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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

The Universal Church celebrates the feast of one of its most cherished saints, namely, St John Marie Vianney, popularly known as Curé of Ars, on 4 August. He is not only the patron saint of parish priests but also the patron saint of confessors. His dedication and spiritual service in converting a vast number of people and bringing them back to the light of the Lord, by spending hours of battle at the confessional, has made him the patron saint of confessors. His life is an inspiration to priests in their service. His commitment to the conversion of sinners and the confessional is a reminder to us of the importance of the sacrament of confession.

In fact, the great miracle of the Curé of Ars was his confessional that was besieged day and night. Four years after his canonization in 1925, Pope Pius XI named him the patron saint of parish priests. The fundamental reason why the Church named St John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests, is not because he left us a body of inspiring sermons like Fulton J. Sheen, or celebrated Mass with copious tears, or because of his all night vigils of prayer, fasting on boiled potatoes, legendary battles against the devil, his love and care for orphans. What made him famous, what earned him there pupation of being a saint in his life time, was what God did through him in his besieged confessional. For most of his 41 years in Ars, a town that had 230 people when he arrived and about 600 permanent people when he died, he heard confessions of about its entire population regularly. He used to hear confessions for 12-14 hours in the winter and 16-18 hours in the summer.

In a 1986 letter to priests on the bicentennial of the Curé's birth, St John Paul II said that the state of the world requires that all priests should imitate the pastor of Ars in making themselves very available for the Sacrament of Penance. He asked them to give it priority over other activities so that the faithful will realize the value attached to this most difficult, the most delicate, the most taxing and the most demanding priestly ministry of all - especially when priests are in short supply.

During the year of the priesthood, Pope Benedict XVI lifted St John Mary Vianney up as an example for all priests, meaning that he is a model not merely for those priests who do the most important work of all in the parishes, but also those who teach full-time, those who work in diocesan offices, those who work in the diplomatic corps, those who serve as bishops and even popes. Pope Benedict wrote in a 2009 letter to the priests of the world, wrote: "Priests ought never to be resigned to empty confessionals or the apparent indifference of the faithful to this Sacrament. In France, at the time of the Cure of Ars, confession was no more easy or frequent than in our own day, since the upheaval caused by the revolution had long inhibited the practice of religion. Yet he sought in every way, by his preaching and his powers of persuasion, to help his parishioners to rediscover the meaning and beauty of the Sacrament of Penance, presenting it as an inherent demand of the Eucharistic presence. He thus created a 'virtuous' circle. By spending long hours in church before the tabernacle, he inspired the faithful to imitate him by coming to visit Jesus with the knowledge that their parish priest would be there, ready to listen and offer forgiveness. Later, the growing numbers of penitents from all over France would keep him in the confessional for up to sixteen hours a day. It was said

that Ars had become a great hospital of souls.”

Reading through the life of St John Mary Vianney, we can learn many lessons for making our priestly lives more effective and meaningful. The first lesson concerns the practical tips he gave on how to go to confession. He encouraged penitents to be candid, clear, concise and contrite. With proper preparation, he said, the confession even of someone who had been away for years should be able to be done within a few minutes. He tried to help those who were prone to loquacity, especially in giving non-essential details, to prune their confession and give just those circumstances that were directly relevant to committing the sin. This was not so much to save time, but because he generally saw that the greater the details, the less sorrowful the penitent; rather than identifying the root causes of sins, the extra details were normally employed to explain or excuse them. That’s why he counselled from the pulpit: “Avoid all the useless accusations. They waste the confessor’s time, fatigue those who are waiting to confess and extinguish devotion.”

Second, St Vianney sought to remove whatever fears people might have incoming to confession. He knew that many were reluctant to confess because they worried what the priest might think of them. He sought to reassure them, first, by telling them that there was nothing that they could say that would surprise the priest. “Is it really humiliating to accuse yourself of your sins?,” he asked. “The priest knows well what you’re capable of.” Then he told them what the priest’s reaction would be to their humble self-accusation and trust in God’s mercy. “The priest will have mercy on you. He will cry with you,” as often St John Vianney did.

