



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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31 July 2021

Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

The month of August brings with it the celebrations of the feasts of St John Mary Vianney, the Assumption of our Blessed Mother and the Independence Day of our country. I wish you a fruitful month of August and joyous celebrations of these feasts.

St John Mary Vianney is our patron saint. He was a man of prayer, who spent much of his time at the confessional bringing God's mercy and forgiveness to thousands of people, who came to him. The celebration of his feast invites us to be serious in our priestly ministry and to be men of prayer especially during these days of the lockdown. We pray for our people, for our families, for the Eparchy and above all, pray for ourselves that we may become worthy priest after the example of St John Mary Vianney. His reflections on prayer are very insightful. One he wrote: "Prayer is nothing else than union with God. When our heart is pure and united to God, we feel within ourselves a joy, a sweetness that inebriates and a light that dazzles us. In this intimate union God and the soul are like two pieces of wax melted together; they cannot be separated. This union of God with His little creature is a most beautiful thing. It is a happiness that we cannot understand. We have not deserved to pray; but God, in His goodness, has permitted us to speak to Him. Our prayer is incense, which He receives with extreme pleasure. My children, your heart is poor and narrow; but prayer enlarges it, and renders it capable of loving God. Prayer is a foretaste of Heaven, an overflow of paradise." I am sure we shall have a meaningful celebration of his feast on 4 August reflecting upon his life and ideals.

The solemnity of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady helps us to reflect upon the virtues of our Blessed Mother. Addressing a jubilant crowd of over 500,000 people packed in the St Peter's Square, Pope Pius XII solemnly defined in *Munificentissimus Deus* on 1 November 1950 that "the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever-virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." The role of our Blessed Mother in the mystery of salvation provides the foundation for the belief in the Assumption.

The Archangel Gabriel recognized her as full of grace and as someone blessed among women. By the power of the Holy Spirit, she conceived Jesus Christ, and through her, true God became true man. During her lifetime, Mary always presented to others Jesus: to Elizabeth and to her son, John the Baptist, who leapt for joy in the womb at the presence of the Lord still in His own mother's womb; to the simple shepherds as well as the wise Magi; and to the people at Cana when our Lord acquiesced to His mother's wish and performed the first miracle.

Besides, Mother Mary stood at the foot of the cross with her Son, supporting him and sharing in his suffering through her love as only a mother could do. Finally, she was with the Apostles at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended and the Church was born. Therefore, each of us can step back and see Mary as the faithful servant of God who shared intimately in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us: “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians: ‘In giving birth you kept your virginity; in your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death’” (CCC #966).

The Feast of the Assumption gives each one of us great hope as we contemplate this one facet of the beautiful woman of faith, our Blessed Mother. Mary moves us by example and prayer to grow in God’s grace, to be receptive to His will, to convert our lives through sacrifice and penance, and to seek everlasting union in the Heavenly Kingdom.

Further, on 15 August, every year, our motherland celebrates her independence from the British rule. It brings back the memories of India’s historical freedom struggle and the creation of the world’s most populous democracy. The citizens of India will rejoice and celebrate in full spirit the country’s proudest day, despite the gloom that pervades the country with the onset of the pandemic. It cannot be denied that there are still many areas where our country needs improvement. No doubt, there is no alien power ruling us, but it cannot be ignored that India is still struggling for freedom from multitude of social problems.

Besides being conscious of the issues that trouble the country when we celebrate our Independence Day, we also need to reflect upon freedom as a precious gift that God has generously given to us. He has given us the ability to choose and to decide. But unfortunately, it is the most misused gift of God today. Adam and Eve were given freedom to eat the fruits of all the trees in the Garden of Eden. As if to test how good they were in obeying God and choosing what is good, God instructed them, not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil that was in the middle of the garden and to obey the dictates of their conscience. Satan tempted them to choose disobedience and they ate the forbidden fruit and we know the consequences of their rebellion.

Let us remember that God’s gift of freedom must be used to choose the good which promote our wellbeing. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to “the slavery of sin.” (CCC # 1733). And thus we arrive at the concept of true freedom which is “the capacity to obey God.”

It is our human experience that often or even daily, we are engaged in making decisions, some are easy while others we need to discern well and make proper decisions because all our choices either make us or break us. In his letter to the Galatians (5:13), St Paul taught his early disciples, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.” Jesus says: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31-32).

Thus, human freedom is rooted in love and truth. In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II quoting the words of Christ, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,” says: “These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world.” We can possess true freedom only when we go beyond individual and collective selfishness and reach out to that which reason perceives as objectively good and true. To be isolated from others is a form of self-imprisonment. We become most truly human in the measure in which we go out of ourselves and give ourselves for the sake of others.

