



Bishop's *Circular*

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Diocese of Thuckalay

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For Priests / Sisters

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Dear and Rev. Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

We are in the month of the Holy Rosary. In this circular, I want to present to you the important teachings of St John Paul II on the Holy Rosary. He is a model for each one of us in our desire to pray the Holy Rosary. In fact, nineteen years ago, on 16 October 2002, Pope St John Paul II released his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, which not only introduced to the Church a new set of mysteries for the Rosary to complement the traditional 15mysteries but also brought out his love for the Holy Rosary. In addition to the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries, John Paul II recommended to the faithful the Luminous Mysteries, which he said brought out fully “the Christological depth of the Rosary” by including “the mysteries of Christ’s public ministry between his baptism and his passion” (No. 19). The Pope said in the letter that he had no intention to curtail “the freedom of individuals and communities” to pray the Rosary as they preferred. His aim was to help the Church rediscover the beauty and power of the Rosary, which he hoped would lead to a greater practice of prayer, a closer walk with Christ and, thereby, a more lasting peace in the world, beginning within the family and spreading to society at large (Nos. 40-41).

In the apostolic letter, the Holy Father laments the disintegration of the family and the “fresh scenes of bloodshed and violence” that the world witnessed at the start of the new millennium, beginning with 9/11 (No. 6). He urged people to use the Rosary as a tool to counteract such inhumanity. When prayed well, he said, the Rosary not only disposes people to the plan of God - which is nothing less than the salvation of the world that brings to fulfilment the peace and love won by Christ - but also prepares people to actively participate in God’s plan by practising charity and being peacemakers here and now. The Pope ends his apostolic letter with a heartfelt supplication: “May this appeal of mine not go unheard!” (No. 43).

The person who prays the Rosary will bear fruit inasmuch as he/she assimilates and actualizes the Christian virtues that the Rosary puts forward. The Rosary assists people in this assimilation process by providing a model and a method for putting on the mind of Christ. The model is Mary, and the primary lesson she shares - not only for people who want to pray the Rosary, but also for everyone - is that transforming the world according to God’s plan begins by being docile to God’s word. Or to put it more bluntly: If you want to change the world, you first have to change yourself. Long before giving birth to Jesus, Mary was listening to and pondering God’s word. She then confirmed her actions to what she had perceived through prayer. Mary sought God’s will and worked to align her will with his. A great danger to one’s life is to do the opposite: trying to manipulate God’s will to match one’s own. Hence, it is important to listen to God first.

As a faithful and practising Jew, Mary was immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures. The few times her words are recorded in the New Testament, Mary reveals a familiarity with the Biblical tradition; it is something

she had read and thought about, as her allusions to the Bible demonstrate. Therefore, when God makes his word known to her, that he wants her to bear his son, she is ready to receive his message. Notice, moreover, that the way Mary receives God's word honours both his divine majesty and her God-given dignity. She is not a blind follower. Rather, she gives God's request, which to say the least is far from ordinary, the consideration it deserves. Her question - "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" - is entirely appropriate. Mary does not doubt that God's word can be fulfilled. Much less is she trying to trap God. Quite the contrary, she is making the effort to understand him. As the Pope wrote in the Letter, Mary models how people can respond to the word of God: "to ask humbly the questions which open us to the light, in order to end with the obedience of faith" (No. 14). Once Mary has come to an understanding of God's will, she gives her assent.

Mary's "yes" to God cooperates with his plan, with the result that Jesus becomes man and enters the world, leading not only to Mary's salvation but also to everyone's (see Lk 1:46-55). The peace and love of God break into the world in the most personal and glorious way: by God's own real presence. What more could anyone hope for?

Mary's "yes" also affects her and every human person in another way: She becomes an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life. One could say, as St John Paul II did (No. 11), that she contemplated the mysteries of the Rosary as they happened, and thereby she became both a disciple of her son and a teacher to his other disciples. Since, as the Church proclaims, Mary is alive in Christ even now, she continues to pray with and for humanity. Her most compact and profound advice was precisely the fruit of prayer, and it remains an integral part of Christian discipleship today: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

In effect, Mary invites everyone to participate in God's plan just as she did. Everyone can listen now to the word of God, ponder its meaning, question it with humility and end in the obedience of faith that leads to the transformation of one's self and the world. As the Holy Father put it: "Mary constantly sets before the faithful the 'mysteries' of her Son, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power" (No. 11).

