



**Bishop George Rajendran SDB**  
Diocese of Thuckalay

Mobile: +919443281100  
Email: bpgeogerajendran@gmail.com

BISHOP'S HOUSE  
P.B. No. 12, Thuckalay P.O.  
Kanyakumari District  
Tamilnadu – 629175, India  
Phone: +91-4651-250633  
Diocese Email: thuckalaydiocese@yahoo.com

Ref. No. Priests/GR/83/2018

28 June 2018

Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings and best wishes from Dallas, TX, USA

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. In this circular, I want to briefly reflect with the spirituality of St Alphonsa, who is the first Saint from our Church. We have a Shrine dedicated to her at Nagercoil and it attracts large number devotees during her feast. 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 loving suffering. She is called the 'Little Flower' of India. As a Franciscan Clarist nun, her life was confined within the four walls of the FCC Convent at Bharananganam. Her life is also a tale of docility to God, to her fellow sisters, to her spiritual master, to her relatives and to the children around in the school. Although confined externally, it is this child like docility, which helped others feel and discover the mystery of the grace of sanctity at work in her. The funeral sermon that her Spiritual Director Rev. Fr Romulus preached is the first instance when her hidden sanctity was revealed. Among other things, he said: "With the most profound conviction in my heart and as one who has known this religious very intimately, I affirm that we are now participating in the last rites of a saintly person. If the world had realized her intrinsic worth, unprecedented crowds including hundreds of priests and bishops from all over India would have assembled here. They would have rushed and clamoured for even a glimpse of this body and for some precious relic or token of this person. I assure you, that as far as human judgment can be relied on, this young nun was not much less saintly than the Little Flower of Lisieux."

Annakutty was the childhood name of Alphonsa. Her childhood name not only reveals her childhood goodness, virtues and trials, but also an often unsung story and history of the family values, faith practices and ecclesial foundations of the Christians in Kerala. Annakutty was born on 19 August 1910. Her mother died three months after birth and on her deathbed she entrusted Annakutty to the care of her own sister Annamma Muricken. With her aunt, Annakutty painfully and joyfully tried to overcome the inexplicable loss of her mother and motherly love. Her father unwillingly placed the child with her newly found mother with the sole motive of promoting an ideal upbringing, which would make Annakutty more capable as a future housewife. Annamma Muricken was a stern disciplinarian and Annakutty was brought up in a strict environment. The family played a key role in her faith formation and love for Christ, especially through the prevalent practices of regular evening prayers, observance of weekly fasting and participation in the Eucharistic celebration.

Fr Romulus rightly emphasized in his funeral sermon the role that the family had played in the life of Alphonsa in nurturing and deepening her Christian faith. However, the most important fact is that Annakutty developed a personal devotion and love for Christ. This is the fruit of her genuine faith

formation. It is also the first visible sign that faith was a lived experience in her childhood. Jesus Christ began to become a concrete personal relational reality for her. It is because of this relational realization of God's love and knowledge of Jesus Christ that Annakutty began to yearn for sanctity. The desire for sanctity was for Alphonsa a concrete response to the invitation of Christ. The surprising depth of spiritual understanding that Alphonsa possessed in her childhood teaches us the most profound lesson on the Christian life. Spirituality and sanctity are not mere objects to yearn for but they come as a result of a personal experience with Jesus Christ in the Church and in the Sacraments. In fact, she wrote: "I loved God more ardently. I took great care to avoid all faults. I had nothing special to mention in my First Confession. I zealously aspired to become a saint. I felt that desire while I was reading the biography of St Therese of Lisieux."

The decisive upbringing of Annakutty in a devout Christian family paved the way to the fruit borne in her life as a professed Clarist nun at Bharananganam. During her convent days, she accepted and loved suffering and pain. She wanted to take part in the suffering of Jesus. She understood the important role that suffering play in the process of sanctification. Suffering that is accepted and offered is a rare spiritual height for the Christian soul than a passive fatalistic resignation to one's problems or pain. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "...the sufferings to be endured can mean that in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church...Suffering...becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus."

The writings of Alphonsa point to the redemptive value of that suffering have. She wrote: "Since only grief and suffering have fallen to the lot of my Spouse, I too lovingly embrace them, and my soul is at peace, though my body continues to be tormented. For the last seven years I have ceased to be my own, being given over entirely to my Divine Spouse. You know all that; and now let the Lord do as He will with me. It is not a cure I am anxious for, but only that His Holy Will be fulfilled in me." Thus, behind the suffering, Alphonsa cheerfully accepted the truth of a living and loving encounter with Jesus Christ. She denied herself. She died to herself. She eschewed everything imaginable of a personal sense of ownership or belonging. In this self-emptying, she gained everything in Jesus Christ. She became a person living in Christ so that all her sufferings and pain are not thought to be experienced apart from Christ but in Christ and with Christ.