Let us celebrate these events with systematic catechesis and due solemnity, as permitted by the Covid-19 protocol, in our respective institutions so that the great spiritual values these feasts provide may not be lost. I request you to lead our people to a greater level of fidelity to their Christian calling especially these days when they experience the aftermaths of the pandemic.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Junior Priests’ Meet: Even though it was a period of lock down, we organized the meeting of junior priests at Sangamam on 5 July 2021. This year there were seven priests who were below five years of ordination. Rev. Fr Thaddeus from the diocese of Kuzhithurai was the resource person and he took classes for the Fathers on various topics related to the life and the mission of a young priest. All his sharing was based on the Word of God. The topics that he dealt with were ‘who do people say about me’ (Mt 16:13), ‘you will be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:8), ‘stay with us Lord’ (Lk 24:29), ‘I have completed well’ (2 Tim 4:7) and ‘behold, your Mother’ (John 19:27). After supper together with the Vicar General, I met all the Fathers and had a fruitful sharing. Thank you, dear Fathers, for showing interest in the programme organized by the Eparchy.

Day of Recollection: After a period of three months, our presbyterium came together on 6 July 2021 to spend a day in recollection and prayer. They also had the opportunity to make their confessions. Rev. Fr Lijo Thekkel was the preacher. He guided all the Fathers on the topic God’s love. It was a golden moment for all us, Fathers, to spend time in the presence of the Eucharistic Lord and to receive his blessings. After lunch we had the Priests’ Conference. All the Heads of Departments and Pious Associations shared the activities that they carried out during the lockdown period. It was decided that since strict lockdown is lifted and faithful are allowed to come to Church on Sundays, we could gradually stop the online Catechism classes and resume physical classes in the parishes. The presbyterium welcomed Rev. Fr Jomy Kuttianimattam, belonging to the Eparchy of Idukki, who has been sent to our Eparchy for pastoral work.

Priests’ Provident Fund (PPF) Committee: In order to see to the holistic development and welfare of Priests of the Eparchy, we have formed a PPF Committee. The members of the PPF Committee were elected during the meeting of the presbyterium held on 6 July 2021. Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, Presbyterial Council secretary and Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arakaparmbil, Procurator of the Eparchy are the ex-officio members. The elected members are Rev. Fr Joseph Santhosh, Rev. Fr Antony Jose, Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadakal, Rev. Fr Seby Manimalakandathil and Rev. Fr Vinu Joseph. Later, I nominated Rev. Fr Geo Choozhikunnel to the PPF Committee. The Committee will meet and prepare the by-laws and it will be registered as an independent body in order to take care for the welfare of Priests of the Eparchy.

First Death Anniversary of Rev. Sr John Berchmans: Rev. Sr John Berchmans, a pioneer missionary of the Eparchy passed away last year. Due to Covid-19, we were unable to attend the funeral of Sr Berchmans. On 8 July 2021, on the occasion of her first death anniversary, a Holy Qurbana was organised at Sacred Heart Convent, Palukal. All the Sisters of SH Congregation and some Fathers joined the event. After the mass, we also prayed the office of the dead. We gratefully remember her contributions to the then Kanyakumari Mission and later to the Eparchy of Thuckalay.

Day of Prayer: On 10 July Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, Director of the Major Seminarians, organised a day of prayer and recollection for the candidates in formation at Sangamam. Rev. Fr Lijo Thekkel preached the recollection. I met all the Brothers in the evening and gave them a conference. All the Brothers were present for the recollection and benefitted much from it.

Career Guidance Programme: On 12 July 2021, TCYM of our Eparchy in collaboration with Don Bosco Vazhikatti, Trichy, organized a Career Guidance Programme for the students who completed class 12 examinations. The venue for the programme was at APJM School, Soosaipuram. The students were given information about the ample opportunities available today for higher studies and avenues for employment. At the end of the session, the students were taken to our Alphonsa College for a visit. It was followed by Lunch. There were more than hundred students benefitted from the programme. I am grateful to Don Bosco Vazhikatti, Trichy, TCYM unit of Thuckalay and Alphonsa College for helping the young students of our Eparchy.

