



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb

Diocese of Thuckalay

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,
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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes Bishop's House, Thuckalay! In this letter, let me reflect with you on two important topics that have bearing on our faith. The first theme is the upcoming season of Lent. The second issue concerns with the reflections that the Jubilarians put forward in the course of their meeting with the Major Archbishop in 2016 and I feel that the points that these veteran priests have raised are vital to the effectiveness of our pastoral ministries.

On 15 February, we shall begin the holy season of Lent, a time of intense preparation for the celebration of the paschal mysteries of Jesus Christ. In our tradition, the period of Lent is also called *50Nombu*. This is because, all the days beginning from the Ash Monday of the Lent, including Sundays, are counted as days of abstention. The issue of whether the season of Lent should extend for 40 days (as is the case in the Latin Church) or 50 days, is a matter of liturgical tradition. These differences should not affect the spiritual essence of Lent. The ultimate purpose of all Lenten observations is the spiritual succour that people yearn for.

The "Great Fast" (*Sauma Rabba*) is a period that commemorates Jesus' 40-day fast and his passion and death. Consequently, this period is understood as a time of fast and penance in order to be partakers in the sufferings of Christ. Though the prominent theme of the last week of the period called 'Passion Week' is the passion of Christ, the rest of the weeks has a variety of themes that point to an upright Christian living.

At the beginning, it was a continuation of the period of Epiphany (*Denha*), a period that commemorates the baptism and the 40-day fast of Christ, and the following public life. History tells us that the Lent had two fundamental aims: A long preparation for Easter and a proximate preparation for baptism on Holy Saturday.

Though Jesus fasted for 40 days, the earliest practice of Christian fast seems to have been of one or two days up to six or seven weeks according to different traditions. From a 4th Century Jerusalem document we understand that the Lenten season was of eight weeks, whereas in Rome it was of six weeks. The tradition of Ash Wednesday started in the West sometime in 8th Century.

According to a 3rd century tradition, Christians fasted for six days in preparation for Easter. It might have been an imitation of the Jewish practice of 7-day fast in preparation for Paschal Feast. The Christian tradition might have thought of reducing the days from seven to six considering Sunday as a 'non- fasting' day.

Later, imitating Jesus' fast of 40 days, Christians also began to fast for 40 days. There is a mention about this practice in the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. However, the variations in the practice of Lent differently — each community according to their own traditions and beliefs highlights the liturgical uniqueness different Churches.

Traditionally, Lent in Eastern Churches begins on the seventh Monday before Easter. It is a matter of tradition and good faith that most Christians of Syro-Malabar tradition eat only vegetarian meals for 50 full days. It has been pointed out that though Church laws do not stipulate abstinence from meat and fish on all days of Lent, especially on Sundays, St. Thomas Christians abstain from meat, fish and alcohol throughout Lent voluntarily. This has been praised as one of the finest spiritual offerings of the Christians. For the majority the Lenten spirit begins with the ashes on one's forehead, no matter whether it is on Ash Monday or Ash Wednesday.

To achieve the primary purpose of Lent, namely, the spiritual preparation for the celebration of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church leads her children to *ametanoia* or *repentance* by the reordering of their priorities and the changing of their values, ideals and ambitions, through fasting, prayer and self-control. Since by baptism we share the death and resurrection of Jesus, reflections on our own baptisms either directly or indirectly during this season is pertinent.

I invite every one of you to make this Lent a time of renewal of life through penance and prayer. It should be a time for personal reflection on where we stand as Christians and as priests accepting the Gospel challenges in thought, word and deed. It is also a time to assess our relationships with our family, friends, working colleagues and the other people we come in contact with, especially in our institutions. Let us convert Lent into a time for spiritual growth by being more attentive to the celebration of the liturgies. Let us use Lent to fight daily against the evil within us and around us by practising self-control relying on the power of prayer and Scripture.

In November 2016, during the gathering of Jubilarians of Syro-Malabar Church with our Major Archbishop, many points came up during their sharing and I thought some of the issues are relevant for us as well. Hence, I want to bring to your notice the various points that emerged during that meeting.

