



News Letter

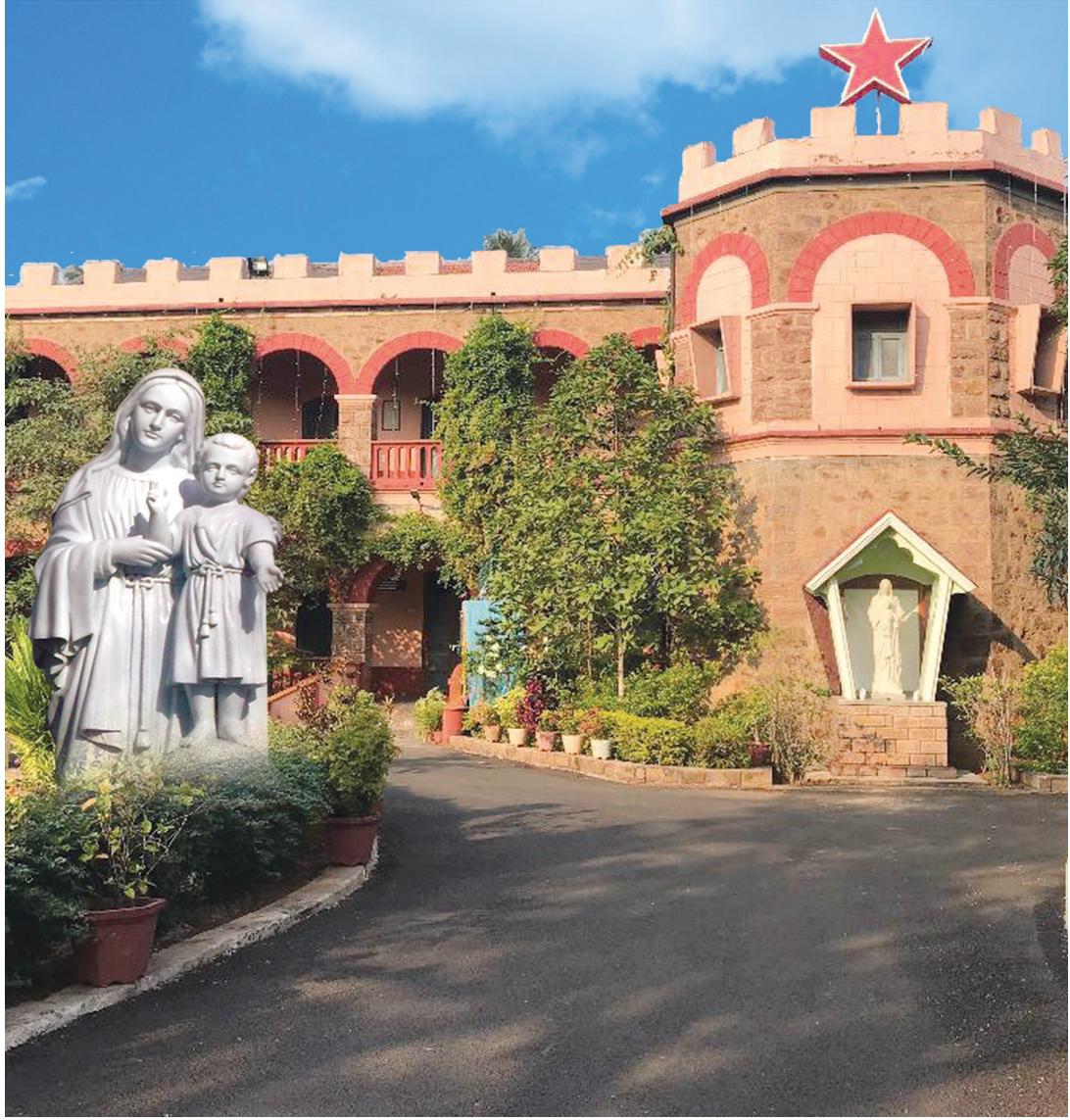
ARCHDIOECESIS OF VISAKHAPATNAM



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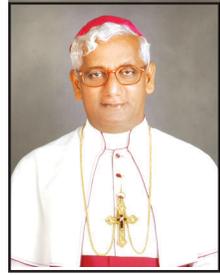
JANUARY 2019

No. 1



The Pastor Speaks

Mystery of life: Looking back and looking forward, and making resolutions !



As the New Year commences we all are made to think more consciously about the forward movement of life. As believers we accept that God is involved in this forward movement of each one's life. There is also involvement of human freedom in this forward movement. But, not everything that happens in life is dependent on human freedom alone. That is the mystery part of the dynamism of life, visible both in nature and in human life! Yet, there is so much in human life as a consequence of the daily exercise of human freedom, individually and collectively. Looking at the year that has gone by each one of us will have a lot of things to recall, the good and the bad, that happened due to our decisions and our way of exercising our freedom. There will also be many events and experiences that are not due to one's decisions. One has nothing to say but one (or the family or the society) has to just accept and cope with. One has to just keep going on with the hope to succeed in all the endeavors one undertakes with responsibility and accountability.

1. *Renewal of our attitudes towards the good and valuable:*

On the occasion of the New Year celebrations it is very common to speak about "**Resolutions**" for the New Year. It is like visualizing and deciding to attend to different aspects of our life in a certain planned way. A planned way of conducting oneself regarding diet, sleep, spending money, use of time, use of social media and recreation, relationships with the family members, neighbors and fellow workers, the poor and the neglected in the society, civic responsibilities, prayer and worship or religious practices, etc would mean that there is certain way of understanding all these that are meaningful and necessary in one's own life. Making resolutions regarding any of these or all of these would mean that one sees a certain value or usefulness or duty and obligation, and they need to be taken seriously and responsibly. Neglect of or indifference to such good and valuable or necessary things for life would mean some deficiency and would not augur well for one's personality and character!

Making fresh resolutions here would also mean a recognition and re-affirmation of the value of something. It also means a renewed commitment to the values, be it moral or spiritual or social, or simply because something which is good for one's body and spirit. It is "**stop-look-move forward.**"

2. *Understanding of life apart from God is an option:* New Year Day is actually another day like any other day of twenty-four hours duration, so why all the fuss about it and gala celebrations on that day? We are created at a particular moment in the dynamic movement of time and the endpoint of life is known to us, that is, moment of death. But, unlike other creatures we the human beings are not just instinctively and automatically moving forward. Though there are similarities in the biological sphere between us and other living beings, we humans have the self regulating capacity because of the rational faculties we have. Instinctual behavior is a regulated behavior and there are reasons to regulate our life in a certain way. We understand our life and we make decisions according to that understanding. We are able to explain, justify and defend our choices." By choice, one can understand and live without reference and connection to God. With that, understanding one tries to regulate one's life. The meaning of life and the values one tries to abide by rationally explained, justified and defended.

3. *We understand our life as God wants us to understand:* For a believer solely depending on rational, sociological, or anything biological understanding of one's life is not sufficient. For, one important source or means to learn about and to understand our life is God who created us, "***in His image and likeness.***" In fact, we also understand God through our faith and the teachings of the faith tradition we belong to. God whom we believe and understand teaches or reveals to us about what life is, life in relation to Him and life in relation to the rest of the humanity, and the creation at large. For us Christians, it is the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom we believe and with whom we relate. In and through the revelation from that God received in faith, especially, the revelation in Jesus Christ, God-made human being, we understand life and strive to live our life according to that understanding. But, in all of us the instinctual behavior naturally present in us cannot be denied. Our natural

instincts and inclinations do persist but they are to be guided and regulated by our understanding of life in God while making our decisions and choices. In the past year, who and what guided our life, our decisions, our plans and projects? Was it God and our understanding of life in Him? These questions should help us to know how we fared and that should help us make new resolutions for the New Year 2019!

4. *Can we cope with the challenges and difficulties!* Life is a mixed bag of happy and painful experiences. We are surprised how things happen and how we are expected to cope with the situation. We have no clear-cut proposal to make in order to cope with the consequences, which are mostly sudden and shocking. We should trust that God and His Spirit give the needed wisdom and inspiration to deal with the challenges at hand in the best way possible. With the available resources and the strength we have gained from the past experiences we have to pick up confidence to do all that is possible within our reach. Here, help and assistance from one another is very valuable, strengthening and comforting. Things may still happen contrary to our expectations: terminal illness, unexpected or sudden death of a dear one, breakdown of relationships, financial problems due to injustice and deception of others, loss of a good position or employment, etc. All these happen contrary to or just the opposite of what we want and what we expect in our life. Faced with such as these, only surrender in faith and hope, and accepting the situation before God is the best choice! Not easy but that surrender will help to accept the situation and is helpful to keep moving forward! We should not forget that we believe in a God who intervenes and involves in our journey of life! Directly or through other human beings of good will God intervenes. We are not alone!

5. *Intervention of God in the journey of life:* The history of salvation and the mystery of salvation is one long chain of accounts of God's intervention in the history of the people of Israel, the people of God. Numerous times and in numerous ways God comes to the rescue of the people. Individually and collectively God's intervention has been experienced by the people. In Jesus Christ God continues to intervene in many unique and tangible ways. With this God accompanying us in

life journey, we should be able to see the “**silver lining**” even when the darkest clouds that surround us. This God wishes the best for us and therefore even when we are faced with some serious and hopeless situations we should have the courage to say, “**Let God’s will be done!**” On the New Year Day, we as the Church are celebrating the Divine Motherhood of Our Blessed Mother Mary. Privileged to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, Incarnate Son of God, she was also Mother of Sorrows! She lived through the journey! We should seek refuge in her and also learn from her to struggle through the difficulties and challenges that come in the course of our journey of life! It is necessary that we understand our life in God and what He keeps us teaching about our life, its meaning and destiny!

“As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (James, 5:10-12).

+ *Prakash M.*

† **Prakash Mallavarapu**
Archbishop of Visakhapatnam



LET US PRAY

For Holy Father’s Monthly Prayer Intention



Evangelization: in the service of the transmission of faith. That people, who are involved in the service and transmission of faith, may find, in their dialogue with culture, a language suited to the conditions of the present time.

