



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

Ref. No. Priests/GR/97/2019

31 July 2019

Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

Dear and Reverent Fathers,

On 4 August, we mark the feast of St John Mary Vianney, the patron of all parish priests and diocesan priests. It is a special day for each one of us. As we celebrate this day, let us reflect briefly upon his life and teachings. Vianney accepted his obligation to holiness at an early age, and it took complete possession of him. Every word he uttered was spoken out of the world of religiousness. He brought to a conclusion an achievement which it would be hard for anyone to imitate. From this man there emanated an influence which cannot be overlooked, and the results of which cannot be contested.

Vianney's mother was a woman of great piety, and she led him into the way of religion at an early age. "I owe a debt to my mother," he said, and added, "virtues go easily from mothers into the hearts of their children, who willingly do what they see being done." He was a good-natured boy, with blue eyes and brown hair. In spite of his lively disposition, he admitted much later on in life that "when I was young, I did not know evil. I was first acquainted with it in the confessional, from the mouths of sinners."

As all of are well aware, it was only after much toil and trouble that Vianney was admitted to the priesthood. At the age of 20, he was having great difficulty in his studies for the priesthood. Mathias Loras, perhaps the most intelligent of Vianney's fellow seminarians, who was assigned to help him in his lessons, was of a nervous and excitable temperament. One day his patience was exhausted by the sheer incapacity of the big young man, and he boxed his ears before all the others. Vianney was also excitable, but he knelt down before the boy of twelve who had treated him so outrageously and humbly asked his forgiveness. Mathias had a golden heart. Suddenly he felt smitten with grief and, his face bathed in tears, he threw himself into the arms of Vianney who was still on his knees. This incident marked the beginning of an abiding friendship. Mathias Loras subsequently became a missionary in the United States, and eventually Bishop of Dubuque, but never could he forget the action of Vianney and the accent with which he spoke on that occasion.

In his assignment as parish priest of Ars, Vianney achieved something which many priests would like to have done, but which is scarcely granted to any. Not over night, but little by little, the tiny hamlet underwent a change. The people of Ars were unable to remain aloof for long from the grace which radiated from the remarkable personality of their pastor. When a man attacks inveterate disorders and popular vices, he challenges opposition. Vianney was not unprepared. He knew the enemy would raise his head. "If a priest is determined not to lose his soul," he exclaimed, "so soon as any disorder arises in

the parish, he must trample underfoot all human considerations as well as the fear of the contempt and hatred of his people. He must not allow anything to bar his way in the discharge of duty, even were he certain of being murdered on coming down from the pulpit. A pastor who wants to do his duty must keep his sword in hand at all times. Did not St Paul himself write to the faithful of Corinth: 'I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls, although loving you more, I be loved less.'

In his early sermons, Vianney thundered against the prevalent vices of the village of Ars: blasphemies, cursing, profanation of Sundays, dances and gatherings at taverns, immodest songs and conversations. "The tavern," he would say, "is the devil's own shop, the school where hell retails its dogmas, the market where souls are bartered, the place where families are broken up, where health is undermined, where quarrels are started and murders committed."

Vianney would never consider Ars converted until all of the 200 villagers were living up to the ten commandments of God, the six precepts of the Church and the fulfilment of their duties in life. Complete enforcement of the third commandment took him eight long years. "You labour, but what you earn proves the ruin of your soul and your body. If we ask those who work on Sunday, 'What have you been doing?' they might answer: 'I have been selling my soul to the devil and crucifying our Lord... I am doomed to hell...'" When I behold people driving carts on Sunday, it seems to me I see them carting their souls to Hell."

Undoubtedly though, the most heinous crime in the eyes of this saint, the one that made him weep whenever he heard it or spoke against it, was the taking of the most Holy Name of Jesus in vain. He used to say that it was an astounding miracle that people who did this were not struck dead on the spot. But he warned them, "If the sin of blasphemy is rampant in your home, it will surely perish."