- There is a new tendency taking place in the Church: each parish is becoming a kingdom by itself, each diocese/eparchy looking out for its own welfare only, etc.
- Synod has become a private affair. No one knows its agenda and its outcome.
- Church can adopt a more democratic approach in its nature and operation.
- Priests are not really helping the lay people to grow and to become good leaders. Our political influence is becoming less and less.
- Priests have a tendency to blame the parishioners when things go wrong. Instead of blaming them, we need to lead them to prayer. We should cultivate child-like trust in God and must teach the same among our parishioners.
- Parishes should not accumulate more wealth than they require. The wealthier the parishes are; the more distance people will keep from the Church.
- Priests should always adopt human values in their approach to the people.
- We are priests not because of our merit but because of the grace of God. Our behavioural pattern should incarnate this great truth.
- Priests should share their talents with people and they will surely multiply.
- There is clericalism on the increase and the leaders are not addressing this major handicap that plagues the Church.
- Priests should not get angry with people. They should not create occasions for people to shed their tears because their words and actions.
- Preaching in the church is of critical importance. The priests should explain the Word of God and should be conversant with scriptural verses. The Word of God has power and it can bring healing to people.
- Priests should understand the needs and aspirations of the people and help them to achieve them. To this end, they need to listen to them, they need to visit often the sick and the elderly, and they should be

available to them. They should go in search of the people instead of waiting for the people to come to them.

- Big parishes have a tendency to become like Government machinery - highly impersonal and time bound.
- Christianity should not lose its vitality.
- Ongoing formation of priests of great importance.
- What is critically important in our world today is personal relationships: priests should be friend of each family including families from other religions.
- The Bishops should take their priests into confidence and trust them. They may fail the Bishops but the Bishops should keep trusting them.
- Priests should not impose their dreams on the people rather they should understand the local situations by discerning God's plans for them.
- Priests should both be kings but at the same time be beggars.
- Syro-Malabar Church should take the initiative to study the miracles taking place in the Church and should take definite stand on them.

As I already mentioned, some of these suggestions are relevant to us as priests of Thuckalay Eparchy. Let us take whatever is relevant to us to heart and follow them. They will not only make our lives meaningful but also help our people to grow in faith. Let us also fruitfully spend the season of Lent helping our people to reach God. May our acts of prayer, penance and almsgiving bear much fruit not only in our lives but in the lives of our people for whom we have dedicated our lives!

NEWS AND EVENTS

Popular Mission Retreat: Popular Mission Retreats began in the Eparchy on 24 January 2021. The first parishes to have these retreats were Paraicode and Anayadi. I inaugurated this special retreat at Paraicode and Fr Thomas Powathuparampil in Anayadi. These retreats will definitely create a spiritual renewal and deepen the faith of our faithful. They will improve family relationships by solving family problems and strengthening the bonds among the couples. Hence, I request you to make aware of their importance to our people and prepare them for their active and effective participation. In this jubilee year of the Eparchy, let us endeavour to deepen the faith of our faithful. Fr Sebastian Puthenpurayil, Director of Sinai Retreat Centre, is preparing the schedule. You can approach him for any information that will help you to prepare well for the Popular Mission Retreats.

First Holy Communion in the Parishes: As I have informed you, kindly make arrangements for the administration of First Holy Communion of Children together in the parishes during this jubilee year. Some of the parishes have already conducted it well. St Thomas Parish, Marappady held it on 27 December 2020, Holy Cross Parish, Malaicode on 3 January 2021 and St Xavier's Parish, Varuthattu on 24 January 2021. More than 25 children each from these Parishes received Holy Communion. I sincerely congratulate Fr James Kanakalil, Fr Geo Choozhikunnel and Fr Printo Kurias and the Sisters who prepared the children for the reception of Holy Eucharist and I thank the faithful for their cooperation.