ENGAGEMENTS

JANUARY 2019

- 1st New Year Day, Sithammadhara Parish, Mass at 8.00 a.m.
- 4th Blessing of Patimeeda Village Chapel, Velangi Parish, at 5.30p.m.
- 5th Blessing of Gandredu Village Chapel, Velangi Parish, at 10.00 a.m.
Silver Jubilee Celebration of Gloria E.M. School, Rajeev Nagar, at 4.30 p.m.
- 6th Family Day of St. Peter's Cathedral, Gnanapuram, Mass at 7.00 p.m.
- 7th – 13th CCBI Standing Committee Meeting, Chennai
- 14th Infant Jesus Feast Day Mass, Sithammadhara Parish, at 5.30 p.m.
- 16th Silver Jubilee of Fr. Rajappa, Bangalore
- 17th Priestly Ordination of Bro. Prasad TOR, Mandapeta Parish, Mass at 10.00 a.m.
- 18th Priestly Ordination of Bro. Francis OSS, Marriveedu Parish, Mass at 10.00 a.m.
- 19th Feast Day Mass, Sithanagaram Parish, 5.00 p.m.
- 20th Confirmations, Butchirajapalem Parish, Mass at 8.30a.m.
- 22nd – 24th Colloquium of bishops and theologians and Congregation for
Doctrine of Faith, Bangalore
- 25th Unity Octave, Prayer at Pastoral Center, Bishop's House, at 6.00 p.m.
- 26th Feast Day Mass, Pachipenta Parish, at 11.00 a.m.
- 28th – 30th TCBC Meeting, Hyderabad
- 31st Flag Hoisting for Feast of St. Joan of Arc, Rajamundry, Mass at 5.30 p.m.

FEBRUARY 2019

- 2nd Padha Yatra, Kondaba Feast, Starting from Gnanapuram at 6.30 a.m.
School Day of St. Francis High School, Madhurawada Parish, at 4.30 p.m.
- 3rd Kondadaba Feast Day, Kondadabalu, Mass at 7.30 a.m.
- 5th School Day of Nirmala High School, Vadlapudi
- 6th Blessing of Basilian Sisters' House, Thorreedu, at 5.30 p.m.
- 7th Feast Day of Anaparthi Parish, Mass at 2.00 p.m.
- 9th – 13th Celebrations of the World Day of the Sick, Kolkata
- 16th Blessing of Markondaputti Village Chapel, Makkuva Parish, Mass at 10.30 a.m.
- 17th Gnanapuram Parish, Peetakala Pandaga, Mass at 5.30 p.m.
- 18th Preparatory Meeting for Rakshna Giri Feast, Gnanapuram, at 4.30 p.m.
- 21st Blessing of Butikani Valasa Village Chapel, Salur-1, Mass at 10.30 a.m.
- 24th Confirmations, Vadlapudi Parish, Mass at 8.00 a.m.

COMMUNICATIONS

- 1) May I wish all the priests, religious and the faithful A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR! May you have the grace and blessings of the Lord for accomplishing all that you aspire to undertake!! May you have a blessed year 2019!! I also acknowledge with appreciation all those who greeted for Christmas and New Year!
- 2) The “Ordo” 2018-2019 is already in the hands of all the parishes, priests and religious communities in the Archdiocese. I thank Fr. Ratna Kumar for doing all the work and for taking care to be accurate in the details given in the Ordo. All the priests and religious should follow the directions in the Ordo in addition to the Directives given by the CCBI and General Instructions in order to celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist and other sacraments with order, dignity and devotion.
- 3) Monthly Recollection for the clergy in the month of January will be at the deanery level and therefore the respective deans should make the necessary arrangements for the recollection.
- 4) Annual Returns: It is time again to do the annual exercise for the Church we belong to! Please take time to take the Forms for the Annual Returns for the year 2018 and submit the same after duly filling in all the details of your parish or institution or religious community. Please take care to see the record of the previous year 2017 submitted by you or your predecessor. This exercise should be completed latest by 15th of February. Your prompt exercise will help the office to submit to Rome within the stipulated time.
- 5) Jyothirmai (Regional Pastoral Center) Sunday will be observed on 27.01.2019. There will be specially prepared material for the Liturgical celebration and for the sermon during the Mass. All the pastors will pay attention to highlight the importance of self reliance and self supporting Christian Communities in every parish and in every village. It is not only financial self reliance but also in all the matters of the Christian Community the people should take responsibility and be involved in the various activities in the given parish or the village or mission station.

For this, ongoing faith formation is another point to be highlighted frequently, especially on Jyothirmai Sunday.

- 6) Unity Octave from January 18 to 25 is to be observed and help the community to pray for the Christian Unity. Besides the special prayers during the week, parish priests should try to take initiatives to arrange some meeting with the pastors of other Churches present and invite them to pray together. In Visakhapatnam, under the leadership of Fr, Ch. Mariadas, Pastoral Centre Director, prayer meeting will be conducted on Friday, 25th January, starting at 6.30 p.m.. All the parish priests in the Visakhapatnam Urban deanery should encourage the religious and lay people to participate in the prayer meeting for Christian Unity on 25th January.

+ Prakash M.

† Prakash Mallavarapu
Archbishop of Visakhapatnam

JANUARY

Fr. Peter Senapathi	1	Birthday
Fr. Jesudas Mycherla	2	Birthday
Fr. Yugal Kumar Pasupuleti	3	Birthday
Fr. Jojibabu Karanam	4	Ordination Day
Fr. Anandarao Jalumuru		
Fr. Maripi Pratap	8	Birthday
Fr. Agnel Ravindra kumar Eagala	21	Feast Day
Fr. Velangini Suman Pradeep Arinana	26	Birthday

*Many Many Happy returns of the Day
to Dear Fathers*

ARCHDIOCESE NEWS

Pastoral Center News

Report of Formation of Children's Faith

For 7th, 8th and 9th class catechism children(Urban Deanery) With the collaboration of the Telugu Regional Pastoral Centre (Jyotirmai Society), on 9th (Sunday) December 2018, formation of Children's faith program was conducted at Pastoral centre Hall from 9am to 4pm. There were 320 children attended from all the parishes from Urban deanery. Many thoughts were given to them in the form of Bible stories, short talks on Sacraments, quiz, games and activities to have love for the church and their faith. I sincerely thank Rev. Fr. M. Solomanraj (Telugu Regional Pastoral Centre Director) for his support and guidance and all the parish priests and catechism teachers for encouraging children to participate. I also thank Rev Fr. D. Balashowry (Vicar General) Fr. P. Yugal kumar who were present for the program and instructed children to be good and faithful children of the church.

Report of Pre- Christmas Celebrations at Pastoral Centre

Pre - Christmas celebrated for all the youth of our Archdiocese at Pastoral Centre, Maharanipeta, On 16th (Sunday of December 2018, from 10 am 6pm,. Youth with so much of talent have participated in singing, dancing, fancy dress (Tableaus) and Bible quiz (Book of Revelation) competitions. The winners were awarded with mementos. The awardees are:

Singing: 1st Prize : St. Anthonys Church Youth, Mahranipeta Parish.
2nd Prize : St. Thomas church Youth, Butchirajpalem Parish.
3rd Prize : Velaganimatha Church Youth, Kailasapuram Parish.

Dance: 1st Prize : St. Thomas church Youth, Butchirajpalem Parish.
2nd Prize : Christ the Saviour Church Youth, Steelplant Parish.
3rd Prize : St. Anthonys Church Youth, Mahranipeta Parish.

Bible Quiz: 1st Prize : Holy Cross Church Youth, Gajuwaka Parish.
2nd Prize : Christ the Saviour Church Youth, Steelplant Parish.
3rd Prize : Velaganimatha Church Youth, Kailasapuram Parish.

Tabuleaus: 1st Prize : St. Francis Church, Madurawada Parish.
2nd Prize : Holy Cross Church Youth, Gajuwaka Parish.
3rd Prize : Velaganimatha Church Youth, Kailasapuram Parish.

Over all championship Trophy was awarded to Holy Cross Church Youth, Gajuwaka Parish. Archbishop Mallavaarapu Prakash exhorted the youth to live a life as experienced the Saviours birth and be witnesses in their day today's life. I acknowledge the service rendered by Rev. Fr's P. Jeevanbabu, E. Ravindrakumar and P. Yugalkumar who were judges for these competitions.

Pre-Christmas celebrated for all the catholic health personals (Doctors, Nurses and all those working in medical field) on 18th Tuesday, December 2018, at Pastoral Centre, Maharanipeta, from 10am to 4pm with the kind co operation of Rev. Sr. Balajoicy, St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing, Rev. Sr. Jaisemary St. Ann's School of Nursing and the committee members of Health personnel's was grandly celebrated with Holy mass by His Grace Mallavarapu Prakash and exhorted them to have love and care for all the patients with a soft touch in their treatment. Carols were sung and Christmas Quiz conducted.

Catholic teachers and catechism teachers Pre – Christmas was celebrated on 19th December 2018, Wednesday,, at Pastoral Centre from 5pm to 8pm. Teachers gathered from all the schools in the city and from all the parishes in big number. I thank sincerely all reverend Parish priests, Principals of collages and schools, head masters and head mistresses for taking a special care and encouraged the teachers. Presentations and Carols were done among teachers themselves.

Report of Marriage preparation course in East Godavari Deanery

Marriage preparation course for the deanery of East Godavari was conducted in three parishes namely **Prathipadu Parish on 4th December**, **Rajahmundry Parish on 5th December**, **Samalkota on 6th December**. All together there were 155 young people came for the course, who showed much interest to learn about the marital life. There were biblical reflections, canonical clarifications, medical aspects and pastoral aspects dealt, which gave a bright understanding of the marital life to all those attended. A sincere thanks to all the priests of the deanery for taking special interest

to make the great opportunity be use full to their parish youth. We acknowledge the help and support of Rev. Fr. S. Showrybabu (Dean), Fr. K. Chinnappa, Fr. J. Anandarao, Fr. S. I. V. Shekar, Fr. Jayaraj, Fr. Prathap and Rev. Sr. Suguna (St. Joseph of Annecy) for their timely guidance and support.

