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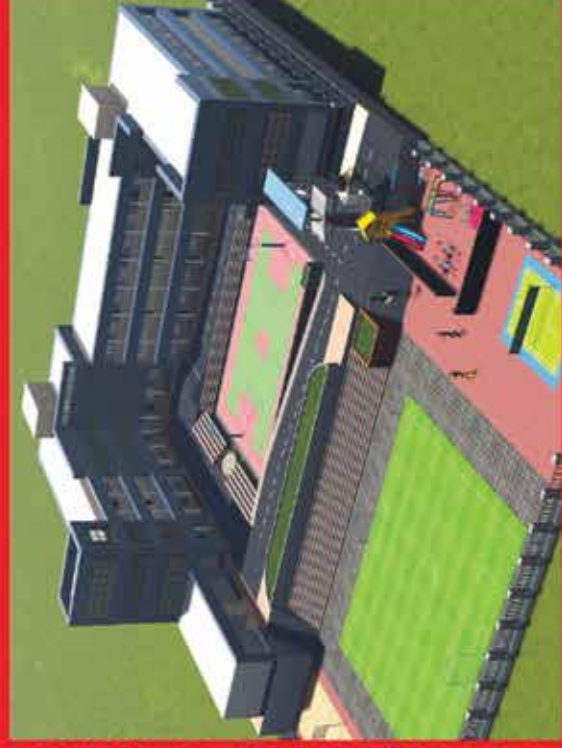


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Love Quotient

Live Lent with Love

Lent is an invitation to live the higher grades of Love. To experience Lent with love means caring for those who suffer, the neglected, the rejected or the abandoned. To do this we need high degree of Love Quotient (LQ). The LQ, the ability to love willingly, is the simple act of being kind towards people, be it at the workplace or with one's own family or in ministry. We are familiar with many human intelligences such as physical quotient, emotional quotient, intelligent quotient, spiritual quotient and so on. Among all these human intelligences the most important human intelligence is LQ, the Love Quotient, the capacity to be compassionate, the capability to be human and the ability to be empathetic. In this age of robots and palmtops love quotient has great significance.

Jesus' Love Quotient

Love Quotient was the supreme message of the Old Testament, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deut 6:4-7). This was the prime message of Jesus in the New Testament, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 13, 12-13). St Paul illustrates the LQ, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (1 Cor 13, 4-8). St John defined God as love (1 Jn 4,16). Significantly LQ is the ultimate criteria in the last judgement, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ... For whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25, 34-40).

Love Civilization

Every endeavor to grow in love quotient will lead to a civilization of love in a world where hatred and disunity reign. Prayer, penance and works of charity are the best means to grow in love quotient and thereby establishing the kingdom of love. If the passion and death of Christ was the first and most powerful super dynamic love bomb explosion the only means of continuing a similar lifestyle is by participating in His Paschal Mysteries. The more we participate in His way of the cross and in His crucifixion, the better we bring forth peace, harmony, love and life, the fruits of His resurrection. This love explosion shall gradually become a revolution of love and that in the course of time will develop a culture of love instead of a culture of death. To lay the foundation for this revolution and civilization of love, we need to deepen our friendship with Jesus, with one another, and with the most suffering and neglected of the society.



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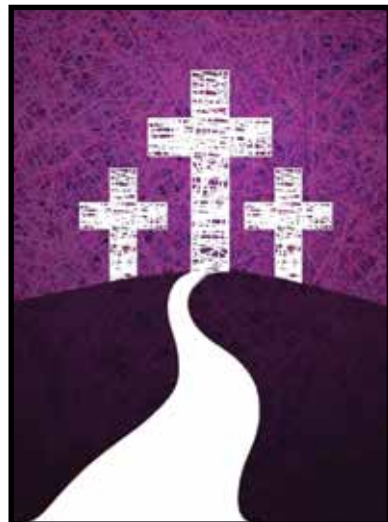
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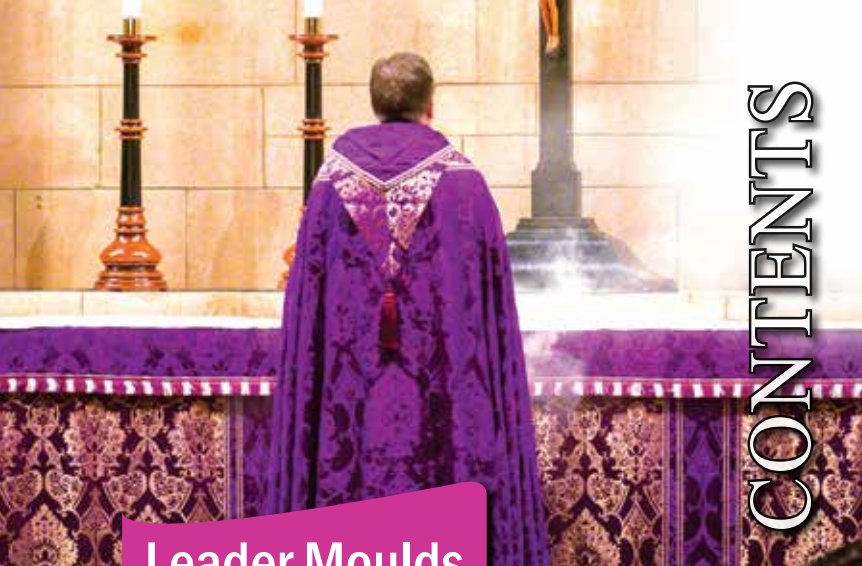
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Lent



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MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2023¹

LENTEN PENANCE AND THE SYNODAL JOURNEY

During Lent we are invited to ascend “a high mountain” in the company of Jesus and to live a particular experience of spiritual discipline – asceticism – as God’s holy people.

Dear brothers and sisters! The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all recount the episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus. There we see the Lord’s response to the failure of his disciples to understand him. Shortly before, there had been a real clash between the Master and Simon Peter, who, after professing his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, rejected his prediction of the passion and the cross. Jesus had firmly rebuked him: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a scandal to me, because you do not think according to God, but according to men!” (Mt 16:23). Following this, “six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John his brother and led them away to a high mountain” (Mt 17:1).

The Gospel of the Transfiguration is proclaimed every year on the Second Sunday of Lent. During this liturgical season, the Lord takes us with him to a place apart. While our ordinary commitments compel us to remain in our usual places and our often repetitive and sometimes boring routines, during Lent we are invited to ascend “a high mountain” in the company of Jesus and to live a particular experience of spiritual discipline – asceticism – as God’s holy people.

Lenten penance is a commitment, sustained by grace, to overcoming our lack of faith and our resistance to following Jesus on the way of the cross. This is precisely what Peter and the other disciples needed to do. To deepen our knowledge of the Master, to fully understand and embrace the mystery of his salvation, accomplished in total self-giving inspired by love, we must allow ourselves to be taken aside by him and to detach ourselves from mediocrity and vanity. We need to set out on the journey, an uphill path that, like a mountain trek, requires effort, sacrifice and concentration. These requisites are also important for the synodal journey to which, as a Church, we are committed to making. We can benefit greatly from reflecting on the relationship between Lenten penance and the synodal experience.



In his “retreat” on Mount Tabor, Jesus takes with him three disciples, chosen to be witnesses of a unique event. He wants that experience of grace to be shared, not solitary, just as our whole life of faith is an experience that is shared. For it is in togetherness that we follow Jesus. Together too, as a pilgrim Church in time, we experience the liturgical year and Lent within it, walking alongside those whom the Lord has placed among us as fellow travellers. Like the ascent of Jesus and the disciples to Mount Tabor, we can say that our Lenten journey is “synodal”, since we make it together along the same path, as disciples of the one Master. For we know that Jesus is himself the Way, and therefore, both in the liturgical journey and in

the journey of the Synod, the Church does nothing other than enter ever more deeply and fully into the mystery of Christ the Saviour.

And so we come to its culmination. The Gospel relates that Jesus “was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light” (Mt 17:2). This is the “summit”, the goal of the journey. At the end of their ascent, as they stand on the mountain heights with Jesus, the three disciples are given the grace of seeing him in his glory, resplendent in supernatural light. That light did not come from without, but radiated from the Lord himself. The divine beauty of this vision is incomparably greater than all the efforts the disciples had made

in the ascent of Tabor. During any strenuous mountain trek, we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on the path; yet the panorama that opens up at the end amazes us and rewards us by its grandeur. So too, the synodal process may often seem arduous, and at times we may become discouraged. Yet what awaits us at the end is undoubtedly something wondrous and amazing, which will help us to understand better God’s will and our mission in the service of his kingdom.

The disciples’ experience on Mount Tabor was further enriched when, alongside the transfigured Jesus, Moses and Elijah appeared, signifying respectively the Law and the Prophets (cf. Mt 17:3). The newness of Christ is at the same time the fulfilment

of the ancient covenant and promises; it is inseparable from God's history with his people and discloses its deeper meaning. In a similar way, the synodal journey is rooted in the Church's tradition and at the same time open to newness. Tradition is a source of inspiration for seeking new paths and for avoiding the opposed temptations of immobility and improvised experimentation.

The Lenten journey of penance and the journey of the Synod alike have as their goal a transfiguration, both personal and ecclesial. A transformation that, in both cases, has its model in the Transfiguration of Jesus and is achieved by the grace of his paschal mystery. So that this transfiguration may become a reality in us this year, I would like to propose two "paths" to follow in order to ascend the mountain together with Jesus and, with him, to attain the goal.

The first path has to do with the command that God the Father addresses to the disciples on Mount Tabor as they contemplate Jesus transfigured. The voice from the cloud says: "Listen to him" (Mt 17:5). The first proposal, then, is very clear: we need to listen to Jesus. Lent is a time of grace to the extent that we listen to him as he speaks to us. And how does he speak to us? First, in the word of God, which the Church offers us in the liturgy. May that word not fall on deaf ears; if we cannot always attend Mass, let us study its daily biblical readings, even with the help of the internet. In addition to the Scriptures, the Lord speaks to us through our brothers and sisters, especially in the faces and the stories of those who are in need. Let me say something else, which is quite important for the synodal process: listening to Christ often takes place in listen-

ing to our brothers and sisters in the Church. Such mutual listening in some phases is the primary goal, but it remains always indispensable in the method and style of a synodal Church.

On hearing the Father's voice, the disciples "fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and do not be afraid.' And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone" (Mt 17:6-8). Here is the second proposal for this Lent: do not take refuge in a religiosity made up of extraordinary events and dramatic experiences, out of fear of facing reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions. The light that Jesus shows the disciples is an anticipation of Easter glory, and that must be the goal of our own journey, as we follow "him alone". Lent leads to Easter: the "retreat" is not an end in itself, but a means of preparing us to experience the Lord's passion and cross with faith, hope and

love, and thus to arrive at the resurrection. Also on the synodal journey, when God gives us the grace of certain powerful experiences of communion, we should not imagine that we have arrived – for there too, the Lord repeats to us: "Rise, and do not be afraid". Let us go down, then, to the plain, and may the grace we have experienced strengthen us to be "artisans of synodality" in the ordinary life of our communities.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit inspire and sustain us this Lent in our ascent with Jesus, so that we may experience his divine splendour and thus, confirmed in faith, persevere in our journey together with him, glory of his people and light of the nations.

FRANCIS
Rome, Saint John Lateran,
25 January, Feast of the
Conversion of Saint Paul

¹ *Courtesy to Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

Let us go down, then, to the plain, and may the grace we have experienced strengthen us to be "artisans of synodality" in the ordinary life of our communities.

POPE: HUMAN TRAFFICKING 'DISFIGURES DIGNITY'¹

Deborah Castellano Lubov

Pope Francis decries human trafficking's 'disfiguring' of human dignity, in a video message released for the 9th World Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking, marked in the Catholic Church on the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita.

Pope Francis has launched an appeal to combat "the shameful scourge" of human trafficking, decrying that it "disfigures dignity." The Pope's cry came in a video message for the ninth World Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking, released Wednesday, 8 February, the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita. The Catholic Church's annual observance was first introduced by Pope Francis in 2015 when he invited women and men religious of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) and the Union of Superiors General (USG) to mark the day on the liturgical memorial of St. Josephine Bakhita, patron saint for victims of human trafficking.

The United Nations separately marks its own World Day Against Trafficking in Persons on 30 July.

'Journeying in Dignity'

The Pope began by recalling this year's theme "Journeying in dignity," which involves young people as protagonists. The Holy Father addressed young people in a special way, encouraging them "to care for

dignity, yours and of every person you meet."

Being committed to protecting human dignity and against human trafficking, he said, "you can contribute to keeping hope alive, and I would also add joy, which I invite you to preserve in your hearts, along with the Word of God, because the true joy is Christ!" "Human trafficking disfigures dignity. Exploitation and subjugation limit freedom and turn people into objects to use and discard. And the system of trafficking profits from the injustice and wickedness that oblige millions of people to live in conditions of vulnerability."

