



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/110/2020

30 June 2020

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

As the entire world is battling the Corona virus since December 2019, the cases of victims of this pandemic have risen in our country as well as in our State. When over half-a-million people affected in our country, the State of Tamil Nadu has 82275 cases with 45537 recovered and 1079 losing their precious lives. In our own district of Kanyakumari, the number of infected persons is on the rise.

The Corona virus has come as a huge shock to us, and within a very short time, it has challenged our attitudes and behaviours radically. In one sense, life continues as normal – and yet it is not normal at all. Should I take the bus? Can I go safely go out for a walk? Should I visit my neighbour or my friend? That cough I notice, could it be the virus? How long will this last? Will we ever get back to real normality again?

Sometimes, the anxiety surrounding the publicity is as contagious as the virus itself, spreading fear and nervousness among the community. In the developed world, in particular, we are in a state of shock. In many ways, we have come to believe that we are in control of our lives, that we have a cure for every disease that we can fend off all the dangers that threaten our securities. We have built up solid walls to protect us against every unwanted guest, but now our walls have been breached, and the unwanted guest is here. Our securities no longer seem so secure, something in our world is out of our control, and many do not know where to turn.

Let us pray that our scientists will soon find a vaccine for this disease, and that it will be made widely available for everyone who needs it, rich or poor. But in the meantime, we can reflect on our shock. It is a reminder to us that we are never in total control of our lives, that we can never eliminate every misfortune or heal every illness. Ultimately, our trust has to be in something more solid than we can ever find here on earth. Ultimately, God alone is our security. "God is our refuge and our strength, a helper close at hand in times of distress" (Ps.46:1). Trust Him! Let us keep all those who suffer from the virus in our prayers and let us continue to help our people to tide over this crisis that has enveloped the entire humanity!

On 3 July, the entire Church keeps the solemnity of St Thomas, the Apostle and in particular our Syro-Malabar Church marks the *Dukhrana*. On this occasion, I wish you, dear Fathers, the feast of the Father and the Founder of our Church. The name of Thomas is listed along with the other apostles in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13). His name is also mentioned on three occasions in the fourth Gospel.

St Thomas was among those who had been with the Lord from the beginning. He heard him preach, saw the miracles, and enjoyed the Lord's friendship. Then came the Lord's crucifixion and death. It must have seemed as though his world had come to an end. So, when the other Apostles told him that, while he was out, the Risen Lord had appeared to them, Thomas thought they were delusional and demanded proof. He wanted, with his own hand, to inspect the wounds of the crucified Lord. A week later, Thomas got his chance – as the Lord invited him to touch the wounds by which we have made whole.

Pope St Gregory the Great comments that Thomas' incredulity, his lack of belief, even his resistance to believing – did more to kindle our faith than the faith of the other apostles. For when Thomas saw the Risen Lord bearing the wounds of our mortal flesh, he uttered a profession of faith repeated countless times by Christians everywhere: "My Lord and my God!" That encounter with the Risen Lord changed Thomas forever. His encounter with Jesus unlocked his God-given freedom. Not bound by the fetters of doubt and unbelief, he was no longer a *doubting* Thomas. He was instead an *evangelizing* Thomas who proclaimed the Gospel far and wide and bore witness to the Crucified and Risen Lord by his own death, his martyrdom.

Tradition has it St Thomas brought the Gospel to our land. Even though he did not know either the language or the culture, Thomas, in the power of the Spirit, went forth, far beyond his comfort zone. What has come down to us, especially through the Syro Malabar and Syro Malankara Churches, is a pattern to guide the Church's work of spreading the Gospel, whether near or far, namely, to engage the culture constructively, drawing from it whatever is compatible with the Gospel, while proclaiming and celebrating the Gospel with joy and keeping one's eyes fixed on serving the poor and the vulnerable.

By breathing into Thomas the power of the Holy Spirit, the Risen Lord set Thomas free from the heavy yoke of slavery to sin; the Risen Lord set Thomas free from the constraints of unbelief that lock us in a self-contained world of fear and despair; the Risen Lord set Thomas free for mission – free to leave behind everything so as to bring the Gospel as a stranger in a strange land.

Similarly, the Lord looks upon us with love during the celebration of the Eucharist. During Eucharistic worship, when we give thanks for the God-given gift of religious freedom, the Lord restores in us the gift that he imparted to Thomas. It is all too easy to allow the freedom with which God endowed us from birth to lie dormant and to be covered over and weakened by our sins, or to be neglected because of an attitude of complacency. All of us need to undergo a process of transformation like the Apostle Thomas.

Before religious liberty is a political or legal issue, it is first and foremost a matter of innate human dignity – for our religious freedom inheres not on the parchments where laws are written; rather, it is indelibly engraved on the human heart. When we encounter the Risen Lord, no matter how incredulous we have been, no matter how resistant to the Gospel, when we encounter the Lord—this beautiful gift of religious freedom comes alive. It is entangled in the DNA of a response of faith and love to the Lord, to the Church, and to the mission which the Lord has mapped out for each and every one of us. Without truth there is no freedom. Without freedom, there is no love.