Marriage Preparation course for Urban Deanery

Marriage preparation course for all the Urban Deanery youth will be conducted on 12th January 2019 (Second Saturday) at Pastoral Centre Hall, from 10am to 4pm. Dear Parish priests please do encourage all those youth who will be getting married in near future to attend compulsorily to have a good knowledge of what they are going to aspire. Registration fee will be collected Rs 300/-. Lunch will be provided and certificate will be issued to those who attend.

Marriage Preparation course for Rural Deanery

For all the youth in Rural Deanery Parishes Marriage preparation course will be conducted at J. M. J. School Campus, Anakapalli from 16th January 2019, 10am to 17th January 2019, 4pm. There will be talks and prayers to make the young people be aware of the responsibilities of marital relationship. May I request the parish priests to announce and encourage the young people, who are going to get married in a short period.

Regents Recollection

There will be Bi Monthly Recollection on 15.01.2019 for all the regent brothers at pastoral centre from 10am to 2pm. May I request the in charge priests to send them for this recollection for their spiritual growth.

A Day Of Prayer For Unity Of Churches

For the unity of the churches a day of prayer will be conducted at Pastoral Centre, Maharanipeta, on 25th of January 2019 from 6pm onwards. May I request all the Visakhapatnam Urban Deanery Priests to join for the prayer and encourage the faithful to participate from your parishes.

Annual Catechism Examination

Annual catechism examination for this academic year, 2018 for both media will be conducted on 26th January 2019, Saturday. Please prepare the children for this examination. Final exam will be conducted at these centres St. Theresa's Church Salur, St. Maurice Church, Vizianagaram, St. Joan of arc Church, Rajahmundry,

St. Ann's Church, Kakinada, and Kristujayanthi English Medium School, Maharanipeta. Those of you are near to these centres can write your final examination by showing your identity. Parish priests, sisters and catechism teachers and those in charge of catechism in the parishes please take special interest and make the children do their best in catechism.

Jyothirmaie Primary Scholarship

Jyothirmaie primary Scholarship distribution in all the four deaneries of our Archdiocese will commence on these dates:

- 17th January 2019, Visakhapatnam Rural Deanery, at St. Paul's Church, Anakapalli.
- 18th January 2019, East Godavary Deanery, at St. Ann's Church, Kakinada-1.
- 20st January 2019, Visakhapatnam Urban Deanery, at Pastoral Centre, Maharanipeta.
- 21st January 2019, Vizianagaram Deanery, at St. Theresa's Church, Salur-1.
- Jyothirmaie coordinator will make a call to the parish priest and informs you the details of the necessary things.

Village Camp Sisters

Three groups of Camping sisters (St. Joseph of Annecy, St. Ann's Luzern and Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate) for helping in our parishes for pastoral care are available. Those of you the parish priests like to have their services can approach the pastoral centre office.

Fr. Ch. Mariadas

Pastoral Centre Director

Fr. Marineni Lourdu lost his father Mr. M. Joji (94 years) on 25.12.2018. May the good Lord grant his father eternal rest and console him and his family members.

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2019

Jointly prepared and published by
The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
The Commission on Faith and Order of the
World Council of Churches
Forwarded by CCBI Commission for Ecumenism

FOREWORD

“Dear brothers and sisters, I have desired to come here, a pilgrim in quest of unity and peace. I thank God because here I have found you, brothers and sisters already making this same journey.” These were the concluding words of Pope Francis’ address at the prayer service on June 21, 2018 when he visited World Council of Churches’ (WCC) Ecumenical Centre in Geneva to mark the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the WCC. The Holy Father’s ‘pilgrimage in quest of unity and peace’ is indeed “an historical milestone in the search for Christian unity and for the cooperation among the churches for a world with peace and justice,” according to Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary. It was a long journey for a Pope from Mortalium Animos to Geneva, indeed a long journey for the Roman Catholic Church! In 1928 Pope Pius XI in his Mortalium Animos had forbidden the Catholics from participating in any ecumenical initiatives. This has to be appreciated in the historical context of the time. Today, however, the Pope himself leads the Roman Catholic Church in a pilgrimage in search of unity, nay, in search of brothers and sisters and finds them at WCC in the same pilgrimage. This heralds the common pilgrimage, all churches hand in hand marching towards the Omega point.

It is heartening to note that this ‘pilgrimage in quest for unity’ was begun in our own country. In 1806, William Carey, a Baptist Missionary working in Calcutta dreamt of a World Missionary Conference to be held in Cape Town in 1810, to be repeated every ten years. This was one of the solutions he foresaw to overcome the hurdles posed by the disunity among the churches in the mission field. It took another hundred years for his dream to be realized at the first World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 which heralded the modern ecumenical movement culminating in the founding of WWC in 1948.

The theme of Holy Father's address on the occasion was 'Walking, praying and working together.' The Roman Catholic Church, since Vatican II, has joined the above ecumenical journey and found itself in Geneva praying with the WCC for unity among the Christians that facilitates the ushering of peace in the world. Speaking on prayer, Pope Francis said, "we cannot move forward by ourselves because God's grace is not so much tailored to fit each individual as spread harmoniously among believers who love one another. Whenever we say "Our Father", we feel an echo within us of our being sons and daughters, but also of our being brothers and sisters. Prayer is the oxygen of ecumenism."

The common pilgrimage, as mentioned above, is in search of Unity which is the gift of God and therefore, as Cardinal Walter Kasper says, "it is fitting that Christians pray for it together." Vatican II states, "Such prayers in common are certainly an effective means of obtaining the grace of unity, and they are a true expression of the ties which still bind Catholics to their separated brethren," (UR 8). In the words of Cardinal Kasper, "The celebration of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity world-wide is an initiative of singular importance to be encouraged and further developed," (A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism, no. 28). Hence, the CCBI Commission for Ecumenism is happy to forward this booklet "The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019" soliciting all Catholics to join other Christians and pray together for the precious gift of Christian Unity which is sine qua non for witnessing to the Gospel.

As seen above, the desire for Christian Unity for the credibility of the Gospel message originated in our land in the prophetic vision of William Carey. India has been always on the forefront in ecumenical initiatives. After the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, the Ecumenical Forum of the Protestant and Orthodox Churches in India established 'The National Council of Churches in India' in 1914 as the National Missionary Council which in 1923 became the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon, and in 1979 became the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Similar ecumenical initiatives were behind the founding of CSI in 1947, CNI in 1970, Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) in 1951 etc., the United Christian Prayer for India (UCPI) being the latest. In this fertile soil of ecumenism our 'pilgrimage in quest of unity and peace' would certainly help us find our 'brothers and

sisters already making this same journey.’ This is our prayer and our hope.

This year’s prayer for Christian unity has been prepared by all the churches in Indonesia. Christians belonging to various denominations who make a meagre up 10% of the population of the country have chosen the theme, “Justice and only justice you shall pursue,” (Dt 16:18-20) highlighting the rampant corruption in the country that has undermined justice. As a result, “the gap between the rich and the poor has widened; and so a country rich in resources has the scandal of many people living in poverty.” In fact, “Justice is, ... one of the foundational values of human society for the simple reason that the harmonious existence and its continuation in any society are wholly dependent on it,” (Fr. Andrew Anil Sequeira, OFM Cap., “Christian Moral Theology Series: Living Christian Life,” Vol. 3, p. 219). Therefore, all the Churches of Indonesia request our prayers in their united efforts in pursuit of justice. Let us support them with our prayers, especially this week.

It is now our tradition in India that the Sunday within “The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” is celebrated as “Ecumenism Sunday”. This year the ‘Ecumenism Sunday’ falls on January 20, 2019. As every year, the material for the liturgy is provided at the end of this booklet (page -). The Commission wishes fruitful celebration of these important days and hopes that these prayers in common will go a long way in sustaining us in our pilgrimage in search of the unity so dear to the Lord.

Fr. Gilbert Aranha
Executive Secretary

ECUMENISM SUNDAY - January 20, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Today is the 2nd Sunday of the Ordinary time and the Church in India celebrates it as “Ecumenism Sunday”. Ecumenism is a movement among Christians towards unity. The Church through today’s liturgy calls on us to pray for unity among Christians. We are in “The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity”, January 18-25. Various reasons in history have separated Christians from each other but Churches today have come to underline the baptismal

unity, the fundamental bond that unites us with Christ as one Body. Every Church is sad about the divisions and craves for unity. While the modern ecumenical movement was the initiative of our protestant brethren, Roman Catholic Church is intensively active since Vatican II which declared that “restoration of unity among all Christians is one of (its) principal concerns” (UR.1). Let us join the Christians worldwide during this ‘Week of Prayer for Christian Unity’ and in a special way today in this Eucharistic celebration for the gift of unity, especially in India for the credible witnessing to the Gospel.

The Church in Indonesia is asking for our prayers so that they may all be united to fight the various types of injustice that has beset their country. Let us rise them up in our prayers during this Mass. Selfishness and pride have divided and fragmented the church. Let us ask forgiveness for our shortcomings that have contributed to the separation and aloofness, and for our failure to take necessary steps to reconcile with our separated Christian brethren.

INTRODUCTION TO THE READINGS

Today is the 2nd Sunday in the Ordinary Time. The readings proper of the day are retained except for the First reading where an option is offered (Deuteronomy 16: 18-20) as it is the passage chosen for this year’s biblical theme for “The Week of Prayer for the Christian Unity.”

First Reading: Is 62: 1-5

Today’s first reading is from the Servant’s Song where the Messiah vows to continue proclaiming salvation and intercede for Jerusalem. The Lord will avenge wrong done to his people. The Lord will forgive his people, give her a new name and marry her – a biblical imagery expressing the covenantal relationship between God and His people – the spousal metaphor. In the New Testament this metaphor is used to describe the relation between Christ who is the bridegroom and the church his bride. Divisions in the church are on account of our sins which have caused violence and bloodshed as Christians fought among themselves and in recent years an unprecedented persecution of Christians. Christians should repent like the people of Israel and reconcile. The Lord will raise his church up. She will

then be “a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” as described in the book of Revelations. The relationship between this couple will be very intimate, for the bridegroom will not only be her husband but also builder.