The Holy Father acknowledged that those most easily recruited, are people impoverished by the economic crisis, wars, climate change and many forms of instability. He also decried the targeting of women, children, and migrants.

The Role of Young People

Even if we live in a difficult time, Pope Francis recognized, "all of us, in particular young people, are required to join forces to build

networks of good, to spread the light that comes from Christ and His Gospel." The Pope went on to urge young people to charge forth "as missionaries of human dignity, against human trafficking and every form of exploitation."

Preventing the 'Shameful Scourge'

The Holy Father acknowledged that this inaugurates a special year of involvement of young people, calling on them "to be a blessing for other young people." "Never tire of seeking pathways for transforming our societies and preventing the shameful scourge that is human trafficking." The Pope encouraged them to promote anti-trafficking actions, and walk together "hand in hand," "to build a culture of encounter that leads to the conversion of hearts and inclusive societies, capable of unmasking stereotypes and protecting the rights of every person."

Walking Together against Trafficking

The Pope urged them to be close to "those who are destroyed by the violence of sexual and labour exploitation," "migrants, displaced persons, those who are searching for a place to live in peace and family." Inviting all people to courageously reaffirm the value of human dignity and go forward, Pope Francis concluded by giving his Apostolic Blessing. "May Saint Bakhita pray with us and for us. I heartily bless all of you who work against trafficking, and every person you meet on this journey for dignity."

¹ Vatican News 8 February 2023



EUCCHARISTIC WORDS OF THE CATHOLIC LITURGY AND POPE BENEDICT XVI



Joseph Pandiappallil MCBS
Th.D & Ph.D

The institution words, the death of Jesus and the resurrection: these three belong together and these three constitute the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic theology of Pope Benedict XVI is present in his apostolic exhortation ‘Sacramentum Caritatis’ and in his books ‘Behold the pierced one: an approach to a spiritual Christology’, ‘The Spirit of the Liturgy’, ‘God is near us, Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: Church as Communion and in ‘The Feast of Faith: approaches to a theology of Liturgy’. Joseph Ratzinger was a professor of dogmatic theology and fundamental theology. But he wrote not only on dogmatic and fundamental theological themes but also on almost all different theological, spiritual and ecclesial themes. Eucharist has the central place in the theology of Pope Benedict XVI. He wrote in his doctoral dissertation on the ecclesiology of St Augustine with the

title ‘People and House of God in the teachings of Augustine on the Church’. “Unus panis unum corpus sumus multi” which means because of one bread, we are, though many, one body”. This Eucharistic ecclesiology of Pope Benedict is present even in the texts of the Second Vatican council. His writing on the Holy Eucharist is mainly from a liturgical perspective with a dogmatic and fundamental theological basis. Similar is his interpretation of the Eucharistic words of the holy Liturgy. His interpretation of the Eucharistic words in the context of the Jewish liturgy and the Old Testament tradition of the offerings to God and God’s revelation seems unique in its accomplishment.

Necessity of the Eucharistic Words in the Liturgy

According to Pope Benedict

XVI the last supper alone is not sufficient for the institution of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic words of Jesus, his death on the cross, love as the reason for the death, etc. are needed for that. The institution words, the death of Jesus and the resurrection: these three belong together and these three constitute the Eucharist, says the Pope. These three are the paschal mysteries that are experienced in the celebration of the Eucharist. Out of the paschal mystery the Holy Eucharist is born. Therefore, Eucharist is much more than a meal. Eucharist offers a previous taste of death. The majesty of death is present in the Holy Eucharist. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we should awe the mystery of this death and resurrection. Since death is overcome by resurrection, we celebrate death as feast of life and as transformation of the world. In every culture and



every age humans have attempted to belch death. Death is the question of all questions which never got a satisfactory answer. The Christian feast of the Eucharist reaches the depth of this question and the depth of the reason for it and it opens a way to life which overcomes death. In that sense our traditional faith about the Eucharist that the Eucharist is the offering, is the visualization and making present of the offering of Christ on the cross in the present time.

Eucharist as Anticipation

Pope Benedict says that the institution of the Eucharist is ‘the anticipation and the mental accomplishment of the death of Jesus’. It means that Jesus and the twelve disciples had the opportunity during the last supper to experience the mystery of the

suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus in anticipation and as mental accomplishment. Pope Benedict argues that the Eucharistic words are the answer to the question of Rudolf Bultman, on how Jesus persisted death. By uttering the Eucharistic words Jesus mentally accomplished death. Through the Eucharistic words Jesus transformed death in the mental act which is an act of love through which he was handed over. “The Eucharistic words without death would be a currency with no backing. The death in turn without the Eucharistic words would be a mere execution for no apparent purpose,” says Pope Benedict.

Eucharistic Words Rooted on the Temple-Theology and the Covenant

Pope Benedict says that the

words of Jesus “This is my body; this is my blood” originate from the temple-theology of the Israelites. They express the sacrificial language of the Israelites. They indicate the offered gifts in the temple. Jesus used these words to designate Himself as the final and the real offering in which all the attempts of offering in the Old Testament are fulfilled. God would not like an animal offering because the entire animal world belongs to him. God would not like human offering because God had created the human beings. God would demand love because in loving the human transforms itself and becomes able to be like God to love others. All the attempts in the history of humanity to give offering to God to please God is now fulfilled in the Eucharist. The unity with God is realized in this offering of the

Eucharist. Jesus Christ unites us with God in the Holy Eucharist. This concept of union with God is taken from the idea of the covenant on Mount Sinai, says the Pope.

Eucharistic Words Rooted on the Song of the Suffering Servant

Pope Benedict says that the text, 'this is my body broken for you and this is my blood shed for many' comes from the song of the servant of God in the book of Isaiah chapter 53. The destruction of the Temple through the Babylonians and the denial of offering, liturgy and praise to the true God convinced the Israelites that the suffering of the people of Israel is the true offering to God. The suffering was the celebration of Liturgy. This suffering was for the sake of the people of Israel to adore the true God. In this theology of suffering and offering, the people of Israel were the servant of God and in their suffering God reconciles the world. But this Israel itself became egoistic and sinful. Therefore, Israelites could not fulfill the mandate to be the servant of God. At the same time its call to be the mouth of God remained inseparable. In the last supper Jesus takes this concept and the corresponding words as Jesus suffers for many and fulfills the expectation of the Israelites. In the suffering of Jesus, the great and the meaningful liturgy takes place. It was a service of God namely the Liturgy for all the human beings which was accomplished through suffering, death and resurrection.

Eucharistic Words as the New Covenant

Another expression is "the new covenant in my blood". This has a reference to Jeremiah 31:31. The new covenant is in the



tradition of the covenant with Abraham. The new covenant is the new love and the new heart through the suffering and death of Jesus. The death of Jesus is the realization of the new covenant. This is a blood relation between God and human. It is in the tradition of the covenant on Mount Sinai also. "Behold, 'the days are coming,'" declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah" (Jer.31:31). In the covenant of Israel God made covenant with twelve tribes of Israel by sprinkling blood. Through the shedding of blood and death of Jesus He establishes a new blood relation between God and the human and a new communion. This is a tragic event which overcomes the mystery of all other religions. The response

and answer to this cry remain in darkness. When Jesus expresses his love to the Father and to the human in his death God alone can accept this offer of love and truthfulness. In him the covenant is set up. The Holy Eucharist has emerged in and through this love. Eucharist has its source in this offering of love.

Eucharistic Words as Haggada

The idea of offering to God comes from God himself. In John 3:16 we read that God loved the world so much that He gave His own Son. Christ is not only a gift or an offering, he loves, suffers and is the instrument of the love of God. He became like a slave to reconcile us with God (2Cor.5:20). Reconciliation is required before we bring an offering to the altar. (Mt.5:23). The

Eucharist is therefore not only a meal, but also an anamnesis of the paschal mystery.

offering of Father Abraham is the prototype looking back to the tradition of the Christian faith to its roots. Jesus is the lamb who carried our sins and took away our sins. This offering of God is at the same time our prayer and anamnesis. On the feast of Passover, the father of the house spoke the history of the people of Israel according to which the presence of God led the people. Haggada of Passover was the center of the liturgy of Israel. In the Christian liturgy the Eucharistic words are the Haggada of Passover which is a prayer of thanksgiving. These are the words of the victory of God's love over sin.

'For Many' or 'for All'

In this case one could discuss the phrase "for many" or "for all". In the translations into the mother tongue, the corresponding phrase is translated as "for all". In the Latin Liturgy and in

the Greek New Testament it is translated as "for many". This difference has created restlessness. It is evident that Jesus died for all and not for a group of people or a part of the human beings. God loves all whom he created. Therefore, Jesus died for all (Rom. 8:32; 2Cor.5:14; 1Tim.2:6). He died as ransom for all. Therefore, it was said in the liturgy that his blood is shed for all. But in the 17th century there developed a theology that Jesus did not die for all. This was against the faith of the Church. Although Jesus died for all, God will never compel salvation. Humans have the freedom to deny salvation. The formula "for all" and the formula "for many" have truth in them. None of both expressions convey comprehensive meaning because God offers salvation for all and at the same time humans have the freedom to deny this offer. Therefore, it is to reflect whether it is meaningful to choose the expression "for all" that Pope Benedict suggests the corresponding vernacular translation of the original phrase namely "for many".

"Do in Memory of me!"

Pope Benedict says that if someone argues that by saying, 'Do this in memory of me', Jesus did not suggest liturgical rites, vestments, ceremonies etc. that is a Protestant thinking, not Catholic theology. In Catholic theology the liturgical traditions including music, prayers, vestments, rites, etc. are important. Jesus did not mean to have such a meal alone as Jesus said to do in memory of Him. Jesus told his disciples to do it always when they gathered in His name. But such a meal was not possible in every gathering because the last supper was a Passover meal which is celebrated only once a year on a definite

date. Therefore, in the context of the liturgy of the Israelites, Jesus instituted a new liturgy without giving a Christian form and rite to celebrate it. The Christian Eucharistic liturgy was celebrated originally in the community of family or families. Gradually the Christians developed liturgical rites and ceremonies. Therefore, the liturgical rites and ceremonies belong to the Eucharistic liturgy. It was the tradition of the Church or traditions developed in the Church. Christian liturgy was not only a Passover meal, but also a celebration of the paschal mystery which Jesus instituted during a Passover meal. What the disciples did in memory of Jesus was not a Passover meal, but the celebration of the anamnesis of the last supper, suffering and death and the resurrection of Jesus. It was anamnesis of the paschal mystery. Today we celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy as anamnesis or reminiscence.

Pope Benedict XVI says that the canons of the Eucharistic prayer originated from the prayer of praise from the Jewish liturgy. They are the core of the Eucharistic liturgy. Our suffering, our love, hopes, needs etc. are expressed in it: "rationabile obsequium". Neither the Eucharistic words, nor the death nor both together are sufficient to express the mystery of the everlasting love of God in Jesus Christ. Resurrection and the new life through it are needed to fulfill this mystery of love. Eucharist is therefore not only a meal, but also an anamnesis of the paschal mystery. The Eucharistic Words express the anticipated experience and mental accomplishment of the paschal mystery which the new covenant in the offering of the new Servant of God; it is the new Temple-Theology and the new Haggada.



COME, LET US CELEBRATE RECONCILIATION

Lent has always been a time of reconciliation which is the process of bringing accord out of discord between two parties, or the restoration of a relationship.



Dr Jaison Kunnell MCBS

Pope Francis' 40th apostolic journey abroad (31st January -5th February 2023) to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, was centred on peace and reconciliation. In his first official discourse in South Sudan's capital city Juba, the Supreme Pontiff reminded the nation's Authorities, Civil Society, and Diplomatic Corps at the Presidential Palace of Juba that he had come "as a pilgrim of reconciliation, in the hope of accompanying you on your journey of peace." The Pope condemned the "years of war and conflict that seems never to end" and noted that "even yesterday" lives were lost in bitter clashes. "At the same time, the reconciliation process seems stagnant and the promise of peace unfulfilled." He expressed his hope that the protracted suffering of the people is not in vain, that their patience and sacrifices challenge everyone and "allow peace to blossom and bear fruit."

The history of God with humankind is a broken one from the beginning of creation. Sin breaks that which is "very good" (Gen 1). The "fall of man" (Gen 3), the "fratricide" (Gen 4), and much more, show the turning

away of man from God and from the good order. Our relationship with God is broken because God does not tolerate iniquity. But again and again, he turns to humankind full of mercy. Even in the angriest myth of the Flood, he still creates a future for the creation and mankind and promises a "never again" (Gen 9:11). What is already evident in the First Testament is condensed in the story of Jesus with people. Jesus approaches the people. He takes care of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1) before his repentance. He forgives the adulteress (Jn 8:1-11) and hopes for her future life. He also communicates with people who do not yet manage to repent. Finally, his surrender on the cross is an expression of his all-conquering love, and the resurrection expresses God's unbroken faithfulness to Jesus and the human race. Reconciliation always begins anew with the word "yes" spoken by God, who wants all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). Lent has always been a time of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the process of bringing accord out of discord between two parties, or the restoration of a relationship. Moreover, it is the work of God through Christ by

which He restores humankind to a favourable relationship with Himself. The cross and blood of Jesus reverse this broken relationship and bring us closer to God. His blood wipes away our sins and has the power to restore us back to God.

