



Bishop's *Circular*

Bishop George Rajendran sdb
Diocese of Thuckalay

Bishop's House, P B No: 12, Thuckalay PO,
Kanya kumari Dt- 629 175, Tamil Nadu, India

For Priests / Sisters

Ref. No. Priests/GR/88/2018

30 November 2018

Dear and Reverend Fathers,

On 2 December 2018, we shall enter into the holy season of Advent and subsequently the season of Christmas. It is important that we reflect upon the crucial roles this season ought to play in the lives of our people. The days of Advent and Christmas are moments of grace for every believer. Hence, we need to reflect upon them and teach our people the importance of these seasons in their lives and how to spend fruitfully these holy days.

The liturgical season of Advent marks the time of spiritual preparation by the faithful before Christmas. As you are aware, Advent begins on the Sunday closest to the Feast of St Andrew the Apostle (30 November). It spans four Sundays and four weeks of preparation, although the last week of Advent is usually truncated because of when Christmas falls.

The celebration of Advent has evolved in the spiritual life of the Church. The historical origins of Advent are hard to determine with great precision. In its earliest form, beginning in France, Advent was a period of preparation for the Feast of the Epiphany, a day when converts were baptized; so the Advent preparation was very similar to Great Lent with an emphasis on prayer and fasting which lasted three weeks and later was expanded to 40 days. In 380, the local Council of Saragossa, Spain, established a three-week fast before Epiphany. Inspired by the Lenten regulations, the local Council of Macon, France, in 581 designated that from 11 November (Feast of St Martin of Tours) until Christmas fasting would be required on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Eventually, similar practices spread to England. In Rome, the Advent preparation did not appear until the sixth century, and was viewed as a preparation for Christmas with less of a penitential bent.

The Church gradually formalized the celebration of Advent. The *Gelasian Sacramentary*, traditionally attributed to Pope St Gelasius I (dated 496), was the first to provide Advent liturgies for five Sundays. Later, Pope St Gregory I (dated 604) enhanced these liturgies composing prayers, antiphons (Psalms), readings, and responses. Pope St Gregory VII (dated 1095) later reduced the number of Sundays in Advent to four. Finally, about the ninth century, the Church designated the first Sunday of Advent as the beginning of the Church year.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* stresses the two-fold meaning of the coming of Christ that we commemorate during this season. When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah. In sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful are helped to renew their ardent desire for his second coming.

On one hand, the season of Advent invites the faithful to reflect back and encourages celebrating the anniversary of the Lord's first coming into this world. We ponder the great mystery of the incarnation when our Lord humbled himself, taking on our humanity, and entered our time and space to free us from sin. On the other hand, we recall in the *Creed* that our Lord will come again to judge the living and the dead and that we must be ready to meet him.

In the Syro-Malabar tradition, the liturgical year begins with the period of Annunciation. The four weeks of preparation for the feast of the Nativity of Jesus constitute this season. Since, our people observe abstinence from 1 to 25 December to prepare for Christmas, this period is called as *25 days Lent*. Though we observe it only for 24 days, we call it 25 days Lent, because we count the days from 30 November evening. For this reason, it is called *Pethurtha*, which means, returning, ceasing etc. Lent is a time to return from worldly pleasures and eating the meat products. A question can be raised on the observance of this Lent. We are preparing for a joyful event, namely, the birth of Jesus. Hence, what is the need for observing Lent for receiving a Good News? We know that the inner meaning of Lent is spiritual preparation for a holy life. For us, it is usual to prepare well to receive important persons to our parishes or to our homes. In this sense, how much more we should prepare in order to receive the King of kings! The best preparation would be to make sacrifices. Moses was with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating and drinking before receiving the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:28). Elijah, before entering the mountain of God, travelled forty days and forty nights without eating and drinking (1 king 19:8). Jesus himself taught us: "Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mt 16: 24). Therefore, 25 days of Lent, which we observe in preparation for Christmas, is an occasion to prepare our lives to receive the child Jesus.