Or

Deuteronomy 16: 18-20

Moses appointed judges to administer justice. They were expected to be persons fair and impartial. They were not to pervert justice either by bribe or by influences. They were to follow justice and justice alone. Injustice is one of the serious sins for which the Israelites were punished (Cf. Amos). Injustice is the root cause of most of today’s conflicts. Justice is a requirement for peace in the world. Injustice also feeds our divisions. Christians, especially the leaders in the Church, must unite against injustice and facilitate the ushering in of Peace - the gift of the risen Christ.

Second Reading: 1 Cor. 12: 4-11

In today’s 2nd reading we hear Paul insisting that there are different kinds of gifts, different kinds of services and different kinds of working all for the building up of the Body of Christ. Vatican II in Lumen Gentium 8, recognizes that “many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its (Roman Catholic) visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.” These gifts are from the Holy Spirit, single source, and they are to be shared with each other for the building up of the Body of Christ. Every church has something to offer us. We shall pray for the grace of humility to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in other Churches and accept His gifts bestowed to other churches, and at the same time, for the generosity to share our gifts with them.

Gospel: Jn 2:1-12

The ‘joy of heaven’ is expressed in the imagery of the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19: 6-9) and Jesus speaks of the invitation to the wedding feast in the Gospels. He began his ministry with the invitation, “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” His first miracle was at the wedding feast of Cana where he turned water into wine. Wine is the sign of joy. Conversion and reconciliation between churches should precede the proclamation of the Gospel. The “Joy of the Gospel” has to be shared at every cost. The invitation to banquet is open to everyone but we need messengers to reach the invitation.

POINTS FOR HOMILY

Introduction to each reading given above, and the “Forward” in the beginning of this booklet could be developed for the homily. A few more points are given here:

1. The people of the Old Testament committed sins and broke the spousal covenant with God and brought punishment upon themselves. Sin of selfishness and pride have caused divisions in the church, the spousal relationship is damaged. The weakness that stems from our disunity has emboldened our enemy to hurt us. (Pope Francis says, “Those who kill do not ask to which church we belong, they kill because we are Christians.” We are united in the ecumenism of blood.)
2. Eucharistic banquet that we participate in is the foretaste of the wedding banquet of the Lamb in heaven. No meal is a joyful experience if our dear ones are not present. The absence of our separated brethren at the Eucharistic table should hurt us – if it does not, we lack something vital. Wounds stop hurting when dead, but we are emphatically alive. The nostalgia for our separated brethren who are not with us here at Eucharist should grow stronger. The wedding feast is ready but our joy is incomplete – our brethren are not at table.
3. Mother Mary senses the situation at the wedding and instantly rushes to help. This reveals our Heavenly Mother. Her natural response was to turn to her Son for help in addressing a crisis. Jesus heeded to her by turning water into wine. Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of messianic banquet where there would be abundant wine, superior wine (Is 25: 6; Jer 31:12).

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Celebrant: Brothers and sisters unity is a Grace which only God can grant us through the Holy Spirit. Gathered around the altar on this Ecumenism Sunday let us implore our loving Father for the gift of unity in the Body of His only begotten Son.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

1. We pray for Pope Francis who as the successor of Peter is nostalgically going after our separated brethren yearning for the joy of their embrace. May God bless him with good health and continue to bless his ministry to unity. We pray to the Lord:

2. May the words of Pope Francis at the WCC center at Geneva on the occasion of its 70th anniversary last June, "I have desired to come here, a pilgrim in quest of unity and peace. I thank God because here I have found you, brothers and sisters already making this same journey," inspire all our church leaders and each one of us to earnestly seek unity. We pray to the Lord:
3. We pray for the world ecumenical organizations like, World Council of Churches, Anglican Communion, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Evangelical Alliance etc., and similar unions of churches in our country that their efforts for unity may be fruitful. We pray to the Lord:
4. We pray for the Church in India that we may through prayer and fraternal dialogue overcome the difference inherited from the west and come to appreciate each other's gifts and work unitedly as one Body of Christ for the noble cause of the Gospel. We pray to the Lord:
5. We pray for our national and state governments and all the other leaders that they develop a genuine concern for and compassion towards their less privileged countrymen. May their commitment towards the spirit of secularism and democracy enshrined in our constitution be their beacon light in the service of the nation. We pray to the Lord:
6. We heed the prayer request of the Churches in Indonesia for unity among themselves to fight various types of injustices that are present in their country. Through their united efforts, may justice, peace and prosperity for all be established. We pray to the Lord:
7. We pray for our brethren persecuted all over the world for their profession of faith in Christ. May the Spirit of God touch the hearts of the persecutors and convert them as Saul to Paul, and may God sustain those being persecuted with His grace to bear witness to Him as St. Stephen did. Let us pray to the Lord:

Celebrant: Loving Father, Hear the prayers of your children imploring you on behalf of all the churches for the gift of unity in the Mystical Body of your Son. Grant us the earnestness to seek our separated brethren and embrace them so that our Eucharistic banquet is complete. We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord.

People: Amen

Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Honourable Former President of India ushers in the Christmas Celebrations at the Christmas get-together of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, hosted the Christmas gathering to usher in the Christmas celebrations in the Country, on 13th Dec. 2018, at the Sacred Heart Cathedral premises, New Delhi. The Christmas carols sung melodiously by the CJM school choir filled the atmosphere with joy as the guests who included Ministers, Members of Parliament, Bureaucrats, Ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic core, Bishops, Priests, Sisters, Brothers, leaders of various Christian denominations and different faiths and the laity. The Chief Guest for the evening was Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Honourable Former President of India and other Guests of Honour on the stage were His Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), Shri Justice Kurien Joseph, Retired Judge – Supreme Court of India, Shri Conrad Sangma, Honourable Chief Minister of Meghalaya, His Excellency Joshua Mar Ignathios, Vice President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Shri K.J. Alphonse, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism and IT – Govt. Of India and Rev. Monsignor Mitja Leskovar, First Counsellor, Apostolic Nunciature, India.

The programme started with the opening prayer led by His Grace Most Rev. Vincent Concessao, Archbishop Emeritus of Delhi. His Excellency, Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas, Secretary General of the CBCI welcomed the Chief Guest, the guests of Honour and all the dignitaries who had arrived for the function. In his welcome address he quoted W.J. Cameron who said, "There has been only one Christmas – the rest are anniversaries" and announced the theme of the celebration this year – United in diversity for a mission of service and witness" which was the theme of the Church in India for the year. After the welcome speech Chief Guest was felicitated with a shawl by His Excellency Joshua Mar Ignathios, the Vice President of the CBCI.

The President of the CBCI, Cardinal Oswald Gracias in his Christmas message said that there was a perceptible atmosphere of joy and peace specially with the presence of Shri Pranab Mukherjee, a man of peace and good will, as the Chief guest. Jesus came to bring peace and reconciliation in an unprecedented way in the history of

humankind. The nativity scene at Bethlehem is a perfect scene of peace and harmony with God, humanity and nature. As Christmas is an assurance that God is with us, it is also a challenge to all of us that we need to be agents of peace and harmony even as the whole world welcomes Jesus yet once again. He concluded his message extending the Christmas wishes of peace, harmony and reconciliation to all.

Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the Chief Guest in his message expressing his joy at being present at the celebration conveyed his heartfelt good wishes saying that Christmas was a celebration of the eternal and omnipresent values of Compassion, Forgiveness and Universal Love that Lord Jesus – the son of God, stood for - the values of “Love of God and Neighbours”, “Fidelity”, “Renunciation of Vengeance and worldly goods” and “Forgiveness” that inspired Swami Vivekananda to say, “Had I lived in Palestine in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed his feet, not with my tears, but with my heart’s blood”. The emergence of religions in the history of evolution of mankind raised the level of human consciousness from mere survival to spiritual directing human endeavours towards the three basic tenets of Truth, Compassion and Righteousness - tenets that comprised the Ram Rajya of Hinduism, Dharma of Buddhism, and the Kingdom of God concept of Christianity. The civilizational history of mankind was not a history of struggle between classes, religions, castes or gender but a struggle between the universal good and its antithesis wherein it was always the former that won. Aberrations of a crusade, a jihad or violent struggles between sects in India, were always defeated in the favour of the reign of brotherhood, peace and resultant prosperity. Though we are going through troubled times of divisive tendencies, intolerance and prejudiced “fear of the other”, considering the composite and yet diverse nation that we are for over 5000 years of co-existence, acceptance, adaptation and assimilation, it is my considered belief that this, like in the past, is a temporary phase. India and Indians will tenaciously fight this in order to once again establish our unique national identity which has emerged out of our civilizational values and remains etched ever so clearly in the Constitution of India. We are a nation of 1.3 billion people who use more than 122 languages, 1600 dialects, practice 7 major religions, belong to 3 major ethnic groups – Caucasians, Mongoloids, and Dravidians and yet live under one system, one flag and one identity. Pandit Jawaharlal

Nehru so vividly expressed in the 'Discovery of India', "India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads. Overwhelmed again and again, her spirit was never conquered and she remains unsubdued and unconquered. About her illusive quality of a legend of long ago some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision and yet real and present and pervasive". There can be many conflicting visions of the idea of India, but we can all agree that India is a truly beautiful idea that very naturally encompasses all its conflicting visions.

The most enduring image of the Catholic Church in India are the crores of Indians, irrespective of religion, who get educated in the schools and colleges set up by the Church and millions of patients who get treated in their hospitals. The Catholic Church in India is personified by the Priests or nuns in habit, whose very image brings to one's mind, discipline and dedication. It is the heartening images of the Missionaries of Charity led by Mother Teresa, tending to the last person on the margin of society that personifies the Church in India. Having existed in India for more than 2000 years, when St. Thomas, one of the twelve Disciples of Christ came and settled here, Christianity has been more Renaissance and Reformation and rarely about Evangelism. Indigenization, adaptation and respect of local customs and traditions have made Christianity as Indian a religion as the ones that originated in its ancient geographical boundaries.