So that people may pray with Mary, St John Paul II also suggests a method for praying the Rosary. Note that it is "a method" and not "the method." The aim of all Christian prayer is less about technique and more about encountering Christ and getting to know him (see No. 14). Although the Rosary is structured upon the major moments of Jesus' life, it is not a nostalgic exercise. The events of Jesus' life "not only belong to 'yesterday'; they are also part of the 'today' of salvation" through the grace that continues to pour forth from them (No. 13). Moreover, grounding the whole practice of prayer is the belief that Jesus remains with the world not only through the sacraments (pre-eminently in the Eucharist), but also, in no less a real way, through one's relationship with him and with others.

St John Paul II wrote that "we should not be surprised that our relationship with Christ makes use of a method" (No. 27). Human beings are flesh-and-blood animals. Yes, they are made in the image and likeness of God, but they still approach God as creatures. Therefore, the Rosary "engages the whole person in all his complex psychological, physical and relational reality" (No. 27). Hence, the method that John Paul II offers in the Letter is similar to the traditional way of praying the Rosary. One can still make use of beads. It still includes all the familiar prayers. The change that the Pope recommends - besides the inclusion of the Luminous Mysteries - has more to do with pace, attention and follow-through.

St John Paul II wants to protect the Rosary as a valid method of contemplation and guard against it becoming an end in itself (No. 28). Moreover, he warns against the easy slip into a "hurried recitation" of

the Rosary, which can dull the mind to the reception of the mysteries (No. 33). In order to benefit from his method, John Paul II writes that one must approach the Rosary in a spirit of love, just as Mary did as she lived with her son and pondered his activities (No. 26).

The method that the Pope recommends consists of three important exercises in support of the traditional practices: the need for concreteness, the need to listen to the word of God and the need for silence.

By concreteness, St John Paul II means “to open up a scenario on which to focus our attention” (No. 29). It can be done, among other ways, by announcing aloud the particular mystery to be contemplated or by using an icon that portrays the mystery. Concreteness helps to concentrate “the mind on the particular mystery.” It involves the use of one’s senses, which reminds one who prays that one’s entire being - body and soul - is ordered toward God. Concreteness also reminds one that the physical senses are good and correspond “to the inner logic of the Incarnation.” The aim is to open oneself to the ever-present saving power of Jesus’ actions, which continues to spread throughout space and time.

The need to listen to God’s word is essential to being a participant in his plan. Therefore, St John Paul II suggests that after announcing the mystery, “the proclamation of a related Biblical passage” should follow. Both Jesus and Mary are models of listening to the word of God, motivated by their love for the Father and the desire to do his will. Like them, the one who prays the Rosary with love will receive the word of God not merely as information, but as a message “spoken for today and spoken ‘for me’” (No. 30). In any relationship, the importance of listening cannot be understated. If a person desires to hear God and to know his will, a continued effort at attentive listening is crucial. Such listening includes the humble and faithful questioning that Mary practiced and that leads to obedience.

St John Paul II wrote that a period of silence should follow the announcement of the mystery and the proclamation of the word of God. Back in 2002, he commented that a “drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve” (No. 31). Nineteen years hence, the society has only increased its dependence on cell phones, tablets and digital media. Distractions continue to be a stumbling block for people in their relationship with God and with each other. To receive God’s word clearly, one needs to remove the “noise” of other voices and concerns in order to hear God speak (if he so chooses), just as Elijah learned during his interaction with God.

By bringing the events of Jesus concretely to mind, by listening to the word of God and by maintaining silence in order to give these mysteries “space” in one’s life, one is prepared to enter the prayer of the Rosary ready to receive the gifts that God may bestow. As one continues with the Our Father, the Hail Mary’s, and the Gloria, one is joined to Mary in prayer and centred on Christ. Over time, the praying of the rosary - offered attentively, with love and with openness to God - can become an agent of change in one’s life. The rosary helps one to assimilate the virtues of Christ, even as sharing Jesus’ life did the same for Mary.

