



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/101/2019

30 November 2019

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

We are entering the month of December, the last month of the year. It is a significant month for us Catholics as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on 25 December. In preparation for this great solemnity, we have twenty-five days fast and the season is very meaningfully called Advent – waiting for the Saviour. I wish God's blessings upon all our people as they begin to undertake this fast. I am sure you are already began to make better plans and preparation for the celebration of Christmas in your respective parishes or institutions. As I mentioned to you during the priests' conference, which was held on 20 November 2019, kindly include in your planning, a celebration with the people of your neighbourhood. Kindly invite all the people who live in and around your parish or institution. Organise a brief programme with them explaining to them the significance of Christmas. If possible, I suggest that you give to each of them a small gift. After all Christmas is a celebration of sharing and whatever we share with others make our Christmas very meaningful.

To help us to reflect upon Christmas, let us consider a significant line in the Gospel that challenges our love of God and of others. It also points to God's humble and abiding love for us. In the infancy narratives, St Luke very poignantly writes: "For there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). Joseph, on behalf of Mary and Jesus (who is in her womb still), seeks entrance to the homes and lodgings of those in Bethlehem. Although the Jewish people in those days placed a high obligation upon the duty of hospitality to the stranger and passer-by, the answer repeatedly given is, "No room here." Mary's obviously advanced pregnancy and the imminence of delivery seem to make little difference.

It was indeed a cold night, not so much in terms of the air temperature, but in terms of the hearts of the people. Surely someone could make room for a pregnant woman! But no; no room at the inn. The only warmth to be found is amongst the animals. An old Latin antiphon for Christmas says, "O great mystery and stunning sacrament, that animals would see the newborn Lord lying in a feed box." Here in the manger, warmth will be found, among the animals. It is sometimes said that man can be brutish, but the reality is that we can sink even beneath the beasts, doing things to ourselves and to one another that even animals do not. Scripture says: "The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know me, my people do not understand ... They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him" (Is 1:3-4). Again we read: "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to

that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (Jn 1:10-11). The animals received him and gave warmth, yet his own people, knowing him not received him not. But in this midnight darkness and cold, the light and warmth of God’s love will shine forth. “The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone” (Is 9:1).

Surely God stoops low to come from lightsome heaven to our war-torn, dark, cold world. As he stoops, he stoops to the lowest place, being born not in a palace or even in a comfortable home. He stoops to a manger. God will defeat Satan’s pride with humility. All who will find him during this Christmas must also stoop. This stooping of God is illustrated even in the very topography of the area. The towns of the Holy Land were built on the tops of the tall hills. Where land is relatively scarce, this is done so as to leave the fertile valleys for agriculture. Bethlehem was perched on higher land and the shepherd’s fields lay below. The streets of Bethlehem were steep and built on tiers or levels. Thus, the back lot of many homes and buildings dropped steeply down and beneath the buildings. Beneath the buildings the people hollowed out caves where animals and tools and tools were kept.

It was in such a place, down under, where Joseph and Mary sought hasty shelter, for it was a cold and dark midnight and Mary’s time had come. God stooped with them to be born, among the animals and agricultural implements, in the damp cave under some house or inn. Those who want to find our God must stoop low. Even to this day, when one visits Bethlehem and wants to see the place of Jesus’ birth, one must first enter the church through what is called the ‘door of humility.’ For security reasons, this door was built to be only about four feet high. One must stoop greatly to enter through it. Yes, we must stoop to find our God. The site of the birth is at the other end of the basilica, under the altar area. Here again, more stooping is required; down steep stairs, through another low and narrow door, and into the cave. To touch the spot, one must kneel and reach forward into a narrower part of the cave. ‘Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary,’ says the inscription. The only way to get there is to stoop.

