

Prot. No. 0714/2020

## **PASTORAL LETTER ON *SABHADINAM*-2020**

George Cardinal Alencherry, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Men and Women Religious and Lay Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church. May the Grace of the Lord be with you all!

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

The Feast of *Dukrana* of St. Thomas on July 3<sup>rd</sup> is fast approaching. We celebrate the feast of *Dukrana* as the *Sabhadinam* (Day of the Church) too. This is also the feast of the proclamation of faith by the Apostle. It was through his preaching that we received the faith and he became, thus, the father of our faith. The words of St. Thomas after seeing the wounds on the body of the risen Jesus, “My Lord and My God”, is the boldest proclamation of faith in the Gospels. Both addresses, ‘my Lord’ and ‘my God’, indicate the divinity of Jesus. What he did was to proclaim Jesus who was born, died and risen as a human being is also a divine being. An equivalent proclamation to this was given by St. Peter when he said that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter’s proclamation took place in the middle of the public ministry of Jesus while that of the Apostle Thomas was later after the resurrection. What St. Peter did after the resurrection was the proclamation of his love. In that proclamation of Peter, there was the declaration of his total faith in Jesus. Love is the fulfillment of faith. St. Paul says that we are saved by the faith that is active in love. Our community witnessing to the faith that we received from St. Thomas gets reflected in different facets of love, expressed through various activities. May God give us more opportunities to make them more alive during this time of Covid pandemic.

### **Renewal of Life**

This lock down owing to the Corona virus has opened several possibilities for the renewal of our lives. We are forced to adopt a life of simplicity which was pointed out at different levels and were thought of for a long time. This year and in the coming years, we should adopt a style that is simple and frugal, avoiding all extravaganzas. Pompous shows and prodigality should be avoided from our life style. Please do not embark upon

new constructions. Institutions and parishes have to practice a spirit of self-discipline that helps them to slow down constructions they have already started. We shall take a decision not to take up collections on a compulsory basis. We shall manage the functions of our community and meet our expenses from the voluntary contributions of our people, however small they may be. We shall stop issuing advertisements through bill boards and showy celebrations that give the impression that the goal of retreats and feast celebrations is the amassing of wealth. It is not proper to hold celebrations and engage in constructions for individual glory and prestige. The needs of the churches are to be met from a spiritual attitude generated through the fraternity of the sons and daughters of the church.

Individuals and institutions should abandon the policy of amassing wealth far above the needs of the community. Let the face of the church be poor and simple as Pope Francis has repeatedly urged us. The church should belong to the poor. The wealth of the Church is the people of God. The members of the Church have the practical wisdom to help the Church in times of need. Let there arise in the Church a way of life that recognizes that the Church belongs to the people and it is theirs and that they have the obligation to meet the needs of the people engaged in different ministries of the Church.

The very face of the Church should be the charitable activities which were done, prompted by a deep love of God. All the activities of the Church in the fields of education, healthcare and social ministries should be pervaded by a spirit of mercy and thus may become a strong witness to the Christian faith. I offer my gratitude and congratulations to all the parishes, dioceses and their social welfare departments for the marvelous services they are rendering to the society during this Covid time.

### **Liturgical celebrations in the Covid period**

It appears that 2020 will be known as a Covid year in the history of the world. The world would have to live with the experience of the viral infection until the end of the year. Hence, it is absolutely necessary to stop the social spread of this viral fever for the existence of the human race. We have to struggle hard to keep this sense of responsibility in every person. All the countries of the world have now, in this second phase of the infection, adopted a policy of the containment of this viral fever by not halting ordinary activities of life. Our country has also adopted a similar policy. Hence, exemptions are being given in an orderly way during this lock down period. Commercial establishments, factories and government offices have begun to function in full strength.

Private transportation is functioning without any interruption. There is no limitation in the field of construction projects. The Govt. has given permission to open the places of worship from June 9<sup>th</sup> onwards. Along with all these exemptions, the Govt. is also giving stringent guidelines for the prevention of the social spread of the infection. The sons and daughters of the Church have to follow these guidelines for the common good.