Fr Stan Sami: In order to create awareness among the people in the society, the Kanyakumari Minority Federation (KKMF) organised a condolence meeting on 15 July 2021 at 4.00pm at Thuckalay to mourn the death of Fr Stan Samy. Pastor Ganadas, President of KKMF, chaired the meeting. I was invited to impart a blessing to the congregation. Many representatives from various Christian denominations and Islam took part in the meeting. All of them conveyed their pain and anxiety at the treatment meted out to Fr Stan Sami. A person who spent his entire life promoting Justice was killed by an unjust system in our country.

Visits to the Missions: Along with Fr Thomas Pawathuparambil, I visited Thenkasi Mission on 24 July 2021 and organized a meeting of all the Fathers and Sisters at CMC Convent, Vanchinagar. The programme began with a recollection talk and time for making confessions. It was followed by a formal meeting of all the missionaries. All the Heads of Departments and Pious Associations presented the report of their activities. We have arrived at an understanding that since our community is small; all the departments can function off-line in order to animate the faithful spiritually. From there, we proceeded to Madurai.

On 25 July 2021, we celebrated Holy Qurbana for the migrant community at Deepakam. We had a meeting with parish community. I appreciate the parish priest and the parishioners for arranging for the meeting. On the same day evening, we visited Theni mission and had a fruitful discussion with CMI community at Theni. We have decided to give official status to the existing mission there. We also visited the FCC Sisters at Chinnamannoor.

Blessing of the Foundation Stone of Church at Ariur in Madurai: On 25 July 2021, I blessed and laid the foundation stone for a church at Ariur in Madurai Mission in the presence of Rev. Fr Anil Raj, Mission Coordinator, Fathers and Sisters. We shall begin the construction of a hall on the ground floor and the first floor of the building will be the church in the near future.

Blessing of the Foundation Stone of Church at Kunnuvilai Mission: It was in 2005 that Valan Nagar, Kunnuvilai Mission started. The Holy Qurbana is celebrated on the basement of a building and space was left for the church to be built in the future. Unfortunately, we could not build the church due to financial constraints. The Kunnuvilai Mission has 25 families faithfully living their Catholic Faith. With great trust in God's providence and support of some benefactors, we decided to build a new church. I gave the responsibility of overseeing the construction to Rev. Fr Augustine Thalodil. In view of this project, I appointed him the Parish Priest of Kunnuvilai Mission. The foundation stone was blessed on 28 July 2021 in the presence Priests and faithful. I am grateful to Fr Augustine for taking up this extra responsibility of raising funds and beginning the construction work. I am grateful to the benefactors for the financial support. The faithful of Kunnuvilai are extremely happy to have a new church.

Grandparents' Day: From this year, our Holy Father has asked the entire Church to observe the feast of saints Joachim and Ann as Grandparents' Day to celebrate the elderly. Following the injunction of our Holy Father, our Eparchy observed this day in some of our parishes. Special prayers, felicitations and giving away of gifts to the elderly were organized. Such a celebration gives new life and enthusiasm to our grandparents. The Diocesan Health Unit of our Eparchy visited the Old Age Home at Munchirai and celebrated Holy Qurbana for the inmates and provided them meals and gifts. I am grateful to Rev. Fr Abin Poovathumootil and other Fathers for taking this initiative to observe the day and bringing joy to the elderly persons in our parishes.

Minor Seminary: We have formally begun the classes in our Minor Seminary for the students. We have six brothers. Rev. Fr Joshy, Rector, Rev. Fr Alex, Spiritual Father and Rev. Fr Shijo, Vice Rector, look after them. Let me remind you of the need for promote vocations to Priesthood and Religious Life. I request the Fathers who are in-charge of vocation promotion to carry on with their regular visits and encouraging people to pray for vocations. There is a one-hour of adoration once a week by the members of Curia and the Fathers in-charge of vocation promotion at Forane level.

Inauguration of activities of Kuzhandai Isso Iyakkam: on 31 July, 2021 the inauguration of activities of *Kuzhandai isso Iyakkam* was held at St Michael School, Kattathurai. The office bearers including the parish animators were present for the meeting. Rev. Fr Joemon, director of KII chaired the meeting and I gave a felicitation talk. The annual report was well presented with the activities of the whole year especially during the lock down period. In the second part of the meeting, plans and activities for the future were discussed and decided. Hear after the KII meetings will be held off-line in the parishes. I thank and appreciate the director and all the animators for the effort they take to carry out the children's ministry in the Eparchy.

