



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

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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

On 13 October, Pope Francis will canonise the Blessed Mariam Thresia, founder of the Congregation of Holy Family, and will enrol her among the saints of the Catholic Church. It is indeed a momentous event for our Syro-Malabar Church. I am happy to attend this solemn event together with all the bishops of our Church. As an Eparchy, we shall celebrate this event solemnly on 23 November 2019 at Padanthalumoodu. We have some of the Sisters of the Congregation that she founded carrying out their ministry in the Eparchy. As we thank God Almighty for this bounteous gift, we pray that her charism and holiness may permeate the members of the Church. In this circular, I shall briefly reflect with you the life and the spirituality of Blessed Mariam Thresia.

Blessed Mariam Thresia was born on Wednesday 26 April 1876. Her parents were Mr Thoma and Mrs Thanda. Following the custom, she was baptized seven days after her birth on Wednesday 3 May 1876 in the parish church of Puthenchira by the parish priest, Fr Poulose Maliekal Koonan. She was given the name Thresia after St Teresa of Avila.

The little Thresia learned to love Jesus from her virtuous mother. She used to tell her the stories of the Bible and some incidents from the lives of the saints. When she was only three years old, on hearing the bell rung for the Angelus, she inquired and learnt from her beloved mother about the meaning of making the sign of the cross and the prayer Hail Mary. The mysteries of the Holy Trinity, the Annunciation, and the Passion of Christ were also the subjects of her inquiry. In her life there are many proofs that Thresia meditated and treasured them in her life.

When Thresia was 12 years old, Mrs Thanda, her mother, died. She adopted the Blessed Mother as her own mother and found consolation in it. After the death of her mother she received all sorrows, pains and hardships with surprising equanimity. She was consoled by the celestial visions, especially those of the Holy Family when she was tortured by the devil with trials and tribulations. She chose Fr Joseph Vithayathil as her spiritual father, who led her along the path to sanctity. Blessed Mother helped and gave her strength in her struggles and asked Fr Joseph Vithayathil to add the name Mariam to the name of Thresia as a mark of her love for her. Accordingly, on 8 December 1904 she was called Mariam Thresia.

God prepared Mariam Thresia for thirty-eight long years through temptations, sufferings and misunderstandings to become the Foundress of the Congregation of the Holy Family. History reveals that Blessed Virgin Mary instructed Mariam Thresia to visit families of Puthenchira village. This has

become a turning-point in the apostolic vision of Congregation of Holy Family. She wished very much to be united with God in solitude. Bishop John Menachery, then Vicar Apostolic of Trichur sent her to the Carmelite Convent at Ollur. But Thresia realized that her way of life was different from that of the Carmelites. She informed her spiritual father of this. The people of Puthenchira, who understood the value of her services, requested the bishop to bring her back to them. Bishop Menachery acceded to their wish. He wrote to her: "It is not the will of God that you stay in this convent, so you may return to your own place. Your spiritual father will build a house for you there." She returned home on 26 January 1913. The bishop asked Fr Vithayathil to build the "Ekanthabhavan" (The House of Solitude) for Thresia.

As instructed by the bishop, Fr Joseph Vithayathil made plans to construct the House of Solitude. The land for the building was donated by Mr Maliekal Koonan Kunjuvaried Ittoop. Fr Joseph Vithayathil started the construction at his own expense. When it reached up to the plinth-level, he found it difficult to continue the work for lack of funds. Thresia comforted him, saying that she would find the money needed by begging. With much difficulty he reluctantly consented to it. She went with a companion to various places seeking help. Within a short time, the House of Solitude was completed.

As Fr Joseph Vithayathil was not feeling well, he sent Thresia and a companion with a letter to the bishop, seeking his permission to bless the house. But she did not get a favourable reply. She returned disappointed, but resigned to God's will. "Lord whatever you desire, only that I want. Let your will be done." The next day, however, the bishop deputed his secretary, Fr John Ukkann, to bless the House of Solitude. In the presence of Fr Joseph Vithayathil, many other priests and many parishioners of Puthenchira, Fr John Ukkann blessed the House of Solitude on 23 September 1913. The people of the place met all the expenses for the same.