The Call to Reconciliation

"Nobody is perfect." Even the best preparation, conscientious examination, and purest motives are not enough to be perfect. But I do not need to soften this insight before God. Nor do I need to trigger apologetic mechanisms to deal with my imperfections and guilt history. At the same time, we need the assurance that a final condemnation does not follow this guilt. Instead, we should let ourselves be told, by God and other people that they trust us to become different and act accordingly. According to German theologian Richard Hartmann, not the statement "I am sorry," which comes easily to some people's lips, but the request: "I beg your pardon," enables others to approach me and offer reconciliation as well. However, this expectation becomes problematic when the guilt is overwhelming and when

an individual can, at best, speak for himself, “I forgive you.” As long as humanity possesses the ability to forgive the unforgivable, reconciliation happens quickly.

Man can Bring about Reconciliation

Can we grant reconciliation? How much time does it take? Can I accomplish such a task alone, or do I not need others to be involved in the process? What can an individual really carry if their wound cannot be healed? Individuals can bring about reconciliation but must not put themselves under pressure. A too-quick “It’s okay again” has - consciously or unconsciously - undertones that keep echoing, that remind and thus make us realize that reconciliation is far from working. Some processes take the time that cannot be calculated in advance in a master plan. Again and again, people experience and suffer that a lifetime is insufficient for reconciliation and that parts of the biography can go un-reconciled even to death. Richard Hartmann uses one of the phrases in his sermons, as a motivation for reconciliation: “Consider whom you will meet again in heaven.” And heaven will then really be only when God Himself transforms the barriers of our irreconcilabilities. At the same time, they also experience that successful reconciliation releases new strength and energy and that new common paths also succeed in families and other related stories. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to tell more and more such stories of reconciliation.

Christians show the way for Society

Reconciliation is not only an individual event. It is a necessary condition for society to learn to

live together. In a global world, it will not be possible to isolate all conflicts of interest, and all dislocations lived out with the conflicts from each other by protective walls. Christians who have accepted reconciliation for themselves are empowered to work towards reconciliation. Even today, initiatives of the Pope and the Vatican institutions are repeated requests in reconciliation processes, illustrating the hope many have in the power of reconciliation from God. On April 12, 2019, Pope Francis knelt to kiss the feet of two rival South Sudanese leaders, President Salva Kiir and his former deputy-turned-rebel leader Riek Machar, and pleaded, “I am asking you as a brother to stay in peace. I am asking you with my heart let us go forward. There will be many problems, but they will not overcome us. Resolve your problems.” Reconciliation succeeds best when humility, self-criticism, and self-acceptance are combined with great mercy, breadth, and love for the other.

Reclaim the Sacrament of Reconciliation Anew

Lent provides an opportunity to reconcile oneself with God through the sacrament of reconciliation. The centrality of the offer of reconciliation is shown by the fact that reconciliation as a sacrament is a special sign of God’s presence. Pope Francis wrote in his Lenten Message 2022, “Let us not grow tired of asking for forgiveness in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, knowing that God never tires of forgiving. Let us not grow tired of fighting against concupiscence, that weakness which induces to selfishness and all evil, and finds in the course of history various ways to lure men and women into sin.” Con-

fessional is the place where the individual is explicitly promised: Your sins are forgiven. Reconciliation is promised to you by God. Not that your deeds are criminalized, but the person with his or her history of guilt is accepted. Such experience helps the individual to live reconciliation and to turn to others anew in his or her everyday special life situations. Confession offers the opportunity to reflect and readjust one’s life and actions in the eyes of God in a confidential setting. The experienced outside view of the confessor, his perceptions, and deep drilling help mobilize and accept one’s own danger and strength anew.

Reconciliation is the overcoming of the disturbed relationship between God and his creatures realized by God in Jesus Christ and the foundation of a fundamentally new relationship. Since the purpose of every sacrament is to give grace, and the purpose of grace is to heal and sanctify, then the ultimate goal of each sacrament is to heal us and make us holy so that we can become like God. In the confessional, Christ “is the physician tending to each one of the sick who needs him to cure them.” (CCC 1484). Jesus wants to restore us to the Father’s likeness. How? Through the sacrament of Reconciliation. He told St. Faustina that the greatest miracles take place in the confessional and that there is no sinner who cannot be restored: God’s focus is not on our sin, but on our relationship with Him. He’s focused on our pain — on our woundedness. He knows what sin is! He knows that sin is misery, that it’s sickness. He knows that we’re aching, and He wants to heal us, to restore all that has been lost.

COMP

THE SEASON OF GREAT FAST IN THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH



Pauly Maniyattu

The fast and abstinence during the season of Great Fast prepare the faithful to get identified with the passion and death of the Lord. This season enables the faithful to look back to their past life and repent for their sins and return to the house of God.

The season of lent is of great significance in all Christian traditions. This season is known as the season of Great Fast (*Sauma Rabba*) in the East Syriac tradition. The Syro-Malabar Church following the East Syriac liturgical tradition, keeps the same understanding concerning the Great Fast. Just like in any other Christian tradition, the Syro-Malabar Church also keeps the Great Fast in imitation of the forty days' fast of Lord Jesus. In general, in all liturgical traditions the great lent is of forty days. However, in the Syro-Malabar Church there are fifty days of fast. The St. Thomas Christians observe it as Fifty Days Fast (*Anpathu Nonpu*) because of the special arrangement of the fasting days.

History of Great Lent

In the history of the Church, we can find a steady develop-

ment with regard to the number of the fasting days. In the second and early third century we find two days' fasting, namely fasting on Passion Friday and Great Saturday. Tertullian (+ca220) and Hippolytus (+235) are witnesses to the fasting on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The catechumens preparing for the baptism at midnight of Saturday had to fast on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. This fasting comprised of forty hours commemorating Christ's spending of forty hours in the hands of death. It is the time when the groom is taken away from the wedding guests. (Mt 2:19-20). Later we find this fast extended to 6 days in the third century itself. This was perhaps due to the Jewish influence. Before the paschal feast, the Jews ate only unleavened bread for seven days. But the Christians fasted only for six days. Sunday, being the day of the Lord was

exempted from fasting. The system of forty days fasting became common practice by the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century. It was based on Jesus' fasting in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. Athanasius of Alexandria (295-373), Cyril of Jerusalem (+386) and John Chrysostom (+407) make mention of the six-week preparation for the Pasch. These weeks were known as *Quadragesima*, that is forty consecutive days preceding the *paschal Triduum*.

Season of Seven Weeks and Forty Days of Fasting

In the fourth century, authors like Basil the Great and Sozomen testify to the seven-week period of preparation for Pasch in Constantinople. The St. Thomas Christians of India had the practice of the seven weeks of fasting. The main reason for keeping fifty days' fast is the in-



sistence on keeping the system of seasons of seven weeks in the East Syriac liturgical year. Of the nine seasons in the East Syriac liturgical year most of the seasons have seven weeks. The seasons of Great Fast, Resurrection, Apostles, and Summer have just seven weeks each. The seasons of *Elijah-Slima* and *Mushe* are counted such a way as to get seven weeks for each season. According to the Anonymous Author of the ninth century, the number seven explains the significance of seven Sundays in the salvation history. He enumerates seven Sunday events to indicate the seven new beginnings in the economy of salvation. Of the 49 ($7 \times 7 = 49$) days before Easter, seven Sundays are not considered as fast days. ($49 - 7 = 42$). Since Passion Friday and Great Saturday

are days of special fasting, they are excluded from the other fast days. Thus, there are 40 days. ($42 - 2 = 40$). The notable difference in the observance of the Lent between the Latin and Syro-Malabar Churches is that in the Syro-Malabar Church and in all Oriental Churches the Lent begins on Monday of the seven weeks before the feast of Easter. But the Latin practice is that the Lent begins only on the Wednesday of that week, that is, after two days.

Jesus prepared himself through fasting to accept the plan of the Father concerning the paschal mystery for the salvation of the world. Through fasting he conquered the plan of the evil one which is in fact thoroughly against the plan of God (Mt 4:2). The Gospel proclamation assigned for

the first Sunday of Great Fast in the East Syriac tradition is the temptation of Jesus by the devil (Mt 4:1-11). Through his fasting Jesus gave us the model for the strategy to win over the evil one and to embrace the plan of God envisaged in the paschal mystery. Though the main concern of this liturgical season is the preparation for the commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, one of the most important aspects of the celebration is the observance of fasting. The Apostles and the first Christians commemorated the death of Jesus on the day of the Jewish Pasch as a sorrowful day with prayer, contrition and fasting. In the great Fast of St. Thomas Christians, we find sincere concern for identifying ourselves with the suffering of the Lord.

The St. Thomas Christians followed rigorous ascetical practices during the entire period of lent. The general norm was that all the faithful should abstain from the favourite food items like meat, fish, egg, milk, and all sorts of entertainments and the couples shall abstain from the conjugal act. They ate only one time in the whole day and it was in the afternoon around 3 p.m.

Main Themes of the Season of Great Fast

There is the understanding that along with the Lord

we shall pray more earnestly. There is a special emphasis on the prayer in general. The readings of the season point out the need for turning to an authentic prayer appealing to God. In the Holy Qurbana and the Liturgy of Hours, there are proper prayers speaking on the meaning and relevance of fasting. The numerous hymns in the Liturgy of Hours speak on the need of authentic prayer. The main themes found in the propria of the season of Great Fast are those enabling a true life-renewal of the faithful. The

important themes are the passion, death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Other important themes are life-renewal, memory of death, fruits of fasting, almsgiving, reparation and restoration, the reconciliation between God and human beings and the reconciliation among the human beings. the disastrous effects of sin, acts of repentance, the mercy and love of God, and eucharistic union with Christ. Related to the salvation there are themes like self-giving, self-immolation and glorification.

The Scriptural lessons of this



season focus on the renewal of Christian life in the model of Jesus. Authentic faith and a life befitting this faith is the important Scriptural theme of the second Sunday of Great Fast according to the East Syriac calendar. The emphatic proclamation of the need of participation in the paschal mystery is the Gospel theme of the third Sunday of Great Fast. The sinful response towards the Gospel values is the Gospel theme of the fourth Sunday. The Gospel passage of the Fifth Sunday shows Jesus as source of the water of life. Jesus is again presented as the light of the world. Jesus is presented in the Gospel proclamation of the sixth Sunday as the good shepherd, who is prepared his life itself for the life of the sheep. Jesus' solemn entry into Jerusalem for his passion, death and resurrection is the theme for the seventh Sunday.

Special Days of the Season

Besides the great days like the Palm Sunday, Passion Friday, Great Saturday, the St. Thomas Christians observed special days in the season of Great Fast. The first Sunday is known as Sunday of *Pethurtha*. The term *pethurtha* implies 'return home', 'reconciliation', 'to look back' etc. It indicates towards a thorough examination of conscience looking back to one's own life for a real reconciliation through fast, penance, and charitable works during the period following this Sunday. As a preparation for the days of fasting, sumptuous meal is served on this day. Another important day is the *paathinonpu* (half-way of the fasting season). The fourth Wednesday in the season of Great Fast is observed as the *paathinonpu*. This particular

The season of Great Fast prepares the faithful for the great feast of Resurrection.

day is observed, perhaps as a reminder to be more earnest in the remaining half period of the Fast. The Saturday before Hosanna Sunday (Palm Sunday) is known as *Kozhukotta* Saturday. In most Churches this Saturday is known as Lazarus Saturday. The Malayalam word *koẓhukotta* in middle Kerala stands for round shaped rice sweet filled with spicy ingredients prepared on this Saturday. It is prepared to commemorate Jesus' dining at Lazarus' house. The symbolism of *koẓhukotta* is derived from the costly nard perfume, in round shaped bottle, used to anoint the feet of Jesus by Mary at Lazarus' house (Jn 12: 1-11).

The Maundy Thursday is called *Pesaha* Thursday in the East Syriac tradition. (*Pesaha* = *Passover*). On that day a special meal is prepared in the families of St. Thomas Christians. After the supper, in commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist, the father of the Family

breaks unleavened bread, known as *Pesaha* bread or INRI bread, marked with the sign of the cross, and distributes it among the family members. A sweet drink made of coconut milk and jaggery is also distributed. The family members consume them devoutly. The *Pesaha* meal celebration is considered an occasion for the reconciliation of the family members. Usually, the children and grandchildren of the family come together for this celebration, for the celebration of the love of the family. The last week of the season, known as the 'passion week', is specially set apart for intense spiritual renewal and preparation for the new life with the Risen Lord. Rigorous fasting, meditation on all the events of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, prayer and vigil, and listening to sermons are the special observances of this week.