It took Vianney ten whole years to renew Ars, but the community changed so noticeably and to such an extent that it was observed even by outsiders. There was no more working on Sundays, the church was filled more and more every year, and drunkenness fell off. In the end the taverns had to close their doors since they had no more customers; and even domestic squabbles abated. Honesty became the principal characteristic. "Ars is no longer Ars," as St John Vianney himself wrote. It had undergone a fundamental change. Under his guidance the little village became a community of pious people, to whom all his labours were directed. He delighted in teaching the children their catechism and he did this daily. After a while the grown-ups came too and he found that those who were children during the Revolution were in complete ignorance of their religious duties. He taught the people love for the rosary and wanted everyone to carry one around at all times. It is truly astounding to reflect upon what Vianney, with a staff of trained assistants, was able to achieve in the village in the space of a few years. What an immense amount of endeavour underlay his work will best be appreciated by anyone who has had to convert only a few drunkards to sanity.

Vianney sanctified himself whilst at work in the field or in the house. The supernatural world was ever present to him, but for all that he was neither a slacker nor a dreamer, his being a healthy and active temperament. "O what a beautiful thing it is to do all things in union with the good God!" he would say. "Courage, my soul, if you work with God, you shall, indeed, do the work, but He will bless it. You shall walk and He will bless your steps. Everything shall be taken account of - the forgoing of a look, of some gratification - all shall be recorded. There are people who make capital out of everything, even the winter. If it is cold they offer their little sufferings to God. Oh! What a beautiful thing it is to offer oneself, each morning, as a victim to God!"

In letters of consolation to a cousin, Frère Chalovet, whom obedience had sent to the Hotel-Dieu of Lyons and who was greatly tempted, Vianney wrote: "My good friend, I write these lines in haste to tell you not to leave, in spite of all the trials that the good God wishes you to endure. Take courage! Heaven is rich enough to reward you. Remember that the evils of this world are the lot of good Christians. You are going through a kind of martyrdom. But what a happiness for you to be a martyr of charity! Do not lose so beautiful a crown. 'Blessed are they that suffer persecution for my sake,' says Jesus Christ, our model. Farewell, my most dear friend. Persevere along the way on which you have so happily entered and we shall see each other again in heaven..."

Often when the Vianney was returning to Ars from missionary expeditions, Mayor Mandy, who was anxious about the safety of his holy pastor, would send his son Antoine to accompany him on his journey home. "Even amid the snows and cold of winter," Antoine afterwards related, "we rarely took the shortest and best road. Vianney had invariably to visit some sick persons. Yet the tramp never seemed really long, for the servant of God well knew how to shorten it by relating most interesting episodes from the lives of the saints. If I happened to make some remark about the sharpness of the cold or the ruggedness of the roads, he was always ready with an answer: 'My friend, the saints have suffered far more; let us offer it all to the good God.' When he ceased from speaking of holy things we began the rosary. Even today I still cherish the memory of those holy conversations."

Vianney had loved Mary from the cradle. As a priest he had exerted all his energy in spreading her glory. To convince themselves of it, the pilgrims had but to look at the small statues of her that adorned the front of every house in the village. In each home there was also a coloured picture of the Mother of God, presented and signed by Vianney. In 1814 he had erected a large statue of Mary Immaculate on the pediment of his church. Eight years earlier, on 1 May 1836, he had dedicated his parish to Mary Conceived Without Sin. The picture which perpetuates this consecration, says Catherine Lassagne, is placed at the entrance to our Lady's Chapel. Shortly afterwards he ordered a heart to be made, in vermeil (colour), which is, even to this day, suspended from the neck of the miraculous Virgin. This heart contains the names of all the parishioners of Ars, written on a white silk ribbon. On the feasts of Our Lady, Communion were numerous, and the church was never empty. On the evenings of those festivals the nave and the side chapels could barely contain the congregation, for no one wished to miss Vianney's homily in honour of Our Blessed Lady. The hearers were enthralled by the enthusiasm with which he spoke of the holiness, the power, and the love of the Mother of God.

