructing to include the commemoration of St. Joseph in the invariable part of the ***Onitha d'Raze*** has already been sent to you. Kindly replace the verses in the proper place. Stickers with the changed words were included in the envelope to facilitate this addition.
3. Fr. John Thekkeyil celebrated his 80th Birthday on 20th November in Sangamam. We remember him with love and continue to pray for him.

4. Fr. Zacharias Kaithara was remembered on his 10th death anniversary on 15th November. Around 40 persons from our diocese participated in the memorial service held at Pulinkunnu.
5. It is one year since Fr. Mathew Plathottam left us for eternal reward. The fathers, sisters and faithful gathered at Palukal parish on 22nd November and celebrated the memorial Qurbana. We gratefully remember his sacrificing work and commitment to Thuckalay diocese.
6. Rosary Rally was held on 23 October. We congratulate and thank all those who organized the rally, especially the Marian Senai, and the fathers who sent their faithful to participate in it and all those who participated.
7. Chain Rosary was held on 19th October. We thank the fathers who arranged for it to be meaningfully conducted.
8. The Foundation Stone of the new building of our St. Alphonsa College was blessed on 9th November. The construction work for the new college building has started.
9. Youth Camp: 30 young leaders from our diocese gathered at Sangamam under the animating leadership of Fr. Felix Arulnathan SDB from 21st Nov to 23rd Nov. Fr. Mariadass SDB and Fr. Vijayan SDB were the resource persons.

Forthcoming Events

1. The Year of the Religious or Year of the Consecrated Life will be inaugurated in our diocese on 1st February at 2.00 pm at Padanthalamoodu.
2. Annual Bible Convention will be held from 5th to 7th December at Padanthalumoodu. Kindly prepare the faithful and make arrangements to bring them to the convention.
3. The first death anniversary of Fr. Thomas Thekkeyil occurs on 14th December. We fondly remember Fr. Thomas and recall his dedication and love especially in his building up of the Kanyakumari Social Service Society as its Finance Officer and as Director. A memorial service will be held on 13th December at KKSSS, Kalluvilai, and another service on 16th December at Mankulam. Some of our fathers including Fr. VG will go to Mankulam to participate in the death anniversary memorial service.
4. Pre-Christmas Gathering for the Presbyterium will be held on **18th** December at Sangamam. Please note that the date of the gathering is 18th and not 16th as planned before. This change is in view of the memorial service for Fr. Thomas Thekkeyil to be held on 16th Dec. at Mankulam.
5. From 1st Dec. we begin the 25 days fast in order to prepare for Christmas. My prayerful wishes to you and the faithful for the holy season.
6. The major seminarians will be in the diocese from 19th Dec.
7. Conclusion of the Family year: January 11th 2015 Sunday will be the concluding day of the Family Year. On 28th December the Sunday after Christmas, all Parishes must celebrate the feast of the Holy Family, as the Day of Kudumba Sangamam. Animation notes with regard to the celebration and about the conclusion of the Family year will be forwarded to you later.

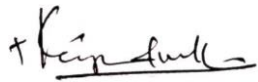
Kindly also note that from the year 2015 we will not have any Forane Level Priest Conference.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

We will be celebrating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8th December. Our Blessed Mother accompanied Jesus not just as a silent spectator, nor merely as a concerned mother. She was the first disciple who awaited the final revelation in Jesus Christ; she was the first recipient of the Good News; she was the first person to experience within herself the first fruits of redemption taking shape. She was prepared by God Himself to be born as the Immaculate Vessel of Redemption. Today she is a loving mother to us all who are priests. We seek her daily guidance in all that we do. She is our mother who is conceived without original sin. She is our example and guide to live our priestly life of chastity. Let us pour forth our heart to her, all our needs, and anxieties, our joys and sorrows as we journey along carrying our crosses following Jesus. She is there ever ready to accompany us her sons.

Wish you all a very Happy Feast of the Immaculate Conception and a time of Holy Preparation for the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Rajendran SDB". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+George Rajendran SDB

Bishop of Thuckalay