Conclusion

The season of Great Fast prepares the faithful for the great feast of Resurrection. It is a time to rediscover the true significance of the Christian call and response. Following Christ, that is, participating in his paschal mystery, is the true task of the Christian. In order to follow Christ, we need to be identified with his passion, death and resurrection. The fast and abstinence during the season of Great Fast prepare the faithful to get identified with the passion and death of the Lord. This season enables the faithful to look back to their past life and repent for their sins and return to the house of God. The season of Great Fast induces the people to prayer, fasting and charity towards the poor. Thus, the season of Great Fast serves as a catalyst for vigorous Christian life.

COMP

THEOLOGY OF LENT IN MALANKARA LITURGY

Lent is the vigilant servant who sows good seeds in our souls. Lent is that expert therapy which heals all ailments. Lent is also the farmer who plucks all wickedness and removes all evil from the crops.

Introduction

Lex Orandi Lex Credenti is the dictum which governs our faith and sacramental life. In the Syriac Tradition, especially in the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church, any theological reflection should be based on its liturgical celebration. Thus, here our attempt is to identify the theological significance of the Lent as it is expressed in the liturgical texts, especially in the Liturgy of the Hours of

the Malankara Church. Going through the different stages and events of the Lenten days culminating in the Holy Week celebration is in fact an occasion of Theosis or Divinization for the faithful.

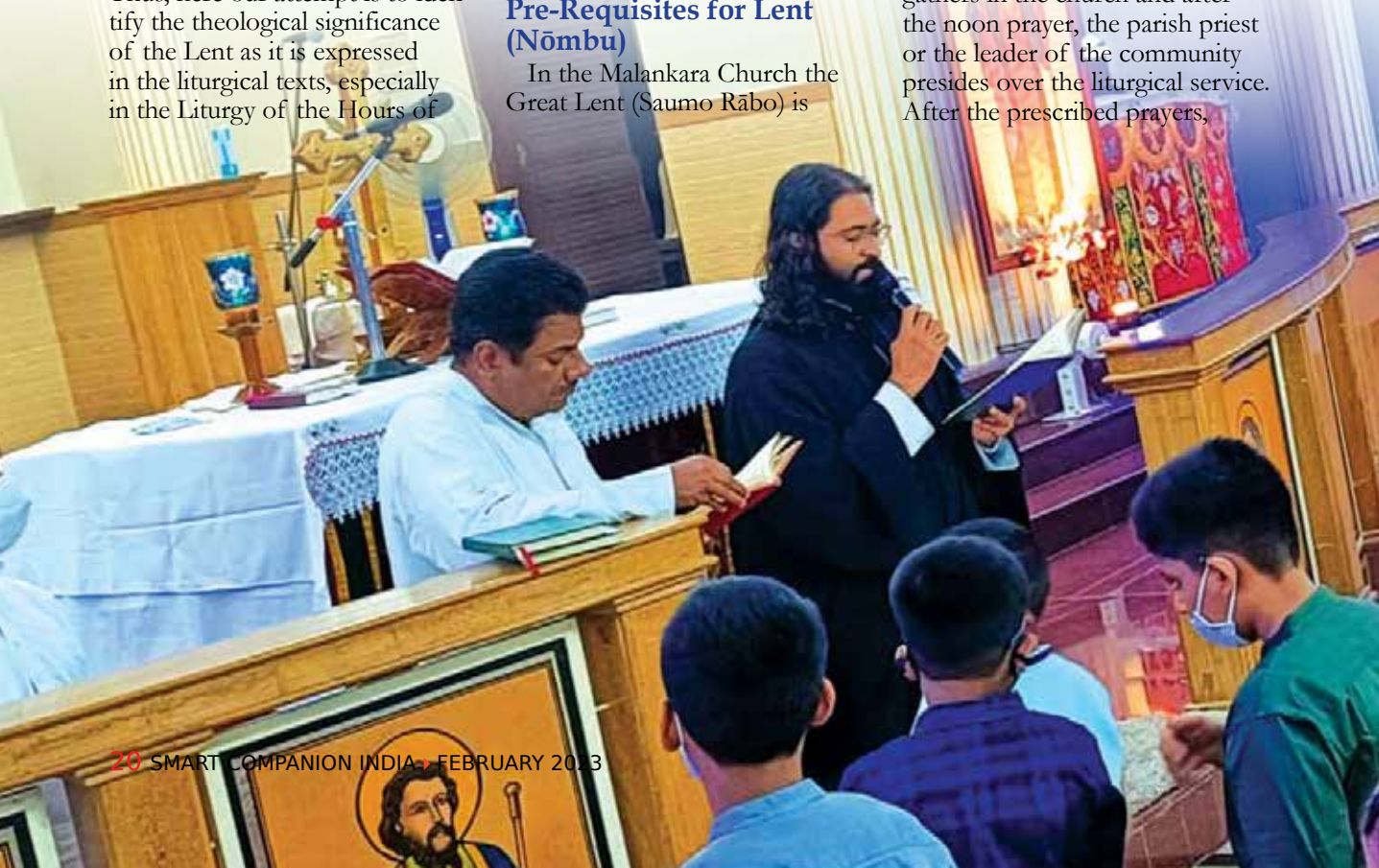
Love and Forgiveness as Pre-Requisites for Lent (Nōmbu)

In the Malankara Church the Great Lent (Saumo Rābo) is



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marked with a Reconciliation Service known as Shubkōno at the beginning of the Lent and it ends also with another Service of Peace during the Easter Liturgy. The placement of the Lent between these two services clearly shows the spiritual, theological as well as sociological significance of love, mercy and forgiveness as a pre-requisite for the Lent. In the Reconciliation Service held at noon on the first Monday of the Lent, which is a mandatory fasting day, the whole community gathers in the church and after the noon prayer, the parish priest or the leader of the community presides over the liturgical service. After the prescribed prayers,



psalms, hymns, etc., which are centred on the theme of love, forgiveness and repentance come the scripture readings 1 Jn. 4: 11–21, 1 Cor. 13: 4–10, the famous passages dealing with love; love of God and love of man. Finally, the main celebrant makes the Gospel proclamation which is taken from Mt. 18: 18–35 which deals with the question raised by St. Peter: “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” we know the answer given by Our Lord.

The Qōlo which precedes the readings summarises the whole sense of the readings. It describes the love of God as tree which is desirable (reminding us of the Tree of Life in Gen. 2:9) and says: “O blessed tree of love, how desirable are you? The place where you dwell will be auspicious by you. Because of you, God dwelt with Abram. Because of you, the priests entered the Sanctuary. Because of you St. Paul said: “no afflictions or torments can separate me from the love of God” Hallelujah Blessed is the One who gave this. So, the

love of (for) God is the basic inspiration and source of any piety and prayer or the driving force behind any fasting, sacrifice or lent. The second Qōlo brings out the real irony contradiction in our normal way of fasting and observing lent. It sings: Let us love each other, my brethren; Those who fast in order to fulfil the commandment (law).

After the Gospel reading, the main celebrant exhorts them to forgive. He then prostrates before them and asks and requests them to forgive him. This he does three times one after the other. To each request the community replies in return: “Father, forgive us and bless us.” After this all of them get up and kiss the hands of the priest and forms a round in the church where each and every one gathered there goes to the other and exchange the kiss of peace as a sign of mutual forgiveness. Thus, we enter into the Lent as members of one body reconciled and united in love. The Lent ends also with a Service of the Exchange of Peace, which is the message of Resurrection. After the whole liturgical service which

takes place before the Holy Eucharist the main celebrant passes on the Kiss of Peace to the whole community of the worshippers and every one present there just like in the Shubkōno service.

What is Lent?

In the Sedro prayer of the Evening prayer on Monday the Church prays and explains: “lent is the vigilant servant who sows good seeds in our souls. Lent is that expert treatment or therapy which heals all ailments. Lent is also the farmer who plucks all wickedness and removes all evil from the crops. Lent is also the marvellous ladder which raises us to heaven.” The sentence, “the Holy Lent is the sign of victory and the unrelenting weapon against the wicked” is umpteen times repeated in the prayers. Perfect lent is love and nothing else. The prayer reminds us on the basis of the teachings of the Gospel: “We should not hate our brethren and neighbours. We should love our enemies and those who hate us. This is the lent our Lord has commanded us.”



Jesus Set us Free through His Lent

This is one of the most important theological and soteriological aspect we proclaim and experience in the Malankara liturgy. Almost every Bōūtho of Mor Jacob of Serugh in the Lenten prayers start with the line “Lord, who did set us free through your fasting, have mercy upon us.” In other places it is made clearer through another version: “Christ, who saved us from our sins by your lent, accept our lent and have mercy on us.” So Christ made us free from our sins through his fasting. And we are celebrating this freedom once again when we are fasting.

How to Observe Lent?

How intensely the spirit of lent shall permeate over the whole life and physical organs of a believer is expressed in the following Sedro of Tuesday morning: “Grant us Lord, eyes which see only goodness, ears which listen to the divine revelations, nose that inhales your breath, lips that always proclaim your glory, and legs and hands which move only for almsgiving and other good deeds.” In fact, it is an invitation and initiation to mysticism. Again, in the Sedro of the Wednesday morning prayer, Lent is considered to be the armour which protects our body, and with which we overcome the desires of the senses that cause death and destruction.

Observation of Lent in the Malankara Liturgical spirituality encompasses the whole life and realms of the faithful. Inner and spiritual aspects of lent are very much stressed in the prayers. “It is good and desirable that one keeps himself away from rivalry and observe the lent with purity of heart. God has promised that the one who abstain from food as well as evil, and observe the lent in a worthy manner, will rejoice in

the bridal chamber of light”. Giving alms and sharing makes any lent meaningful and perfect. “He is blessed who fasts in purity, and shares his bread with the needy. He will get his reward from the merciful Lord and inherit the kingdom of heaven.” Not only that, “the one who observes the lent of our Lord, should separate his thoughts from all wicked desires and turn his eyes to God.”

Fasting is something that not only applies to the body. There is also the so-called spiritual fasting. We pray on Wednesday morning like this: “It is befitting that body and soul fast simultaneously. When the body abstains from food, the soul should be free from vices. Such a lent is useless where the soul does not fast from desires and bad thoughts and only the body avoids food [...] In the forty days fasting of Moses, not only was his body free from food, but also his soul from all evil”. Doing justice and taking care of the poor is an inevitable side of the Lent. In the noon prayer on Thursday the Church prays and teaches: “Dear fastener, invite the poor and feed him. Do not wait for him to come to you. Rather you go after him and satiate him. For, the fields do not go after the farmer, rather the farmer himself carries the seeds and go to the field to sow”.

Gains from Nōmbu

Lent gains superior beauty for those who observe it. Observation of lent in Malankara Tradition is an invitation to enter into a mystical way of life together with the Lord. The most quoted example which appears in almost every hour of the prayer is that of Moses who face became dazzling bright like the beauty of the Sun at the Mount Sinai. The spiritual gains of lent in the present-day life of the church are clearly mentioned in the prayer on Tuesday

morning: “O King of kings and the one who weaves crowns for the kings, let your sheep prosper and flourish by grazing in the meadows of lent and be glad in holiness, be led in brilliance and glory and be protected in purity.” In the noon prayer of Tuesday the fortune of those who engage in fasting are mentioned: “Those who observe nōmbu are very fortunate at the morning when the light appears. They will rejoice in the kingdom of heaven together with the just and the righteous. they will be glad over the result of their thoughts and deeds.” Effects of lent are numerous. “Through lent debts are forgiven and sins are removed. By the lent filth and stain are rubbed off from the soul and the soul becomes clean and spiritual wings are grown to it.”

Conclusion

At the end of the forty days lent and at the beginning of the Holy Week, there is a special liturgical celebration in the Malankara Church which marks the passion week. It is known as the Arrival at the Shore (Vāde d’almīno) at the end of the Nōmbu. The Holy lent was a voyage through the sea of life full of storm and thunder. However, the faithful through the strict and faithful observance of the lent, was able to reach the harbour/shore of salvation (Golgotha), where the celebration of the paschal mysteries, namely the passion, death burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ takes place. Lent for a Malankarite is a pilgrimage to the ‘Harbour of Life’ and the voyage is very hard and tiresome. Cleanliness of heart, forgiveness and harmony with the fellow beings, love of God and love for the other, almsgiving, steadfast prayer, justice, care of the poor and the hungry, etc., are various factors that make our lent meaningful and worthy.



LENT: A SEASON OF SPIRITUAL SPRINGTIME



Dr Job Vazhakkootathil

The meaning of the word lent is “springtime”. This is how the season of lent really becomes a season of spiritual spring time in the lives of the Church and her children.