Syro-Malabar Synodal News: The January session of the Synod was held online between 11-16 January 2021 from 5.00 to 7.00pm. Many issues concerning our Church were discussed and some decisions were made to implement them with immediate effect. I give below some of them and the rest shall be informed to you during the Priests' Conference to be held on 12 February 2021:

- The Synod decided to postpone the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly from January 2022 to August 2022 due to the rapid spread of Covid-19. The Synod requests every Eparchy to propose the themes at the earliest after making the necessary consultations in the concerned forums of the priests, the religious and the laity. We shall take up this during our Priests' Conference.

- The Synod directs all the Eparchies to respect the amount of stipend for Masses fixed by the Regional/Provincial Conferences of Bishops without any changes to cover other related expenses. I shall clarify this point during the Priests' Conference.
- The Synod directs the Bishops to take appropriate actions against those who indulge in acts of indiscipline against the hierarchy and the teaching of the Church.

Youth Camp: A residential Youth camp was held at Sangamam on 15 and 16 January 2021. The participants were mostly the leaders of the TCYM youth movement. Nearly seventy youth from the parishes participated in the seminar. Well-experienced resource persons were invited for classes on leadership and on other themes. I was glad to see how the youth themselves took the responsibility of organising the two-day programme. I congratulate and thank Fr Joseph Santhosh, Director of Youth Apostolate, for bringing together the youth of the Eparchy.

Syro-Malabar Mission Week: The Syro-Malabar Mission week was observed from 6-12 January 2021 all over the world. As in previous years, we celebrated the week in our Eparchy with the help of Mission League through online tasks and competitions. As per the request of our Major Archbishop, a collection was taken in the parishes on 10 January 2021 and I hope that you have handed over the collection to Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Eparchial Procurator. Those who are not yet submitted, please kindly submit it immediately. The collection is to be sent without delay for the Mission Work of the Major Archbishop. I thank Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu and the Mission League team for organising this event in the Eparchy.

TNBC News: The Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council gathers twice a year. The January session of last year was held in our Eparchy and we had inaugurated the Charity Activities and Action Plan of Jubilee Year during the Holy Qurbana concelebrated by all the Bishops at St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil. This year, the TNBC gathered in the Eparchy of Marthandam on 27 and 28 January 2021 and it was organized in their Engineering College at Elavuvilai. The meeting discussed various issues that the Tamilnadu Church faces, especially, the forthcoming Assembly elections.

Seminar for Catechism Teachers: One of the Silver jubilee programmes of the catechism department was to organise a Seminar on *Syro-Malabar Holy Qurbana* for all the catechism teachers of our Eparchy. The seminar was held online from 5.00 to 7.00pm on 9, 16, 23 and 30 January 2021. Most of the teachers attended the seminar. All the parish priests made arrangements in their respective parishes/schools for the teachers to attend this online programme. The teachers attended the seminar with great interest and earnestness. They willingly learned more about the meaning and the mystery of our Holy Qurbana. Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadackal and Br Mahesh were the resource persons for the classes. I congratulate and thank Fr Prince Maliyil, Director, Catechism Department, Fr Abilash Xavier Raj, Assistant Director, Catechism Department, Fr Robins Kuzhikodil, Director, Communications, and the resource persons, parish priests, headmasters, sisters and conveners of the Catechism departments for their hard work in making programme a success.

Feast of St John Bosco: The feast of St John Bosco falls on 31 January. In order to remember this great Saint, the Fathers of Thuckalay-Plankalai Forane and some invited guests gathered at Sangamam on 30 January 2021 at 12.30pm. The gathering began with a short prayer service in the chapel and it was followed by Lunch. I thank Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil for organising this gathering.