Yes, our God stoops; he stoops to the lowest place. To find him and be with him we, too, must be willing to stoop. God hates pride. He just cannot stand it because he sees what it does to us. He comes to break its back, not with clubs and swords or by overpowering, but with humility. Darkness cannot defeat darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot defeat hate; only love can do that. Pride cannot defeat pride; only humility can do that. So God stoops.

At Christmas, God calls us with this same humility. He could have ridden down from heaven on a lightning bolt and stunned us into fearful submission. Instead he goes to the lowest place. He comes quietly, non-violently, without threat, as an infant. Even in this lowly way, though, He is still calling. So there is a knock at Christmas. Scripture says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). An old song says, “Somebody is knocking at your door! Oh Sinner, why don’t you answer?”

When human history is complete and the last books are written, one of the saddest lines in all of that history will be this one: ‘For there was no room for them in the inn.’ How strange and sad for this world that God simply does not fit. He does not fit our agendas, our schedules, our priorities. No room; He just does not fit. Scripture says: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (Jn 1:11). “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).

What could be sadder than to miss this gift to become the very children of God? But there was no room for him in the inn. What of us? Is there room for Jesus in the “inn” of our hearts? If there is, Jesus comes bearing many gifts. There is a knock at the door during this Christmas. Jesus knocks at our door.

Every year Jesus comes knocking. He stoops low and invites us to find him in the lowly places of this world, in the lowly places of our own life. What are the things in your life that may be crowding out Jesus? What obstacles and preoccupations leave little or no room for him? What keeps you from recognizing Jesus and opening the door wide when he comes? If you’ve already opened the door to him for many years, praise God and ask the Lord to help you open wider. Even though many of us have invited Jesus in, we have given him poor accommodations, perhaps relegating him to the couch or the floor.

Hence, the message of Christmas, dear Fathers, is this: make room for Jesus. Make more and more room for him in the inn of your soul. The Scripture assures us: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12). Christmas night is a night of gifts and Jesus stoops low to give us a priceless gift: the power to become children of God. However, the question is: Is there room in the ‘inn’ of our hearts?

NEWS AND EVENTS

6th Pastoral Council Inaugurated: I inaugurated the Sixth Pastoral Council 2019-2022 on 1 November 2019 at Sangamam. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Vice President of the Pastoral Council and Mr Aniyam Kunju, former Pastoral Council Secretary of the Archdiocese of Changanassery were present. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil welcomed everyone to the meeting. He also announced the appointments of Fr Thomas Sathianesan as the Director and Mr John (Kumarithozhan) as the Secretary of the Sixth Pastoral Council. During inaugural programme, Mr Aniyam Kunju took class for an hour for the members of the Pastoral Council on how to be an effective member in the Church. In the afternoon, there was the presentation of the Silver Jubilee theme. Fr Joseph Santhosh, Fr Joshy Kulathumkal and their team guided the discussions. I also used the opportunity to thank Fr Jose Muttathupadam, former Vice President, Fr Mijo Puthenpurayil, former Secretary and Mr John, former Joint Secretary for their dedicated work for the smooth running of the Council for last six years. I also thanked all the members of the previous Pastoral Council. Mrs Vijayakumari and Mr Shonik are appointed Assistant Secretaries for the Pastoral Council.

Felicitation for Sisters in their First and Final Professions: The Eparchy organized a meeting of all the Sisters who made their first and final professions this year. The meeting was held in the Bishop’s House on 8 November 2019. These Sisters are serving in our Eparchy. The finally professed Sisters are Sr Jincy Maria SABS, Sr Geo Maria SABS, Sr Jeremi Maria CMC, Sr Dona Maria CMC and Sr Alphine John CMC. The Sisters who made their first professions are Sr Anju Maria Nedumparambil SABS, Sr Swapna Maria Kochuparampil SABS, Sr Sophia Jose FCC and Sr Shiny Alphonse FCC. The meeting started at 6.00 pm with my conference. It was followed by Holy Qurbana and the meeting concluded with Supper. The Sisters expressed their happiness for having spent time with the Bishop. They also felt very close to Eparchy. The meeting concluded at 9.00 pm.

