



# Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

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**Diocese of Thuckalay**

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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings and prayerful wishes Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic our people have endured testing times with courage, resilience, and compassion. Individuals and communities have made great sacrifices for the protection of health and life. Like many others, the Church has endeavoured to support the people in the face of considerable uncertainty and disruption. I owe a great debt of gratitude to you, dear Fathers, and to the many volunteers whose continued dedication has ensured that our churches have remained very safe places to gather for Mass and the Sacraments. We have also been blessed in the commitment of our school communities who have been supporting our young people in very demanding circumstances, including assisting with their Sunday catechism classes.

Advent and Christmas are likely to be very different this year. Advent, as a time of patient, hopeful waiting and longing, will have a particular resonance in these times, while the much-needed joy of Christmas may well be tempered by the impact of restrictions. I encourage parish communities to explore creatively ways in which the hope of Advent and the joy of Christmas can be realised and safely celebrated.

His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, writes in his book *Seek That Which is Above*: "Advent is concerned with that very connection between memory and hope which is so necessary to man. Advent's intention is to awaken the most profound and basic emotional memory within us, namely, the memory of the God who became a child. This is a healing memory; it brings hope. The purpose of the Church's year is continually to rehearse her great history of memories, to awaken the heart's memory so that it can discern the star of hope. It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope."

With advent, we begin a new liturgical season and start living and celebrating the mysteries of redemption afresh in the new year. It is a special season, in which we join the fathers and prophets of the Old Testament in waiting for the coming of the promised Messiah. It is a period of fruitful waiting for the Lord. This waiting has a double dimension: it relives the memory of long wait for the first coming of Jesus as an Infant born of the Virgin Mary; it is a hopeful expectation of the glorious return of the Lord to judge the living and the dead.

Waiting is one of the most profound human experiences in life: a couple expecting a child, a student waiting for the results of an examination, someone expecting the arrival of a friend or family member after long separation. In fact, it is hope and expectation that keep humans alive. The moral and spiritual strength of a person is measured in terms of his/her hopes and expectations. In this time of Christmas, we are expecting the incarnation of the Son of God, the saviour of all. Our world is in need of a Saviour and as believers, we await God's coming. It is an invitation to live with a new spirit of hope and expectation for God's intervention in our lives and in human history. Wish you all a fruitful advent season.

Advent tells us that the Emmanuel - God with us – has left his divinity to enter into our humanity to raise us up to a higher place, a higher purpose, to transform our lives, to redirect our lives, to turn us around, plant our feet on higher and solid ground. When we understand the real value of Advent in our lives, we would be led into a much greater understanding and appreciation for Christmas; and when we have a greater understanding and appreciation of these two seasons, we will find ourselves in the place where we can no longer think only of cards and cribs and cakes; but move beyond it to recognizing God in ourselves and especially in the working of God in history and the people.

In our Syro-Malabar tradition, advent is a season of fasting. We fast for twenty-five days to prepare for the nativity of Our Lord. When speaking of fasting, we need to keep in mind that, it is not an external action. It has to come from within, spread to all our actions and raise us to the heavens. Fasting is not a period of sadness; it is a period of enjoyment. It is a period of enjoying heavenly bliss. It is a period for celebrating the Holy *Qurbana* and the Liturgy of the Hours in the most solemn manner possible. It is a time for being with God in His temple. In fasting, more than not eating or drinking or taking part in any bodily entertainments, it is the spiritual entertainments that are more important, namely, the celebration of the liturgies.

If fasting in the Old Testament was a sign of repentance, in the New Testament it is for acquiring the divine qualities and is equal to the heavenly life. Fasting is for purifying the heart. It is for humbling ourselves in the presence of God in the heavenly kingdom. We know the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18: 9-14). The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” We know that the tax collector and not the Pharisee, who went home justified before God.

Let us meaningfully spend the twenty-five days that are at hand in order to prepare for receiving the child Jesus. Whenever we think of Christmas, we are reminded of the nativity scene with the stable, the ox, the donkey, the shepherds, Mary, Joseph and on Christmas the image of the Child Jesus. This is an opportunity to reflect on the mystery of God’s love for us that we are celebrating.

Christmas is about a definitive moment in time, in human history, when God showed that He cared for every one of us by entering into our humanity so that He could walk with us, so that He could live with us, so that He could lead us, carry us, lift us to that better place. It is therefore not just about holidays, but rather about the love of our God who wanted to become one with us so deeply, that he gave up his divinity to enter into our wretched humanity. Our greetings, therefore, as they relate to these two seasons should stay clear of a happy holiday syndrome. Our greetings should clearly speak of, and include the real reason for the seasons of Advent and of Christmas - Jesus Christ.