Meeting with Minister Mano Thankaraj MLA: Mr Mano Thankaraj MLA, Minister for Information and Technology, Tamil Nadu, called for a meeting of all the Church leaders of Kanyakumari District on 31 July, 2021, at Kottar Bishop's House. All the Bishops and representatives from the denomination Churches were present. This meeting was called to get the opinion and mind of the church leaders on the development of our district. While speaking, the minister expressed his concern on various issues that are affecting the development and life of the people of the district. He spoke on the need for protecting the ecosystem especially the natural resource; problems faced by fisher men at the sea coast, Minority rights etc. He was on the hope that coming together frequently and taking some of the issues legally on the right forum will reduce tension in the society. A suggestion was also presented to minister, to have a meeting with the district collector in presence of all the religious heads of the district in order to bring peace and harmony in the district.

INFORMATION

- At my request for Priests to the Missions, Bishop of Idukki responded positively and sent Rev. **Fr Jomy Kuttanimattam** to our Eparchy. We welcome him whole heartedly. He was formally welcomed on 6 July during the Priests' Conference. Fr Jomy is sent to Mankarai Parish for three months to learn Tamil language and to prepare himself for the Missions.
- As usual we shall have the Vianny Day celebrations on 4 August at our Minor Seminary. I invite all the Fathers to come on time to experience the fellowship of one another. The Rector of Seminary has already sent out the invitations and programme to all of us.
- We welcome Rev. Sr Jane Rose CHF to the Eparchy. She has taken charge as Assistant Director of Family Apostolate.
- We are going to begin the academic year of **Sinai Theological Centre** on 1 August 2021. This year we have 16 new students for Diploma Course in Theology. I welcome them. I am grateful to Rev. Fr Sathianesan and his team of professors for taking the formation of laity forward.
- In view of Syro-Malabar Bishops' Synod to be held from 16-27 August, our beloved Major Archbishop asked the entire Syro-Malabar Church to observe one-month of prayer for the success of the Synod from 27 July to 27 August. Kindly see that this information reaches to all our faithful and pray for this intention.
- Translation of Liturgy of the funeral rite and the remaining Propria is going on at Padanthalumood under the guidance of Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadakal.
- Father of Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam is admitted in Matha Hospital, Kottayam with serious health issues. Let us con pray for his recovery.
- Prayer is requested for the speedy recovery of Rev. Sr Canissiamma S.H, our pioneer missionary. She has been admitted at the Medical Centre Hospital, Kottayam.
- We have made the Catechism classes off-line now. Hence, I requesting all the Parish Priests to organize the classes in the parish itself.
- Except Uraviums, the activities of all the other Departments and Pious Associations are to resume in all our parishes off-line.
- I request all the Fathers to continue to conscientize our people on the dangers of the pandemic
- TCYM in collaboration with Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue of our Eparchy will organize a social awareness seminar on Fr Stan Sami today's Prophet on 7 August at Sangamam. The seminar will be more of academic in nature. This is meant to create a right mind set among our people on the issues on Social Justice. Bishop Nazreen Soosai and other prominent speakers will present papers and will join in the team discussions. Those of you would like to join can contact either Rev. Fr Sathosh or Rev. Fr Antony Jose.
- RIP: The beloved mothers of Rev Sr Reeja CMC and Germey CMC passed away on 12 July and 27 July respectively. We express our deepest condolences and prayers to the Sisters and to their bereaved family members. May the Lord give eternal bliss to the departed!
- Rev. Fr Jinu Jacob has returned to Rome on 28 July and reached safely to his University. We are grateful to him for his active presence in the diocese especially involving himself in the spiritual animation and fund raising program of the diocese. Fr Jinu is the sub-editor of THUCKALAY TIDING which he will continue to be from Rome. We wish him all the best and God's bless in his studies.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

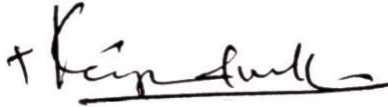
01 August	-	Inauguration of laity Theological program
04 August	-	Vianny Day Celebration
07 August	-	Seminar on Fr Stan Sami
12 August	-	Church Blessing: Kudukachivilai
16-27 August	-	Syro-Malabar Synod (online)
15 August	-	Assumption of our Lady
30 August	-	Department Meeting

CONCLUSION

Despite the enormous and unimaginable loss of life and livelihood many have endured last two years due to the pandemic, there is, I am sure, light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, as vaccine distribution is picking up greater momentum. While so much has changed over the past years, this global disruption presents an opportunity to take a step back and reflect upon our lives. We should realise that we need to invest more of our time in deepening our relationship with God more than ever. It is central to our lives. At times, we have missed the celebration of daily Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations in our eagerness to do things for the Lord while forgetting the Lord himself. Let us get our priorities right and move forward with greater fidelity in our priestly ministry!

May our Blessed Mother intercede for each one of us!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