23rd Diocesan Day and Inauguration of the Two-year Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Eparchy: The inauguration of the two-year celebrations of the Silver Jubilee of the Eparchy was held during the 23rd Diocesan Day. It was celebrated on 10 November 2019 in Padanthalumoodu at 2.45pm. Mar

Mathew Arackal, Bishop of Kanjirapally, was the chief guest. He welcomed at the entrance of the Church. Bishop Mathew presided over the Holy Qurbana. During the Holy Qurbana, he inaugurated the two-year Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Eparchy by lighting the Silver Jubilee Candle. At the end of the Holy Qurbana, the Jubilee candles and plaques were given to every parish and convent of the Eparchy. Kaikars and one lay lady representative from every parish and superior of the convent received the candle from the Bishops. After the inaugural programme, the Diocesan Day programme commenced. In the parishes, the inauguration of the two-year celebrations of the Silver Jubilee was held on 24 November 2019.

Visit of Bishops of Palai: Mar Joseph Kallarangattu, Bishop of Palai, Mar Joseph Pallikparampil, Bishop Emeritus of Palai and the Vicar General visited our extended territories of Sivagangai, Ramanathapuram and Madurai on 12-13 November 2019. Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil, Fr Peter Kizhakeyil and Mr Sounder Raj accompanied them. They visited some of the villages in and around these districts. It was heartening to see Bishop Pallikparampil, in his advancing years, moving around the villages with great enthusiasm and commitment.

Mission League Rally: The Mission League of the Eparchy organized the Rally of Mission League children from Kalluvilai to Kattathurai on 17 November 2019. More than 1500 children participated in the rally. Many of the parish priests and Sisters took part in the rally. The rally highlighted the different themes using floats, placards and dresses that the children used. I thank sincerely all the priests and Sisters for their active participation. This year I would like to thank and congratulate in a special way the Forane Directors of Mission League for their active involvement in organizing the children of their respective Foranes. Arukani Forane won the first prize, Manjalumoodu Forane won the second prize and Thuckalay-Pilankalai won the Third prize. I also appreciate and congratulate Fr Alex Puthettu, Director and Fr Jose Vayalil, Assistant Director, and all the Mission League central body members for their hard work and dedication in organizing the programme so well. Special thanks to all the Forane directors and sisters who have prepared the children well.

Celebration of Canonization of St Mariam Thresia: The Eparchial level thanksgiving celebration of the canonisation of St Mariam Thresia, Founder of Holy Family Congregation, who was canonized on 13 October 2019 by Pope Francis in Rome, was held on 23 November 2019 at Padanthalumoodu. It was a great blessing that all our neighbouring Bishops were present: Most Rev. Peter Remegius, Most Rev Nazarene Soosai, Most Rev. Jerome Das and Most Rev. Vincent Mar Paulus. I officiated the Qurbana and Most Rev Vincent Mar Paulus gave the homily. Most Rev. Peter Remegius solemnly installed the holy relic of the Saint. At the end of the Holy Qurbana, Most Rev. Nazarene Soosai led a prayer through the intercession of St Marian Thresia and gave the final blessing with the Holy Relic. Many priests, religious and lay people were present for the programme.

Inter-Eparchial Meeting: The inter-eparchial meeting was held on 26 November 2019, at Bishop's House, Changanaserry. The Bishops of Palai, Kanjirapalli, Changanaserry and Thuckalay along with the department heads of all the Eparchies were present. Nine of us represented our Eparchy. The meeting began at 10.00 am with a prayer and words of welcome by Archbishop Joseph Perumthottam. One of the topics for discussion was the new missions in the extended territory of our Eparchy. Every one present expressed their happiness and satisfaction at the commencement of mission stations by various Eparchies. I requested that the Eparchies could make further contributions by sending more priests and religious to the extended territories. The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