Thresia, who loved solitude very much shifted to the House of Solitude on 7 October 1913. Soon some of her companions joined her taking turns to keep company with her at night. They started to live with her from January 1914 onwards. Eventually the Congregation of the Holy Family was founded on 14 May 1914.

At the time of the blessing of the convent and chapel at Thumbur six Postulants received the veil and seven Novices were given the religious habit. On account of the rush of the people assembled, a portion of the railings of the sanctuary collapsed and fell on Mother Mariam Thresia's leg as she was kneeling and praying there. She did not take the wound seriously in her busy schedule. As the Directress of the Novices she had been spending time with them. She made all the arrangements for those who were to go to the study house at Trichur the following day. Mother Mariam Thresia was taken to a doctor of the Government Hospital, Chalakudy as she developed acute pain and swelling on her leg. The doctor advised to admit her in the hospital.

When the pain and swelling on the leg aggravated, the doctor decided to operate Mariam Thresia. After the operation she was kept in a building of the diocese adjacent to the hospital. Even though she was given all the care and attention, due to high diabetes, her condition started to deteriorate gradually. Eventually, she was brought to Kuzhikkattussery on 7 June 1926 and Fr Joseph Vithayathil gave her the sacrament of the sick and the holy viaticum.

The following day Blessed Mariam Thresia felt a little relief. She appeared to be fresh though weak. The Sisters and the boarders of the convents of Thumbur and Trichur came and joined with the Sisters

of Kuzhikkattussery and Fr Joseph Vithayathil and stood in tears near her and prayed. Blessed Mariam Thresia begged pardon of all and thanked them. She called all of them near her and spoke her last words. "My beloved daughters, why are your hearts troubled like those of people of little faith? You know just like me that I shall not be relieved of this illness. If it is the will of the heavenly Bridegroom that I leave you very soon in answer to His invitation, let it be fulfilled. Our congregation is still an infant. You should not forget that it is your responsibility as members of this congregation to foster and rear it. Deal with the superiors sincerely and lovingly. Love one another, help one another."

After giving this advice to her daughters, Mariam Thresia called Fr Joseph Vithayathil and entrusted him the whole responsibility of the congregation and its members. Her condition worsened and became more and more critical. All keenly observed and served her. Hours passed. At her own request she was laid down on the floor on a mat while her spiritual father and the Sisters knelt down and prayed for her. She kept repeating the ejaculations very prayerfully and consciously after her spiritual father. Blessed Mariam Thresia was very peaceful and calm at the moment of intense pain and suffering and submitted to the will of God.

In the evening condition became critical. Fr Joseph Kayyalakam, the vicar of Puthenchira church, came to her bed side. At 8 pm repeating the ejaculatory prayer after Fr Joseph Vithayathil "Jesus, Mary, Joseph I entrust my soul and my body into your loving hands," Blessed Mariam Thresia passed away. The house was filled with deep silence and great sorrow. During that night of tears and sobs, surprisingly all the jasmines blossomed in the garden, though it was not the season for jasmines to flower. A crown of jasmine flowers was placed on the head of Blessed Mariam Thresia and the coffin was decorated with jasmine flowers. The people thronged to have a glimpse of the saint. Trusting in her holiness, they touched their rosaries and other religious articles on her remains.

The whole of Puthenchira stood still at the departure of Blessed Mariam Thresia. As Bishop Francis Vazhapilly, was out of station, Msgr Matthew Edakulathur, Vicar General of Trichur Diocese, officiated at the funeral service at 6.00 pm. on 9 June 1926 in the presence of Fr Joseph Vithayathil and many other Priests, Sisters, Brothers, the public and the sorrowful members of the congregation. The body was buried with tearful prayers in the tomb specially prepared in the ground of the chapel under construction. Rev. Fr Joseph Kayyalakam, the vicar of Puthenchira church, delivered the homily. He narrated her holy life, her apostolate and the growth of the congregation in a very touching manner. He concluded his words saying that though this funeral is conducted in a very simple manner, the time will come when another saint like the 'Little Flower' will rise up from this tomb.