He said that the most important thought he wanted to share at this Christmas time, was that no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the propaganda, our Constitution, one of the best in the world, has provided us many rights and freedoms - freedom to practice and propagate our religion, freedom to set up our educational institutions, to choose any occupation - all these are important and must be safeguarded. This is the bedrock of our democracy and the foundation for our growth. Further, as the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray, asking God to forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, let us share this message of forgiveness with all those around us. Becoming tolerant and compassionate people, let us keep anger and hatred away, let us not allow the poison of division to soil the very heart of

India. Birth of Jesus brought Joy and peace, let that joy and peace be in our hearts, in our homes, in our neighbourhood and fill our nation, he concluded.

A statue of Baby Jesus was presented to the Chief Guest. Rev. Fr. Jervis D'Souza, the Deputy Secretary General, CBCI proposed the vote of thanks. The programme concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas

Secretary General, CBCI

Office for Education and Culture, CBCI
Revision of the
“All India Catholic Education Policy 2007”

Your Eminences, Graces. Excellencies, Dear Fathers, Sisters, Brothers,

Greetings from the CBCI Office for Education and Culture, New Delhi!

At the CBCI National Education Consultation held in Delhi on 12th and 14th Nov. 2018, after initial input sessions, the question of launching the revision of the “All India catholic Education 2007” was taken up and discussing the modalities of doing it, various suggestions emerged. The gist of the discussion was as follows:

The revision of the existing Catholic Education Policy will necessarily mean first of all doing a detailed study of the existing policy, which by now those involved in active education ministry may not even be fully aware of as such study was done across the country several years ago and those who were familiar with it may not anymore be involved in the education apostolate. So it is most relevant and appropriate that the policy be studied again in view of any revision / changes / additions that may need to be incorporated, considering the changed situation that we are living in now, even as the Government too is working at a new National Education Policy. For example when the “All India catholic Education Policy 2007” was promulgated, there was no “Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE)” bill; there was no “Laudato Si”; there was no “POCSO 2012”; there was no “Women’s Safety at Work Place” bill; there was no App based learning or Home study

concept; there was no social media effect etc. So it was suggested that an official communication be sent out to all the 14 Ecclesiastical Regions with their respective Dioceses and to all Provincial Superiors and Education Coordinators of religious Orders and to the NCRI and to the various Educational Associations of Schools and Colleges to organize study sessions/ seminars to go through the existing policy and forward suggestions / modifications/ additions etc. that emerge from such sessions, to the CBCI Office for Education and Culture, New Delhi, within the next three months after which a commission may be set up to compile and draft the revised policy.

Hence this official communication is coming to you requesting you to ensure:

1. That the Regional Education Secretaries along with the Diocesan Education Secretaries and the Provincial Superiors and Education Coordinators of Religious Orders conduct meetings to study the existing Catholic Education Policy of 2007 in view of making suggestions/ modifications/ changes and forward the same to the CBCI Office for Education and Culture, before 31st March 2019 for compiling and coordinating the work towards a new revised draft.
2. That the various Religious Orders also undertake congregation-wise study and discussions regarding the Catholic Education Policy 2007 and forward suggestions/ changes / additions etc to the CBCI Office for Education and Culture, New Delhi before March 31st 2019 for compiling and coordinating the work in view of a new revised draft.
3. That the various educational associations like AINACS, Xavier Board of Higher Education with their Regional Bodies, Consortium of Christian Colleges and the National Conference of the Religious of India (NCRI) also have their own meetings and organized study sessions regarding the “All India Catholic Education Policy 2007” and forward observations/ suggestions/ modifications etc. to the CBCI Office for Education and Culture before 31st March 2019 for compiling and coordinating further work regarding the same. Finally we request those invested with leadership roles as Regional / Diocesan Education Secretaries or National / Provincial Education Coordinators of Religious Congregations or Office bearers of Educational

Associations and the Conference of Religious in India to take the lead in consultation with the Bishops/ Provincials / Superiors and cooperate whole heartedly in this important work for the benefit of the education apostolate of the Church in India. Needless to say that education in all its inclusive form (School education, Higher education, Technical education, special schools, Vocational Training, Skill training etc) should be considered and if any help in this regard by way of animation is required from the CBCI Office for Education and Culture, in any of the Regions, please let us know and we will be happy to help.

Fr. Joseph Manipadam SDB

National Secretary, CBCI Office for Education and Culture

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF INDIA, OFFICE

It is with great joy and happiness that I bring to you my dear Indian Brothers and Sisters and men and women of Good will everywhere the Christmas greetings of the Catholic Church in India. Every year on 25th of December the world celebrates Christmas the Birth of Jesus Christ. Even while houses and buildings will be decorated and illuminated with bright lights and colours, shopping malls will be full with everyone looking for gifts for dear ones, and Christmas trees, Santa Claus and Christmas functions will abound, the real attention will be focused on the Holy Mass in the Church and on the little baby Jesus lying in the manger. The star that shone that night pointing to the Birth of Jesus Christ and the Crib that we put up in remembrance of the humble birth of our saviour are just symbols of the message that our Lord Jesus Christ brought to Humanity. And the Message is GOD LOVES US. Yes, as St. John tells us, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son to humankind". The thirty-three years that Jesus walked on this earth specially the last three years of active ministry to the poor, the downtrodden and the marginalized reveals what this love means. Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, of his life, his ministry his ultimate sacrifice for humanity. It is the remembrance of all that he stood for and of everything he taught us. As our Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi would say about Jesus Christ,

“A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.” Jesus proclaimed to us the coming of the Kingdom of God: a kingdom in which love and forgiveness, peace and harmony, justice and truth would reign. The Birth of Jesus had been prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah as the birth of the Prince of peace, his reign was foretold as a governance of righteousness. About his Kingdom the Prophet had declared, that on that day, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the baby goat, and the calf and the lion and the fatling will live together, and a little child shall lead them.” Indeed, Jesus is that little child who later taught us, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” Christmas is an occasion for us in the Catholic Church to renew our dedication and commitment to continue serving with love and compassion our countrymen and women as we have been always doing down the ages. Our nation building, educational activities, health care services and other compassionate works are guided by Jesus’ Command, “love your neighbour as yourself.” Following the example of our Lord and master, our hearts and our lives reach out in a special way to those abandoned and excluded, to those left out on the peripheries of development, to the poor, the dalits, the tribals and to all those who remain on the margins of our society. In the words of St. Mother Teresa, an ardent follower of Jesus Christ we can say, “I try to give to the poor people for love what the rich could get for money. No, I wouldn’t touch a leper for a thousand pounds; yet I willingly care for him for the love of God.” We want to continue working with the Government and with all men and women of good will to bring solace and comfort, education and health care, love and security to all who need it.

The birth of Jesus changed the world forever. Our Great Indian spiritual leader, Swami Vivekananda would say, “Had I lived in Palestine, in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed his feet, not with my tears, but with my heart’s blood!” Christmas is the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Peace. Today more than ever before our Country and the world hungers for peace. Amidst wars and violence, mob lynchings and religious persecutions, and even as fringe elements become bolder and

attempt to set communities against communities and groups against groups the voice of Jesus rings loud and clear, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”. We pray for our country and for the world that the kingdom of peace and harmony may be ushered in, that the Almighty may raise many peacemakers among us. We pray for our beloved country India known for its long tradition of unity in diversity and of tolerance without discrimination, that the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the baby goat, the calf and the lion and the fatling may be able dwell together in peace and harmony without being forced to be other than what they are.

Christmas is the Birthday of Jesus who lived and died for truth and justice. Opposing discrimination of any kind he ate with outcasts and treated women with respect and dignity. He asks a Samaritan woman at the well to give him water to drink. This was a direct challenge to the social system of the day in which the Samaritans were considered low castes. In the parable of “love your neighbour”, Jesus portrays the Samaritan, as the real follower of God, superseding even the Priests and the Levites who do not seem to understand God’s commandment to love one’s neighbour. We pray for our country and society that the message of Jesus may echo in our ears and that we may end all discrimination based on caste or religion, on language or region. May we learn to treat each other with love, respect, and equal dignity. Jesus taught his disciples, “The Truth will make you free”. He stood for truth even to the point of sacrificing his life.

Christmas Celebrations of PMI Unit with Most Rev. Dr. Prakash Mallavarapu on 22.12.2018



TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE HIERARCHY



Sub: Most Rev. Elias Gonsalves appointed as the new Archbishop of Nagpur

Your Eminence, Your Beatitude, Your Excellency, Your Grace, Your Lordship,

In the light of the Communication received from the Apostolic Nunciature, I wish to inform you that His Holiness, Pope Francis has appointed His Lordship Rt. Rev. Elias Gonsalves, until now Bishop of Amravati, as the new Archbishop of Nagpur.

This ecclesiastical provision was made public in Rome on Monday, 3rd December, 2018, at noon local time, corresponding to 16:30 hours, Indian Standard Time.

His Lordship, Rt. Rev. Elias Gonsalves, was born on 4th July, 1961, in Chulna Village, Vasai Road, Thane, Maharashtra. He studied at St. Pius X Seminary, Mumbai and was ordained priest on 1st April, 1990 in Vasai, for the Archdiocese of Bombay. He has a B.A. in History and Economics, from Bombay University (1982), he did his studies in Community Based Development and Leadership, from St. Francis Xavier University, Coady Institute, Canada, and studies in Counselling. He was Assistant Parish Priest at Nandakhal, Vasai (1990-1991) and Sandor, Vasai (1991-1997); Youth Coordinator for South Vasai Deanery (1993-1996); Priest in-charge at Roha (1997-2004); Priest in-charge at Panvel (2005-2008); Asst. Director and then Director, Centre for Social Action, Mumbai (2008-2012); Director, Sarvodaya Centre for Capacity Building, Mumbai (2009-2012). He was elected Bishop of Amravati on 11th July, 2012 and consecrated on 29th September, 2012. As Bishop, he has been in charge of Catholic Education in the Western Region Catholic Bishops' Council.