The explanation of this mysterious transformation of the village of Ars can only be grasped in the remarkable manner that this simple priest realized that a man must always begin with himself, and that even the rebirth of a community can only be achieved by its renewing itself. We must expect nothing of men which is not already embodied within them. On the basis of this perception Vianney set to work, in the first place, upon himself, so that he could attain the ideal which he demanded of his parishioners in his own person. He took his own religious obligations with the greatest seriousness, and did not care whether the people noticed this or not. And finally the inhabitants of Ars said to one another: "Our priest always does what he says himself; he practises what he preaches. Never have we seen him allow himself any form of relaxation."

The priest of Ars subjected himself to a strict fast. In this way he sought to reduce the requirements of his life to minimum. One meal sufficed him for the whole day. He abstained from alcohol except wine at holy Mass and normally ate only a little black bread and one or two potatoes cooked in water: he

would prepare sufficient of these to last him the whole week, keeping them in an earthenware pan, and often they were covered with a coating of mould. Frequently he fasted for a whole day until, overcome, he would collapse from physical weakness. In view of this mode of life he had no need, of course, of a housekeeper - apart from the fact that his house stood almost empty anyway. Since he considered that his self-mortification was all too inadequate, he had a special penitential garment made, which he wore next to his skin, and which, by reason of the constant friction against his body, was soon stained a reddish brown. For the most part he slept on a bare mattress when he was not sleeping on a bundle of wood down in the cellar.

Vianney's assiduity in the confessional and the hardships entailed thereby would, of themselves, have sufficed to raise him to high sanctity. However, he thirsted for mortifications as others thirst for pleasure, and he never had his fill of penance. He laid on himself the sacrifice never to enjoy the fragrance of a flower, never to taste fruit nor to drink, were it only a few drops of water, during the height of the summer heat. He would not brush away a fly that importuned him. When on his knees he would not rest his elbows on the kneeling bench. He had made a law unto himself never to show any dislike, and to hide all natural repugnance. He mortified the most legitimate curiosity: thus he never expressed so much as a wish to see the railway which passed by Ars at a distance of a few kilometres, and which daily brought him so many visitors. During the whole of his priestly life he never indulged in any light reading, not even that of a newspaper. The Annals of the Propagation of the Faith are the only periodical that he ever perused.

Regarding mortification, he once said, "My friend, the devil is not greatly afraid of the discipline and other instruments of penance. That which beats him is the curtailment of one's food, drink and sleep. There is nothing the devil fears more, consequently, nothing is more pleasing to God. Oh! How often have I experienced it! Whilst I was alone - and I was alone during eight or nine years, and therefore quite free to yield to my attraction - it happened at times that I refrained from food for entire days. On those occasions I obtained, both for myself and for others, whatsoever I asked of Almighty God."

Vianney read much and often the lives of the saints, and became so impressed by their holy lives that he wanted for himself and others to follow their wonderful examples. The ideal of holiness enchanted him. This was the theme which underlay his sermons. "We must practise mortification. For this is the path which all the Saints have followed," he said once from the pulpit. He placed himself in that great tradition which leads the way to holiness through personal sacrifice. "If we are not now saints, it is a great misfortune for us: therefore, we must be so. As long as we have no love in our hearts, we shall never be Saints." The Saint, to him, was not an exceptional man before whom we should marvel, but a possibility which was open to all Catholics. Unmistakably did he declare in his sermons that "to be a Christian and to live in sin is a monstrous contradiction. A Christian must be holy." With his Christian simplicity he had clearly thought much on these things and understood them by divine inspiration, while they are usually denied to the understanding of educated men.

The conversion of the whole parish was too unusual an occurrence for it to remain unknown. From the year 1827, there began the famous stream of pilgrims to Ars. People went to Ars from all parts of France, from Belgium, from England and even from America. The principal motive which led all these crowds of pilgrims to the priest of Ars was purely to make their confessions and to receive spiritual counsel from him. They were driven to his thronged confessional by the longing to meet once and for all the priest who knew all about the reality of the soul. The priest of Ars possessed the ability to see the human soul in its nakedness, freed of its body. This grace is only rarely bestowed on people. He

never put his nose into the spiritual affairs of other people. He was entirely free from inquisitiveness. Like St Francis de Sales, he had the gift of “seeing everything and not looking at anyone.” In confessing to this holy man, who had a fundamental knowledge of sin, people strove after one thing only - to save their souls. This was also his ardent desire, and for the sake of it he suffered all the tortures of his daylong confinement in the confessional. This great saint heard confessions from 13 to 17 hours a day, and could tell a penitent’s sins even when they were withheld. In order to save souls one must be possessed of that holy love of men which consumed the priest of Ars. He would often weep in the confessional and when he was asked why he wept, he would reply: “My friend, I weep because you do not weep.”