The spirituality of Thresia centres on the passion of Jesus Christ. Her spirituality is a participation in the mystery of Christ. Many great saints of the church meditated on the sufferings of Christ and cultivated a strong desire to suffer and die for Christ. "Either suffer or die for Christ" was the motto of St Teresa of Avila. For St John of the Cross, it was "to suffer and to be humiliated for Christ." Thresia used to steep herself in the passion of Christ even from her childhood. Her mystical vision and life emerged from her recollection and meditation on the sufferings of Christ. Her penitential exercises were not only fasting and abstinence, but kneeling on the floor spread with gravel, adding bitter stuff to food, keeping awake all night, wearing jacket with thorns, etc. All these show her irresistible thirst to suffer for Christ.

Thresia received the Stigmata for the first time when she was twenty-eight years old. It first appeared in 1905. Afterwards at 3.00 pm on every Friday this event recurred and ended at midnight. Sometimes

drops of blood could be seen outside the heart on the chest and on the palms. To be united with Christ became a burning passion in her life. Jesus who was pleased with Thresia's intense love of God willed to give the imprint of his Five Wounds (Stigmata) in the body of Thresia permanently in the year 1909. She cultivated a holy indifference or detachment to worldly pleasures and honours. Hers was a Christ-centric spirituality.

Mariam Thresia had particular devotions to Virgin Mary, the Holy Family and St Joseph. She had a tender and childlike devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary from her childhood onwards. During her infancy she chose Mary as her Mother and was particularly devoted to her. It is said that, Blessed Virgin Mary taught her how to recite the rosary in her infancy. She regarded Mary as her own mother. Thresia consecrated herself, body and soul, to the Blessed Mother of God. She received frequent visitations from Mary, who counselled her and comforted her during her trials, temptations and diabolic attacks. Blessed Virgin Mary often gave her directions about her apostolate of house visiting in its early phase

Mother Mariam Thresia is the progenitor of the idea of Family Apostolate in Kerala. She was the pioneering model of a nun, divinely inspired to enter into the agonizing world of the under-privileged to promote their welfare with relentless effort. Mother Mariam Thresia paved the way for a new course of life, when she dedicated herself to the service of her brethren in the world, overcoming all objections and hurdles. Long before the modern world awakened itself to the new realisation; she believed that the Religious Orders were not to confine themselves to their institutions, but they should engage themselves in service to the fellow beings. She not only realized it in principle but also implemented it in practice. Her heart brimmed over with compassion towards the suffering brethren. With merciful love she went about giving solace and comfort to all, irrespective of caste or creed. She shared their pains and agonies and helped them to solve their problems. The sick and the dying found support and strength in her.

In his homily for the beatification of Sr Mariam Thresia on 9 April 2000, St John Paul II said: "From childhood, Mariam Thresia Mankidiyan knew instinctively that God's love for her demanded a deep personal purification. Committing herself to a life of prayer and penance, Sr Mariam Thresia's willingness to embrace the Cross of Christ enabled her to remain steadfast in the face of frequent misunderstandings and severe spiritual trials. The patient discernment of her vocation eventually led to the foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Family, which continues to draw inspiration from her contemplative spirit and love of the poor. Convinced that God will give eternal life to those who convert sinners and bring them to the right path, Sr Mariam Thresia devoted herself to this task by her visits and advice, as well as by her prayers and penitential practice. Through Blessed Mariam Thresia's intercession, may all consecrated men and women be strengthened in their vocation to pray for sinners and draw others to Christ by their words and example."

Blessed Mariam Thresia died seventy years back in the unremarkable Kerala village of Puthenchira, far from the flash bulbs of conscience-stricken press. Now on 13 October 2019, Pope Francis will canonise her. Let us make our people aware of this great saint of our Church and let us organise prayerful celebrations in our parishes and institutions to mark this event with gratitude to God. Let us rejoice at the growth of holiness in our Church and strive to become more holy.

NEWS AND EVENTS

TCYM Youth Apostolate: The Eparchial Youth Apostolate Department organized a youth retreat at Sangamam from August 30 to 2 September. As well it also organised an Onam celebration on 11 September 2019 at Kalluvilai. Many youth representatives participated in these programmes. I request all the Fathers to encourage our young people to take part in such programmes so that our parishes are spiritually enriched. I sincerely appreciate the youth department for making our young people to get involved in the Eparchial activities.

