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Greetings from the Bishop's House!

The Role of Prayer in the Life of a Priest

The role of prayer in the life of a Catholic priest is very crucial. His vocation is unique. Unlike the priests in pagan religions and even in the Old Testament, he is not a priest in his own right. In the New Testament the only Priest is Jesus Christ. Moreover, Jesus is not only Priest but also King and Prophet; the ministerial priest, however, only participates in these three offices of Christ. The task of the ministerial priesthood is to actualize the royal and prophetic priesthood of all the members of the Church. Priesthood is not a job, nor is it simply a sacred function. While every priest needs - almost daily - some time away from priestly activities in order to relax and replenish his energies, he can never take a vacation from his priesthood just as it is beyond his power to divest himself of his own identity.

St. Paul condenses his priestly vocation into one complex sentence as he explains the grace given to him by God "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the priestly ministry of the Gospel of God so that the offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16). The priesthood of all Christians is to offer their "own bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, their spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). Paul's vocation, on the other hand, and in some way every ministerial priest's, is to actualize this self-offering of the Christian people, their spiritual worship, by gathering them into one body (shepherding), enkindling their faith by the word of the Gospel (prophetic office), and uniting their gift of self to the one perfect sacrifice of Christ (priesthood in the strict sense: sacramental ministry).

From this perspective, it can be said that there is no opposition in the two ideals that a priest should cherish, namely, the "priest who celebrates life" and the "priest who celebrates the sacraments." The ministerial priest recruits and receives people from the world and introduces them to the sacraments, especially to a participation in the Eucharist. Any fruitful celebration of the Eucharist, however, sends us into the world "to love and serve the Lord as lions breathing fire" in the words of St. John Chrysostom. The Eucharist is the source of loving and serving God in people with the very love of Christ. If a priest wants to celebrate only life, it will degenerate into an illusory "feel good" routine or into social service, which should only be a part of his work. In fact, the work of a social-activist priest could often be more professionally done by a competent layperson. But if a priest, on the other hand, wants to be only a sacramental minister, he ignores the dynamism of the sacramental grace of ordination which has been given to him so that, by his example, teaching, and actions, he would inspire his people to offer in the Eucharist their bodies, their will, and their actions in such a way as to influence and shape their daily lives.

The priests are individually chosen and personally called by God. Paul describes his apostolic vocation with the words of the prophetic call of Jeremiah: God set him apart from his mother's womb and called him through his grace. Regardless of how the call reaches the person, whether awakened by another priest, a parent, or friend, it will always penetrate the inmost depths of his soul and surface in his consciousness in the form of a question, a desire, a frightening burden, a sweet dream, or even an unshakeable certainty. Already at this point, the one who has become aware of the call should respond with prayer. If he ignores it and tries to mute it by throwing himself into the deafening noise of distractions or burying himself in work, God may still pursue him just as he tracked down Jonah. After a while, however, he may give up the chase. Even a loud protest to God is better than ignoring the invitation. If you begin to fight God, enumerating all the obvious reasons why you should not become a priest or religious, God will fight you back and you should allow him to overcome your resistance. The most insidious way of resisting God is to assure him that you sincerely want to obey his will whatever it might be, but you insist that his call should be "clear and unambiguous." Think of St Paul. He was knocked down to the ground by a blinding light. But God rarely obeys our whims and almost always surprises us. He spoke to Elijah in a gentle breeze and very often the loud noise of our cravings makes us deaf to his gentle whispering.

As we surrender to the call, we should accept the possibility that we are mistaken about it. But it will never be clarified unless we develop a regular prayer life including frequent confession and spiritual reading besides the regular liturgical celebrations that we are engaged in with our people. Also of real importance is the selection of a capable spiritual director. The quality of our prayers will greatly influence our priestly life and activities. Even at this point God sees us connected with all those who are entrusted to our care. Our fight against temptations as well as a generous renunciation of all that could hinder our vocation will have an impact on many other people. We never fight only for ourselves and we never fight alone. Our Virgin Mother Mary and the saints we invoke are all helping us with their prayers.

There is a story told about a Parish where the Bishop once paid a visit. The people welcomed the Bishop with great pomp and fanfare. At the end of the visit, the people submitted to the Bishop a memorandum. It dealt with the brief history of the Parish that was about to celebrate the silver jubilee of its establishment. The first Parish Priest put up a small shed for mass. The second Parish Priest built a convent while the third Parish Priest put up a primary school and the fourth constructed a beautiful and spacious church. The fifth Parish Priest upgraded the primary school into a Higher Secondary School where the children were able to study. The memorandum concluded with a request to the Bishop to send them a praying parish Priest. Although a mere story, it has a message for each one of us. Are we praying Priests? People can easily make out whether we are praying or not. Let the example of St. John Mary Vianney who spent hours before the Blessed Sacrament and at the confessional continue to inspire us to become praying priests!