“The great miracle of the Curé d’Ars,” someone has said, “was his confessional, besieged day and night.” It might be said with equal truth that his greatest miracle was the conversion of sinners: “I have seen numerous and remarkable ones,” the Abbé Raymond assures us, “and they form the most beautiful chapter of the life of the Curé d’Ars. ‘Oh, my friend,’ he often told me, ‘only at the last judgment will it become known how many souls have here found their salvation.’” “In reality,” Jeanne-Marie Chanay writes, “he made but small account of miraculous cures. ‘The body is so very little,’ he used to repeat. That which truly filled him with joy was the return of souls to God.” How many occasions he had for such joy! M. Prosper des Garets relates: “I asked him one day how many big sinners he had converted in the course of the year. ‘Over seven hundred,’ was his reply.” Hence it is easy to understand the wish expressed by a Curé who made the pilgrimage to Ars: “Those of my parishioners who go to Vianney become models. I wish I could take my whole parish to him.”

One day, under the pretext of sending him on an errand, the Baronne de Belvey dispatched to Vianney a hardened sinner, who only set foot in the church at Christmas and Easter. It would seem that he had not been to confession since his first Communion. “How long is it since you were last at Confession?”, Vianney asked. “Oh, forty years.” “Forty-four,” the saint replied. The man took a pencil and made a hasty calculation on the plastering of the wall. “Yes, it is quite true,” he admitted, overcome with amazement. The sinner was converted and died a good death.

Vianney possessed the gift of being able to understand the soul of a person in an instant, and, without any lengthy explanations, to feel at once what spiritual trouble was afflicting it. He had a clear sighted vision which often enabled him to foretell to a man what would happen to him in the future. This gift of God overpowered the people who visited his confessional, and to whom he granted a word of pardon. The words and advice of the Curé were like darts; they penetrated deeply. He said little, but his little was enough. To a priest who complained about the indifference of people in his parish, Vianney answered: “You have preached, you have prayed, but have you fasted? Have you taken the discipline (a self imposed scourge)? Have you slept on the floor? So long as you have done none of these things, you have no right to complain.” To a mother of a large family, who was expecting another child, he said with fatherly kindness and consideration: “Be comforted, my child. If you only knew the women who will go to Hell because they did not bring into the world the children, they should have given to it.”

Miracles are signs of divine approval, though sanctity may exist without them. Had he wrought not a single miracle, the Vianney would yet call for our admiration. His life was in itself a daily prodigy. In the Process of his canonization, Mgr. Mermod, who was Curé of Gex at the time, relates the following incident: “An incorrigible drunkard of Chaleins, my former parish, was converted by Vianney. During the three years that he lived afterwards that man never drank a drop of wine, and led an exemplary life.

Now a striking thing happened. One day the good man called at the priest's residence; he was quite well, yet he wished to go to confession, giving as his reason that he was going to die. As he persisted in his request, I gave him absolution and Holy Communion. An hour later he was dead.”

On 4 August 1859, Vianney gave up his soul to God. He had been parish priest of Ars for 41 years. In 1925, he was canonized and placed in the index of the Saints. Today over 500,000 people visit every year this simple farming town where they come to see the incorrupt body of one of the greatest saints in the history of the Church. The life of Vianney is the story of a humble and holy man who barely succeeded in becoming a priest, but who converted thousands of sinners. May he inspire each one of us as we carry out our pastoral ministries in our respective Centres!