St John Paul II passed on a quote from Blessed Bartolo Longo that explains the assimilation process well (and which Bartolo practised, being transformed from an unbeliever to a faithful follower of Jesus): “Just as two friends, frequently in each other’s company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection” (No. 15).

Given the transformation that can happen in one's life by praying the Rosary with Mary as one's model and by using his method, one can understand why St John Paul II was convinced that it would lead to a wider experience of God's love and peace won by Christ. If individuals change their lives, practicing charity and working for peace in their relationships, then the possibility of positive change in society increases dramatically. Certainly the world has seen the opposite: Individuals filled with hate and greed have created disharmony and contaminated society with the effects of their sins. All the more reason to heed St John Paul's appeal to pray the Rosary with love for God and a desire to cooperate with his plan. If people do so, then, like Mary, they will change the world by changing themselves.

I encourage everyone to make good use of this month dedicated to the Holy Rosary by organising special rosary services in your respective parishes and institutions with our people. Special Holy Qurbanas can accompany such services so that people can have a real spiritual experience of Jesus together with her Mother Mary.

CONCLUSION OF THE SILVER JUBILEE...

Let me also remind you that we are coming to the conclusion of two-year preparation for the celebration of our Silver Jubilee. The concluding ceremony is slated to be held on 14 November 2021. Let us recall the solemn inauguration of the Jubilee that we had on 10 November 2019 at Padanthalumoodu, where we distributed jubilee candles, posters and prayer cards. For the last two years, we were praying the jubilee prayer. We have prepared ourselves and the entire Eparchy well for the conclusion of the jubilee through an Action plan that we had chalked out in order to guide the priests, religious and faithful of the Eparchy. We had organised a number of formative programmes with the theme *Put out into the deep* (Lk: 5:4), to help us go deeper in to our own faith and to give witness to the Gospel. Most of the programmes were formative and spiritual in nature. They were aimed at deepening our commitment as priests, religious and faithful, and to grow in holiness.

Initially we carried out all the programmes through various departments and pious associations on a regular basis. When our churches were closed due to the lockdown and people could not come together, we organised them online. Unfortunately, we could not organise some of the programmes that we had planned.

We have now, only a month left for the final conclusion of the Jubilee. The Jubilee Monitoring Committee has prepared an intensive spiritual preparation for the conclusion of the Jubilee. Dear Fathers, I am sure you have already received the schedule and I exhort you to prepare our faithful well in order to celebrate the conclusion of our Jubilee. Every spiritual programme should be well planned, informed in advance and carried out in our parishes with due preparation. I request everyone's cooperation and support in this regard. I have attached a copy of the programme.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Feast of Nativity of Our Lady: The Syro-Malabar Church gives much importance to all the Marian feasts and especially to the feast of the Nativity of Our Blessed Mother. In preparation for the feast, there is the *Ettu Nonbu* (eight-day fast) which was marked from 1-8 September. All the parishes in the Eparchy observed this feast with due preparation. Though, we could not have spiritual services in our churches on weekends, every Parish priest made arrangements to observe the feast in the parish with special novena prayers and Holy Qurbanas. It was heartening to see how our faithful were flocking to Our Blessed Mother for her intercession.

Thank you Sr Elseena SJSM: Madurai Mission witnessed a number of initiatives and development during the apostolate of Rev Sr Elseena of the Congregation of the St Joseph Sisters of St Marc. Sr Elseena reached Madurai Mission in 2019 and worked for two years. Prior to that, she worked in France for more than 23 years and on her return to India, she volunteered to work in the Madurai Mission. She is a good tailor and was involved in stitching garments and liturgical vestments. She helped many poor village women to learn stitching and helped them to earn their livelihood. We organised a simple farewell programme for her on 12 September 2021 at Ariyur, Madurai. Rev. Fr Babu Thattil, Parish Priest, Rev. Fr Anil Raj, Mission coordinator, and Sisters were present for the farewell. I was fortunate to be present for the programme and I thanked Sr Elseena for the sacrifices she made for the Mission. The Eparchy is grateful to Sr Elseena SJSM for her ministry and let us continue to pray for her future ministry.