If we would revitalize the evangelizing mission of the Church in our Eparchy and in our parishes, then we must unlock in ourselves and in the people we serve a renewed sense of this freedom that lies in the depth of our being. This gift is unlocked when we allow the Lord to free us from the slavery of sin – those things that cause us to misuse our freedom to our own unhappiness and the unhappiness of those around us. This gift is unlocked when we allow the Lord to set us free from fear, to make us "free to worship him without fear all the days of our life" – to give us "knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of our sins." In a word, we are made free when at long last we allow the Risen Lord to touch the wounds of our

existence, to heal our wounded freedom, to liberate us from the self-contained prison of our unruly desires, wants, and needs! Thus liberated, we are free for mission. Our spirit is freed, our tongue is loosened, our religion is no longer contrived, rather, we have the authenticity of true witnesses to Jesus Christ crucified and risen, witnesses who are able to engage those who have no faith, those who are alienated from the Church, those whose faith is lukewarm, those who are at the cusp of holiness and mission themselves. St Thomas teaches us to experience that freedom and to place our faith in the risen Lord. May St Thomas pray for us!

On Dukhrana, there will be Holy Qurbana celebrated online at 7.00 am and in Shalom TV at 12.00 noon. Kindly encourage our people to participate in any one of these Qurbanas. Remember that it is a day of obligation in our Church. I have already sent to the circular of our Major Archbishop. A video version of the circular will be published in the evening of 2 July 2020. Kindly instruct our people to watch the video. Through these simple ways, let us mark the solemnity of St Thomas.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Presbyteral Council and College of Eparchial Consultors: We have constituted the Presbyteral Council and the College of Eparchial Consultors on 18 January 2020. These Councils are officially inaugurated in the Eparchy on 20 June 2020 at Sangamam at 10.00 am. The inaugural session was begun with an informative animation by Rev. Fr Joy Mangalath, a canon law expert, from the Archeparchy of Changanassery. He explained all the canonical norms regarding the rights and the duties of these councils. After the session, the inauguration ceremony was held at 11.15am. I inaugurated these councils with an inaugural address and lighting of *Nilavilakku*. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Fr Jose Muttathupadam and Fr Thomas Thekkethala CMI also lit the lamp. At the start of the meeting of each of the councils, Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal presented the Eparchial Statues to the members. The meeting came to end at 3.00 pm.

- **Presbyteral Council:** The members are Bishop George Rajendran— President; ex-officio members - Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Protosyncellus, Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor, Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Procurator; elected members - Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Rev. Fr Geo Choozhikunnel, Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, Rev. Fr Robins Kuzhikodil, Rev. Fr Tobin Alapurackal, Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu, Rev. Fr Ajeesh Attiyil, Rev. Fr Vinu D. Joseph, Rev. Fr Thomas Thekkethala CMI, Rev. Fr Chacko Akkathara CMI; nominated members - Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil, Rev. Fr Antony Jose and Rev. Fr James Kanakalil. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal was elected as the Secretary of the Presbyteral Council. The Council elected members for the **Agenda Committee** - Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil, Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Rev. Fr Antony Jose and Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal; and **Priests Welfare Committee** - Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam and Rev. Fr Robins Kuzhikodil.
- **College of Eparchial Consultors:** The members are Bishop George Rajendran – President; the members -Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil, Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal and, Rev. Fr Antony Jose. The members of the College of Consultors gathered at 2.00 pm on 20 June 2020. During the meeting, the Bishop appointed Rev. Fr Antony Jose as the Secretary of the Council.

Catechism Department and Online Classes: As per the directives of our Major Archbishop, we have begun the catechism classes online in our Eparchy. I inaugurated the New Catechetical Year on 14 June 2020 at 10.00am with a Holy Qurbana. Fr Prince, with the help of his collaborators, prepared the Sunday

catechism classes for the children through online in our Eparchy. The regular Sunday school classes have begun from 21 June 2020 through pre-recorded lessons for all the classes. I appreciate the efforts of Fr Prince and his team. Let me remind you once again that:

- ◆ The final examinations for Class X will be conducted on 5 July 2020, and for Classes XI & XII on 12 July 2020 in their own respective Sunday schools.
- ◆ The Scholarship examinations and Sunday School Annual Day for this year are cancelled.
- ◆ All the Catechism Headmasters are requested to prepare the promotion list soon after the examinations.

Priestly Ordinations: Deacon Robin Jose and Deacon Toji Sebastian were ordained priests on 11 June 2020. I ordained Deacon Robin Jose at Sangamam. The whole liturgical ceremony was well organized by Fr Thomas Powathuparampil keeping the requirements of Covid-19. Mar George Madathikandathil, Bishop of Kothamangalam, ordained Deacon Joseph Kozhuvakandathil (Toji Sebastian) at St Joseph's Church, Njarakkad, Kerala. The Eparchy is grateful to the parish priest of Njarakkad who organized all the liturgical ceremonies well. The number of persons who participated were limited. We shall felicitate our new priests at an opportune time. The Eparchy is glad to welcome the two priests to the Eparchial presbyterium. We wish our new priests God's blessings. We wish them fruitful ministry in the Eparchy.