Third, St John Mary Vianney sought to help the penitents to receive sacramental absolution prayerfully, by getting them to grasp what it really meant. “When the priest gives absolution, it’s necessary to think of only one thing: that the blood of the good God is flowing through our soul to wash it, purify it and make it as beautiful as it was after baptism.” Absolution is a great miracle, just like the miracle of baptism, when the soul that was deadened by sin experiences the miracle of the resurrection. It is not uncommon in some places, especially where confessional lines are long, for priests to have penitents to say their act of contrition simultaneously with the prayer of absolution, or for penitents to begin praying their penance while the absolution is being given. The Curé of Ars wanted no such multi-tasking. He tried to help his penitents slow down to reflect on what was occurring, which he was convinced would help them grow to love the sacrament more and experience more of its fruits.

Fourth, St John Vianney tried to get his parishioners and penitents to pray for their confessors. “The penitent should pray,” he suggested repeatedly, “that the good God give to his confessor the necessary light and grace.” Just as he was praying and fasting for penitents, so he was asking them to do the same for him and his brother confessors. He knew, perhaps more than any other priest in Church history, how much priests are in need of prayer to act to act effectively in the person of the Divine Physician with each penitent who comes. They need God’s grace to understand not just the sins but the sinners who come before him, to remain patient with those who try their patience, to be gentle with those who are particularly sensitive, to be firm with those who need a good spiritual kick in the pants, to cry with those who lack contrition, to give hope to those in despair, to guide with clarity those who are lost and confused, and to know what to say and what not to say in order to help the penitent turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.

Fifth, the patron saint of priests always reminded his penitents that, if they wanted to receive God’s mercy, they had to be merciful with others. “Unless you forgive others their sins,” Jesus said in the Gospel, “your Heavenly Father will not forgive yours” (Mt 6:15). St John Mary Vianney helped them to see that their absolution required forgiving others 70 times 7 times. “The good God will

pardon only those who pardon,” he said. “That’s the law.” He helped his parishioners to live by it.

Finally, St John Mary Vianney not only sought to help the penitents to forgive others but to bring others to receive the same forgiveness that they had received from God. He tried to make them cheerful apostles of the sacrament of reconciliation, spreading the joy of being forgiven to their family members, friends and neighbours. Far more effective than 100 homilies on confession is the witness of a satisfied customer. The geometric explosion in the number of penitents in the tiny, barely accessible hamlet of Ars, was ascribable not only to God’s grace and the Curé’s prayers but to the testimonies of so many penitents whose joyful personal tales were compelling advertisements.

As we celebrate the feast of St John Mary Vianney, let us take to heart some of these lessons. We need to remember that the most effective means in getting the penitent to return is, in most cases, not by pointing the finger at them or telling them that they need to go to confession. But it is to go to confession ourselves and then to share with them the incredible joy we have in being reconciled with the Father. This is a great time to experience personally this wisdom of the Curé of Ars and to invite others you know to come to experience healing. Let us, through our priestly ministry, allow the great hospital of souls keep running in our Eparchy.

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Mission Appeal in USA:** Thanks be to God, the mission appeal programme in the US went off well. I visited 6 Syro-Malabar parishes and met many friends who are supporters of our mission. I presented our mission work especially the new missions in our extended territories to the faithful there. The people in the US were happy to know that Syro-Malabar Church in Tamilnadu is active and is spreading God’s love among the poor and the needy. I was also happy to see growth of Syro-Malabar Church in the Diocese of Chicago. Most of the communities have their own parish churches and people make great efforts to come to the church for liturgical celebrations despite the long distances and heavy schedule of work. I returned to the Eparchy on 3 July 2018. I wish to thank you for your prayerful support during my missionary sojourn.

**Diaconate Ordination of Br Abilash:** Rev. Br Abilash was ordained Deacon on 3 July 2018 in the Christ the King Church, Christurajapuram at 5.30pm. As you know, Deacon Abilash has completed his theology in Rome. I welcome him to our presbyterium and wish him God’s blessings. Deacon Abilash has joined the St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor for the Diaconate Course on 16 July 2018.