Thettiyode Turns Golden: It was in the year 1972 that Thettiyode Mission opened. Late Rev. Fr Zacharias Kaithara was the pioneer. The inauguration of the year-long golden jubilee celebrations was held on 13 September with the Holy Qurbana. I officiated the Holy Qurbana. During the liturgical celebration, a brief history of the Mission was read out and the community gratefully remembered the early missionaries both the Sisters and the Fathers. A special logo depicting the golden jubilee was released. The jubilee hymn composed by Fr Santhosh, Parish Priest, was sung after the Holy Qurbana. We wish the Thettiyode parish community all the best for the year-long celebrations.

Forane Priests' Conferences: In the month of September, the priests' conference was held Forane wise. The meeting of priests belonging to Manjalumoodu, Kaliyal and Arukani Forane was held at Arukani on 12 September while those of Nithravilai and Padanthalumoodu Forane was held at Padanthalumoodu on 13 September. The priests from Thenkasi Mission and the missionaries from the extended territories met together at Pulari School on 14 September. The priests from Soosaipuram and Thuckalay-Pilankalai Forane met at KKSSS, Kalluvilai on 15 September. Rev. Fr Thomas Pawathuparampil, Vicar General, and Rev. Fr Sathianesan, Chancellor, convened these meetings. The revision of Qurbana Text and the decision of the Synod to introduce uniform Holy Qurbana in the entire Syro-Malabar Church were the main agenda. Rev. Fr Dency Mundunadakal, liturgical animator of the Eparchy, presented the new revised text of the holy Qurbana and asked all the Fathers to get familiarised with this text in Tamil language. The new version of Holy Qurbana will come to effect from 28 November 2021. The concluding programmes of the Eparchial Silver Jubilee was also discussed. Responsibilities for the same were distributed to the Fathers.

Meeting of Departments: A meeting of heads of the departments and pious associations was organised on 17 and 22 September respectively at Bishop's House. Based on the formation of faithful, the meeting was held separately for KII, Mission league, Catechism youth departments and Vincent De Paul, Family Apostolate, Mariyavin Senai, Laity Council, etc. All the departments shared their programmes and expressed their difficulties in executing them in the parishes due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Catechism and some other departments were able to organise classes and programmes online. It was suggested that the jubilee action plan for the departments are to be carried forward to the coming year.

Priests' Conference: The monthly priests' conference was organised for all the Fathers of the Eparchy online on 18 September 2021. All the priests including priests from Germany and Italy joined the meeting. After the presentation of the report, the departments announced their forthcoming programmes. Due to Covid-19 protocol our churches are closed on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. However, I urged the priests to have regular liturgical celebrations and activities of the departments offline wherever it is possible following the Covid-19 SOP. The Jubilee Monitoring Committee presented the one-month

intensive preparation for the conclusion of the Jubilee to all the Fathers and requested their full cooperation and support in implementing it in all the parishes. 12, 13 and 14 November will be the final days of the Jubilee celebrations. Our Major Archbishop, Bishops from the district along with leaders will be invited for the Holy Qurbana and public meeting. Our Major Archbishop is also celebrating the silver Jubilee of his Episcopal ordination this year and it would be celebrated on 13 November with all the priests and religious of Eparchy at Sinai Retreat Center, Kalluvilai.

Meeting of Mission League: The Mission League has a new Director in the person of Rev. Fr Printo Kurias. The Eparchial level meeting of all the executive and Forane level members was organised on 17 September 2021. The meeting was meant to introduce the new Director and to plan for future activities of the League. Together with the Vicar General, I also attended the meeting. I suggested certain areas where the new team can concentrate. The League needs to reach out to all the children in all our parishes. Fr Printo, while appreciating our presence in the meeting, requested whole-hearted cooperation and support from the members to carry forward the mission entrusted to him. We wish the new Director God's blessings. I am grateful to Fr Alex Puthettu, outgoing Director, for animating the association for the last two years.