Christu Arasar Glaus Packing Unit: I inaugurated a Glaus Packing Unit on 22 June 2020 at Anakuzhy under the Christ the King Parish, Palapallam. This unit was started with the help of Kanam Latex India Pvt Ltd. During the inauguration ceremony, Mr Ravi Kurian Joy, Vice President of Kanam Latex India Pvt Ltd., Rev. Fr Antony Jose, Forane Vicar, Rev. Fr Abin Poovathummootil, Director of KKSSS and dignitaries from the locality were present. The unit is meant to provide jobs for the women living around Palapallam Parish. Forty women have already started to work. In order to start this unit, KKSSS took the initial steps along with the help of Fr Printo Kurias, the then parish priest of Christ the King Parish, Palapallam. Rev. Fr John Paul, after his appointment as parish priest, pursued the project with Kanam Latex India Pvt Ltd and completed the project. I thank and congratulate all those who worked behind for the success of this unit.

Health Commission: Since Covid-19 is spreading exponentially in our district, during the meeting of the Presbyterial Council, it was suggested that we create more awareness among the people and offer them some remedial measures. To realise this suggestion, we called a meeting of the Health Commission headed by Fr Abin Poovathummootil. His team of nurse Sisters, Fr Antony Jose and Mr Sounder Raj attended the meeting. Fr Antony Jose presented the Homeopathy Arsenicum Album 30 that the Government of Tamil Nadu under the special programme AAROKYAM of the Ayush ministry recommended for enhancing the immune system in the body in order to resist the virus. It was decided to promote this medicine along with it a set of guidelines to all the people in our Parishes and Centres. The Health Commission with the help of Self Help Groups of KKSSS will distribute the medicine. The medicine will reach your respective Parishes by 5 July and kindly distribute it to all the families through the Uraviums of the Parishes.

INFORMATION

The Government of Tamilnadu will give a new directive regarding the reopening the places of worship on 30 June, after which the diocese will take an appropriate decision by consulting all the fathers; until then we shall continue the following practices:

Stay Home; Stay Safe: COVID – 19 is gradually rising in our district and its has been identified in more than 24 spots in the district. Therefore, I request you, dear Fathers, once again to remain in the presbytery and stay safe. The coming days are very crucial. Let us follow strictly the rules:

- Stay safe in the presbytery and do not make any visits till further orders.
- Do not include the laity in the private Holy Qurbana celebrated for Sisters in the Convent or in the Church.
- Be in touch with the faithful through phone and instruct them not to go out unnecessarily.
- Instruct the people to wear face mask, keep social distance and wash hands frequently.
- Keep the Churches open for the people to pray.
- Make use of the tele-counselling facility of the Family Apostolate Department for our faithful.
- Encourage our people to participate Holy Qurbana through TV and Online. Instruct them to be regular with their family prayers.
- Catechism classes will go on as usual through online.
- Give tasks or classes to the faithful through WhatsApp groups of the parishes.
- The online classes organised by the Schools and College will go on as usual.

Transfers:

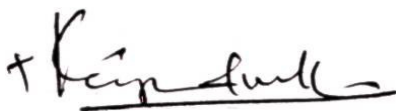
- **Rev. Fr Robin Jose** is appointed Secretary to Bishop and Mission Procure with effect from 20 June 2020. He resides at Bishop's House, Thuckalay. You can contact him for posting messages in the WhatsApp infogroup or for making appointments to meet me.
- **Rev. Fr Sajan Nettaponghu** is appointed In-charge of Mar Siluvai Mission at Valiyattumukham. He is relieved from the offices as Eparchial Office Secretary at Bishop's House and Assistant Director of Catechism Department with effect from 20 June 2020.

CONCLUSION

The month of July is an important month for us in our Syro-Malabar Church. On 3 July, we keep the solemnity of St Thomas and on 28 July we celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa. On St Thomas we have already reflected in the introductory part of the circular. Regarding St Alphonsa, we have a shrine dedicated to her at Nagercoil and it attracts large number devotees during her feast. Unfortunately, this year, due to Covid-19, we may not be able to have all the usual festivities associated with the celebration. Her spirituality lies in her relationship to Jesus Christ and her experience of his presence in her daily life. She was a person who loved and invited lovingly sufferings in her life. She is called the 'Little Flower' of India. As we are going to celebrate the feast of this great saint from own land, let us learn the redemptive value that suffering has in own lives and live our lives as St Alphonsa did.

May St Thomas and St Alphonsa intercede for each one of us that we may live our Christian and Priestly lives after the model of the Crucified Saviour, whose heart was pierced for our sake!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