**Sunday School Anniversary:** The anniversary of catechism was held on 8 July 2018. I was happy to witness the large number of students and teachers for the celebration. From this year onwards, we have decided to keep the anniversary celebration for the entire day. During the forenoon hours the teachers and students had orientation programmes separately. Holy Qurbana was then celebrated. In the afternoon, there was the Anniversary celebrations and public meeting. The catechism students from various parishes took part in the cultural programme. On this occasion we honoured the teachers who have completed 50 or 25 years of teaching catechism. Their achievements were highlighted. The Golden Jubilerian is Mr. Viswanathan - Nithravilai, and Sr. Therese CMC for 40 years of service and the Silver Jubilerians are Sr. Grace ASMI, Sr. Anupama FCC, Sr. Jessy FCC, Mrs. Sneha Latha and Mrs. Daisy G. – Munchirai, Mrs. Maria Baby – Mankarai, Mrs. Christal Ancy – Vayalinkarai, and Mrs. Flowrance – Killiyoor. I congratulate Rev. Fr Sanil Panthichirackal, Director, Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurackal, Assistant Director, Fathers, Sisters, promoters and teachers for taking the trouble to bring children in large numbers.

**Major Archbishop with Priests of the Eparchy:** Major Archbishop Mar George Cardinal Alencherry reached the Eparchy on 14 July 2018. He was received at Sangamam at 4.00pm. After the reception, he spent the evening with the priests of the Eparchy. It was a golden opportunity for us to express our gratitude, support and prayers. In his message, the Major Archbishop asked to love the church and to work for the good of the Church.

**Events of Major Archbishop in the Eparchy:** On 14 July evening after the meeting with the priests, Major Archbishop visited Rev. Mother Mariyamma FCC, who was admitted for a surgery at Holy Cross Hospital, Nagercoil.

Major Archbishop Mar George Cardinal Alencherry blessed the foundation stone of the new church to be built at Christ the King Church, Paraicode on 15 July 2018 at 9.30am in my presence. Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arackaparambil, parish priest, Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor, Rev. Fr Luka Kollamparampil CMI, Forane Vicar and a large number of parishioners were also present.

On the same day, the Cardinal visited CMC Sisters at Thuckalay Vice Provincial House, the Thuckalay friends at Bishop's House, the construction work of St Martin De Pores Church, Kazhuvanthittai and the seminarians at St Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkootukal. He had a meeting with the Sisters of the Eparchy. He also met the pastoral council members of our Eparchy at 2.00pm in the CMC Mount Carmel Auditorium, Muzhucode.

**Golden Jubilee of Muzhucode Parish:** The blessing of the renovated church at Muzhucode was held on 15 July 2018 at 4.00pm. Major Archbishop, Mar George Cardinal Alencherry blessed the renovated church and presided over the Holy Qurbana. I concelebrated with him. Other prominent priests presented for the occasion include Rev. Fr. Sebastian Chamathara CMI, Provincial of St Joseph's Province Thiruvananthapuram, Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam and Rev. Fr Davis Karukkappally CMI. The Cardinal also inaugurated the Golden Jubilee meeting.

**Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi Missions:** Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil and Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu have started their mission in Tirunelveli. They celebrated Holy Qurbana for the migrant Syro-Malabar community on 15 July 2018. I congratulate Fr. Ginoy and Fr. Alex for their dedication in finding out the people and starting a small community in Tirunelveli within a month.

**Feast of St Alphonsa at Nagercoil:** As in previous years, all the Fathers participated in the celebrations. A number of people from different parishes took part in the *Nadaipayanam* on 21 July 2018 which started at 6.30 am from Bishop's House, Thuckalay. The Youth Director of the Eparchy systematically arranged it with the help of young people of the Eparchy. I want to personally appreciate and thank the people of Thakkalivilai who walked from their parish to St Alphonsa Shrine at Nagercoil. They started the *Nadaipayanam* at 4.30am from their parish. This is the first time in the history of *Nadaipayanam* that people took the initiative to walk from their parish. I congratulate and thank all the Fathers and our faithful for the cooperation and participation at the Forane level and Eparchial level celebrations. The Eparchial Pilgrimage Day was held on 29 July 2018. Many of our priests and faithful took part in Holy Qurbana very enthusiastically. I use this opportunity to thank Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, parish priest, Rev. Fr Ajin Jose, assistant parish priest and the parishioners for making all the arrangements for the successful completion of the feast of St Alphonsa.