Meeting of Leaders of Education: An online meeting of all the Principals and Correspondents of all the schools including the schools run by the religious in the Eparchy was held on 21 September 2021. The meeting was meant to share the present Educational scenario in the wake of the re-opening of schools for Classes 9-12 students after Covid-19 lockdown. All the schools were given time to share their concerns. Most of them shared their difficulties in paying the salary to the staff during the lockdown as the students did not pay the fees regularly. I am happy to note that all the schools have welcomed the students back to schools following the Covid-19 norms strictly. It was also an opportunity for the Eparchy to inform and to seek support of all the schools for the new initiatives it is taking. The Eparchy in collaboration with Don Bosco Vazhikatti, Trichy is going to begin a Students' Help Desk at TCYM office, Kalluvilai. Rev. Fr Arul Antony SDB, Director of Vazhikatti, spoke to all the Principals and Correspondents regarding the ministry of Vazhikatti and requested their support. Rev. Fr Roy Kannanchira CMI talked about the new initiative that Deepika has taken, namely, supply of General Knowledge books to all the schools. The proceeds from this initiative will be used for the development of Deepika. I encourage all the Fathers and Sisters to give your whole-hearted co-operation for these initiatives.

Rev. Sr Vinayamma CMC: The CMC province of Thuckalay held the Synaxis and elected Rev. Sr Vinayamma CMC as the new provincial on 23 September 2021. She was the Vice Provincial and in the past she served as the Headmistress for many years at Kaliyal School. The Synaxis also elected Rev. Sr Jessie CMC, Rev. Sr Pavana CMC and Rev. Sr. Ann Maria CMC and Sr. Philo CMC as Provincial council members. I wish the new provincial team God's blessings as they begin their ministry of leadership.

Meeting with Leaders of Special Schools and Charitable Institutions: An online meeting of all the principals of all the special schools and leaders of Charitable institutions of the Eparchy was held on 28 September. All the Sisters from the special schools presented the educational and charitable programmes that they organised during the Covid-19 lockdown. It was heartening to note that every school was involved in the life and education of special children. The Sisters visited the homes of these children a number of times distributing food. All the schools are taking classes online for the children. All the charitable institutions in the Eparchy had difficult time during the Covid-19 lockdown. However, with the help of God, all the inmates were spared of the pandemic. I shared with the Sisters and the Fathers regarding the manner of celebrating the forthcoming World Mental Health Day. It was decided that 10

teachers each from every special school and some staff from the charitable institutions will gather at DNN, Karode on 9 October to celebrate the World Mental Health Day. It was also decided that one Sister from every special school will be inducted as member of Diocesan Health Unit. Rev. Fr Abin Poovathumootil organised the programme and delivered the vote of thanks.

Presbyterial council Meeting: The Presbyterial council meeting was held on 30 October, 2021 at Sangamam. All the members gathered together in order to reflect and deliberate on the agenda: Priests Welfare Association (PWA) and a self evaluation of our ministry in the diocese. The Secretary Rev. Fr Joshy Kulathumkal, presented the bylaws of PWA and the members went through minutely, later with a few clarification and suggestions approved the bylaws and asked to present the same to the presbyterium later. It was also brought to attention of the Council, as the Eparchy is concluding its Silver Jubilee the importance of evaluating the life and mission of the Eparchy in a scientific manner. A 4 member committee was chosen to prepare a scientific questionnaire in order to begin the evaluation process. I informed the members that the Holy Father is going to open General Synod of Bishops on “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission”. All the documents for the same have been received and the inauguration of the Synod at the local Church will be on 17 October, 2021. We formed a 4 member committee headed by Rev. Fr Sathianesan to study and prepare the Eparchy for this Synodal preparation.