First Baptisms in St Philip's Mission, Kuzhithurai-Kattuvilai: The Kuzhithurai-Kattuvilai mission was started in 2011. About 25 members normally take part in the Sunday prayer service and later in the Holy Qurbana. After eight years of mission work, 7 children were baptized in the St Philip Mission Church, Kattuvilai-Kuzhithurai on 8 September 2019. Rev. Fr Thomas Jebanesh, priest in-charge of Kuzhithurai-Kattuvilai, Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadackal, Parish Priest Padanthalumoodu and Rev. Fr Anil Raj, Parish Priest of Thettiyode officiated the baptism ceremony. I congratulate the former and present missionaries and the MMM Sisters and the parishioners.

Blessing of Hospice at Thittankanavilai: We are already in the third year of mobile palliative care service in the Eparchy. It was felt that the Eparchy should begin a residential palliative care unit for the terminally bed ridden patients. A small hospice named Mother Theresa Hospice was inaugurated at Thittankanavilai on 16 September 2019. It will function under the direction of KKSSS and Fr Robins Kuzhikodil is the local director of this palliative care unit. ASMI sisters are in-charge of the day to day affairs of the Hospice. A fulltime nurse Sister and two lay nursing staff work there. We are grateful to the Sisters for giving us the space and the building for this purpose.

St. Michael' Mission Church Vellampi: The Holy Qurbana in St. Michael' mission church at Vellampi is celebrated for long years in a small hall dedicated for the activities of the mission which belongs to a private party. The hall is now given new church-look by painting the Altar. The modified Altar and the hall were blessed and celebrated Holy Qurbana on 29 September 2019 by Fr. Toji Parampilparampil and Fr. Vinu D. Joseph. I congratulate and thank Fr. Vinu D. Joseph for his initiative and dedication for the mission. As well I thank all the parishioners and well-wishers for their help.

Pastoral Council Members: The election for the pastoral council members of the Eparchy is being held in the months of September and October. Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam is the convener for the elections. Rev. Fr Mijo Puthenpurayil and Mr John Vayalinkarai are helping him for the smooth conduct of the elections. The elections are going on in the Foranes. The first meeting of the pastoral council will be held on 1 November 2019. All the Directors of various Eparchial departments are ex-officio members. I have requested Rev. Fr Thomas Sathianesan, Chancellor, to meet with the ex-officio, elected and nominated members of the pastoral council in groups prior to the first meeting. I request your kind cooperation.

Silver Jubilee preparations of the Eparchy: Under the leadership of Rev. Fr Thomas Powathuparampil, Vicar General, a committee was formed to make plans and schedules for the preparation for the silver Jubilee of the Eparchy. A number of meetings were held with the presbyterium and the Forane Vicars in order to chalk out the various events that should be included in the celebrations. It was felt that we need to consult the faithful and the religious of the Eparchy. Their active cooperation is vital for the success of the celebrations. The Jubilee is an occasion for the spiritual renewal of the faithful, priests and religious of the Eparchy. The jubilee committee has sent out a set of

questionnaire in order to gather data about the various activities that the Eparchy carries out. I request all the parish priests to discuss these sets of questionnaire with the following groups: Parish Council cum Uravium leaders, Sunday school teachers, members of Vincent de Paul Society, members of Mather Jyothis and Youth leaders. You may appoint a secretary to take notes and kindly submit your findings by 15 October 2019.

Extraordinary Mission Month: Hundred years ago, on 30 November 1919, Pope Benedict XV issued an Encyclical, *Maximum Illud*. He invited all the Catholics to bring the Good News to people all over the world. He spoke about the need for mission *Ad Gentes* (to the people). To commemorate the centenary of this path breaking Encyclical, Pope Francis has declared October 2019 as an extraordinary month of mission (EMM). We have already made plans to observe this month in our Eparchy together with the usual programmes that we organise during this month. The pastoral letter that you read in your respective parishes on 29 September should give you some practical proposals for celebrating this month. We need to rekindle the missionary ardour among our faithful.