As all of us are aware, Christmas - the birth of God in a poor manger - is the most celebrated feast in this world. Christmas offers us all an opportunity to recapture glimpses of childhood’s sacred memories. There is timelessness about gazing into the crib and coming face to face with the truth that God came down from heaven and dwelt among us as a helpless baby. The gospel story tells us that at Bethlehem on a starry night the Son of God was born. A burst of light startled the shepherds, and angels sang at his birth. It is the simplicity of this happening that captures the imagination. Christmas is more than a story that is told; it is about a birth that brings heaven right down to earth. Love came down at Christmas, broke the sacred barrier between creature and Creator and gave an eternal value to our lives. God has given us the gift of reaching beyond ourselves and discovering the joy of heaven.

There was nothing romantic about the first Christmas. Christ's birth was a hard and bitter experience for Joseph and Mary, two poor people with doors slammed in their faces. They were the picture of poverty with neither room nor lodgings; forced to shelter in a stable outside the entry walls, where animals gave up their manger for the child Jesus. The Christ who was to die on Calvary outside of Jerusalem was born outside of Bethlehem. The message is clear from the very beginning that the love of God is available to all, but especially the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged. The stable is an indication of our need to see grace and goodness in the most deprived of people. As we kneel before the crib, we can pray for the vision during this short life of ours to see things God's way and for the courage to act according to his will.

Christmas means something only in so far as we welcome the Lord as he comes to us in the wonder of every human being and as he reveals himself in the value and dignity of every person with whom we live and work. One of the things that makes Christmas very special is being remembered by friends. It is essentially a family feast and an occasion for exchanging gifts and sharing the warmth of our homes in the company of friends. Our hearts and our thoughts are especially with family members who are absent and unable to take part in our festivities. God's presence and love can be experienced in healing misunderstandings, patching up quarrels and letting bygones be bygones. Sometimes removing bitterness can be extremely difficult, but forgiving and forgetting will enable us to enjoy our Christmas happiness to the full.

Christmas is also about kindness, about giving and about the returning of love for love. It is the time of year when our hearts are in the right place and when we realize it is more blessed to give than to receive. We become alive and sensitive to the many needs of the poor who are crying out for our generosity and caring. Spare a thought also for those people who find the going tough and whose lives at this particular time are in the shadow of the crib because of a cross or a recent death. Our joy highlights their sadness. May your Christmas be a holy one because if it is, it will be a happy and joyful one.

I invite you, dear Fathers, to enter into these important moments – the season of advent and the season of Christmas - of our Christian living with greater commitment and devotion so that we can reap rich spiritual benefits not only for ourselves but also the people for whom we have dedicated our lives.

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Meeting with Choir Members of the Eparchy:** The members of Eparchial choir gathered at Sangamam on 5 November 2020 at 2.30pm. The group discussed about the modalities for the formation of choir groups in our parishes.

**Eparchial Day:** As you know, every year we celebrate the Eparchial Day on 11 November. This year, the 24<sup>th</sup> Eparchial Day was celebrated on Sunday, 8 November in our parishes. In order to give opportunities for more people to participate in this event, we organised Holy Qurbana in all our parishes at 3.30pm. The felicitation ceremony and Eparchial Day events were telecasted online from Sangamam at 5.00 pm. During the ceremony, Mr Mariadhas, who received *Preshitha Tharam* award of Syro-Malabar Church, and Ms Sherly Vimal, who secured first rank in the DEO examinations, were felicitated. A spiritual book written by Fr Lijo Thekkel was also released. The programme lasted one and half hours. A report on the state of the Eparchy was also presented. I thank you, dear Fathers, for your participation and efforts to telecast the events for the people. I congratulate and thank Fr Thomas Powathuparampil and his team for their hard work.

**Priests and Religious Sangamam:** This year we celebrated the Priests and Religious Sangamam in a simple way at St Chavara CMC Provincial House Thuckalay on 14 November 2020. The celebrations started at 9.30am with

the Holy Qurbana. Rev. Fr Mathew Mulangasseril, who celebrated the silver jubilee of his priesthood, was the main celebrant. Thereafter, the Jubilarians were felicitated and honoured. Rev. Sr Alice Vigi CMC, Rev. Sr Zeliguerin CMC, Rev. Sr Elsy Caroline SH, Rev. Sr Bency Ann SH, Rev. Sr Rosaline Jose SH, Rev. Sr Elizabeth Pulinkumthadam SABS, Rev. Sr Rose Sebastian SDS, Rev. Sr Francis Mary SDS and Rev. Sr Mary Bosco SDS celebrated the golden jubilee of their first religious profession. Rev. Fr. Mathew Mulangasseril, Rev. Fr Joseph Anithottam CMI and Rev. Fr Babu Thattil CMI celebrated the silver jubilee of priesthood. Rev. Sr. Preetha Theresa SH, Rev. Sr Anns Maria CMC, Rev. Sr Mary Beena LSDP and Rev. Sr Mary Jaimy LSDP celebrated the silver jubilee of their first profession. The whole ceremony was well organized by the CMC Sisters. I sincerely thank and congratulate Rev. Mother Vigi CMC, provincial, and all the Sisters for making the event something memorable for the Jubilarians.