We send our prayerful greetings and best wishes to Archbishop-elect Elias Gonsalves and assure him of our prayers.

Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas, SFX
Secretary General, CBCI

TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE HIERARCHY

Sub: Sad Demise of Most Rev. Thomas Thennatt, SAC, Bishop of Gwalior Most Rev. Thomas Thennatt, SAC

Your Eminence, Your Beatitude, Your Excellency, Your Grace, Your Lordship,

It is with great grief and sadness that I inform you of the sudden demise of our beloved



Bishop Rt. Rev. Thomas Thennatt, SAC, Bishop of Gwalior, who succumbed to the severe head injury he suffered in a tragic car accident. His Lordship was returning to the

Bishop's House after an annual function in the school where the vehicle he was

travelling skidded off and overturned. He was immediately rushed to the nearest hospital and thereafter to St. Joseph Hospital, Gwalior where he was declared dead. In him we have lost a true shepherd and a great human being. This is the official information we have received from Fr. David. A., Vicar General of the Diocese of Gwalior. He was born on 26 November 1953, ordained a priest on 21st October 1978 and ordained Bishop of Gwalior on 8th January 2017. Funeral details are awaited. We entrust our beloved Brother Bishop Thennatt into the hands of the Lord and pray to him to receive him in His loving arms. We pray for comfort and consolation for the Priests, Religious and faithful of the Diocese of Gwalior in this moment of immense tragedy. Eternal Rest grant unto him O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him!

Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas,
Secretary General, CBCI



**SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD
HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS**

Vatican Basilica

Monday, 24 December 2018

Joseph with Mary his spouse, went up “to the city of David called Bethlehem” (Lk 2:4). Tonight, we too, go to Bethlehem, there to discover the mystery of Christmas.

Bethlehem: the name means house of bread. In this “house”, the Lord today wants to encounter all mankind. He knows that we need food to live. Yet he also knows that the nourishments of this world do not satisfy the heart. In Scripture, the original sin of humanity is associated precisely with taking food: our first parents “took of the fruit and ate”, says the Book of Genesis (cf. 3:6). They took and ate. Mankind became greedy and voracious. In our day, for many people, life’s meaning is found in possessing, in having an excess of material objects. An insatiable greed marks all human history, even today, when, paradoxically, a few dine luxuriantly while all too many go without the daily bread needed to survive.

Bethlehem is the turning point that alters the course of history. There God, in the house of bread, is born in a manger. It is as if he wanted to say: “Here I am, as your food”. He does not take, but gives us to eat; he does not give us a mere thing, but his very self. In Bethlehem, we discover that God does not take life, but gives it. To us, who from birth are used to taking and eating, Jesus begins to say: “Take and eat. This is my body” (Mt 26:26). The tiny body of the Child of Bethlehem speaks to us of a new way to live our lives: not by devouring and hoarding, but by sharing and giving. God makes himself small so that he can be our food. By feeding on him, the bread of life, we can be reborn in love, and break the spiral of grasping and greed. From the “house of bread”, Jesus brings us back home, so that we can become God’s family, brothers and sisters to our neighbours. Standing before the manger, we understand that the food of life is not material riches but love, not gluttony but charity, not ostentation but simplicity.

The Lord knows that we need to be fed daily. That is why he offered himself to us every day of his life: from the manger in Bethlehem to the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Today too, on the altar, he becomes bread broken for us; he knocks at our door, to enter and eat with us (cf. Rev 3:20). At Christmas, we on earth receive Jesus, the bread from heaven. It is a bread that never grows stale, but enables us even now to have a foretaste of eternal life.

In Bethlehem, we discover that the life of God can enter into our hearts and dwell there. If we welcome that gift, history changes, starting with each of us. For once Jesus dwells in our heart, the centre of life is no longer my ravenous and selfish ego, but the One who is born and lives for love. Tonight, as we hear the summons to go up to Bethlehem, the house of bread, let us ask ourselves: What is the bread of my life, what is it that I cannot do without? Is it the Lord, or something else? Then, as we enter the stable, sensing in the tender poverty of the newborn Child a new fragrance of life, the odour of simplicity, let us ask ourselves: Do I really need all these material objects and complicated recipes for living? Can I manage without all these unnecessary extras and live a life of greater simplicity? In Bethlehem, beside where Jesus lay, we see people who themselves had made a journey: Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. Jesus is bread for the journey. He does not like long, drawn-out meals, but bids us rise quickly from table in order to serve, like bread broken for others. Let us ask ourselves: At Christmas do I break my bread with those who have none?

After Bethlehem as the house of bread, let us reflect on Bethlehem as the city of David. There the young David was a shepherd, and as such was chosen by God to be the shepherd and leader of his people. At Christmas, in the city of David, it was the shepherds who welcomed Jesus into the world. On that night, the Gospel tells us, "they were filled with fear" (Lk 2:9), but the angel said to them "Be not be afraid" (v. 10). How many times do we hear this phrase in the Gospels: "Be not afraid"? It seems that God is constantly repeating it as he seeks us out. Because we, from the beginning, because of our sin, have been afraid of God; after sinning, Adam says: "I was afraid and so I hid" (Gen 3:10). Bethlehem is the remedy for this fear, because despite man's repeated "no", God constantly says "yes". He will always be God-with-us. And lest his presence inspire fear, he makes himself a tender Child. Be not afraid: these

words were not spoken to saints but to shepherds, simple people who in those days were certainly not known for their refined manners and piety. The Son of David was born among shepherds in order to tell us that never again will anyone be alone and abandoned; we have a Shepherd who conquers our every fear and loves us all, without exception.

The shepherds of Bethlehem also tell us how to go forth to meet the Lord. They were keeping watch by night: they were not sleeping, but doing what Jesus often asks all of us to do, namely, be watchful (cf. Mt 25:13; Mk 13:35; Lk 21:36). They remain alert and attentive in the darkness; and God's light then "shone around them" (Lk 2:9). This is also the case for us. Our life can be marked by waiting, which amid the gloom of our problems hopes in the Lord and yearns for his coming; then we will receive his life. Or our life can be marked by wanting, where all that matters are our own strengths and abilities; our heart then remains barred to God's light. The Lord loves to be awaited, and we cannot await him lying on a couch, sleeping. So the shepherds immediately set out: we are told that they "went with haste" (v. 16). They do not just stand there like those who think they have already arrived and need do nothing more. Instead they set out; they leave their flocks unguarded; they take a risk for God. And after seeing Jesus, although they were not men of fine words, they go off to proclaim his birth, so that "all who heard were amazed at what the shepherds told them" (v. 18).

To keep watch, to set out, to risk, to recount the beauty: all these are acts of love. The Good Shepherd, who at Christmas comes to give his life to the sheep, will later, at Easter, ask Peter and, through him all of us, the ultimate question: "Do you love me?" (Jn 21:15). The future of the flock will depend on how that question is answered. Tonight we too are asked to respond to Jesus with the words: "I love you". The answer given by each is essential for the whole flock.

"Let us go now to Bethlehem" (Lk 2:15). With these words, the shepherds set out. We too, Lord, want to go up to Bethlehem. Today too, the road is uphill: the heights of our selfishness need to be surmounted, and we must not lose our footing or slide into worldliness and consumerism. I want to come to Bethlehem, Lord,

because there you await me. I want to realize that you, lying in a manger, are the bread of my life. I need the tender fragrance of your love so that I, in turn, can be bread broken for the world. Take me upon your shoulders, Good Shepherd; loved by you, I will be able to love my brothers and sisters and to take them by the hand. Then it will be Christmas, when I can say to you: “Lord you know everything; you know that I love you” (cf. Jn 21:17).

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD:
ACHIEVEMENTS, OMISSIONS, NEGATIONS”
[ROME, 10-11 DECEMBER 2018]**

Dear Cardinal,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to send my cordial greeting to all of you, Representatives of States to the Holy See, of the Institutions of the United Nations, of the Council of Europe, of the Episcopal Commissions for Justice and Peace and of those for social ministry, of the academic world and of organizations of civil society, convened in Rome for the International Conference on the theme “Human Rights in the Contemporary World: Achievements, Omissions, Negations”, promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and by the Pontifical Gregorian University, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the 25th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Through these two documents, the family of Nations sought to recognize the equal dignity of every human being,[1] from which derive the fundamental rights and liberties that, as they are rooted in human nature — the inseparable unity of body and soul — are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interconnected.[2] At the same time, the 1948 Declaration recognizes that “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”.[3]

In the year in which significant anniversaries of these international juridical instruments are being celebrated, an in-depth reflection on the foundation and the respect for human rights in the contemporary world seems timely, a reflection which I hope may herald a renewed commitment in favour of the defence of human dignity, with special attention to the most vulnerable members of the community.

Indeed, by closely observing our contemporary societies, one observes numerous contradictions that lead one to wonder whether the equal dignity of all human beings, solemnly proclaimed 70 years ago, is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every circumstance. In the world today numerous forms of injustice persist, fed by reductive anthropological visions and by a profit-based economic model, which does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings.[4] While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights disregarded or violated.

I think, among other things, of the unborn, who are denied the right to come into the world; of those who do not have access to the indispensable means for a dignified life;[5] of those who are excluded from an appropriate education; of those who are unjustly deprived of work or compelled to work as slaves; of those who are detained in inhumane conditions, who suffer torture or who are denied the opportunity for redemption;[6] of the victims of forced disappearances and of their families.

My thought also goes to all those who are living in a climate dominated by suspicion and scorn, who are the object of acts of intolerance, discrimination and violence due to their race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.[7]

Lastly, I cannot fail to recall those who endure a multitude of violations of their fundamental rights in the tragic context of armed conflicts, while unscrupulous dealers of death[8] enrich themselves at the cost of their brothers' and sisters' blood.

Faced with these grave phenomena, we are all accountable. Indeed, when fundamental rights are violated, or when some are favoured to the detriment of others, or when they are guaranteed only to specified groups, then serious injustices occur, which in their turn

feed conflicts with heavy consequences both within single Nations and in relations among them.