DIRECTIVES

1. Marriage preparation course: Mandatory for all

As you know that the family apostolate department is doing its best to carry out its responsibilities. In this regard the department has reorganised the marriage preparation course which includes now the participation of parents too. It is observed that all the parishes do not send the candidates to our diocese but yield to the pressure of the family to attend the course

in other dioceses. I understand if this is done for an emergency situation. I feel it is the responsibility of every parish priest to promote our young people to the courses conducted in our diocese. To make things easier for the parish priests if any one comes for exception from the course conducted by our diocese kindly tell them to get a written permission from the Vicar General of the diocese, only then should they be allowed to attend courses conducted by other dioceses. If needed, you can convey this information to the faithful during the Holy Qurbana and explain to them in Tamil/Malayalam.

2. Job Application by Catholics: Catechism certificate necessary

For those who seek job in any of our institutions, it is compulsory that they present the catechism class ten certificates along with the application. Please inform the faithful.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Feast of St. Alphonsa

The feast of St. Alphonsa will be celebrated at the St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil. The diocese level celebration and conclusion of feast is on 31st July. Let us make it a spiritual event in the Diocese. Please encourage many more of your parishioners to participate. You can organize pilgrimages from every parish to the shrine during the 10 days feast especially as we are in the year of mercy. It can be also be conducted at the Forane level on allotted days. Do cooperate with the organization of the days of Feast and of the Feast day itself. Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, the parish priest of the shrine will contact you personally in this regard.

Alphonsa Youth Rally (நடைப்பயணம்)

Every year the TCYM youth department of our diocese organizes புனித அல்போன்ஸா நடைப்பயணம். Over the years we realised the participation of not only the youth but also senior persons from our parishes. This is because you have given wide publicity to the event and have spoken about the spiritual advantage behind taking a pilgrimage on foot. I encourage you to prepare our youth and faithful spiritually in advance to take part in these two events. I have decided to walk with young people and I request all the fathers to do the same; those who are unable to walk, can use the vehicle.

Anniversaries of KII, Mission League, and Catechetical departments

The anniversaries of Kuzhandai Iso Iyakkam, of the CML, and of the Catechetical Department were held on 4th, 5th, and 19th of June respectively. We congratulate the heads of the departments for organizing the anniversaries as they celebrated their achievements while looking forward to a fruitful year.

Rev. Fr. Sathianesan successfully defends his thesis

Fr. Sathianesan successfully completed his thesis “**Evangelization: The Fundamental Right and Duty of the Eastern Churches *Sui Iuris***” and defended it on 13th June. Once again we congratulate Fr. Sathianesan for the successful completion and defense.

Overseas Missions

In view of taking up overseas mission our fathers, Rev. Fr. Robin Koorumullil, and Rev. Fr. Sajan Nettaponghu attended the IELTS course in the past months. They have now successfully completed the IELTS exams. Congratulations dear fathers.

Year of Mercy Practices

We are through our Year of Mercy celebrating it with the Universal Church. Let me remind you about the Year of Mercy, the resolutions we had made and the different acts of piety and devotion and acts of mercy we had planned to put into practice. This is a kind reminder to review and realise the same.

Rev. Fr. Geo Choozhikunnel's mother passes away

Rev. Fr. Geo Choozhikunnel's beloved mother passed away on 20th June. She had not been well for the past three and half years. Many of our fathers, sisters from our Diocese and I attended the funeral service held on 22nd June at Koothattukulam. Several of the parishioners from the parishes, where Fr. Geo had worked, were also present. We offer our heartfelt condolences once again to Fr. Geo and to his dear ones.

Schools and College Reopen

All our Schools and our Alphonsa College stepped into their new academic year this month. Both the schools and the college were well-prepared to receive the students. There were 210 new admissions to the college taking its strength up to 500. I appreciate the hard work of the staff and of you dear fathers in promoting our college and for encouraging many more students to enroll. New and well-qualified members on the staff are appointed. Some are from our parishes.

Sisters' Transfer and New Appointments

Women religious congregations within our diocese have effected transfers and almost all the religious houses have new sisters. We wholeheartedly welcome the sisters to their new places of ministry and wish them well as they take up their assignments. We warmly welcome in a special way and give our best wishes to those sisters who have come from Kerala to serve in our diocese.