**CMC Muzhucode turns Silver:** It was on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1993 that the CMC Convent, Carmel Bhavan, was established at Muzhucode. Since the CMI Fathers had already started their mission centre, the Sisters from Kaliyal Convent collaborated with them in the pastoral activities. Rev. Fr Mathew

Vakkayil, then Mission Co-ordinator, took the initiative to begin a Convent there and built a small house with the necessary conveniences for the Sisters to stay. The first inmates were Sr Betty CMC (Superior), Sr Leo CMC, Sr Geo CMC, Sr Zeligurine CMC and Sr Elseena CMC. They were involved in the Faith formation of the people. The Sisters began to teach Catechism, visited houses, conducted prayer meetings and run health care centres. As they felt the need to educate the people in order to up lift them morally, culturally and economically, the Sisters began an English medium school on 1 June 1994 and it was officially inaugurated on 16 July 1994 taking the name Mount Carmel School, Muzhucode. Now this Matriculation school has become a centre of learning for the people in the neighbouring villages.

The Convent celebrated the silver jubilee on 26 July 2018. During the celebration, the newly built auditorium was inaugurated. Let us thank God for the choicest blessings that He has showered upon this convent and its apostolate.

### **INFORMATION**

- ❖ Rev. Fr Josy Puthenpurackal is coming to the Eparchy for a month of vacation on 1 August 2018. We welcome him warmly and wish him happy stay in the Eparchy.
- ❖ The MCBS Fathers have begun a religious presence at Surandai, Shenkottai. The apostolate will consist of running a School, administering an old age home and undertaking pastoral ministry. We welcome the Fathers and wish them God's blessings.
- ❖ 2 September 2018 will be celebrated as Communication Day in our Eparchy. The Sunday collection of that day will be meant for the upkeep of Matha TV. Kindly inform our people and ask them to contribute generously towards our Catholic TV.
- ❖ The feast day of St Maria Vianney, 4 August 2018, is celebrated in the Eparchy as Priests' Day. The Priest's Day is celebrated in a solemn way in the Minor Seminary Mukkoottukal. Match between Priests and Brothers, cultural programme of the Brothers and solemn dinner are the highlights of the day. I request you, dear Fathers, to note down this date and participate in this programme without fail. Rev. Fr Josy Kulathumkal, Rector of the Seminary, will organize the event.
- ❖ The Priests and Religious Sangamam will be held on 3 September 2018 at St Little Flower Church, Pilankalai, Azhahiyamandapam. I request all the Fathers and Sisters to mark this date and participate in this programme. During the programme, those who are celebrating their Silver or Golden jubilees of their religious profession will be honoured. Kindly give the names of those who are celebrating their jubilees with their photos to the Chancellor.
- ❖ Rev. Fr Robin Koorumullil was in the Eparchy for a month for his vacation. He returned to Ireland on 5 July 2018.
- ❖ The Mukkoottukal and Arukani schools have inaugurated the Golden Jubilee celebration.

### **FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES**

04 August 2018	- St Maria Vianney Day at Minor Seminary Mukkoottukal
07 August 2018	- Priests' Conference
13 August 2018	- Inter Eparchial Meeting at Palai
15 August 2018	- Blessing of Deva Matha Church, Killiyoor
19 August 2018	- Laying of foundation stone for the Church at Paraicode
20-31 August 2018	- Syro-Malabar Synod at Kakkanad

**Ongoing Formation Course for Junior Priests will be held on 13 and 14 September 2018. It ends with the Priests' Conference.**

## CONCLUSION

The month of August offers us with a number of feasts not only for celebration but also for our edification. Besides the feast of St John Mary Vianney, on 15 August we celebrate the twin festivals of Assumption of our Blessed Mother Mary and the Independence of our beloved motherland. Assumption is an expression of our deep faith because we believe in the real, physical elevation of the sinless soul and incorrupt body of our Mother Mary into Heaven. 15 August also commemorates the independence that we obtained from the United Kingdom after years of struggle. On this day, let us pray for the wellbeing of our country and ask Mother Mary to intercede for us so that we become free from every form of bondage and be with her one day in heaven.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

