

PASTORAL LETTER

VARKEY CARDINAL VITHAYATHIL, 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, blessings and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

Let me extend to all of you the greetings of *Dukrana* of St. Thomas, our father in faith. *Dukrana* reminds us that we should keep up the courageous faith of St. Thomas amidst. We ought to imitate the person whom we commemorate. Our devotion to St. Thomas should lead us to our imitation of St. Thomas.

From the gospels we can see that St. Thomas is the fertile garden of theological virtues. In the gospel of St. John, we encounter Thomas, the apostle, on three occasions. On each of these occasions, we are able to witness to the zenith of a particular theological virtue. We can see in Thomas, the Apostle the deep love towards Jesus when he says, “Let us go and die with Him” (Jn 11, 16). His decision to surrender himself to the Messiah who is “the way, the truth and the life” is the reflection of his hope in the Saviour (Jn 14, 6). At last, when Thomas encountered the risen Christ face-to-face, he could spell out the sublime proclamation of faith, “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20,28). Instead of branding him the doubting Thomas, he is to be seen as the one who had proclaimed firm faith in Jesus.

The life of St. Thomas teaches us what the real missionary spirit is. The driving force of our missionary work is nothing but the profound love and true faith in Christ. The prayer the celebrant makes in the first *G’hanta* of our Holy *Qurbana*, namely, “we implore You to strengthen us to celebrate, with deep love and true faith these gifts that You have given us,” challenges us to make our own the faith commitment of St. Thomas, our father in faith.

The love of the other flowing from the love of God is intrinsic to the missionary spirit. Those who do not love a brother or a sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 Jn 4,20). These words of St. John should inspire us to love the other. Jesus has taught us to love one another as He has loved us (Jn 13, 35). The zeal to share the message of salvation we received with our brethren, gets perfected in the love of the other. It is here that the charitable works under the auspices of the Church receive their significance.

It is only because St. Thomas possessed deep love and firm faith that he could courageously face the challenges against faith and be a martyr for Christ. Only if we possess this deep love and firm faith will true evangelization be possible today and will we be able to take a firm stand against the contemporary challenges. Ours is an age when secularism envisaged by the Indian

Constitution is misinterpreted as the negation of religion any crisis, when spirituality is ignored and rejected in the growing trend of materialism and faith in God is branded as outmoded. In this present era, when the media, which are unable to portray the truth in its fullness, and the atheistic political ideologies, are opposing Christian teachings vehemently, it is difficult to lead an authentic Christian life. When the rights of the Christian minorities are looked with suspicion even when they stand for their legitimate rights without in any way undermining the principles of the Indian Constitution, one can see the religious life is not devoid of challenges.

The challenges faced by the Church are not merely external. It is a painful truth that the children of our Church too are trapped in the overdose of materialism which is biting into spirituality. The number of Catholics who discard the official teaching of the Church in the field of morality and medical sciences and who dilute the traditional teaching of the Church that Christ is the Universal Saviour of the whole world are on the increase. It is a betrayal of our ancestors in faith when instead of keeping alive the light of faith enkindled by St. Thomas, we put it out and join the Pentecostal sects.

The Holy Father declared the year for priests so that the priests who lead the people of God may imbibe the zeal of faith. Let the respected priests understand that it is in the Church that one becomes a priest, and that apart from the Church there is no meaning for priesthood. The recently concluded year for priests was a year of self-examination for the priests. The year for priests, filled with the sublime memories of St. John Maria Vianney, had aimed at forming priests according to the heart of Jesus. The heart of Jesus is the heart pierced by the love for humanity. The faithfulness of the priesthood of Christ consists in this love. The motto “Faithfulness of Christ, the faithfulness of priests” speaks about this faithfulness rooted in love. I believe that my fellow priests try their best to realize this goal. We shall pray earnestly to God for more vocations to priesthood and consecrated life to strengthen our Church and encourage vocations in our own life situations.

When we celebrate the feast of *Dukrana*, we can't but remember the great blessings God has showered upon the Syro-Malabar Church. God has been gracious to give six new bishops to our Church in this year: Mar Bosco Puthur, the Curia bishop, Mar Remigiose Inchananiyil, the bishop of Thamarassery, Mar Pauly Kannookadan, the bishop of Irinjalakuda, Mar George Njaralakkatt, the bishop of Mandya, Mar Paul Alappatt, the bishop of Ramanathapuram and Mar Raphael Thattil, the auxiliary bishop of Trichur. Besides, two new dioceses Mandya and Ramanathapuram were erected in our Church. I wish the divinely appointed new pastors the prayerful greetings of all the faithful of Syro-Malabar Church. May God grant them the strength to build up the Church in communion and unity. I also remember with gratitude Mar James Pazhayattil, Bishop of Irinjalakuda and Mar Paul Chittilapilly, Bishop of Thamarassery, who have retired from active service after long years of ministry in their respective eparchies.

As you know in our Church we celebrate the feast of *Dukrana* as *Sabhadinam*. On this *Sabhadinam*, I specially remember the Syro-Malabar faithful residing outside the proper territory of the Church. Although our efforts to provide pastoral care in our own ecclesial and liturgical traditions to Syro-Malabar faithful outside the proper territory and to get the right for evangelization all over India have not met with the desired success, I wish to assure you that we are continuing with our pursuit relentlessly. I request your prayers for the success of our attempts for securing the right regarding evangelization and pastoral care all over the world. I earnestly solicit the generous cooperation of every member of the Syro-Malabar Church in our attempt on the occasion of *Sabhadinam* to raise the funds needed for the various ministries of the Church.

The third Major Archiepiscopal Assembly of our Church is going to be held in August during the Synod of Bishops of our Church. “Faith in service of life” is the principal theme of the assembly. This assembly hopes to pin point the challenges of the present day culture of death to confront them and to give birth to a culture which promotes life in its totality having an integral view of the creation, as opposed to the culture of death.

I would like to recall to your mind the words of St. Cyprian, the Church Father, that, “one who does not accept the Church as mother cannot call God as Father”. Like St. Thomas, our Father in faith, we shall firmly resolve to be courageous to be martyrs for the Church, the mystical body of Christ. Once again, extending the greetings of *Dukrana* to all the faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church living inside and outside Kerala and abroad, I bless you, in the name of the father + and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Given at Kakkanad from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St. Thomas on 2 June 2010.

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Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

N.B: *This pastoral letter is to be read out during the Holy Mass on June 27 in all churches and chapels of the Syro-Malabar Church where there is Sunday Mass for the public.*