Inter-Diocesan meet

Inter-diocesan meet was held at Palai on 20th June. Very Rev. Fr. Muttathupadam Jose, VG, Rev. Fr. Mundunadackal Dency, Rev. Fr. Kunnumpuram Tom, Rev. Fr. Erupathanchilchira Shojjo, and Rev. Fr. Puthettu Alex participated in the meeting. Discussions were held on Juvenile Justice Act with reference to the children's boarding run by the dioceses; on Dalit organizations that need to be kept out of undue political influences; on management quota in schools; and on allowance of priests and sacristans. Next Inter-Diocesan meet will be held in our diocese on 13th October.

Inauguration of academic year at Minor Seminary

At the Mukkoottukal Minor seminary the new academic year was inaugurated on 6th June. This year eight new students have been admitted. I thank all the fathers and friends for their support given in promoting vocations. I request all to make efforts and continue both to pray for labourers for the Lord's vineyard and to promote worthy candidates for priesthood.

New Education Commission

We have now established a New Education Commission of the Diocese. While attempting to promote a sound educational system for our faithful and people within our diocese, it will be a consultative body with regard to the educational policies and approaches of the diocese with regard to both formal and non-formal education. The commission will attempt to shape up our educational institutions to benefit to the maximum from the existing government policies. It will also positively and creatively attempt to contribute to the existing educational system.

Rev. Fr. Tom Kunnumpuram will be the chairman of the Education commission. Others who will hold offices in the commission are: Very Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam, VG (Member), Rev. Fr. Johnsilal (Secretary), Rev. Fr. John Bosco SJ (Member), Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil (Member), Rev. Fr. Antony Jose (Member), Rev. Fr. Robins Kuzhikodil (Member), Mr. Justeenar (Member), Mr. John Kumarithozhan (Member), Mr. Rajayyan, Nagercoil (Member).

Malaicode Parish Turns Golden

Malaicode Parish celebrates the 50th year of Mission work begun in the Parish. It is a time to thank God profusely for the numerous blessing brought upon the Parish and its faithful. Malaicode is one of the biggest parishes in our diocese. It is one of the pioneer missions that now witnesses a vibrant Christian community. We remember with gratitude all the missionaries who toiled there, and all the priests and religious who worked for its growth. Today we have a new church, a new presbytery, a new campus, and people full of hope and enthusiasm for the Lord. We congratulate the Parishioners and the Parish Priest for organizing this Golden Jubilee. We pray that this celebration help them to move forward with zeal and faith. Thanks to Rev. Fr. Joseph Nedumpuram the Parish Priest in a special way for preparing the faithful for the celebration.

Seminar on *Amoris Laetitia*

I am sure you would have already read the summary of the Holy Father's document *Amoris Laetitia*. As pastors in the church we have the obligation to understand the mind of the church with regard to families that form the basic units of church. The teachings contained in the Holy Father's document have to permeate not only our thinking but has to percolate into the ground realities, into the families for which the document is intended. To this end and to study the document in detail, we will have a seminar on the document on 23rd July from 9.30am to 4.00pm at Sangamam. Rev. Fr. Roby Alencherry, professor at Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kunnoth will be our animator. The participants will include all of us priests, religious, and some lay representatives.

Forthcoming Events

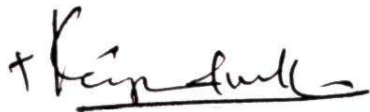
1. 3rd July, Dukhrana: three days fast. Special Collection for Sabha Dinam
2. 6th July: Feast of Maria Goretti. Laying of Foundation Stone for Athencode Church
3. 12th July: Priests Conference
4. 23rd July: Seminar on *Amoris Laetitia*.
5. 30th July: Alphonsa Nadaipayanam
6. 31st July: Feast of St. Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil.

CONCLUSION

Jesus carefully chose his apostles and hoped they will be his companions and will learn from him. One of the things the disciples learned was how to pray. "Lord, teach us to pray!" they

said (Lk 11:1). But when Jesus needed their prayerful support in the garden of Gethsemane they failed him. Yet, Jesus himself did not give up but continued and prayed, "Father... May your will be done" (Mt 26:39). Today will that be like Jesus would ask us: "Were you not able to keep watch with Me for one hour?" He asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Mt 26:40,41). Let us not fail Jesus in our praying ministry. However Jesus will not fail us. He is there to lead us in prayer. Let us pray with him.

Yours in Him who prays always to the Father for us,



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