Mission Sunday: In his message for the World Mission Sunday, Holy Father has invited all Catholics to revive missionary awareness and commitment. Pope Francis spoke about the importance of renewing the Church's missionary commitment by giving fresh evangelical impulses in our preaching and in our desire to bring to the world the salvation of Jesus Christ. This year the World Missionary Sunday will be observed on 20 October. The theme is "Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World." Dear Fathers, the special Mission Sunday collection will be sent to Rome for the missionary activities around the globe. Kindly instruct the faithful to be generous in donating for the missions.

Rosary Rally: Every year under the leadership of Marian Senai, the Eparchy organises Rosary Rally. In order to give maximum participation from all the parishes, this year we have decided to organise this Rally by combining two Foranes each: Pilankalai – Soosaipuram, Padanthalumoodu – Nithravilai and Manjalumoodu – Arukani. It will be held on 27 October 2019.

INFORMATION

- ❖ I left for Europe for the *Ad Limina* visit. I will have the opportunity to meet Pope Francis and to pray at the tombs of St Peter and St Paul in Rome. During this visit, I will meet our Fathers residing in Europe: Fr Robert Mathews, Fr Jimmy Thekkekadumathil, Fr Justin Cheruvilil, Fr Jinu Thekkethalackal and Br Georgekutty.
- ❖ **Visit of Rev. Mother Sibi CMC:** As part of her canonical visit to CMC province, Rev. Mother Sibi CMC, Mother General of CMC Congregation, visited me on 18 September 2019 and we organised a dinner in her honour in the Bishop's House.
- ❖ **Visit of SD Provincial:** Rev. Mother Carmaletha SD, Provincial of Changanassery, visited me in the Bishop's House on 18 September 2019 along with the Sisters of Munchirai and Varuthattu communities.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Josy Puthenpurayil** working in Germany came to India on 30 August 2019 for a month of vacation and he has returned to Germany on 30 September 2019.
- ❖ **Deacon Shijo** will be coming to the Eparchy on 27 September 2019 after the completion of three months' pastoral course in St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor. He is appointed at Holy Cross Church Malaicode for his diaconate ministry under the direction of Fr Geo Choozhikunnel from 28 September to 30 November 2019.

❖ **RIP- Mother Mariamma FCC:** Our beloved Mother Mariamma FCC passed away on September 29, 2019. She was bedridden nearly for three years. We express our heartfelt condolences to FCC family of Thuckalay Province. The funeral Qurbana followed by burial will take place on October 2, 2019 at 2.00 pm in the FCC provincial house, Azhagiamandabam.

UPCOMING EVENTS

25 Sep. -19 October 2019	- <i>Ad Limina</i> Visit, Rome
13 October 2019	- Canonization of Blessed Mariam Thresia, Rome
20 October 2019	- Mission Sunday
20 October 2019	- Chain Rosary
20-25 October 2019	- Annual Retreat for Priests
25 October 2019	- Priests' Conference, Sangamam
27 October 2019	- Rosary Rally Forane wise
27 October 2019	- Blessing of Presbytery at Manjalumoodu

NB.: Annual Retreat for Priests will be held from 20 to 25 October 2019 at Sangamam.

Dear Fathers, let us spiritually prepare ourselves for the retreat. **Mar Prince Panayankadan, Bishop of Adilabad, is the preacher. All the Diocesan priests of the Eparchy are requested to attend the retreat.** Religious priests who are interested are welcome to take part in the retreat. **However, they should attend the priests' conference to be held on 25 October 2019.** Let me remind you that even though some of you have attended other retreats during the year, it is important to take part in the retreat that the Eparchy is organising. **Please come prepared to spend five days. Kindly bring the Holy Qurbana Account book for the verification.**

CONCLUSION

The month of October is the month of the Holy Rosary. The Rosary is primarily a scriptural prayer. It is the compendium of the entire Gospel. It draws its mysteries from the New Testament and is centred on the great events of the Incarnation and Redemption. St John Paul II called the Rosary his favourite prayer, in which we meditate with Mary upon the mysteries which she as a mother meditated on in her heart. In this month of October, let us consider this beautiful prayer of the Rosary as a means to draw closer to Jesus and Mary by meditating on the great mysteries of our salvation.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

