



Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

Bishop George Rajendran sdb

Diocese of Thuckalay

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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

These days we are bewildered by the sudden surge of Corona virus in the world and in our country. We are now lock down in our residences without the possibility of undertaking any pastoral activity. In the Second Book of the Chronicles, we read: "Whenever I hold back the rain or send locusts to eat up the crops or send an **epidemic on my people**, if they **pray** to me and **repent** and **turn away from the evil they have been doing**, then I will hear them in heaven, and forgive their sins, and make their land prosperous again" (2 Chr. 7:13-14).

You will all have read or at least heard the poem *Footprints in the Sand*. I want to reproduce it below in the context of the epidemic that we are suffering from:

"One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.

'Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me.'

He whispered, 'My precious child, I love you and will never leave you
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.'"

Until a few weeks ago, our lives have been normal. Of course, with the usual ups and downs. Then all of a sudden, we were hit with the pandemic - COVID -19 caused by Coronavirus. Now the whole world is reeling under the blow of this unforeseen infectious disease. First identified in China, it has spread all over the world, causing the deaths of thousands of people, especially in China, Italy, Spain and the US. The latest news is that this virus has taken nearly 37820 lives already. In India alone, already 1421 confirmed cases and 41 deaths. There is lot of panic, fear, and anxiety. Now we are all worried about what is going to happen since no successful vaccine has been found to combat this disease so far.

In this alarming situation, we know that God is with us: Emmanuel (Mt. 1:23). But do we believe that in this hurting time, he is not only with us but is really carrying us in his hands? Well, this is really the truth because we were created in his loving providence, and it is under the umbrella of the same providence that we are passing through this crisis. Hence, what is needed is trust in his providence and surrender of our lives into his hands. In the book of Deuteronomy, we read: “There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place” (Deut. 1:31).

The government has declared a time for quarantine to break the chain of the spread of this virus. In the book of Isaiah 26:20, we read: “Go into your house, my people and shut the door behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until God’s anger is over.” We also see in the gospel of John that those who shut themselves in the room were strengthened by the peace of Christ. That is why I say this is a time to introspect oneself and get reconciled to Christ. “It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you,’ he said” (Jn 20:19).

Yes, this is one of the times that we need God’s real peace; we need Jesus to carry us through. Remember, he is with us always as he promised: “I will be with you till the end of the ages” (Mt. 28:20). He is always with us in his Word, in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, and in each one of us. What is important is that we love him and walk with him, trusting in his goodness and mercy.

There is the story of a man who had a dream in which an angel appeared to him with a list of names in his hand. When the man saw the list, he became curious and asked the angel what the list was about. “It is the list of people who love God,” replied the angel with a smile. Getting hold of the list, the man found his name was not in the list. Immediately his face fell. Then the angel showed him another list and said that his name was included in that second list. It was the list of people whom God loves!

Yes, God loves us dearly even when we do not remember him and love him. We need to turn to him and ask his special help to tide us over this heart-breaking crisis. Words like, “Do not be afraid,” “Fear not,” and “Be courageous” appear a few hundred times in the Bible and they are meant for us, to strengthen us and comfort us. Hence, as Jesus says: “Fear is useless; what is needed is faith” (Mk 5:36). Let us now hold onto our faith more than ever before and let us continue to pray with faith that our prayers will be answered.

St Padre Pio used to remind people: “Why worry when we can pray with hope?” Let us try to follow his advice and try to pray constantly with hope and without worry for an early end to this pandemic. Right now we cannot come together to pray as a community. However, united in faith and love, we can pray in our homes for our well-being, as well as the well-being of all humanity. At the same time, let us try to follow the guidelines of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities and take the necessary precautions to avert this tragedy. May God bless you always with good health and peace!

As we pray, let us pray through the intercession of all the Saints so that we may be saved from the threat of this epidemic and contagious virus. Let us say the little prayer that the Holy Father requests everyone to say in our minds, for the protection from corona virus: “I am vaccinated by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. No virus can touch me.” I am also reminded of another scripture verse: “Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always ask him with a thankful heart” (Phi 4:6). I urge you to remember that “when you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for” (Mk 11:24). Let us strengthen one another in our continuous prayer at this time of global catastrophe.