After the season of advent, we enter into the season of Christmas when we shall celebrate joyously the birth of the Saviour. Christmas, coming as it does upon the winter solstice, is a time of paradoxes. We see the light shining in the darkest season, the fire blazing in the cold of winter, life stirring in the fallow of the year. We participate in the paradoxes of the season when we acknowledge the infant light at the darkest point of the year. We read in the Gospel of John, "The light still shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn1: 5). Just as the light of the Sun is secretly rekindled and reborn, so are we given an opportunity for our divine spark to wax and grow in light. Christmas is a feast of the interior light, a rekindling of the spiritual spark within us, even as we see the fire blazing in the cold of winter.

In the Gospel of St Matthew, we read: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means, God with us (1:23)." Let us seize the moment and allow ourselves to feel the presence of this God of ours who prefers to be with us. He comes with the message of forgiveness. He asks to forgive one another so that he can also forgive us our sins. "Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us" (Lk 11:4). Christmas is a time to feel the fact that we are all brothers and sisters created in the image and likeness of God. People belonging to different religions need to live in peace and mutual understanding. Even among Christians, there are different denominations. But they need to work in tandem to bring the message of forgiveness and peace that the Lord came to give to the people around. The prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper should be uppermost in our minds: "They may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I you, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17: 21).

Christmas is also a time of sacrifice in that we often participate in the giving of gifts and contributing to charities at this time. The nativity and birth that we celebrate at Christmas Eve is a sacrifice. Jesus

sacrifices the glory and light vesture of the celestial aeons in order to take on human form and dwell upon the earth. Writing to the Philippians, St Paul was able to capture it. "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God, something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness" (Phi 2:6-7). There is no book, no scripture and no authority outside of one's self that is an authentic source regarding the mystery of incarnation. It is a mystery that can only be witnessed individually in each one's own heart.

Further, Christmas belongs not only to those who call themselves Christians but to the entire world. The lowly animals, birds, plants and trees all participate in this nativity of the divine light at Christmas. An old French legend tells how all the animals were given the gift of speech on Holy Night so that they were granted the ability to give outward expression to their consciousness and recognition of the light. Our compassion for our human brothers and sisters is increased when we realize that the animals and trees are also wondrous beings in even more humble, limited and unrecognizable form than ourselves.

Finally, as we are all very familiar, the baby Jesus was born in a stable used to shelter animals and is laid in a manger - a humble birth for the proclaimed King of kings. We also share that humble existence in this world. We also experience the sacrifice of the glorious light of the aeons and see our light power as a tiny spark of its original flame. The holy birth of Christmas represents the birth of the Christ-Sun within us, an awakening of our consciousness to who we are and the light from whence we came, an awakening from the sleep of forgetfulness.

Christmas is at hand! Let us experience the birth of Christ in our hearts and offer him to our people, who are longing for his presence in their lives.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Golden Jubilee of Mukkootukal School: Holy Family Primary & Higher Secondary School, Mukkootukal celebrated the Golden Jubilee of its foundation on 8 November 2018. Rev. Fr Joseph Madathil, one of the pioneer missionaries of the Eparchy, began the School in 1969. He was its first manager. The pioneers of the school were Rev. Sr Soby SH and Rev. Sr Kenishia SH. Mukkoottukal was very backward area at that time and the people were living very miserable lives. With the coming of the school, the standard of the people came up. 28 SSLC batches and 18 Higher Secondary batches have passed out from this School. The Eparchy remembered with gratitude the dedicated work of all the Correspondents, Managers, Head Masters, Teachers and Staff during the celebrations. I extent my gratitude to Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, Correspondent, Rev. Fr Jose Vayalil, Manager, and Mrs Sasikala Vijaya Kumari, Headmistress, Mr Mathew Varghese, Head Master of Primary School and all the teaching and non-teaching staff for organising the Golden Jubilee celebrations in a colourful manner.

Diocesan Day: On the Diocesan Foundation Day, 11 November, the Eparchy celebrated the 22nd Diocesan Day at Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu. The celebrations started at 3.30pm with a concelebrated Holy Qurbana. I presided over it. An open stage cultural programme presented by the various parishes then followed. Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, VG, welcomed all the faithful. Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor, presented a brief report of the Eparchy. Rev. Sr Mary Vinaya CMC, Rev. Sr Elseena CMC, Rev. Sr Dheeba ASMI, Mrs Amalorphavam from Shenkottai and Ms Malliha from Christurajapuram were honoured with the Diocesan Sevai Chemmal award for their pastoral work in the Eparchy. Many Fathers, Sisters and Faithful participated in the event. Rev. Fr Joseph Santhosh, Rev. Fr Robins Kuzhikodil, Rev. Fr Tobin Alapurackal and Rev. Fr Sumesh

Valliyamthadathil worked hard to make the event a grand success. I thank all of you, dear Fathers, for making the event memorable for all of us.