The Church fully understood the spirituality of suffering that St Alphonsa practised in her life. During the beatification ceremony, St John Paul II said: "From early in her life, Sister Alphonsa experienced great suffering. With the passing of the years, the heavenly Father gave her an ever-fuller share in the Passion of his beloved Son. We recall how she experienced not only physical pain of great intensity, but also the spiritual suffering of being misunderstood and misjudged by others.... She came to love suffering because she loved the suffering Christ. She learned to love the Cross through her love of the crucified Lord."

The central message that comes from the life and the writings of Alphonsa is this: only a living experience of Christ can lead us to a loving appreciation of his suffering for us and a meaningful acceptance and offering of our sufferings to the Lord in love. Because the suffering accepted with the crucified Lord is saving and redeeming. One of the prayers that she composed reveals this great truth. She wrote: "Lord Jesus, hide me in the wound of your sacred heart. Free me from my desire to be loved and esteemed. Guard me from my evil attempts to win fame and honour. Make me humble till I become a small spark in

the flame of love in your Sacred Heart. Grant me the grace to forget all worldly things and myself. Jesus, sweet beyond words, convert all worldly consolations into bitterness for me. O my Jesus, Sun of Justice, enlighten my intellect and mind with your sacred rays. Purify my heart, consume me with burning love for you, and make me one with you.”

As we are going to celebrate the feast of this great saint from our own land, let us learn the redemptive value that suffering has in our own lives and live our lives as St Alphonsa did. Let us ask her to intercede for us that we may live our Christian and Priestly lives after the model of the Crucified Saviour, whose heart was pierced for our sake.

### **NEWS AND EVENTS**

**Reopening of Schools and College:** All the schools in our Eparchy reopened in the first week of June. Our Alphonsa College commenced classes on 17 June 2018. I offer my best wishes and prayers to all the correspondents, principals, headmasters, headmistresses and staff of our educational institutions.

**Youth Apostolate:** The Department of youth apostolate organised a DOCAT Camp on 1, 2 and 3 June 2018 at Sangamam. Rev. Fr Joseph Santhosh, Youth Director, was the organiser. Around 80 young people from different parishes participated in the camp. Some of the parishes were not well represented. I hope the parish priests will take more interest in gathering the youth in the parish and registering them with the Youth Department of the Eparchy.

**Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi Missions:** Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil and Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu reached Tirunelveli on 13 June 2018. I have arranged their stay in an additional building that belongs to Mr. Maria Robin, owner of Edathua House, at Tirunelveli. Rev. Fr Joseph Michael, former VG of Thoothukudi Diocese and Rev. Fr Alphonse welcomed our fathers in the house of Mr. Maria Robin and blessed the residence. I wish them all the best for their missionary apostolate and I thank them for their willingness to work for the growth of the Eparchy in the extended territory.

**Sinai Theological Institute (STI):** As I have already informed you, the official inauguration of Sinai Theological Institute was held on 12 May 2018 at Sangamam at 11.45am. The regular classes for the students of Theological Institute started on 17 June 2018. Since it was the first class, the session started with half-hour adoration to the Blessed Sacrament. Rev. Fr (Dr) Joshy Mullappally MST gave to the students an orientation course that focussed on the topics such as ‘knowing God, knowing ourselves, deepening one’s faith and serving the Church’. Later, Rev. Fr Christudas presented the nature of the course with the students and explained the rules and regulations of the course. I wish Institute God’s blessings!

**Minor Seminary:** The Minor Seminary of our Eparchy was reopened on 1 June 2018 and the classes for the second and third year students started. The first year students reached the Seminary on 20 June 2018. This year we have 9 students in the first year and they hail from our Eparchy as well as from Kerala. Altogether, we have 16 seminarians in the minor seminary. I congratulate all the seminary team for their dedicated services.

**Golden Jubilee of Muzhucode Parish:** A group of CSI Christians from Muzhucode in 1960’s approached Rev. Fr Joseph Madathil, then parish priest of Manjalumoodu and expressed their desire to

form a catholic community. Fr Joseph Madathil directed them to CMI Fathers who were engaged in mission work at Kaliyal. Rev. Fr James Joseph Kozhimattam CMI and Rev. Fr Benedict CMI visited the place and bought a piece of land on 16 January 1968 with the help of Mar Mathew Kavukatt, then Archbishop of Changanassery. The first Holy Mass was offered on 3 July 1968 in a rented hall in YMCA building. From January 1969 onwards the Muzhucode community had a new building to offer Holy Mass and to conduct catechism classes. Later in 1976 a church was constructed and consecrated. The CMI Fathers worked tirelessly for the growth of the community. In 2006, Rev. Fr Chacko Basil established the Chavara Ashram near the Church. In 2016 Rev. Fr Chacko Akkathara renovated and extended the Ashram and Rev. Fr Cyriac Madathil blessed it on 20 July 2016. CMC Sisters actively cooperate in the church activities. At present the church is renovated and its blessing will be held on 15 July 2018 at 4.00pm by Cardinal Mar George Alencherry, the Major Archbishop.