**Blessing of Community Hall at Karode:** The St Joseph Parish, Karode is celebrating golden jubilee of its establishment this year. On this occasion the parish priest and the parishioners worked very hard to fulfil the long standing dream of constructing a community hall. The work was completed and it was blessed on 22 November 2020 at 5.00 pm after the Holy Qurbana. All the parishioners, invited religious and priests, were present on the occasion. I congratulate Fr Ajeesh Attiyil and the parishioners for their hard work.

**Blessing of Community Hall and Cemetery at Manjalumoodu:** As you know, the new Church of St Little Flower Forane, Manjalumoodu, is going to be consecrated on 21 December. Prior to this great event the parish priest and the parishioners felt the need for constructing an additional community hall and cemetery. It was with sheer will power, prayer and hard work that they were able to complete them. The community hall and the cemetery were blessed on 29 November 2020 after the Holy Qurbana at 7.00 am. I congratulate Fr Augustine and the parishioners who worked hard for the development of the parish. I specially appreciate the co-operation of people of Manjalumoodu parish.

**Popular Mission Retreat:** In order to prepare spiritually for the silver jubilee of the Eparchy, all the parishes in the Eparchy will have Popular Mission Retreats preached by the Vincentian Fathers. This special retreat for the faithful will begin from last week of January 2021. Paraicode and Anayadi parishes will be the first ones to begin with. Rev. Fr Mijo Puthenpurayil is appointed the general coordinator of Popular Mission Retreat. Rev. Fr John Bosco VC and Rev. Fr Lijo VC addressed the presbyterium on 17 November and explained to the members regarding the advantages of Popular Mission Retreat and how to prepare the faithful for it. I request all of you to prepare well our faithful for this great spiritual renewal in our Eparchy.

**Vocation:** We are all aware of the present vocation crisis in our Eparchy and the need to pray and to promote good vocations to priesthood and religious life. It is my earnest request to all the Fathers to identify promising boys and girls and follow them up. In order to help the Vocation Director and to support the Fathers in their quest for identifying and following up good vocations, we have appointed one junior priest each to all the Foranes. The main task of these junior priests is to visit the parishes and homes of the selected candidates. I request everyone to give maximum support to them.

## INFORMATION

- Rev. Mother Mercy Nedumpuram SABS, provincial of SABS Changanassery province, made her official visit to all their religious houses in our Eparchy. She met me on 2 November 2020. She also had dinner with the Bishop's House community.
- The Provincial and the Procurator of the Vincentian province visited our mission territory in Thoothukudy District on 18 November 2020. Vincentian Fathers have agreed to begin mission work in the Thoothukudy district without much delay.

- Tamil Class for Sisters began on 21 November 2020 at Karunalayam, Kalluvilai. The classes are held from 10.00am to 3.00pm on every Saturday and the teacher is Mr Kamala Selvaraj. The total number of participants is 36.
- Rev. Fr Anil Raj, co-ordinator the Madurai Mission, has already left for Madurai. He took up his residence in a rented house at Pudur, Madurai on 24 November 2020. The formal blessing of the house will take place on 13 December 2020.
- A Marian Night Competition on Our Lady was organised in our minor seminary on 30 November.

### NEWS FROM THE CURIA

- **Rev. Fr Christudas** is appointed parish priest of St Martin De Pores parish, Kazhuvanthittai and he took charge on 12 November 2020.
- **Rev. Fr Shojo Erupathanchilchira** is appointed parish priest of Christ the King parish, Christurajapuram and Assistant Correspondent of Jaya Matha Matriculation School, Christurajapuram with effect from 12 November 2020.
- **Vattakottai Mission:** In the Vattakottai Mission, one family received baptism and other sacraments. We decided to elevate this mission and to grant permission to form a unit of basic Christian community. The new Centre will henceforth be known as **Arokiya Anni Mission Church, Vattakottai.**
- **Fr Kuriakose (Linslal Augusthy) Mangalath** is suspended from the administration of Sacraments and Sacramentals and from other priestly ministries. He will not be considered a priest of the Eparchy. Hence he should not be admitted for any religious functions as priest in the Eparchy as well as in other Eparchies.

### FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

03 December 2020	- Pastoral Council
12 December 2020	- Visit to Shenkottai
13 December 2020	- Visit to Madurai
17 December 2020	- Pre-Christmas gathering for Priests at Sangamam
19 December 2020	- CRI Pre-Christmas gathering at CMC, Thuckalay
21 December 2020	- Consecration of Little Flower Forane Church, Manjalumoodu


### CONCLUSION

As we begin the holy season of Advent, let our persistent prayer be— Maranatha - Come, Lord Jesus. Let it resonate in our hearts. Advent is also a time for looking both backward and forward. We look backward as we prepare to celebrate the historical birth of Jesus. At the same time, we look forward to the Second Coming of Jesus as we get ourselves ready to welcome him into all the areas of our lives during this season.

Although there will be occasions when we can personally wish one another during this month, still let me, through this letter, wish you, dear Fathers, a Merry Christmas and a God-filled New Year 2021. May you have a faith experience of the Babe of Bethlehem as you prepare to celebrate Christmas! May our Blessed Mother intercede for each one of us!

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