Just because liturgical services are allowed to be held in the places of worship does not mean that all have to rush to the church at the same time to attend the services. Those churches that are open at this time can continue their services following the same regulations. Those who have not opened their churches for worship should follow all the same regulations when they start functioning. There should be no negligence in this matter. If there takes place any incident of infection, the churches and other place of worship should close down, showing thus the serious responsibility of the clergy and the laity for the abatement of the infection. Our aim is that the pace of our sacramental celebration should move in conjunction with the pace of the normalcy in the secular society.

### **New phases of Spirituality**

This Covid period should enable us to give up attitudes and activities that are contrary to Christian spirituality and to bear witness to an authentic spirituality. Those of the clergy, the religious and the laity who are in responsible positions should give real witness to a Christian way of life. During the lock down period, since all the members of the family are confined to their homes, it should be possible for them to participate in family prayers more regularly and closely.

They could also participate in online masses more devoutly. At the same time, we have to see that the children also learn more about their faith through online catechism classes. This opportunity can also be used to increase the faith- awareness of the elders too.

We should avoid all tendencies that are contrary to our faith. We have to be constantly watchful of sinful acts like alcoholism, drug-addiction, attacks against all forms of life, encroachment on the privacy of individuals and tarnishing their reputations through the social media, scandalous gossiping and sexual aberrations. It is through our growth in goodness that we have to defeat the power of evil. We shall strive to foster pure love and mercy in our thoughts and actions and also try to help the poor. We shall also cooperate with the governments in helping the expatriates to return to their homeland and get

settled. The educational institutions of the Church have a responsibility to accommodate the children of the expatriates in their institutions.

Race discrimination is creating divisions in our society. The nations of the world have succeeded in some measure to control such discriminations. But in recent times these problems are arising in different places. It is important for the good of the human society to annihilate this evil. Race discrimination is diametrically opposed to our Christian faith. Jesus saw the Jews, Greeks and Samaritans as the children of God the Father and He lived, taught and preached with that brotherly attitude.

As St. Paul says, “ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 28) .We shall see to it that such discriminatory thoughts or words should not have a place in our speeches or actions. We have to develop a culture of love in our Church where we see all human beings as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We have to reflect on the social dimension of Christian spirituality. During this Covid period and later in the post-Covid time too, we have to become producers and entrepreneurs in order to protect the economic structure of our country as individuals, families and societies. Agriculture is an area that should deserve our special attention.

All the lands in the possession of individuals, institutions and parishes should be made available for farming. Not even a square inch of land should be left uncultivable. The people of God including the clergy should set apart some time daily for agricultural activities. As per the warning issued by the UN, there is a possibility for the world to experience a great famine that it has not experienced in the last fifty years. It is the opinion of experts that Kerala can produce all the food that it needs in Kerala itself. Those who are living in flats and apartments can also join in this venture on their terraces through grow-bags. Under the leadership of parishes and neighborhood associations, commercial marketing outlets can be opened which can sell the produce at affordable rates, helping the farmers in that way very much. With regard to cash crops, we have to direct our agricultural efforts towards producing exportable agricultural products. The *Catholica Congress* and INFAM should offer leadership in this matter by organizing schemes that would help the farmers. The owners of small scale industries and factories should increase their production.

These efforts are needed to overcome the economic slowdown that is happening in the Covid period. We shall also sincerely cooperate with the Govt. in making a success of

their post- Covid economic schemes. We shall also be watchful of the exploitation and corruption that can take place in a democratic set-up. We shall never allow such exploitation and if we come to know of them, we should try to annihilate them by bringing them into attention of the public.

These thoughts will help to promote a new form and character to our Christian life in the present situation. We shall make our spiritual lives and individual, family and social lives to be in conformity with the spirit of the Gospel message during the Covid period and later in the post-Covid phase. We shall reflect the face of Jesus Christ through our life in the Church. We shall also participate in the restoration of the Church and of the society by committing ourselves totally to the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ as St. Thomas the Apostle did.

I wish all of you the blessings of the *Dukrana* feast and of the *Sabhadinam* and bless all of you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad, on 17 June 2020



Cardinal George Alencherry  
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

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NB: *This pastoral letter is to be read out during the Holy Mass on Sunday, 28 June 2020, in all churches and chapels of the Syro-Malabar Church where there is Sunday Mass for the public, respecting the regulations given by the government. Copy of this pastoral letter is to be made available through opportune means to those faithful who cannot participate in the celebration of Holy Qurbana in churches.*