Therefore, each person is called to contribute with courage and determination, in line with the specificity of his or her proper role, to the respect of the fundamental rights of every person, especially of those who are 'invisible': of the many who are hungry and thirsty, who are naked, sick, strangers or prisoners (cf. Mt 25:35-35), who live at the margins of society or who are discarded from it.

This demand for justice and solidarity assumes a special significance for us Christians, because the Gospel itself invites us to direct our gaze toward the least of our brothers and sisters, to be moved with compassion (cf. Mt 14:14) and to commit ourselves concretely in order to alleviate their suffering.

I would like, on this occasion, to address a heartfelt appeal to those who have institutional responsibilities, asking them to place human rights at the centre of all policies, including those of cooperating in development, even when this means going against the current.

With the hope that these days of reflection may awaken consciences and inspire initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting human dignity, I entrust each of you, your families and your peoples to the intercession of Mary Most Holy, Queen of Peace, and I invoke upon all of you an abundance of divine blessings.

From the Vatican, 10 December 2018

Christmas Celebrations at Vizag Central Prison 16.12.2018



POPE FRANCIS
GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 28 November 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's catechesis, which concludes the series on the Ten Commandments, we can take as the key theme that of *desires*, which allows us to review the journey we have made and summarize the stages we have completed in reading the text of the Decalogue, always in the light of the full revelation in Christ.

We began with *gratitude* as the basis of the relationship of trust and obedience: God, as we saw, asked for nothing before he had given much more. He invites us to obedience in order to deliver us from the misleading forms of idolatry that have so much power over us. Indeed, seeking self-realization in the idols of this world empties us and enslaves us, while what gives us stature and consistency is the relationship with the One who, in Christ, makes us children by virtue of his fatherhood (cf. Eph 3:14-16).

This entails a process of blessing and liberation, which is true, authentic rest. As the Psalm states: "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation" (Ps 62[61]:1).

This liberated life embraces our personal history and reconciles us with what, from childhood to the present, we have experienced, becoming adults and being able to give the proper weight to the realities and the people in our life. By this path we enter a relationship with our neighbour which, springing from the love that God demonstrates in Jesus Christ, is a call to the beauty of *fidelity, generosity and authenticity*.

But to live in this way — that is, in the beauty of fidelity, generosity and authenticity — we need a *new heart*, inhabited by the Holy Spirit (cf. Ez 11:19; 36:26). I wonder: how does this heart 'transplant', from an old heart to a new heart, come about? Through the gift of *new desires* (cf. Rom 8:6) that are sown in us by the grace of God, in a particular way, through the Ten Commandments fulfilled by Jesus, as he teaches in the 'Sermon on the Mount' (cf. Mt 5:15-48). Indeed, in contemplating the life described in the Decalogue — that is, a grateful, free, authentic, blessed, adult existence, as guardian and lover of a steadfast, generous and sincere life —

almost without realizing it we stand before Christ again. The Decalogue is his 'x-ray': it is like a photographic negative that lets his face appear — as in the Holy Shroud. And thus the Holy Spirit renders our heart fruitful, placing in it desires that are his gift, the *desires of the Spirit*. To desire according to the Spirit, to desire with the rhythm of the Spirit, to desire with the music of the Spirit.

Looking to Christ we see beauty, goodness, truth. And the Spirit engenders a life that, supporting these desires of his, kindles hope, faith and love in us.

In this way we can better understand why the Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it, to develop it, and as the law according to the flesh was a series of prescriptions and prohibitions, according to the Spirit this same law becomes life (cf. Jn 6:63; Eph 2:15), because it is no longer a rule but the very flesh of Christ, who loves us, seeks us, forgives us, consoles us and in his Body recreates the communion with the Father, lost through the disobedience of sin. And thus, the literal negative, the negative expression used in the Commandments — 'you shall not steal', 'you shall not insult', 'you shall not kill' — that 'not' is transformed into a positive approach: to love, to make room in my heart for others, all desires that sow positivity. And this is the fullness of the law that Jesus came to bring us.

In Christ, and in him alone, the Decalogue ceases to be a condemnation (cf. Rom 8:1) and becomes the authentic truth of human life, namely, a desire for love — a desire for good, to do good is born here — a desire for joy, for peace, for magnanimity, for benevolence, for goodness, for fidelity, for meekness, self-control. It goes from that 'no' to this 'yes': the positive attitude of a heart that opens with the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is what seeking Christ in the Decalogue means: to make our heart fruitful so that it may be filled with love and open to God's work. When men and women comply with the desire to live according to Christ, they are opening the door to salvation which cannot fail to occur because God the Father is generous and, as the Catechism says, "thirsts that we may thirst for him" (n. 2560).

If evil desires defile mankind (cf. Mt 15:18-20), the Spirit places in our heart his holy desires which are the seeds of new life (cf. 1 Jn 3:9). Indeed, the new life is not a titanic effort to comply with a rule,

but rather, the new life is God's own Spirit that begins to guide us to his fruits, in a happy synergy between our joy in being loved and his joy in loving us. The two joys come together: God's joy in loving us and our joy in being loved.

This is what the Decalogue is for us Christians: to contemplate Christ in order to open ourselves up to receive his heart, to receive his will, to receive his Holy Spirit.

Wednesday, 5 December 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we begin a series of catecheses on the Lord's Prayer. The Gospels have consigned to us very lively portrayals of Jesus as a *man of prayer*. Jesus prayed. Despite the urgency of his mission and the pressure from the many people making demands on him, Jesus feels the need to withdraw in solitude and pray. Mark's Gospel recounts this detail to us from the very first passage about Jesus' public ministry (cf. 1:35). Jesus' inaugural day in Capernaum has ended in a triumphant way. Once the sun has set, multitudes of sick people have reached the door where Jesus is staying: the Messiah preaches and heals. The ancient prophecies and expectations of so many suffering people are fulfilled: Jesus is the God-with-us, the God who frees us. But that crowd is still small when compared to the many other crowds that will gather around the prophet of Nazareth; at certain times the gatherings are oceanic, and Jesus is at the centre of it all, the expectation of the peoples, the fulfilment of the hope of Israel.

Yet he slips away; he does not end up being a hostage to the expectations of those, who by then, had declared him a *leader*, which is a danger for leaders: to be too attached to people, not to keep their distance. Jesus realizes this and does not end up being a hostage to the people. From the very first night at Capernaum, he shows he is an original Messiah. At the end of the night, when dawn is already breaking, the disciples are still seeking him, but are unable to find him. Where is he? Until Peter at last tracks him down in an isolated place, completely absorbed in prayer. And Peter tells him: "Every one is searching for you"! (Mk 1:37). The exclamation seems to be the appropriate phrase for an overwhelming success, proof of the successful outcome of a mission.

But Jesus says to his own that he must go elsewhere; that it is not the people who seek him, rather it is above all he who seeks others. He must therefore not put down roots but remain a constant pilgrim on the roads of Galilee (vv. 38-39); as well as a pilgrim towards the Father, that is: praying. On a journey of prayer. Jesus prays.

And it all happens during a night of prayer.

In some passages of Scripture it seems to be first and foremost Jesus' prayer, his intimacy with the Father, that governs everything. It is so, for example, especially on the night at Gethsemane. The final stretch of Jesus' journey (by far the most difficult of those he has undertaken thus far) seems to find its meaning in Jesus' continuous listening to the Father. Certainly not an easy prayer, indeed a truly 'agonizing struggle' in the sense of the athletic spirit, yet a prayer that is able to sustain the way of the Cross.

Here is the essential point: *Jesus prayed* there.

Jesus prayed with intensity in public moments, sharing the liturgy of his people, but also seeking withdrawn places, away from the turbulence of the world, places that allowed him to dwell in the privacy of his soul: he is the prophet who knows the stones of the desert and goes up high into the mountains. Jesus' last words before dying on the Cross are words from the psalms, that is, of prayer, the prayer of the Jews: he prayed with the prayers that his mother had taught him.

Jesus prayed like all men and women in the world pray. Yet his way of praying also contained a mystery, something that certainly did not escape the eyes of his disciples, since the Gospels contain that plea that was so simple and immediate: "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (Lk 11:1). They see Jesus praying and they want to learn how to pray: "Lord, teach us to pray". And Jesus does not refuse, he is not possessive of his intimacy with the Father, but rather, he came precisely to introduce us to this relationship with the Father. And thus, he becomes the teacher of prayer to his disciples, as he undoubtedly wants to be so for all of us. We too should say: "Lord, teach me to pray. Teach me".

Even if we may have been praying for many years, we still have to learn! Man's prayer, this yearning which arises so naturally from his soul, is perhaps one of the deepest mysteries of the universe. And we do not even know whether the prayers that we address to

God are effectively those that he wants to have addressed to him. The Bible also gives us testimonies of inappropriate prayers, which in the end are rejected by God: It is sufficient to recall the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Only the latter, the publican, goes home from the Temple justified, because the Pharisee was proud and he liked people to see him praying and he feigned prayer: the heart was cold. And Jesus says: this is not justified, “for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 18:14). The first step to prayer is to be humble, to go to the Father and to say: “Look at me, I am a sinner, I am weak, I am bad”: each one knows what to say. But one always begins with humility, and the Lord listens. The Lord listens to humble prayer.

Therefore, on beginning this series of catecheses on the prayer of Jesus, the most beautiful and just thing that we all must do is to repeat the disciples’ appeal: “Teacher, teach us to pray!”. It would be beautiful during this Season of Advent to repeat: “Lord, teach me to pray”. We can all go somewhat beyond this and pray better; but asking the Lord: “Lord, teach me to pray”. Let us do this during this Season of Advent and he will certainly not allow our invocation to go unheard.

Wednesday, 12 December 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let us continue on the path of catecheses on the Lord’s Prayer, which we began last week. Jesus places on the lips of his disciples a short, audacious prayer, made up of seven requests — a number that, in the Bible, is not random, but indicates fullness. I say audacious because, had Christ not suggested it, probably none of us — indeed, none of the most well-known theologians — would dare pray to God in this way.