INFORMATION

- **RIP:** Mrs Mary Kutti (71), mother of Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurakal, passed away on 5 September 2021. The funeral was held on 10 September. Fr Shoji, who is doing pastoral ministry in Ireland reached home on the night of 9 September. Her sudden passing away was a shocking news for every one of us. Many of our Fathers from the Eparchy visited the family and prayed the office of the dead. Along with a number of Fathers, I took part in the funeral service on 10 September. Fr Shoji conducted the funeral service at home and I officiated in the church and in the cemetery.
- **RIP:** Mr A.M. Joseph (79), father of Rev. Fr Johnsilal Arakaparambil, passed away on 21 September 2021. The funeral was held on 24 September. He was suffering from cancer. In fact, Fr Johnsilal visited his father on 20 September and administered him the last sacraments. Many of our Fathers and some Sisters and lay people from the Eparchy visited Fr Johnsilal’s home and prayed for the departed soul. Fr Johnsilal officiated the funeral ceremony at home and I officiated the ceremonies in the church and in the cemetery.

As Presbyterium, we express our heart-felt condolences and prayers to our beloved brother priests, Fr Shoji and Fr Johnsilal. We continue to pray for their family members. May the Lord grant the departed eternal rest!

- **RIP:** Mrs Theyyama(79), beloved mother of Rev. Sr Ancil FCC, passed away on 8 September and the funeral was held on 9 September. We express our condolences and prayers to Sr Ancil and to her family members.
- Rev. Fr. Shoji Puthenpuakal will be in the Eparchy till 22 October and he will leave for Ireland on 23 October.
- 16 September was my Episcopal ordination anniversary. The Bishop’ House community and Fathers in and around the Bishop’s House gathered around me to wish. I am grateful to you for your prayerful wishes.
- Rev. Fr Christudas is celebrating the Silver Jubilee of his priestly ordination this year. As presbyterium we would like to congratulate and pray for him. The Eparchy will remember him in a

special way on 2 October during the Priests and Religious sangamam. Fr Christudas will be doing a one-year diploma course in spirituality at Anugraha, Dindigal. We wish him God's blessings.

- Rev. Fr Alex Puthettu left for Rome on 19 September for his ecclesiastical studies. At present he is in quarantine before beginning the regular community life at Damsceno, Rome.
- The meeting of Catholic Hospital Association of Tamilnadu (CHAT) was held from 28-29 September at Vellankanni. Since I am the ecclesiastical adviser to CHAT, I attended the two-day meeting and animated the members.
- **I extend a warm welcome to all of you dear fathers for our annual retreat at Sangamam from 3 – 8 October, 2021. The retreat will begin at 6 pm on the first day and end at 11 am on the last day with priests conference. Rev. Fr Dominic Valavanal and his team will animate the retreat.**
- The youth department of our Eparchy is going to organise a two days camp for the selected youth of the diocese from 14-15 October at Sangmam.
- The family Apostolate department is going to organise a two days camp for the families from 29-30 October at Sangamam.
- The FCC sisters of Kanjirapally province finally have a convent of their own at Sengottai. It is going to be blessed on 22 October, 2021
- Rev. Fr Biju Michael SDB, the General Councillor for South East Asia of Salesian Congregation, from Rome will visit me and the diocese from 20-22 October, 2021.
- A Memorial Holy Qurbana for late Sr Cancia SH, on her 41 day, was celebrated at Holy Family Church, Arukani on 30 September, 2021.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

02 October	-	Priests and Religious Sangamam
03-8 October	-	Priests' Retreat
13-19 October	-	Bishop's Meeting with faithful
24 October	-	Chain Rosary
25-28 October	-	Chain Adoration

CONCLUSION

Dear Fathers, as already mentioned, we are already in the month of October, which is dear to every Catholic. It is definitely a beautiful month in which we manifest our devotion to Mother Mary, in a special way, by praying the Rosary. It is also a grace-filled time for receiving the showers of blessings from our heavenly Mother. Just like the blooming roses which beautify our gardens and refresh the air with their sweet fragrance, the presence of our blessed Mother beautifies our parish communities, removes every element of evil and spreads the fragrance of her maternal love, peace, serenity and harmony. Our Blessed Lord wants the heart of every priest to be a home of Mother Mary, where she is the mother, guide and help. Let us give her the rightful place and honour her with profound love and devotion especially on the feast of the Holy Rosary on 7 October.

May our Blessed Mother intercede for each one of us!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**
Bishop of Thuckalay