### **INFORMATION**

➤ **Feast of St Alphonsa at Nagercoil:** As in previous years, I request all the Fathers to participate in the celebrations and to urge our people to take part in them. Kindly encourage the people to make a pilgrimage to the shrine at least once during the ten-day celebrations. The youth of our Eparchy normally play a major role in the celebrations. Kindly motivate them to participate in the *Nadaipayanam* in large numbers. The Youth Director of our Eparchy in consultation with the Parish Priests of the various parishes and shrine will plan systematically for its success. It is very important to prepare our faithful for this pilgrimage through special prayers, fasting and novena. This year the feast of St Alphonsa at the Shrine will begin on 20 July and will end on 29 July 2018. The important highlights are the following:

- 20 July – *Kodiyettu*, Holy Qurbana, Very Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Proto-Syncellus.
- 21 July – *Nadaipayanam* Pilgrimage by the youth and faithful of the Eparchy
- 25 July – Malankara Qurbana presided over by Very Rev. Fr. S. Varghese, Proto-Syncellus, Marthandam Diocese.
- 28 July – Holy Qurbana in Latin rite presided over by Rt Rev S. Singaroyan, Bishop of Selam Diocese
- 29 July – **Eparchial Pilgrimage Day:** Holy Qurbana, Mar George Rajendran sdb, Eparchial Bishop. I request all the parishes to participate in the Eparchial Pilgrimage. Kindly arrange the necessary transport for your respective parishioners.

**Please remember:**

- ❖ The first nine days will be observed as days of novena in preparation for the feast. There will be Holy Qurbana and novena in honour of St Alphonsa on all these days in the evening. Holy Qurbana on 29 July will be held in the morning at 9.30am.
- ❖ The different Foranes will animate the Holy Qurbanas on different days:
  - 20 July 2018 - Nithravilai
  - 21 July 2018 - Padanthalumoodu
  - 23 July 2018 - Arukani
  - 24 July 2018 - Soosaipuram,
  - 26 July 2018 - Manjalumoodu
  - 27 July 2018 - Thuckalay-Pilankalai
- ❖ To celebrate the feast of St Alphonsa, St Alphonsa Academy will conduct inter-school and inter-college competitions on 4 August 2017.
- ❖ The Parish Priest of St Alphonsa Shrine will send you the detailed programme of the celebrations with date, time and due explanations.

- Rev. Br Abilash has completed his theological studies in Rome and will return to the Eparchy on 30 June 2018. He will be ordained deacon on 3 July 2018 at Christurajapuram at 5.00pm. He will, then, join the Vadavathoor Seminary for the Diaconate Course. We welcome Br Abilash!
- Rev. Br Shijo Jose has completed one year of his Masters course at Urbanianum University, Rome. We congratulate him!
- Rev. Fr Printo has successfully completed the First year of his LLB studies. We congratulate him for managing the studies along with his pastoral works.
- Rev. Fr Abin has successfully completed his first year MSW studies at Loyola college, Chennai. We congratulate him!
- **Blessing of Muzhucode Church & Meeting with Cardinal:** The blessing of the renovated church at Muzhucode will be held on 15 July 2018 at 4.00pm. On that day our dear Major Archbishop will grace the occasion. He will reach the diocese on 14 July. It is a golden opportunity for us priests to gather around him on 14 July by 6.00pm at Sangamam for a short meeting followed by dinner. We shall also have a brief meeting of all the fathers, Sisters and pastoral council members of our Eparchy with the Cardinal at 2.00pm on 15 July 2018 in Mount Carmel school, Muzhucode. Please take note of the date and time. Kindly be present for the meeting and for the jubilee celebrations.

#### FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

03 July 2018	- Diaconate of Rev. Br Abilash at Christurajapuram
07 July 2018	- Blessing of the Church Stage at Manjalumoodu and Night Vigil Prayer
08 July 2018	- Catechism Anniversary
10 July 2018	- Priests' Conference at Sangamam
14 July 2018	- Meeting with Cardinal at Sangamam
15 July 2018	- Blessing of Muzhucode Church & Meeting with Cardinal
16-17 July 2018	- TNBC at Poondy
20 July 2018	- St Alphonsa Feast Begins at Nagercoil
21 July 2018	- <i>Nadaipayanam</i> to St Alphonsa Shrine Nagercoil
29 July 2018	- Eparchial Level Celebration at St Alphonsa Shrine, Nagercoil

#### CONCLUSION

As you receive this circular letter, you will be busy preparing to celebrate the feast of St Thomas, the Apostle of India. While we take pride in calling ourselves St Thomas Christians, it is important that we know him well and make every effort to emulate at least some of the virtues that he excelled in. St Thomas refused to believe in the resurrection of Jesus without having a direct personal experience. When he had that experience, we find him to be a true believer: "My Lord and My God!" Like St Thomas, we too need a personal encounter with the Lord so that our lives will become more enriching and our ministry more effective. May St Thomas intercede for each one of us so that we too can experience the risen Lord as he did!

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



**+George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