In fact Jesus invites his disciples to approach God and to confidently address several requests to him: first in regard to him and then in regard to us. There is no preamble to the ‘Our Father’. Jesus does not teach formulas for one to ‘ingratiate oneself’ to the Lord, but instead invites us to pray to Him by knocking down the barriers of awe and fear. He does not tell us we should address God by calling him ‘Almighty’, ‘Most High’, [by saying,] ‘You, who are so distant from us, I am a wretched man’: no, he does not say this,

but simply 'Father', with total simplicity, as children address their father. And this word, "Father", expresses confidence and filial trust.

The 'Our Father' prayer sinks its roots in the concrete reality of mankind. For example, it has us ask for bread, daily bread: a simple but essential request, which indicates that faith is not a matter of an 'adornment', detached from life, which arises when all other needs have been satisfied. If anything, prayer begins with life itself. Prayer, Jesus teaches us, does not begin in human life after the stomach is full: rather, it settles in wherever a person is, anyone who is hungry, who weeps, who struggles, who suffers and who wonders 'why?'. Our first prayer, in a certain sense, was the wail that accompanied the first breath. In that newborn's cry the fate of our whole life was announced: our constant hunger, our constant thirst, our search for happiness.

In prayer, Jesus does not seek to extinguish the person; he does not seek to anaesthetize him or her. He does not want us to tone down the demands and requests, learning to bear all things. Instead, he wants all suffering, all distress to soar heavenward and become dialogue.

Having faith, someone said, is a habit of crying out.

We all need to be like Bartimaeus in the Gospel (cf. Mk 10:46-52) — let us recall that passage of the Gospel: Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus — that blind man who was begging at the gates of Jericho. He had so many good people around him telling him to keep quiet: 'Be quiet! The Lord is passing by. Be quiet. Do not disturb. The Master has much to do; do not disturb him. You are annoying with your cries. Do not disturb'. But he did not heed those suggestions: with blessed persistence, he insisted that his wretched condition might finally encounter Jesus. And he cried louder! And the polite people said: 'No, he is the Master, please! You are making a bad impression!'. And he cried out because he wanted to see; he wanted to be healed. "Jesus, have mercy on me!" (cf. v. 47). Jesus heals his sight and says: "your faith has made you well" (v. 52), as if to explain that the decisive element of his healing was that prayer, that *invocation shouted out* with faith, stronger than the 'common sense' of many people who wanted him to keep quiet. Prayer not only precedes salvation, but in some way already contains it, because it frees one from the despair of those who do not believe in a way out of many unbearable situations.

Of course, then, believers also feel the need to praise God. The Gospels offer us the jubilant exclamation that gushes forth from Jesus' heart, full of wonder, grateful to the Father (cf. Mt 11:25-27). The first Christians even felt the need to add a doxology to the text of the Lord's Prayer (cf. Mt 11:25-27): "for thine is the power and the glory for ever" (*Didache*, 8:2).

But none of us is obliged to embrace the theory that someone advanced in the past, namely, that the prayer of supplication may be a weak form of faith, while the more authentic prayer would be pure praise, that which seeks God without the burden of any request. No, this is not true. The prayer of supplication is authentic; it is spontaneous; it is an act of faith in God who is Father, who is good, who is almighty. It is an act of faith in me, who am small, sinful, needy. And for this reason prayer, in order to ask for something, is quite noble. God is the Father who has immense compassion for us, and wants his children to speak to him without fear, directly calling him 'Father'; or amid difficulties saying: 'Lord, what have you done to me?'. For this reason we can tell him everything, even the things that are distorted and incomprehensible in our life. And he promised us that he would be with us forever, until the last day we shall spend on this earth. Let us pray the 'Our Father', beginning this way, simply: 'Father', or 'Dad'. And he understands us and loves us very much.

Wednesday, 19 December 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In six days' time it will be Christmas. The trees, the decorations and the lights everywhere remind us that this year too there will be a celebration. The publicity machine invites us all to exchange ever new presents to surprise each other. But I ask myself: is this the celebration that God likes? What Christmas would he like, which presents and which surprises?

Let us look at the first Christmas in history to discover God's tastes. That first Christmas in history was *filled with surprises*. It begins with Mary who was betrothed to Joseph. The Angel arrives and changes her life. As a virgin, she will become a mother. It continues with Joseph, called to be father to a son without begetting him. A son who — in a dramatic turn of events — arrives at the least appropriate moment, that is, when Mary and Joseph were betrothed

and according to the Law, could not live together. Faced with the scandal, the common sense of the time invited Joseph to repudiate Mary and save his good name; but despite this right, he surprises: in order not to shame Mary, he considers leaving her secretly, at the cost of risking his own reputation. Then another surprise: God changes his plans in a dream and asks him to take Mary with him. After Jesus is born and, having plans of his own for his family, once again in a dream, Joseph is told to get up and go to Egypt. Well, Christmas brings unexpected changes to life. And if we want to experience Christmas, we must open our hearts and be ready for surprises, that is, for an unexpected change in life.

But it is on Christmas Eve that the biggest surprise comes: the Almighty is a little Child. The divine Word is an infant, which literally means “unable to speak”. And the divine Word became “unable to speak”. There are no local authorities of the time nor ambassadors to welcome the Saviour: no, there are simple shepherds who, surprised by the Angels while they worked at night, hasten without delay. Who would have expected this? Christmas is the celebration of the ‘*unprecedentedness*’ of God, or better, it is the celebration of an *unprecedented God* who overturns our logic and our expectations.

To celebrate Christmas, then, is to receive on earth the surprises of Heaven. We cannot simply live an earthly existence when Heaven has brought its news to the world. Christmas inaugurates a new epoch where life is not planned, but is given: where one no longer lives for oneself, on the basis of one’s own taste, but rather for God; and with God because from Christmas onward, God is the God-with-us, who lives with us, who walks with us. To experience Christmas is to allow oneself to be shaken by its surprising newness. The Birth of Jesus does not offer reassuring coziness by the fireside, but rather the divine shudder which shakes history. Christmas is the victory of humility over arrogance, of simplicity over abundance, of silence over clamour, of prayer over “my time”, of God over myself.

To celebrate Christmas is to do as Jesus did, who came for us needy ones and to *bend down* to those who need us. It is to do as Mary did: to *trust* God with docility, even without understanding what he will do. To celebrate Christmas is to do as Joseph did: to *arise* in order to do what God wants, even if it is not according

to our plans. Saint Joseph is surprising. He never speaks in the Gospel; there is never a word from Joseph in the Gospel and the Lord speaks to him in silence. He actually speaks to him in his sleep. Christmas means preferring the silent voice of God to the din of consumerism. If we can pause in silence before the Nativity scene, Christmas will be a surprise for us too, not a thing that we have already seen. To stand in silence before the Nativity scene: this is the invitation for Christmas. Take some time, stand before the Nativity scene and be silent. And you will feel, you will understand the surprise.

Unfortunately however, one can have the *wrong celebration* and prefer the usual things of the earth to the newness of Heaven. If Christmas remains just a beautiful traditional celebration where we are at the centre and not him, it will be a missed opportunity. Please let us not make Christmas *worldly*! Let us not put the Celebrated One aside, as happened then, when he “came to his own home, and his own people received him not” (Jn 1:11). Ever since the first Gospel of Advent, the Lord has put us on guard, asking us not to weigh ourselves down with “dissipation” and “cares of this life” (Lk 21:34). During these days, we hurry about, perhaps more than at any other time of the year. But in this way, we are doing the opposite of what Jesus wants. We blame the many things that fill the day, the fast-paced world. And yet, Jesus did not blame the world. He asked us not to be dragged in, but to watch at all times, praying (cf. v. 36).

It will be Christmas if, like Joseph, we make room for silence; if like Mary, we say “*here I am*” to God; if, like Jesus, we are close to those who are alone; if, like the shepherds, we leave our enclosure to be with Jesus. It will be Christmas if we find the light in the poor grotto in Bethlehem. *It will not be Christmas* if we seek the glittering brilliance of the world, if we fill ourselves with presents, meals and dinners but do not help at least one poor person who resembles God because, on Christmas, God came as a poor one.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you a Happy Christmas, a Christmas rich in the surprises of Jesus! They may appear to be uncomfortable surprises, but they are God’s taste. If we choose them, we will make a splendid surprise for ourselves. Each of us has hidden within the heart the ability to surprise oneself. Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by Jesus this Christmas.



NECROLOGY



*“Eternal Rest grant to them, O, Lord;
Let perpetual light shine upon them.*

- 03-01-1901 Fr. Francois Avrillon msfs, 72 years, died at Berhampur
03-01-1901 Fr. John Baptist Adophe Souchon msfs, 57 years, died at Kamptee
05-01-2004 Bro. Isaac Enamattam msfs, 70 years, died in Visakhapatnam
06-01-1973 Fr. John Lawrence msfs, 77 years, died at Visakhapatnam
17-01-1995 Fr. Cherian Karukaparambil, 67 years, died at Visakhapatnam
23-01-1991 Fr. Mathew Karianatt, 50 years, died at Paikaraopeta, Vizag
25-01-2008 Bro. Anthony Nedungatt, 80 years, died at Ettumanoor, Kerala.
26-01-1993 Bro. Francis Thekkemlyadiyil msfs, 82 years, died at Visakhapatnam
27-01-2001 Bro. Joseph Puthur msfs, 94 years, died at Visakhapatnam
27-01-2002 Bro. Madanu Joji msfs, 76 years, died at Visakhapatnam
30-01-1977 Fr. Sebastian Poondikulam, 79 years, died at Visakhapatnam
31-01-1957 Fr. August Gangloff msfs, 86 years, died at Kakinada

May their souls rest in Peace!



Birthday Wishes to



Most Rev. Dr. Mallavarapu Prakash

Archbishop of Visakhapatnam

on 29th January 2019

May Almighty God Shower
His abundant
blessings on you

Our Congratulations
to you, His Grace!
Appointed as
Apostolic Administrator
of the Diocese of Srikakulam!
We Pray for your
new Responsibility!

Best wishes and regards
Priests, Religious & Faithful
Archdiocese of Visakhapatnam