Rev. Fr Chacko Basil CMI: Rev. Fr Chacko Basil Varampathuchira CMI, one of the pioneer missionaries of CMI Congregation in the Eparchy of Thuckalay, has returned to Kerala on 11 November 2018 due to ill health. Fr Chacko was born on 7 January 1938 at Chennamkary, in the Archdiocese of Changanacherry. He was ordained priest on 1 December 1964 for the CMI Congregation. He came to Kanyakumari Mission in 1976 and worked in our Eparchy about 40 years. He worked in Pilankalai, Kaliyal, Anjugramam, Kanyakumari, Netta and Muzhucode. The Eparchy remains indebted to him for the dedicated ministry in the region.

Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil: The Eparchy warmly welcomes Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil, a great missionary of our Eparchy, as a permanently incardinated priest. Fr Mathew was ordained priest on 28 December 1983 and since 25 February 1986 he is working in our Eparchy although he belonged to the Eparchy of Pala. He was a great missionary in Kanyakumari and Shenkottai. After a long period of preparation and meditation, Fr Mathew is now canonically excardinated from the Eparchy of Pala and is incardinated to our Eparchy on 12 November 2018 with the agreement of Mar Joseph Kallaranguattu, Bishop of Pala (CCEO c. 359, 365 § 2). The Eparchy receives Fr Mathew Kuzhinjalil, one of the great missionaries of our Eparchy, with love and gratitude. The Eparchy has now 50 incardinated priests. I am sure his presence and ministry in the Eparchy will give more impetus to our future missionary activities. I use this opportunity to thank Mar Joseph Kallaranguattu, the Eparchy of Pala for allowing Fr Mathew to join our Eparchy permanently.

New Venture of KKSSS: KKSSS has introduced a new venture, namely, Thuckalay Nidhi Limited to serve the needy through easy financial enhancements. The launching of the Thuckalay Nidhi Limited was held on 20 November 2018. The office functions at Kalluvilai as a separate unit in the KKSSS building. It is considered as a land mark in the history of the Eparchy of Thuckalay. My special thanks go to Rev. Fr Saji Elambasseril sdb.

Bible Convention: This year we are organising the Annual Bible Convention from 30 November to 2 December 2018. These are days of blessing and renewal for our people as well as for the Eparchy. Dear Fathers, I am sure you are organizing vehicles for people to come over to Kalluvilai and encouraging them to participate in large numbers. Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, Rev. Fr Mijo Puthenpurayil and their team will coordinate the programme.

INFORMATION

- ❖ **Visit of the Mother General of SD Congregation:** Rev. Sr Raisy SD, Mother General, and Rev. Sr Ancelin SD, General Finance Councillor, of the SD congregation visited the Bishop's House on 8 November 2018 along with the Sisters of Varuthattu and Munchirai communities.
- ❖ **Visit of Provincial Superior of MMM:** Rev. Sr Valsamma Lukose MMM, Provincial Superior, along with one of the Councillors and Rev. Sr Marykutty MMM, Superior of Kuzhithurai Convent visited the Bishop's House on 9 November 2018. They are planning to buy a piece of land near Padanthalumoodu and are planning to start a community there.
- ❖ **New FCC Provincial Thuckalay Province:** Provincial Synaxis of Sanjoe Province of Thuckalay was held from 17-23 November 2018 and elected the new provincial Team:
 - **Rev. Sr Ancelin FCC** - Provincial
 - Rev. Sr Lizbeth FCC - Vice Provincial and first councillor

- Rev. Sr Reema FCC - Councillor
- Rev. Sr. Silvy FCC - Councillor
- Rev. Sr Anupama FCC - Councillor
- Rev. Sr Lissy FCC - Finance officer
- Rev. Sr Amala FCC - Province Secretary

I wish all God's blessing and pray that the good Lord may shower his blessing upon the new team. I sincerely thank Rev. Sr Celia FCC, Out-going Provincial, who worked with great commitment for the welfare of the Congregation for six years. She was very supportive of the various activities of the Eparchy. As president of the CRI Thuckalay unit, she organised a number of programmes of the religious of the area. I thank Rev. Sr Celia FCC her team for their services to the Eparchy.