As we are placed under lockdown to contain the virus that is spreading exponentially, I want to make some suggestions that may help you to spend these days fruitfully:

- Appreciate this period of physical isolation, solitude and silence. This is a time of Sabbath rest. Consider this as a prolonged retreat.
- If you are living with others, maintain interaction but observe physical distance (one meter, no touch). Join common meals. Spend time in prayer and sharing with each other the Word of God.
- Observe proper hygiene – constantly wash your hands, clean and disinfect surroundings (especially doorknobs).
- Be well rested, avoid stress. Get adequate sleep (seven to eight hours). Avoid activities that can disrupt sleep patterns.
- Practice meditation (focus on breathing and mindfulness, centring prayer, meditative recitation of the rosary) – holistic method of deepening spirituality, managing stress as well as boosting your immune system.
- Observe healthy diet to improve your immunity to resist the attack of the virus.
- Since you cannot go out for a walk or a jog, do indoor high intensity exercise (weights, push-ups, etc.), walk around your garden (if you have one) or go up and down the stairs.
- Spend time in reading – feed your mind, update yourself of what’s happening, learn something new. Read the Bible and other spiritual books.
- Do something productive or creative: work in your room, write, do research, work on projects, learn the Tamil language well, pursue your hobby, gardening, play and listen to music, compose songs and poems, start a diary, etc.
- Maintain social contact with your parishioners, friends and colleagues through the internet/social media. Give them updates on what is happening. Share with them what you are doing, your thoughts and feelings. Participate in online interactions. Continue to exercise your prophetic mission online: share the Gospel and bring hope to your people. Find out how you can help especially those in need. Share your resources with those who are less fortunate.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Blessing of Puliyarai Church: Rev. Fr Seby, parish priest, with the help of benefactors and his parishioners began the renovation work of the church last year. The church is given a face lift - more space in front and back, new *Mondolam*, new *Madubhaha* and a new altar. The newly renovated church was consecrated on 1 March 2020. Some Fathers and Sisters from Thuckalay took part in the blessing. Puliayrai is the first mission in Senkottai Taluk that Rev. Fr Mathew Kuzhijalil opened. The liturgy was celebrated for years in a make-shift building. Now, we have a beautiful church in its place. Fr Seby and the parish community worked very hard for realising this project. A number of benefactors and friends

supported the venture financially. We thank and appreciate all of them for their hard work and encouragement.

Inter-Diocesan Meet: The Ecclesiastical Provincial gathering of four Eparchies under the Arch-eparchy of Changanassery was held on 3 March 2020 at St Joseph Engineering College, Palai. All the Bishops together with the Directors of all the major departments of the Eparchies were present. From our Eparchy, 12 Fathers were present for the meeting. Mar Joseph Perumthottam, Archbishop of Changanassery, chaired the meeting. The main agenda was the issues affecting the minorities with regard to the government scholarships and minority benefits. Preparation of a special curriculum that includes the topics like Sacredness of body in the catechism for youth was also discussed.

INFORMATION


- ❖ **The Priestly Ordinations** of Deacon Robin Jose and Deacon Tiji Sebastian are postponed. The new dates will be finalised after the completion of lock down.
- ❖ After the lock down period is completed, we shall prepare the various programmes of the Eparchy for the months of April and May 2020.

CONCLUSION

The season of Lent is almost over and we are entering the Holy Week, which commemorates the most important events of our salvation. Unfortunately, we are not able to celebrate them as we do in previous years with our people. However, we shall follow the directions that our dear Major Archbishop has given us during these days. In all our liturgical celebrations, kindly remember to pray for our people. As we enter the Holy Week, let us remember Jesus' model of service as he washed the feet of the disciples and called them to break bread in remembrance of him. Let us remember his willingness to give everything, even his life, so that justice might prevail on earth. In the emptiness of Holy Saturday, as we await that triumphal celebration of New Life, let us vow not to stay in our tombs, waiting complacently for human rights to abound, but rather to walk in the path marked out by Jesus to have the courage, and the heart, and the love to speak out and take action against human rights and other injustice, and to be willing to suffer the consequences that all people might know and experience the world that God intended. We should always trust the Lord and "take delight in the Lord, and He will give the desires of our heart. Commit our way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make our righteous reward shine like the dawn, our vindication like the noonday sun" (Ps 37:4-6).

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