NEWS AND EVENTS

TNBC Annual Meeting at Coimbatore: Along with Most Rev. Dr Nazarene Soosai, Bishop of Kottar and Most Rev. Dr Jeromdas Varuvel SDB, Bishop of Kuzhithurai, I participated in the TNBC Meeting which was held at Coimbatore from 06 to 09 July 2019. All the Bishops from Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry participated in the meeting. The main topic of discussion was “The Youth and the Influence of Social Media.” There was an animation programme. Later, we had a group discussion and the reports were presented. Seven Pastoral Council members headed by Fr Mijo Puthenpurakal from our Eparchy also participated in the discussions expressing cogently their views.

Orientation Programme for Junior Priests: The Eparchy arranged a two-day orientation programme for all the junior priests at Sangamam on 08 and 09 July 2019. The resource person was Rev. Fr Solomon from the Diocese of Kottar. Rev. Fr Sebastian Manjerikkalam, a pioneer missionary, shared his pastoral experiences with the junior priests. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil coordinated the programme. I congratulate and thank all the junior priests for their active participation. In a special way, I thank Rev. Fr Toji Parambilparambil for making all the arrangements.

Eparchial Priests’ Conference: The Eparchial Priests’ Conference for the month of July was held on 10 July 2019 at Sangamam. Various Departments and Pious Associations presented their reports during the meeting. The highlight of the conference was the visit of Rev. Fr Sebastian Manjerikkalam, a pioneer missionary of the region. He shared his pastoral experiences with all the priests. While thanking all the priests of the Eparchy for their active participation in the conference, I am grateful to Fr Manjerikkalam for journeying all the way from Changanaserry to Thuckalay to be with us.

St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil: The celebration of the feast of St Alphonsa began at St Alphonsa’s Shrine, Nagercoil on 19 July 2019. Very Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Vicar General, hoisted the flag. It was heartening to see thousands of faithful coming to the shrine during the ten days of celebrations in order to pray and to receive the blessings from God. All the priests and the faithful from our Eparchy were present for the various spiritual events of the shrine especially for the Nadai Payanam and the Forane level Holy Qurbana. On 27 July 2019, Most Rev. Neethinadan, Bishop of Chengalpattu, visited the shrine and celebrated holy Qurbana. Over four thousand faithful from different rites took part in it. On 28 July 2019, the actual feast day of St Alphonsa, the faithful, the religious and the priests from all our parishes reached the shrine by 9.30 am. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil led the Novena in honour of the saint. Solemn concelebrated Holy Qurbana followed. After the Holy Qurbana, there was the procession and *Nercha* meals for the faithful. In the evening, another Holy Qurbana was celebrated. Soon the flag was lowered and the celebrations came to a happy conclusion. I gratefully

appreciate the involvement and the hard work of the parish priest, assistant parish priest, Sisters and faithful of St Alphonsa Shrine during the days of celebration.

Pilgrim Walk (Nadai Payanam): The faithful of the Eparchy had a pilgrim walk to Alphonsa shrine Nagercoil on 20 July 2019. People walked from different places like Bishop's House, Sosaipuram, etc. to the shrine reciting the rosary. TCYM organised the programme. The pilgrims reached St Alphonsa Shrine around 11.00 am. After snacks, Rev. Fr Santhosh celebrated holy Qurbana for the pilgrims.

Meeting Religious Superiors and Leaders of Communities: A meeting was held on 27 July 2019 at Sangamam for all the Provincials, Regional Superiors and Local Superiors of Women Religious who serve in our Eparchy. During the first part of the meeting, I took a class for the Sisters on the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Christ Lives* of Pope Francis on young people. After the session, the Sisters were divided into four groups in order to discuss on the youth situation in our Eparchy and their contribution towards youth ministry. All of them actively took part in the discussion and resolved to get themselves involved in the affairs of the youth. In the second part of the meeting, we had an open sharing on the participation of the religious in the pastoral activities of the Eparchy. I am grateful to all the Sisters for their participation and for sharing their views.