The liturgical calendar in the Roman Catholic Church can be divided into three different blocks centered on a particular Christ event. For example, the first block is centered on the event of incarnation or the mystery of the manifestation of our Lord. That is, the feast of Incarnation of our Lord is celebrated on the twenty-fifth of December. In this block we find two liturgical seasons, i.e.,

a season prior to Christmas, the season of advent (*adventus*) and a season after Christmas, the Christmas season (*tempus natalis*). The second block is centered on the public life and ministry of Jesus (the ordinary time, *tempus ordinarius*). The third block is centered on the paschal mystery of our Lord. In this block we have two liturgical seasons. The first liturgical season is a time of preparation for the Paschal feast, the resurrection of our Lord, which is known as the season of Lent; the second liturgical season in this block is the paschal season (*tempus paschalis*). In this article we are dealing with the season of Lent in the Roman liturgical calendar.

The Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar states that “Lent is ordered to preparing for the celebration of Easter, since the Lenten liturgy prepares for celebration of the Paschal Mystery both catechumens, by the various stages of Christian Initiation, and the

faithful, who recall their own Baptism and do penance” (No. 27). The season of Lent starts on Ash Wednesday and ends with the first vespers (evening prayer) of Easter. In the Roman Catholic Church, the season of Lent longs for a period of forty days (*Quadragesima*). Right from the very ancient tradition of the Church, Sundays, being the day of the Resurrection of our Lord, were not counted as the days of fasting. Observing that same tradition, Sundays are not counted as the days of fasting. It is period of preparation for the solemnity of the Resurrection of Our Lord. The church is instructing her children to prepare themselves for the Pascha feast mainly by three ways: prayer, fasting and the works of charity or alms giving. During Lent, we seek the Lord in prayer by reading Sacred Scripture; we serve him by giving alms; and we practice self-control through fasting. We are called not only to abstain from luxuries during Lent, but to a true

inner conversion of heart as we seek to follow Christ's will more faithfully. We recall the waters of baptism in which we were also baptized into Christ's death, died to sin and evil, and began new life in Christ.

Why Forty days?

Mother Church invites her children to imitate Christ who prepared himself before his public ministry by spending in prayer and fasting in the desert for forty days and forty nights. Lent is principally therefore, an imitation of Christ himself. The biblical number forty has a special importance and meaning with regards to lent. Before entering into their promised land, the people of Israel wandered through the desert for forty years. The forty days of the season of lent reminds us that we are also in a period of wandering or pilgrimage on this earth before we enter into our promised land, the heavenly Jerusalem. We see in the book of exodus that before God gives Moses his Ten Commandments, Moses went up to the mountain of Sinai and stayed over there forty days and forty nights. Lent is a time of preparation for encountering the Lord. In 1Kings also we see prophet Elijah traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God (1 Kings 19, 7). In the book of Genesis, we see the Lord sends rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights (Gen. 7,4). That was a process for purifying the old creation and a process for re-creation or new creation. Lent is also a time of purification which leads us to become a new creation, which is made possible by the paschal mystery of Christ.

Sundays in Lent

Sundays in lent are known as

the first Sunday of lent, second Sunday of lent etc. The new catechumenates are elected and examined on the second and third Sundays of lent respectively. Fourth Sunday of lent is known as the laetare Sunday. Laetare means to rejoice. The Church reminds her children that we have passed the middle of lent and approaching the solemnity of the resurrection of our Lord, therefore rejoice! As a symbol of this joy, unlike violet the liturgical color of this day is changed to rose or pink. The fifth Sunday of lent is known as the Lazarus Sunday, because in the year A the gospel reading is the raising of Lazarus from death. Another important feature about this fifth Sunday of lent is that it was previously called "Passion Sunday," this Sunday marks the beginning of Passiontide, a deeper time of Lent. This is the final Sunday of Lent before the beginning of Holy Week. The Liturgy of the Word of this day speaks of re-creation, resurrection, and new life. The practice of covering crosses and images throughout the church from this Sunday may be observed. Crosses remain covered until the end of the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.

Holy Week

After the renewal of holy week liturgy the sixth Sunday of lent began to be called the passion Sunday. On this Sunday begins the Holy Week. The main important liturgical focus on this Sunday is the commemoration of the Passion of Our Lord. Therefore, the reading of the passion of our Lord is an important liturgical act of the day. The second focus of the liturgy is the remembrance of the messianic entrance of Christ into Jerusalem. The Monday in

the Holy week remembers Mary anointing Jesus with perfume at which Judas is scandalized and leaves. Tuesday remembers Jesus' prediction of Judas' betrayal and Peter's triple denial. On Wednesday of the Holy week which is known as the spy Wednesday, we remember the betrayal and handing over of Jesus by Judas to the chief priests.

On Thursday morning of the Holy week we have what is commonly known as the Chrism Mass. This celebration can be shifted to any other day of the Holy week according to the convenience of the people concerned. Since on this day Christ instituted the sacrament of Holy Orders, it is first and foremost a celebration of priestly collegiality together with their bishop. It is during this Mass, priests renew their vows again in front of their bishop. Further, during this celebration, the holy oils (Oelium catechumenorum, Oelium infirmorum and Chrism) for the administration of different sacraments are blessed and consecrated. On Holy Thursday, with the celebration of the Mass of the supper of the Lord (Coena Domini) we enter into the Paschal Triduum. The paschal triduum is the culmination of our whole liturgical year. It reaches its climax at the celebration of our paschal vigil and ends with the second vespers of Easter. There are three important focuses in this liturgy, namely, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, institution of Holy Orders and the commandment of love. The commandment of love is known as mandatum from which originates the term Maundy Thursday.

The Friday in Holy week is known as Good Friday. On this day we celebrate the passion and death of our Lord in a special way. In the Roman Catholic Church, we don't have the celebration of



the Holy Eucharist on this day. Today's liturgy consists of three rites; the liturgy of the word of God, which includes readings from the Old Testament and New Testament, the reading of the passion of our Lord, the solemn intercessory prayers. The second rite is the veneration of the Cross. The third is the communion rite. The liturgical color on this day is red. At the end of Good Friday liturgy, we enter into the paschal vigil. In the Paschal vigil the Church awaits the resurrection of her master and bridegroom observing great silence at His tomb. Then the Easter paschal vigil begins in the night and reaches its culmination with the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. With the celebration of the paschal vigil, we end the season of lent and enter into the season of Paschal time.

Spiritual Springtime

The Season of lent is a season of drought in the liturgical celebrations. We don't sing hallelujah and Gloria during these days. Flowers and other decorations disappear from our altars. Our liturgical music becomes minimal. As the days go on, we don't even hear our beautiful bell ringing from our churches. At its climax, our altar is stripped of its clothes and our tabernacles become empty. Yes it seems a season of drought. But, it brings about the real liturgical spring into our spiritual life. The whole church becomes adorned with spiritual fruits as a result of this season which culminates at the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. The meaning of the word lent is "springtime". This is how the season of lent really becomes a season of spiritual spring time in the lives of the Church and her children.

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FRATERNITY @ FRONTIERS



Fr. Cedric Prakash SJ
Human Rights Activist

Together, let us build an alliance of peace. Rich in diversity, equal in dignity and rights, united in solidarity.

On December 21, 2020, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution – co-sponsored by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt – proclaiming February 4 as the International Day of Human Fraternity, inviting all Member States and international organizations to observe the International Day of Human Fraternity annually. The International Day of Human Fraternity commemorates the historic signing of the Document on Human Fraternity by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on February 4, 2019; the day highlights the principles and values of the Document on Human Fraternity, while exploring good practices towards its implementation as a pathway to building a more peaceful world.

So, 4 February this year will mark the third observance of this day. In a message for the day, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres says, “The International Day of

Human Fraternity celebrates the values of compassion, religious understanding, and mutual respect. These values underwrite peace and are the glue that holds our human family together. Yet all over the world, they are being eroded through deepening divides, widening inequalities, and growing despair; by surging hate speech, sectarianism, and strife. The fact is, we see examples of religious extremism and intolerance in all societies and among all faiths. It is the duty of religious leaders everywhere to prevent instrumentalization of hatred and defuse extremism amidst their followers. The declaration “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” – co-authored by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed El Tayeb – is a model for interfaith harmony and human solidarity. Let us all take inspiration and renew our commitment to stand together as one human family. Together, let us build an alliance of peace. Rich in diversity, equal in dignity and rights,

united in solidarity”.

Guterres is in fact reiterating what Pope Francis and the Grand Imam say in their introduction, “from our fraternal and open discussions, and from the meeting that expressed profound hope in a bright future for all human beings, the idea of this Document on Human Fraternity was conceived. It is a text that has been given honest and serious thought so as to be a joint declaration of good and heartfelt aspirations. It is a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.” The document above all is a ‘Magna Carta’, a way of proceeding for all of humanity, provided there is the necessary political will to ensure that. The document analyses the realities which grip mankind today and provides a blueprint for all in order to address and



ultimately overcome the hate, divisiveness and violence of today!

'Fraternity' however, is not a new concept. Though male-sounding, it embraces every single human in totality. It means brotherhood and sisterhood or a belief in co-existence. Thus, all the member states of the UN are directed by the United Nations to observe the 'International Day of Human Fraternity' in the best and appropriate manner to promote interreligious harmony, friendship, cooperation, and acceptance. 'Fraternity' is also a non-negotiable dimension of the Indian Constitution appearing in the Preamble - a pillar of our democracy. It refers to a feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood and a sense of belonging with the country among its people. The Preamble declares that fraternity has to assure two things—the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.

On 4 October 2020, Pope Francis gave to the world his latest Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship, 'Fratelli Tutti' (Brothers and Sisters All). 'Fratelli Tutti' is path-breaking - it is radical in nature; it highlights and also challenges the core teaching of every major religion in the world. Pope Francis makes an urgent and passionate call for meaningful discipleship, of authentic witness in our world of today! It is a blueprint for concerted action which is addressed to "brothers and sisters all" (#8) and in his opening remarks he states "although I have written it from the Christian convictions which inspire and sustain me, I have sought to make this reflection an invitation to dialogue among all people of good will" (#6). In sum and substance, it provides a clear direction to all women and men, irrespective of their religious/ideological beliefs,

that if we are sincere about addressing the realities of today- 'Fratelli Tutti' is the path we must walk together.

'Fratelli Tutti' provides a road map for all to become more fraternal in deed! Jesus tells his disciples, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). The Encyclical emphasises key dimensions of this witnessing. These include the fundamental one, that the dignity of every person is paramount. "Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally; this fundamental right cannot be denied by any country. People have this right even if they are unproductive, or were born with or developed limitations. This does not detract from their great dignity as human persons, a dignity based not on circumstances but on the intrinsic worth of their being. Unless this basic principle is upheld, there will be no future

either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity” (#107).

On 3 February 2023, the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus under the leadership of its Secretary Fr Xavier Jeyaraj, organised a global webinar ‘Fraternity @ Frontiers’ which launched an interactive global map of Jesuit Social Centres. In an insightful address on the occasion Fr Arturo Sosa, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus said, “We celebrate the happy coincidence of the launch of the interactive map on the eve of the Third International Day of Human Fraternity, a day in which the UN recognizes the gesture of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in signing the important joint document on Human Fraternity, on February 4, 2019. The document invites us to make all this “the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of education and training, so that it may help to create new generations that bring good and peace, and defend everywhere the rights of the oppressed and the least.” In keeping with the vision of the ‘Day of Fraternity’ Fr Arturo was clear that every Jesuit, every ministry (and every single person of course), must move beyond their exclusiveness, transcend narrowness, network and collaborate much more if one truly intends creating an impact! It was a radical call for fraternity with those at the frontiers and with those who live on the peripheries of our dehumanized world!

Very significantly, at the beginning of the Webinar a beautiful and meaningful prayer which was first presented by Cardinal Dearden in 1979 and quoted by Pope Francis in 2015, was read out; an extract reads:

“We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete,

divisiveness and discrimination, xenophobia and exclusiveness seem to gain greater traction and legitimacy. Pope Francis recently said that “Fraternity, means reaching out to others, respecting them, and listening to them with an open heart.” He expressed the hope that Christians will take concrete steps, together with the believers of other religions and people of goodwill “to affirm



but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own”.

So apt! So relevant – to help us understand why we must have the courage to play a more determining role in our world of today in which hate and violence,

that today is a time of fraternity, avoiding fuelling clashes, divisions, and closures.... Let us pray and commit ourselves every day, so that we may all live in peace as brothers and sisters.” This ‘International Day of Human Fraternity’ is therefore a wake-up call to all – to be courageous in defending and promoting justice and the rights of all, so that in sustainable peace, we can truly live as sisters and brothers in dignity, equity and love in this our common home!



THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS IS FREEDOM

Freedom guaranteed by the Constitution has steadfastly been curtailed in India so much so that we forget freedom of speech, expression, religion & belief, food, thought and act



Don Aguiar
President, ALL INDIA
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At the Republic Day in India this year, far-right Hindu narratives became more mainstream and brazen than last year. Hindu nationalist narratives dominate the political and mainstream media discourse in India clamping the Constitutional freedom guaranteed to all citizens and in particular to the minorities.

When Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014 with the powerful Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hindu-centric narratives took centre stage in mainstream media. The BJP came to power by saying that “Hindus are demographically and culturally threatened by Muslims and Christians,” even though nearly four out of five Indians identify as Hindu. Figures aside, Indian Christian, and Muslim, alongside other religious minorities, have contributed for centuries to build the melting pot of cultures that India is today.