Rest in Peace: Mrs Annamma Joseph, beloved mother of Rev. Fr Thomas Thuckalay (Jiji Koipuram) passed away on 24 January 2021 at Medical Centre Hospital, Kottayam. She was suffering from various ailments and was admitted to the hospital two weeks earlier. Fr Thomas Thuckalay was present at her death bed. The funeral was held at 10.00 am on 26 January 2021 at Little Flower Parish, Madappally. I am grateful to all the Fathers

who travelled all the way to Madappally to console Fr Thomas and his bereaved family members and to attend the funeral service. This is a kind but a powerful gesture from the part of the presbyterium to be with a brother Priest who lost his dear mother. Some Sisters and lay faithful from the Parishes where Fr Thomas served were also present at the funeral.

INFORMATION

- **UCC - News:** As you know, the United Christian Council is very active in the district of Kanyakumari. For the last three years, Most Rev. Nazarene Soosai, Bishop of Kottar, was the president of the Council and he was re-elected the president for the next three years by the heads of the Catholic and non-Catholic dioceses and Christian denominations on 8 January 2021. I congratulate and wish him God's blessings.
- **Ariyur, Madurai Mission:** As you know, we have constructed a two-storey building at Ariyur, Madurai. The ground floor of the building will be used as residence for Sisters and first floor of the building is for St Alphonsa Community Centre and Garment Unit. The Centre was blessed on 5 January 2021 and the Sisters have occupied it. The formal inauguration of the centre will a month later after sufficient preparation in the presence of local leaders, people and Fathers from our Eparchy. I am grateful to Fr Thomas Powathuparampil for personally seeing to the construction of the Centre with the help and support of Fr Johnsilal and Fr Anil Raj.
- **Priests' ongoing formation:** As we are aware, this year we will have the orientation program for all the priests of the diocese on 12 and 13 February. Unlike other years, this year on the first day itself we will have Priests conference. The second day classes will be taken by Rev. Fr Xavier Arulraj, a senior advocate from Chennai. He is also the secretary to TNBC legal cell. The timetable will be sent to you soon. Since 12th Feb. is being Friday the program will end by 4.00 pm so that the parishes can have the regular liturgical celebration, those of you do not have evening Holy Qurbana are free to spend overnight at Sangamam.

POPULAR MISSION RETREATS (TAMIL) - (JANUARY TO MARCH 2021)

S.No.	PMR NO	DATE OF PMR	PARISH	DIOCESE
1.	273	Jan 24-29	Paraicode	Thuckalay
2.	274	Jan 24-29	Anayadi	Thuckalay
3.	275	Jan 31-Feb 5	Athencode	Thuckalay
4.	276	Jan 31-Feb 5	Kazhuvanthittai	Thuckalay
5.	277	Feb 14-19	Karode	Thuckalay
6.	278	Feb 14-19	Killiyoor	Thuckalay
7.	279	Feb 21-26	Munchirai	Thuckalay
8.	280	Feb 21-26	Varuthattu	Thuckalay
9.	281	Mar 07-12	Padanthalumoodu	Thuckalay
10.	282	Mar 07-12	Chenamcode	Thuckalay
11.	283	Mar 21-26	Thakkalivilai	Thuckalay
12.	284	Mar 21-26	Kosavampatti	Salem

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

02 February 2021	- Meeting of School/College Principals and Correspondents
06 February 2021	- Presbyteral Council
06 February 2021	- Jubilee Central Animation and Coordination Committee Meeting
09 February 2021	- Death Anniversary of Fr Philip Kodiyanthara
11 February 2021	- Birth Centenary of Cardinal Antony Padiyara
12-13 February 2021	- Priests' Conference & Orientation Programme at Sangamam
15 February 2021	- Ash Monday
18 February 2021	- Inter-Department Meeting

CONCLUSION

We are already in the month of February. The celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany have concluded. All of us have benefitted spiritually from these celebrations. As mentioned already, on 15 February we shall enter the holy season of Lent in preparation for the commemoration of the paschal mysteries of Jesus Christ. This season of Lent is special for each one of us as we are intensifying our preparations for the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the establishment of our Eparchy. During this period, let us prepare our people spiritually to enter into the most important days of our Church. I also want to thank you sincerely for your collaboration and hard work in realising great things in your respective Centres as well as in the Eparchy.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