INFORMATION

- ❖ **Mr Gerardo and Mrs Ulli from Germany** visited the bishop's House on 12 November 2019.
- ❖ **Deacons Robin Jose and Toji** came back to the Eparchy after completing their theological studies. They are appointed at Manjalumoodu and Malaicode parishes respectively. We welcome them and wish them God's blessings as they are beginning their pastoral ministries in preparation for their priestly ordinations.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal** visited our candidates to priesthood at Ujjain on 24 November 2019.
- ❖ **Parish level Inauguration of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations:** To give more participation and to generate involvement of our faithful, parish level inauguration of our two-year Jubilee celebrations was held in all our parishes on 24 November 2019, Solemnity of Christ the King. The parish priests solemnly lit the main jubilee candle and distributed small candles to all the families. The people also recited the jubilee prayer.
- ❖ **Mission Sunday:** We celebrated the World Mission Sunday on 20 October 2019. Still some parishes have not submitted the Mission Sunday collection. I remind you, dear Fathers, to send the Mission Sunday collection to Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Eparchial Procurator, at the earliest.
- ❖ **Eparchial Bible Convention:** The Eparchy organises a three-day convention at Kalluvilai every year. This year the convention will be held on 29, 30 November and 1 December 2019. I welcome you all to attend the convention.
- ❖ **New Bishop of the Diocese of Palayamkottai:** His Holiness, Pope Francis, has appointed Msgr. Antonysamy Savarimuthu (59) of the Clergy of Palayamkottai, as Bishop of Palayamkottai, Tamilnadu. This provision was made public in Rome on Wednesday, 20 November 2019, at noon, corresponding to 16:30 hours, Indian Standard Time. Rev. Dr. Antonysamy Savarimuthu, Bishop-elect of the Diocese of Palayamkottai, will be consecrated as Bishop of Palayamkottai on Sunday, 15.12.2019, at 5.00 pm in St. Xavier's Hr. Sec. School ground, Palayamkottai. The Diocese of Thuckalay along with its faithful wishes the new Bishop all success as a shepherd of the Diocese of Palayamkottai
- ❖ **Christmas Greetings:** I am sure, you have already received the bishop's personal Christmas Greetings to the faithful. Kindly distribute it when you go for Christmas carol singing to the families. You will receive the Liturgical wall Calendar 2019 and Christmas poster for the notice board on 19 Dec. when we have priests gathering. Please read the personal letter addressed to you before distributing the greetings. There is a self-addressed envelope in the pack, kindly encourage all the faithful to contribute generously to the diocese. You are personally asked to collect the envelope from the faithful and later submit the same to the financial officer of the diocese.

UPCOMING EVENTS

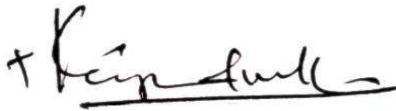
5 December, 2019	-	Inter Department Meeting, Bishop's House
14 December, 2019	-	Death anniversary of Fr. Thomas Thekkeyil
14 December, 2019	-	Pre-Christmas gathering, Shenkottai
15 December, 2019	-	Pre-Christmas gathering, Madurai
15 December, 2019	-	Episcopal ordination, Palayamkottai
16 December, 2019	-	Pre-Christmas gathering with Missionaries of extended territories
19 December, 2019	-	Pre-Christmas gathering with Presbyterium
21 December, 2019	-	Pre-Christmas gathering with CRI- Thuckalay
28 December, 2019	-	Priestly ordination of Dn Shijo

CONCLUSION

We are entering the last month of the year 2019. The year has been very momentous for the Eparchy in many ways. We have achieved much during this year. God has been blessing us with good vocations, sufficient resources and personnel from other Eparchies to continue our mission work in the extended territories of the Eparchy. Let us raise our minds and hearts to God in gratitude for all the blessings that we have received throughout this year. Let me take this occasion to wish everyone a **Christ-filled Christmas and a prosperous New Year!**

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