As India is home to dozens of cultures and languages, the BJP has used “Hindutva” to cast a wide net for Hindu voters. Hindutva is an ideology that fuses Indian and Hindu identities

to create an ethno-religious state and actively discards India’s secularist values that are enshrined in the constitution. Hindutva is the belief that India is inherently a Hindu nation, and this narrative poses a risk of ethnic cleansing to Indian Christians, Muslims and other minorities. Centring Hindu supremacy, and its corollary, Christian conversion and Islamophobia, is also politically convenient in concealing the country’s worsening economic or political issues.

The BJP’s grasp on power hinders the development of a credible political opposition and the controlled press, so there is not much room for diverse content and narratives. Critics and journalists who express different views than those of the government are dubbed anti-national, threatened or jailed.

Hindutva also has the potential to spill over and encompass expansionist ideologies. After Russia attacked Ukraine, the same groups that promote Hindutva immediately shared narratives about a “United India,” which would en globe other South

Asian countries - particularly Pakistan - and the disputed territories of Kashmir. This discourse was trending in India and could potentially be reignited by future triggers.

Modi and other politicians who push for Hindutva are seen as alpha male leaders who can make India a world superpower and lead the country to prosperity.

This year 2023, India will be hosting the G20 Summit in New Delhi. The event will probably boost pro-Modi narratives that paint the Prime Minister as a superhero on the global scene and the BJP as India’s saviour. There will also be key legislative elections in 10 States, which might see a hardening of narratives that portray Indian Muslims and Christians as outsiders.

Even though Modi may try to clean up his image internationally, a common narrative is that India is a sovereign nation and usually has the ‘no one can tell us what to do’ attitude.

India is a big economic market and is seen as a stable government in South Asia to do business with, particularly with

Silicon Valley. This means that despite the hardening of these harmful narratives and an emboldened right-wing population that is flaunting minority rights, clamping the Constitutional freedom guaranteed to all citizens, worsening economic issues, Modi, his government, and his followers might get away with what they are doing.

This is the time of the year when we mindlessly turn into evangelists of fads. Maimed in our thinking of Modi's false promises and cut throat capitalism, we bite the hands that feed us and vote into power the very politicians that are predatory towards our own strata in society. We worship at temples, synagogues, mosques and churches where ministers and priests, in the name of God, lace sermons with social commentary advocating the stripping of human rights, and reducing us into hapless folks.

And this takes us to this incident from the rest house adjacent to the Kombaru sanctuary in Karnataka! -

A leopard was chasing the dog. The dog entered the toilet through a window. The toilet was closed from the outside. The leopard entered behind the dog, and both got stuck in the toilet. When the dog saw the leopard, he panicked and quietly sat in one corner. He didn't even dare to bark.

Even though the leopard was hungry and was chasing the dog, he didn't eat the dog. He could have had his dinner by tearing off the dog in one leap.

But the two animals were together in different corners for almost twelve hours. During these twelve hours, the leopard was also quiet. The forest department zeroed in on the leopard and captured him using a remote injection gun (a form of veterinary anaesthesia).

Now the question is, why didn't the hungry leopard tear off the dog when it was easily possible?

The wildlife researchers responded to this question: According to them, wildlife is very sensitive to its freedom. As soon

as they realize their liberty has been taken away, they can feel deep sorrow, so much so that they can forget their hunger. Their natural motivation to feed the stomach begins to fade away.

As humans we too need freedom in various ways... freedom of speech, expression, religion & belief, food, thought and act, but if our liberty is taken away we forget the need for freedom...

If we look at the idea of freedom more broadly, it is connected with happiness!!! And the secret of happiness is freedom. Freedom and happiness are connected. Freedom to think, act and live in a way that we wish.

From 2014 onwards freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution have steadfastly been curtailed in India resulting in the global happiness index of India dropping very near the bottom as the liberty of the people in India are taken away, so much so that they forget freedom of speech, expression, religion & belief, food, thought and act... But just follow and support the Prime Minister and his party blindly.

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A CHRISTIAN PROTEST

On the morning of 27th December 2022, three tribal Christian women were “summoned” to a village meeting and asked to leave their faith. Upon their refusal, they were publicly stripped and beaten up.

“An Attack on One Innocent Victim is an Attack on All of Humanity”: over 15,000 gathered in Delhi to peacefully protest the atrocities being carried out on Christians nationwide. The Delhi NCR Christian community would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to the members of the community, its leaders, various like-minded groups and the media for their spirited participation in the peaceful protest on Sunday, to highlight the hate and violence being propagated against Christians across the nation. According to reports by human rights group United Christian Forum (UCF), in 2015, only 142 verified incidents were reported on its helpline. In stark contrast, members of the Christian community faced hostility and violence in several forms in 505 incidents in 2021, and 598 incidents in the calendar year 2022. In the 31 days of January, this number had already reached 57 – almost two incidents reported per day on an average. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka remain states of concern because of the continuously rising incidents of hate and violence against the community there. Incidents have been recorded by other groups such as the EFI, and the US based



Dr John Dayal

FIACONA, put the figure higher, with the NRI documenters listing over 1200 incidents.

“The protest is not so much to oppose, as much as it is to bring to the authorities’ notice – to the government, the Supreme Court and local authorities – this sharp rise in the violence against Christians on a national scale”, said senior writer and activist Dr John Dayal, the official spokesman, in the press conference leading to the rally. “While the community continues to have faith in the leadership and the legal system of the nation, it makes a heartfelt and earnest appeal to fellow citizens to stand in empathy and solidarity with it, to raise their voices at the targeted, violent and organised injustice happening across the nation against their brothers and sisters, outraging their religious freedom and inherent dignity”, he had said.

Wearing white or their traditional attire and donning black armbands, the gathering of over 15,000 on Sunday comprised of

members of over 80 churches, including every major national denomination and Rite, youth, church leaders, musicians, lawyers, human rights activists, educationists, and other professionals. The protest also saw various ethnic Christian groups from the Chhota-Nagpur region of central India, Punjab, Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and North East states offering songs of worship and encouragement in many different languages and musical styles. Many regional languages, as a matter of historical record, have survived and been strengthened because of the education brought to these regions by missionaries and the translation of the Bible in even the smaller mother tongues.

Bhupendra Kora, an activist from Chhattisgarh, gave a first-hand account of the atrocities the Christian Adivasis from the Narayanpur area have been facing. In December 2022, more than a thousand of them were, in a seemingly organised attack, hounded out of their ancestral homes and villages. They were presented with three hostile choices – perform “ghar wapsi”, leave the village, or be killed. Those who refused to budge were assaulted, their homes and places of worship destroyed, their harvest burnt and their livestock



slain and consumed. Essentially, there was nothing left for them to come home to. Add to that the insensitivity from the authorities, the hostility from their own kin and folk, and the slow provision of relief – these tribal Christians had no option left except to live in hiding in the forest.

On the morning of 27th December 2022, three tribal Christian women were “summoned” to a village meeting and asked to leave their faith. Upon their refusal, they were publicly stripped and beaten up. A complaint of the same has been filed with the local authorities and the National Commission for Women. On 2nd January, a mob vandalised a Catholic Church, the statue of Jesus Christ and a grotto of Mother Mary in Edka village in the district. The school in the same campus was functioning when the perpetrators attacked the church. Even though the High Court, on 4th January 2023 and then again on 11th January

2023, directed the government to provide relief to these displaced people in government camps set up in the area, most tribals chose to remain in hiding, fearing being forced back to their village after some days. Many of them say that they want to return to their ancestral land and their regular lives, but seek police protection and action against the perpetrators.

Kora also highlighted how the basic human rights and sanctity of belief of Christians are trampled upon in the state – sometimes by cutting of fundamental needs such as food and water, and not allowing grieving families to bury their departed on their own land. Several fact-finding reports have highlighted these human rights violations in the states. From the state of Uttar Pradesh, Patsy David, an activist with working extensively with victims of religious violence, and Shivdesh, a Christian from Fatehpur (where a highly covered

case of alleged forced conversion has been ongoing since last year) spoke about their experiences as Christians living in the state of Uttar Pradesh, a state where its 2021-enacted anti-conversion law is often invoked against minorities, and from where the maximum incidents of persecution are reported. The UCF report claimed that 186 out of the total 598 incidents of 2022 were reported from here. The same report also claimed that out of the 74 cases registered against Christians under anti-conversion laws nationwide, 56 came from UP – meaning three out of four cases.

Shivdesh recounted his own nightmare starting with the mob attack on the evening of Maundy Thursday (14 April 2022), and how the community there was wrongly accused of forced conversion. He also spoke about how his family faced insensitivity from the authorities even as he was arrested and had to spend 25

days in jail under inhuman conditions. Patsy David highlighted the fact that the original FIR, under which over 50 Christians from Fatehpur (including an 11-year old girl) had been arrested and harassed by the police, has been declared unmaintainable by the Allahabad High Court, on the grounds of not being filed by an aggrieved person, rather a member of a local vigilante group.

David also shed light on another bizarre incident where an FIR was lodged in 2022 against a Christian who had died over two years ago, which raises questions at the investigation processes (or the lack thereof) and competency of the local authorities. In the first 50 days of 2023, David claimed that over 40 such incidents of violence against Christians had been reported in Uttar Pradesh. Besides atrocities being dished out against minorities on the ground, they are being targeted systemically also. Since 2017, eight states have enacted or re-enacted anti-conversion laws which are often misused by religious fanatics and Hindutva proponents to target minorities for their faith. There is also a petition re-filed in the Supreme Court for the third time, seeking measures to curb “forced conversions” at a national level. This petition is plagued with baseless allegation and unverified social media “findings” and several minority groups have filed applications against it. In the last hearing, the Supreme Court directed the petitioner to withdraw an additional affidavit containing false claims. The Court is also contemplating tagging all challenges to anti-conversion laws in various High Courts with this petition.


A petition filed in the Supreme Court also highlights the incidents of violence against

Christians, asking the Court for directions to mitigate the violence, referencing Union of India vs Tehseen Poonawala as precedent. In the matter, the Court has directed the Centre to verify and submit a report on the list of incidents in the top eight states as mentioned in the petition. Another matter being heard for almost two decades now is the challenge to the discriminatory Presidential Order of 1950, which only bestows benefits and protections on Dalits of Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist faiths, while overlooking the Dalit members of the Christian and Muslim faiths. Even though several committees instituted through the years have comprehensively concluded that the discrimination and atrocities faced by all Dalit groups, regardless of their religion are more or less similar, the Supreme Court is yet to deliver a verdict on the matter.

A memorandum prepared on the basis of the findings of various watchdog groups was signed by Christian leaders and would soon be presented to President Droupadi Murmu, along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and various other government dignitaries in the Union and State governments. The memorandum seeks justice from the government against senseless violence against Christians, guidelines to better equip law enforcement authorities to offer protection, and stricter measures against the divisive vigilante groups currently trying to inhibit religious freedom in the nation and enjoying impunity while at it. To these ends, the following recommendations were made in the memorandum:

a. Strengthen human rights monitoring mechanisms, including the National Com-

mission for Minorities and the National Human Rights Commission.

- b. Constitute a National/State Redressal Commission/s headed by a retired Supreme Court Judge with representation of the community and civil society to address the issues of targeted violence against minorities.
- c. Speedy closure of cases where false allegations have been levied against Christians, for instance in the case of Late Fr. Stan Swamy who died in prison and many others who continue to face wrongful detentions and prosecutions.
- d. Reconstruction of illegally demolished churches across the country.
- e. Appropriate and adequate compensation to Christian individuals and institutions who are targeted for their religious identity, under the central and state victim compensation schemes.
- f. Strict action against vigilante mobs who round up individuals, trespass private property belonging to churches, Christians or persons of other religions who also have their faith in Lord Jesus Christ or raise communal slogans outside police station premises, on the pretext of forcible religious conversions.
- g. Basic preliminary investigation may necessarily be conducted by the police in cases alleging religious conversions before the registration of FIRs.
- h. Installation of CCTV cameras in local police stations across India.
- i. FIRs may immediately be registered on receipt of complaints by victims of religion-based violence or discrimination. 

LENT: A TIME FOR AN EXTRA-STEP!



Sr Lini Sheeja MSC
Former Chief Editor
Prison Voice Magazine

The extra-steps of Jesus created history and gave life to many. Let our extra-steps be steps of life, hope and joy to the vulnerable, broken and rejected.

Lent: A Journey with God

Man is made out of dust and he returns to that same dust. We have not brought anything on our arrival into this world and we don't carry anything at our departure too. But how do we leave is the question placed before us on this Ash Wednesday, 22 February 2023, and in the season of Lent. What does it mean? It means the date from the time of Jesus! "A.D." stands for Anno Domini (Latin for "In the year of the Lord"), and it refers specifically to the birth of Jesus Christ whilst "B.C." means "before Christ." And this is the footprint that Jesus Christ left in this world. The season of Lent is a journey with this God who made history. This year on 22 February 2023 we begin the Season of Lent with the ashes on our foreheads and on 9 April 2023, we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord and proclaim that we are an Easter people. As we begin our 40 days journey, this article invites us to understand the depth of the journey that we are going to make.

