

Prot. No. 0648/2016

Pastoral Letter on *Sabhadinam*

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!

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

This is the time when the Universal Church is celebrating the Year of Mercy. Let me express my joy at the observance of this Year of Mercy by all our lay faithful, priests, the religious and bishops.

Holy Father Pope Francis has published the Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of Love” in this Year of Mercy after the conclusion of the two synods on family life in Rome. Our faithful are receiving by now new directives and reflections through the writings of the bishops and of other members of our Church with regard to the renewal of family life.

The Holy Father sees the family as a field of activity of the Triune God. I would like to say that all the pastoral and missionary activities of the Church should be focused on families. There should take place a radical change in the mindset of the ministers of the Church while implementing the pastoral plans for the revitalization of family life. The perspective that should guide all our efforts of renewal in liturgy, faith formation, parish revitalization, evangelization, organizations of the parish etc should be aimed at the building up of families and of strengthening their stability and growth. Pastors are requested to convey this basic vision and programmes through family unit meetings, gatherings of Catholic Congress and seminars and meetings conducted under the auspices of parish organizations.

We are celebrating the feast of the Dukrana of St. Thomas, the Father of our Faith, on July 3rd. Since St Thomas is the Father of our Church, it is very appropriate for us to have the Church as the main theme for our reflections on this feast. The mission of the Church in this world is the same as the mission of Jesus Christ. Christian vocation involves proclaiming the love of God, bearing witness to that love and even sacrificing our lives for it as Jesus did.

I am sorry to note that we frequently hear about terrible acts of cruelty that are being perpetrated against Christians in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. We shall offer those heroic lives to the Lord. Some of the Christian brethren in India too are experiencing violence and persecution in different parts of India. They too are ostracized and attacked because of their faith in the Lord. We have to pray constantly for the courage to bear witness to our faith. St. Thomas, the Apostle was martyred for his faith in the Lord. The children of St. Thomas should also be willing to bear witness to Jesus heroically through their lives.

We have to bear in mind that like St. Thomas who was an apostle, we too have to become apostles. St. Paul has echoed this sentiment beautifully when he said: 'Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel' (1Cor 9:16). We should be willing to undertake the necessary sacrifices in spreading the Gospel whether the circumstances are favourable or not. In today's context, evangelization involves translating the values of the Gospel into our lives and to align them with the values that are found in other religions and cultures. We have to collaborate in raising mankind to a common cultural humanism, in a spirit of brotherly love for all, irrespective of caste, creed or race. We have to build this culture where everyone is brother or sister to one another and not alien to them.

God loves every one of us without any personal predilections. God's love should become a model for our love. Jesus has told us that loving those who love us does not mean much. He wants us to love those who have hurt us.

The catalytic force in all our endeavors, whether in the field of education, politics or culture, should be Christian love. We have to work in those areas with a great sense of justice, transparency and mercy. Christians have to create a society without corruption and injustice.

We have to be strong pillars of support to those who are suffering, poor and sick. The Church is teaching through the life and words of Pope Francis that God is mercy. Our daily life should reflect this style of life, of being merciful in words and life.

A way of life based on love and mercy is a reflection of real faith. St. Paul too demands from us a life of faith that is active through love (Gal.5:6). In that way, we can make our faith active and fruitful through love.

This is also a good time for us to remember the migrant Syro-Malabar faithful who are living in different parts of India and abroad. They should have the same privileges of practicing their faith without any restrictions just like the faithful who live in the proper territory of the mother Church. We have not reached any arrangement where we could provide proper pastoral care to our migrants. I would urge everyone to pray for the successful implementation of the necessary conditions to provide proper pastoral care to our migrant communities.

I don't have to emphasize the need to be attentive on the part of all for implementing a successful pastoral plan for the faith formation of the children and the youths of our communities. We have to work towards forming a proper mental and spiritual outlook in them so that they could respond to the challenges of the modern culture in a Christian way. Truthfulness, justice, chastity, love of the country and merciful attitudes should be fostered in their lives. They should also have moral capability, prudence and confidence to take upon these responsibilities at the regional as well as at the church levels. Those who are active in various Church ministries should motivate and train the young to follow them in these ministries.

St. John writes in the Gospel that Thomas doubted the Resurrection of Jesus. That doubt has become redemptive for us as it became a happy doubt like the Felix culpa of St. Augustine to express the joy of the Incarnation. Similarly, I would like to call the doubt of Thomas as happy doubt as it enabled him to address Jesus as “My Lord and My God.” We have to be thankful to the Apostle for his doubt as it enables us to call Jesus as “My Lord and my God”.

O, St. Thomas, now your proclamation has become our proclamation. Just as the faith of St. Peter has become the foundation of the universal Church, so the faith of St. Thomas has become a corner stone in the communion of churches which is the Universal church.

May the merciful Lord bless all of you! I bless you in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Lovingly in Christ Jesus,

+George Cardinal Alencherry
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad,
on the 30th of May 2016.

Note: This pastoral letter is to be read out during the Holy Mass on the 26th of June 2016, in all churches and chapels of the Syro-Malabar Church where there is Sunday Mass for the public.