- ❖ **CMC Synaxis:** The CMC Vice-Province of Thuckalay will hold its Synaxis from 8-11 December 2018. We wish all the Synaxis members and pray to God for them and the special intention of the congregation.
- ❖ **Madurai Mission:** Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil will look after the new mission territory in Madurai along with Rev. Sr Rosline SABS and Rev. Sr Missy Maria SJSJ. Rev. Sr Rosline SABS and Rev. Sr Missy Maria SJSJ are now visiting villages to make the first contacts. They have found possibilities for mission work. Please pray for our mission works in the extended territories of our Eparchy.
- ❖ **Jubilee Celebrations of North Indian Syro-Malabar Mission Eparchies:** The Syro-Malabar Eparchies of Sagar, Satna and Ujjain celebrated the golden jubilee of their foundation this year. It was in the year 1968 that the Exarchs were established. All the three Eparchies have grown over the years. Situated in the heart land of Madhya Pradesh, these Eparchies have served the people with great commitment and dedication. They have supported the marginalised people of the area in their developmental activities. Some of our Brothers are studying in the seminaries of Satna and Ujjain. I participated in the jubilee celebrations held in Satna on 14 November 2018 and in Ujjain on 17 November 2018. All the pioneer missionaries were felicitated during the programmes. I also met all our Brothers studying in the seminaries there.
- ❖ **The Mission Week Celebration of the Syro-Malabar Church 2019,** will be observed from 6-12 January 2019 and in our diocese we can celebrate it on 6 January 2019. Please note that the circular of Major Archbishop is to be read in all our parishes during Holy *Qurbana* on 30th December 2018. Dear Fathers, please remember to celebrate Syro-Malabar Mission Sunday in your Parishes on 6 January and take a collection during the Holy *Qurbana*. The collection from all the Parishes will go to our Syro-Malabar Church Head Office for the mission work of the Church. A clear direction on how to celebrate the Syro-Malabar Mission Sunday will come from the Director to the Mission League children.
- ❖ **Directory 2018-2019.** I am sure you have received the copy of the new directory of the eparchy. If you find any mistakes, kindly give in writing to the Eparchial Chancellor. I am grateful to Fr. Sathianesan, Fr. Shoji, Sr. Philo and Ms Vinoli for preparing the directory.
- ❖ **Christmas Greetings:** As I have mentioned to you dear fathers, you will receive the bishop's personal Christmas Greetings to the faithful soon. Kindly distribute it when you go for Christmas carol singing to the families. Along with it you will receive a Liturgical wall Calendar 2019, which will have to be paid. Please read the personal letter addressed to you before distributing the greetings.

TRANSFERS AND APPOINTMENTS

- ❖ **Rev. Fr Sajan Nettaponghu** is appointed as the Office Secretary at Bishop's House and he has taken charge on 12 November 2018. Fr Sajan is residing at Sangamam, Thuckalay from 10 November 2018. His contact numbers are 8300179691 / 6374163752.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurackal** is relieved from his ministry as Office Secretary from 10 November 2018.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Kurian Koipuram** is relieved from his ministry as the parish priest of Loreto Matha Church, Anamukham from 25 November 2018 and he is now appointed as the assistant parish priest of Arukani. He will help Rev. Fr Tobin and Rev. Fr Kochumon for the pastoral ministries.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Tobin Alapurackal** is given the additional charge as the parish priest of Loreto Matha Church, Anamukham from 25 November 2018. Rev. Fr Kochumon Madapurackal will also help with Holy Qurbana at Anamukham.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil** is appointed to the Madurai Mission.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

30 November - 2 December 2018	- Bible Convention at Kalluvilai
09 December 2018	- Meeting of Kaikars and Accountants at Sangamam
18 December 2018	- Pre-Christmas Gathering for Priests at Sangamam
24 December 2018	- Blessing of Altar at Thadikkarakonam
25 December 2018	- Christmas

CONCLUSION

We are entering the last month of the year 2018. 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 and sufficient resources 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