Lent: A Walk with God to Calvary

On Ash Wednesday, as ashes are placed on our forehead in the shape of the cross, our 40 days of journey begins which will

culminate in the commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. As our inward journey begins, we receive the external sign of the cross with ashes. Lent is a journey of love with the one who came down to redeem us. Lent is a walk with God to Calvary and then to a new life. Lent is a joyful journey in which one embraces the cross with passion as Christ Himself did it. The Blessed Mother journeyed with Jesus to Calvary with a humble heart. Simon of Cyrene journeyed with Jesus by sharing the burden of his Cross. How are we journeying with Jesus? What are our resolutions for this Lent?

Lent: A Time for an Extra-Step!

Jesus took an extra step when He changed water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana. Jesus took an extra step when He healed the man born blind. Jesus took an extra step when He walked into the house of Jairus and raised his little daughter by taking her by the hand saying "Talitha Kum". Jesus took an extra step when He mentioned about the sinful woman to the Pharisees. Jesus took an extra step when He washed the feet of the disciples. Jesus took an extra step when He carried the Cross with love for your redemption

and mine. As we begin our Lenten Season with these ashes let us ask ourselves, what are those extra steps that God wants us to take? Do our extra-steps mean just going to church several times and making many Stations of the Cross or do they mean much more? The recent Pandemic, COVID-19, has taught us to be prepared to depart at any time. Our time is short. Every minute is precious. The extra-steps of Jesus created history and gave life to many. Let our extra-steps be steps of life, hope and joy to the vulnerable, broken and rejected.

Lent: A Journey of Repentance

Ash Wednesday – officially known as the Day of Ashes – is a day of repentance, when Christians confess their sins and profess their devotion to God. Chapters 1&2 from the Book of Genesis tell us that man and other living beings as well were made from the dust of the ground. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). And out of the ground, God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man (Genesis 2:19). After the fall of man through

sin (Genesis 3:17), the Lord God sent man out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 3:23). The Hebrew word for dust in Genesis 2:7 is 'aphar' which means clay, earth, mud, ashes, earth, ground, mortar, powder. Ashes symbolize both death and repentance because they stand for radical change. During this period, Christians show repentance and mourn for their sins, because they believe Christ died for them.

Lent: A Journey to Easter

Lent is the season leading up to Easter. By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. Lent is a 40-day season (not counting Sundays) marked by repentance, fasting, reflection, and ultimately a celebration. The 40-day period represents Christ's time of temptation in the wilderness where he fasted and was tempted by Satan. Over forty passages in the Bible associate ashes with mourning and grief. In Old Tes-

tament times people used ashes as a sign of repentance. They would sit in ashes, roll around in them, sprinkle them upon their heads, or even mingle them with their food and drink. They did this as an outward sign of their inward posture of repentance. To repent, put simply, means to turn away from sin and turn toward God. We use ashes as an outward expression of our need to begin again.

Lent: Three Pillars

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three pillars of Lent. Prayer is nothing, but gazing at the One who loves you unconditionally; spending time with the One who created us; adoring the One who redeemed us and praising the One who sanctified us. In the words of St. Teresa of Avila, "Prayer is nothing else than being in terms of friendship with God." Let us spend more time during this season of Lent in gazing at the Crucified God who bowed down humbly on the Cross. The second aspect is fasting. Jesus fasted for 40 days

and that gave him strength for His public ministry. Jesus withdrew Himself from the world to be united with His Father. There are many ways in which we can fast, besides abstaining from food. We can fast from gossips, fast from anger, fast from jealousy, fast from extravagant living and fast from indifference; similarly, we can fast from being deaf and blind to the needs of others. The third aspect is almsgiving. Jesus argued that the widow gave the most because while the rich gave only from their surplus, and thus did not sacrifice anything to God, the widow sacrificed greatly indeed. She had given "even all her living" (Mark 12:41-44). The two copper coins pleased the Lord. One need not be a millionaire to give alms, but your heart filled with compassion, eyes and heart open to the cry of the needy around you will do wonders. Jesus who appreciated the humble offering of the widow's two copper coins did wonders with two fish and five loaves of bread from a little boy.

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IMPACT OF OPTIMISM & PESSIMISM



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What is Optimism and Pessimism

Different outlooks on life can have a huge impact on our daily lives. Optimism and pessimism are two distinct attitudes that can profoundly shape how we view the world, how we approach obstacles, and how we interact with others. Optimists tend to look for the best in every situation and focus on positive thinking, while pessimists often see only the downside of any given situation, leading to negative thinking. Understanding what optimism vs pessimism looks like, is the key to maintaining a healthy balance of both in our lives. Optimism and Pessimism are two opposing mental attitudes or outlook on life. Optimism is defined as a hopeful and confident attitude about the future, while Pessimism is characterized by an overall negative outlook on life, expecting the worst possible outcome

from any situation. Both attitudes have their own set of advantages and disadvantages when it comes to dealing with difficult situations in life.

Defining Optimism and Pessimism

Optimism and pessimism are two sides of the same coin. Optimism is the belief that things will turn out for the best, while pessimism is the belief that things will turn out for the worst. Both outlooks can be seen as a way of interpreting and responding to life events. Optimists tend to focus on the positive aspects of life, while pessimists focus more on potential negatives. Optimists are more likely to take risks, be proactive, and look for solutions, whereas pessimists may feel overwhelmed by negative thoughts and emotions. Both outlooks have their advantages and disadvantages, but it's impor-

tant to remember that how we approach life can have an impact on our overall well-being. It's up to us to decide which outlook works best for us in order to live a happier and healthier life. Optimism is the belief that things will turn out for the best. It's a healthy outlook that focuses on the big picture and looks for potential solutions. It can also be seen as optimistic thinking, which is a strategy of interpreting and responding to life events. Pessimism is the belief that things will turn out for the worst. This perspective focuses on potential negatives and can lead to self-pity, fear, anxiety, pessimism, depression and often anxiety disorders like generalized anxiety disorder or panic disorder with agoraphobia.

The Pros & Cons of Being an Optimist or a Pessimist

Being an optimist or a pessi-



Half
full

Half
empty

mist can have a profound effect on our lives. Optimists tend to be more successful in their careers, while pessimists often struggle to find motivation in difficult times. But there are both pros and cons to each approach. On the one hand, optimists can find joy and success in life more easily, but on the other hand, they may be too optimistic and overlook potential obstacles or dangers. Similarly, pessimists may be better prepared for challenges but may also miss out on opportunities due to their negative outlook. In this article, we will explore the pros and cons of being an optimist or a pessimist.

The Benefits of Being an Optimist

Being an optimist can bring a lot of positive benefits to your life. Optimism can help you stay motivated and focused on the things that matter, even when faced with challenges. It can also give you the courage to take risks and try new things, which often leads to success. Additionally, being an optimist can help you build strong relationships with others as it encour-

ages open communication and understanding. Finally, optimism can increase your overall happiness by helping you focus on the good in life rather than the bad. With all these benefits in mind, it's clear why being an optimist is so important! Try to maintain a positive attitude even though setbacks can happen; it's important to focus on what you can do rather than what you cannot do. You will find it much easier to accomplish your goals when you maintain a positive attitude.

The Pitfalls of Being a Pessimist

Being a pessimist can have serious consequences on our lives. It can lead to feelings of hopelessness, depression, and anxiety that can affect our relationships, career prospects, and overall well-being. It's important to recognize the pitfalls of being a pessimist so that we can take steps to improve our outlook on life. Pessimism has been linked to higher levels of stress, which in turn can lead to physical health issues such as high blood pressure and heart disease. Additionally, pessimistic people often find it difficult to

form meaningful relationships with others due to their negative attitude towards life in general. Furthermore, pessimism can also lead to career stagnation as it is difficult for pessimistic people to see the potential opportunities that come their way. By understanding the pitfalls of being a pessimist and taking steps towards overcoming this outlook on life, we can ensure that we are living our best lives possible.

Building Resilience and Positive Thinking through Reframing Your Outlook

Reframing your outlook is a powerful tool to increase resilience and positive thinking. It helps us to look at our current situation from different angles, enabling us to gain new perspectives and insights. Reframing also helps us to build an attitude of gratitude and optimism, which can help us stay motivated when facing difficult challenges. By reframing our outlook, we can learn how to accept the things that are out of our control and focus on the things that we can influence. This, in turn, helps us develop the mental strength

needed to cope with life's uncertainties.

Positive Thinking through Reframing Your Outlook is a powerful tool that can help individuals develop greater mental strength and resilience. By restructuring the way you interpret your experiences, you can rewire your thinking patterns to become more optimistic and better adjusted to life's challenges. Reframing your outlook allows you to view difficult situations in a more positive light, helping you to develop more effective problem-solving skills and foster an attitude of gratitude for the good things in life. This technique has been proven to be an invaluable tool for cultivating greater emotional well-being, improving relationships, and enhancing the overall quality of life.

How to Develop a Balanced Perspective Between the Two Mindsets

Developing a balanced perspective between the two mindsets of creative and analytical thinking is essential for success in today's world. Creative thinkers are able to come up with innovative solutions to problems, while analytical thinkers are able to analyze data and information to make informed decisions. By combining the two mindsets, individuals can develop an effective approach to problem-solving and decision-making. In order to develop a balanced perspective between the two mindsets, it is important to understand how they work together. Creative thinking encourages people to think outside of the box and come up with unique solutions that may not have been considered before. Analytical thinking helps people evaluate data and information objectively in order to make informed decisions. By

understanding how each mindset works, individuals can learn how they can work together in order to develop an effective approach for solving problems or making decisions.

Finding a balance between the two mindsets is an important part of personal and professional success. In order to find this equilibrium, it is essential to understand the differences between fixed and growth mindsets. The fixed mindset believes that we are predefined by our abilities and talents, whereas the growth mindset focuses on developing our skills through hard work, learning from mistakes and taking action. To reach a balance, it is important to recognize when a fixed mindset might be more beneficial while also embracing the possibility of growing beyond our current capabilities with a growth mindset. With consistency and effort, we can achieve a balanced approach that will help us progress both personally.

Using Optimistic Thinking to Achieve Your Goals

Optimistic thinking is the key to achieving your goals and turning your dreams into reality. It can help you stay motivated and focused on the path you have chosen, no matter how difficult it may seem. With an optimistic outlook, you can use positive affirmations and visualizations to manifest what you want. Optimism can also be used to build resilience in difficult times, as it helps us to look at a situation from a different perspective and find solutions that we may not have thought of before. By using optimistic thinking, we can create our own success story by setting realistic goals and taking action towards them every day. Affirmations are a powerful tool to help us change our mindset and

improve our life. The power of affirmations is that they are internal, so we don't have to worry about anyone else's perspective. They should be used as a way of gaining clarity on what you want your life to look like, and once you have it in mind, using them regularly will help manifest your goals into reality. Here are some positive affirmations for when you need some encouragement: "I am confident." "Everything is going my way." "I am happy."

The Power of Positive Self-Talk and Affirmations

Positive self-talk and affirmations are powerful tools for improving mental health and well-being. They can help to reduce stress, increase self-confidence, and even improve physical health. By speaking positively to ourselves, we can create a positive mindset that will help us face life's challenges with greater resilience. Affirmations are also helpful in changing our thought patterns and behaviors so that we can live a more fulfilling life. In this article, we'll explore the power of positive self-talk and affirmations for mental health and well-being. An affirmation is a statement that helps to strengthen our confidence and self-esteem. It is usually said out loud or to oneself when feeling anxious, stressed, angry, or depressed. Affirmations can be short phrases or long sentences that express the energies we want to align within our lives. They are commonly used in personal development and self-improvement programs, where they can help us recognize core values and desires that will help us live fulfilling lives. They might also be used as part of spiritual practices like mindfulness meditation, yoga, prayer, and reading spiritual texts.



'WALKING TOGETHER': AN EXPERIENCE OF SYNODALITY



**Shaji George
Kochuthara CMI**

Our synodal journey must be characterised by empathy and we need to adopt a paradigm shift of being partners from being followers.



**Joby
Kochumuttom CMI**

“The synod shall not end as a romance. May it hurt us. From the sugar-coating let us move to the bitter medicine,” said Cardinal Anthony Poola of Hyderabad, India, presiding over the inaugural session of the conference, “Towards a Synodal Church—Moving Forward,” held at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Pontifical Athenaeum, Bangalore, India, from 12th to 15th January 2023.

Situating the conference in the socio-political-cultural context of India, Cardinal Poola pointed out that “differentiation, demonization, and distortion are the trends that are prevalent today in the social, political, and cultural contexts of India.” Besides, even in the Church, we “differentiate in terms of rite, language, and caste, demonise the other, and distort doctrines to suit our convenience.” He underscored that “our synodal journey must be characterised by empathy” and urged to “adopt a paradigm shift of being partners from being followers.