RIP: Rev. Fr Gaston Kanjooparambil CMI passed away at Christ Hall Monastery, Thiruvananthapuram on 27 July 2019. He was 95 years old. He is known for his academic pursuits especially in the study of Sanskrit and other Indian languages. He led a simple and ascetic life throughout his life. He was a pioneer missionary in the then Kanyakumari Mission and in the 80's he founded Anjugramam, Maharajapuram and Palkulam missions. He was very much associated with inter-religious dialogue and humanitarian works. He felt at home with all the poor people and was able to visit the families at any time. Along with some priests and the faithful of Anjugramam and Maharajapuram, I attended the funeral services held at Chettipuzha CMI Ashram, Changanaserry on 29 July 2019. I officiated the Holy Qurbana and the final rites. I also delivered a condolence message on behalf of the Eparchy. Thank you, dear Fr Gaston, for your painstaking ministry in the Eparchy. May the Lord give you eternal repose!

RIP: Rev. Fr. Zacharias Kanjooparambil, C.Ss.R, (80) passed away on July 18, 2019 at Vimala Hospital, Kalady. He was diagnosed with Cancer in February 2019. All these months he was receiving treatment from Rajagiri Hospital, Aluva. The funeral ceremony took place at Nithya Sahaya Bhavan in the presence of many priests, religious and faithful. The diocese of Thuckalay is indebted to Fr. Zacharias because during his priestly ministry he served in Marapady parish for three years. He was known for his humour and pastoral zeal. A few representative priests, religious and faithful from our diocese took part in the funeral service and prayed for the departed soul. We express our heart condolence to the C.Ss.R congregation and also the Kanjooparambil family and continue to pray for the departed soul.

INFORMATION

- ❖ **Sengottai Mission Meeting:** Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparambil, Vicar General, visited all the religious houses and institutions of Sengottai mission and held a meeting with all the Fathers and Sisters on 26 July 2019.
- ❖ **Vianney Day Celebration** will be held on 3 August 2019 at our Minor Seminary. All the Fathers will be receiving special invitations from the Rector of the Seminary. It will be a blessed moment

for all of us to gather and to thank God for our priesthood. I extend a hearty welcome to you dear Fathers.

- ❖ **Priests & Religious Sangamam** will be held on 30 August 2019. This year the venue for the Holy Qurbana and celebration will be Sangamam. Kindly take note of the date and join the celebration.
- ❖ **Memorial Holy Qurbana** for the late Rev. Fr Cyriac Koottumeli and late Rev. Sr Sophiamma SH will be held on 15 August 2019 at 4.00 pm in Malaicode parish. I request as many priests and religious as possible to take part in the Holy Qurbana. I request the faithful from Manjalumoodu and Arukani Foranes to take part in the service as both these missionaries worked in these Foranes.
- ❖ **Health Care Commission:** During the TNBC meeting, I was elected Chairman of the Health Commission and Ecclesiastical Advisor to the Catholic Health Association of Tamilnadu (CHAT).
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Sathianesan** will return to the Eparchy from Switzerland on 4 August 2019 after completing the Mission appeal programme.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Prince Maliyil** has enrolled for his M.Ed. studies while continuing with all his pastoral ministries.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Ajin Jose** will join the M.Phil. correspondence course later this month.
- ❖ **Rev. Br George Kutti** will leave for Rome on 14 August to begin his theological studies.

UPCOMING EVENTS

01 August 2019	- School Correspondents meetings
03 August 2019	- Vianney Day Celebration
05 August 2019	- Meeting of Forane Vicars at Bishop's House
6-7 August 2019	- Meeting with Directors of Departments and Pious Associations
12 August 2019	- Blessing of Cumbam Mission
15 August 2019	- Memorial Holy Qurbana for the Departed Missionaries
19-29 August 2019	- Syro-Malabar Synod
30 August 2019	- Priests and Religious Sangamam

CONCLUSION

We are in the month of August. This month offers us with a number of feasts not only for celebration but also for our edification. Besides the feast of St John Mary Vianney, on 15 August we shall celebrate the twin festivals of Assumption of our Blessed Mother Mary and the Independence of our beloved motherland. Assumption is an expression of our deep faith because we believe in the real, physical elevation of the sinless soul and incorrupt body our Mother Mary into heaven. 15 August also commemorates the independence that we obtained from the [United Kingdom](#) after years of struggle. On this day, let us pray for the well being of our country and ask Mother Mary to intercede for us so that we become free from every form of bondage and be with her one day in heaven.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