A synodal Church assures the participation of each member, without discriminating anyone, listens to one another, learning

from one another, taking responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel. It is about a path taken together, People of God walking together, “journeying together,” under the guidance of the Risen Lord, inspired by the Holy Spirit. For the participants of the conference, it was a true experience of “journeying together,” “walking together,” listening to each other and learning from each other how to make the Church more synodal. The had three main emphases: synodality in the global Church; Asian Churches; Indian Churches. There were about 250 participants from all the continents, from more than 30 countries. Besides, about 500 students and staff members of DVK participated in the conference.

The conference, which was organised as a joint venture of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, and Chavara Central Secretariat, Kochi, had many reputed institutions from various continents as event partners: Archdiocese of Köln; Boston College, USA; Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC); Christ (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore, India;

Durham University—Centre for Catholic Studies, UK; Faculty of Theology, University of Tübingen, Germany; Faculty of Theology, University of Malta; Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven; Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya, Institut für Katholische Theologie, Universität Osnabrück, Germany; Institute of Missiology of Mission, Aachen; Jnana Deepa, Pune, India; Missio, München, Spiritan University College, KUMASI Ghana; Tilburg University—Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Netherlands. An Academic Committee, consisting of members mainly from the partner institutions, and other experts developed the conceptual framework and logistics of the conference. The participants were mostly theologians, from the partner institutions and many other institutions. At the same time, a good number of lay faithful, pastoral workers, youth leaders, religious, major superiors and members of the hierarchy also participated in the conference.

According to Sr Nathalie Beccart, the undersecretary of the Vatican Synod office, who deliv-



ered the orientation talk, “Walking together, as protagonists, is really the constitutive way of a synodal church.” Co-responsibility of all the faithful in the mission of the Church rooted in the baptismal vocation is the basis of synodality. “This sense of building up our communion should be the criteria we use to measure the success of our processes rather than immediate results with quick consequences.” Besides, “Synodality offers a path that builds and strengthens our relationships ad intra and ad extra,” underscored Sr Becquart.

Cardinal Cleemis Mar Baselios, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Church emphasised the significance of listening in the synodal process: “In this listening process, the voice of everyone in the Church is heard... synodality is an invitation for the whole Church to have our voices heard. Once everyone in the Church listens to each other and so everyone is heard, the walking-together in the Church becomes a possibility and a reality.” He continued to affirm that, “This process of listening to each other, in turn, brings about dialogues, which ultimately function as catalysts for a synodal journey with all those who are within the Church and also outside the Church.”

Fr Dr Thomas Chathamparampil, CMI, the Prior General of the CMI Congregation, Monsignor Markus Hofmann

from the Archdiocese of Köln, Fr Dr Paul Achandy, the Rector of Dharmaram College, and Fr Joy Kakkanattu, the President of DVK also addressed the gathering during the inaugural session.

The four-day conference had four keynote addresses, 39 plenary papers, 60 concurrent session papers, 10 posters and two group discussions.

The first day focused on the biblical, philosophical, theological and pastoral foundations of synodality. In the first keynote, Rafael Luciani (Facultad de Teología, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello & Boston College) presented the theological foundations of synodality, inviting the participants to reflect on the Second Vatican Council ecclesiology of ‘People of God’, ‘Theology of the Local Church’ and on situation episcopal collegiality within ecclesial synodality. Luciani affirmed that “reforming a failed institutional model requires authentic theologico-pastoral conversion, re-creation, and re-education or re-learning.”

In the first plenary, Joy Kakkanattu and Sebastian Mulooparambil (DVK) dealt with the biblical resources of synodality, and Anthony Egan (Hekima, Nairobi) presented the pastoral dimension of synodality. Peter Hünemann (Tübingen University), delineating elements of synodality in the Fathers of the

Church and Ecumenical Council showed how it is an integral part of the tradition of the Church. The great Germany theologian who has significantly contributed to studies on Vatican Second and Ecumenical Councils concluded that, “In the patristic Fathers and their synods you find the true sense of synodality in the Church.”

Exploring the sociological and philosophical perspectives on synodality through the lens of José Casanova and Charles Taylor, Jeff Shawn Jose (DVK), opined that their works encourage a synodal Church to “listen [...] to the signs of the times” and engage in “networked listening” and “nodal listening.” According to him, the imagery of networked and nodal listening is evocative because the idea of a synodal church tends towards action. Raising three vital questions, “What kind of Church are we now? What kind of Church do we want to become? How do we get there?” Emmanuel Agius (Malta) discussed the ethical dimensions of synodality. For him, synodality is a journey of moral conversion, “a change of heart and mind which are the seat of one’s attitudes and dispositions towards oneself, towards others, the environment and God,” which implies institutional and structural conversion, cultivation of moral virtues and character formation. While

appreciating the possibility of dialogue between theology and canon law through the inclusion of a plenary paper in the conference, Myriam Wijlens (Universität Erfurt) pointed out that, “Canon lawyers can testify that no structure in itself will bring about a church characterized by synodality... Indispensable is an internal disposition, an appreciation and willingness to accept and live synodality with all it entails.” She affirmed that, history of canon law reveals that “development in law occurs due to innovative interpretation or regularly granting of dispensations.”

Preparing future priests for making the Church more synodal is of vital importance. Often there are apprehensions that many priests consider synodality as a threat to their power. Others point out that this is a misconception of the power and role of the Church; rather the priests should redefine their leadership role in the Church, and learn to animate the active involvement and participation of all the faithful. In the plenary on “Seminary Formation for a Synodal Church,” Dominic Tomuseni, SJ, (Hekima College, Nairobi), Mathew Illathuparampil (St Mary’s Institute of Science and Technology, Palakkad), and Davis Varayilan (Samanvaya Theological College, Bhopal) argued for the need of preparing the seminarians for more listening and dialogue, the involvement of lay people in the seminary formation, and to make them aware of the dangers of clericalism. James F. Keenan, who chaired the session also emphasised the importance of overcoming clericalism and developing new styles of leadership.

On the Second Day, the keynote address was given by Massimo Faggioli (Villanova University) on Synodality

as Ressourcement and Aggiornamento of the Ecclesiology of Vatican II. In the following plenary, Margit Eckholt, (Universität Osnabrück), Marcel Sarot (Tilburg University), and Serena Noceti (Facoltà Teologica dell’Italia Centrale, Firenze) discussed how synodality is founded on the theology of Vatican II.

“Synodality is seen as not only a newer pathway but as a reforming one, not only how we gather as church but how we see leadership in that gathering,” stated James F. Keenan, SJ (Boston College) in plenary 5. Addressing “Leadership in a Synodal Church,” he underscored how hierarchicalism, rather than clericalism, is the real enemy of synodality, distinguishing the “toxic culture of hierarchicalism from a culture of servant leadership.” HE concluded that “we look for a model of leadership in synodality by looking to other cultures that promote listening, searching and moving forward.” Christina Kheng (East Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila) developing synodality at the diocesan and parish levels is crucial if it is to become a lived reality, and offered several suggestions for action, entailing certain paradigm shifts. Joris Geldhof (KU Leuven) Spirituality of Communion in a Synodal Church, especially based on the eucharistic liturgy.

The following plenary presented models of a synodal Church from various continents: Francis Appiah-Kubi (Kwame Nkrumah University, Ghana): Africa; James McEvoy (Australian Catholic University): Australia; Thomas Fernet-Ponse (Institute of Missiology, Aachen): Central Europe; Carlo Calleja (University of Malta): Southern Europe; Carlos Schickendantz (Alberto Hurtado University, Chile): Latin America; Jaisy Joseph (Villanova University): United States of America.

This sharing helped to understand the developments towards a more synodal Church on the global level, in various continents and countries, to evaluate the progress made, and obstacles and oppositions. This was an occasion to listen to different models, to learn from each other, and to encourage each other in “walking together” in the synodal path.

In the third keynote [Day 3] Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR (Sancta Maria, Sri Lanka) highlighted some constituent elements of synodality that have been present in Asian socio-cultural-religious ethos for generations, the ancient synods and synodal ways of life in the early Church communities in Asia. He also referred to such practices present even now in quite a number of Oriental Christian churches in Asia. In light of FABC insights, Tirimanna concludes that “most of the fundamental core elements of synodality are present in Asian socio-cultural realities themselves which the FABC teachings have tapped as their main contextual sources.”

Plenary 7 presented Asian models and initiatives of synodality: Estela Padilla (Philippines): Philippines; Teresa Choi (Sogang University): South Korea; Clarence Devadas (Catholic Research Centre): Malaysia, Singapore; Jeffrey Chang (Fu Jen Faculty of Theology of St Robert Bellarmine, Taiwan): Taiwan, China, Hong Kong; Ignatius Loyola Madya Utama (Yogyakarta Pastoral Centre, Yogyakarta): Indonesia.

Plenary 8 dealt with Synodality in the Indian Church, listening to experts from the three rites/individual Churches in India. Pauly Maniyattu (St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kerala) presented the Synodal Structures in the Syro-Malabar Church, with

Special Focus on Palliyogam, which is a participatory body of representatives from all the families in the parish. Joseph Valliyattu (St Mary's Malankara Seminary, Trivandrum) spoke on synodality in the Syro-Malankara Church, and Francis Gonsalves (Jnana-Deepa, Pune) discussed synodality in the Latin Rite Church in India.

In the same session, Jaya Therese, CHF (Bangalore) discussed how gender equality is a "precondition" for building up a more Synodal Church in India. In fact, the question of gender equality, and women's role in the Church to make it truly synodal was repeatedly raised in various sessions. This issue was particularly raised by those from Asian countries. Many from the West said that they never imagined that women from India and other Asian countries were so strongly feeling about their role in the Church and they were so courageous to express their feelings, including their criticism about the actual situation in the Church. As Maria Isabel Gil Espinosa, a participant from Bogota, Colombia has said, "An important cry at this conference was about how women, both consecrated and lay, can develop our identity of being Church in an effective and efficient way (because it is not a matter of simple collaboration)."


Continuing the discussion on the Indian Church, Plenary 9 was a Panel Discussion on "What Can I Do to Make the Indian Church More Synodal?" The panellists were Bishop Allwyn D'Silva (Auxiliary Bishop of Bombay), Fr Felix Noronha (Parish Priest), Fr Thomas Thekkel, CMI (Provincial, St Thomas Province), Sr Helen Saldanha, SsPS (Streevani, Pune), Astrid Lobo Gajiwala (Bombay), and Fr Maria Arul Raja A., SJ (Arul Kadal, Chennai).

On Day 4, the final plenary focussed on dialogue as the key to a synodal Church. Archbishop Anil Joseph Thomas Couto (Delhi), reflected on ecumenical perspectives of synodality. Edmund Chia (Australian Catholic University) presented the implications of being a Synodal Church in a multi-cultural, Multi-Religious society. He affirmed that, "A Synodal Church is one which supports its members in their engagement with the religious and cultural "other" in view of birthing a world where the "People of God" are not only welcoming all the Peoples of God, ... considering them as brothers and sisters and wanting to live harmoniously with them for the good and blessings of humanity and the peace and prosperity..." Delfo C. Canceran, OP (University of Santo Tomas, Manila) elaborated upon how a synodal Church should respond to the poor and the marginalised. The final keynote, on the challenges of journeying together, was given by Sr D.J. Margaret Devadoss (Our Lady's Centre, Chennai). She invited the members of the Church to "promote a synodal Church that is more caring, more available, with priests who are more approachable and with people who are more responsible."

The concluding message of the conference was delivered by Archbishop Joseph Pamplany (Thalassery). Bishop Rudolf Voderholzer (Regensburg), Josey Thamarassery, CMI, (Vicar General), Thomas Kollampampil, CMI (Member, Theological Commission of the Synod), and James F. Keenan, SJ also addressed the gathering during the concluding session.

The conference was a profound experience of the desire to move forward in spite of the differences and diversity of contexts, oppositions and obstacles. The

determination to walk together, to 'journey together', sharing the common vocation, participating in the mission of the Church, taking responsibility of each one's unique charism was visible. People felt the freedom to express their ideas, perspectives, criticisms, but at the same time, with listening ears and hearts. Multi-cultural, multi-religious context of India, and the presence of different Individual Churches/Rites in India provided a suitable ambience for the reflections on synodality in Bangalore. For many from the West, it also provided an opportunity to go beyond the Northern paradigm in theological thinking on synodality, entering into a dialogue between different cultures and traditions, experiencing that the Church is global and local at the same time. As Peter Knox from Hekima College, Nairobi said, the conference "was a great privilege to listen to people from all over the world talking about their experiences and hopes." In a global Church, reflections on renewal can and should take place in different contexts and places in a profound spirit of dialogue, listening to each other and learning from each other. The Eucharistic celebrations were in different rites: Latin Rite (Archbishop Peter Machado, Bangalore), Syro-Malankara (Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios, Mavelikkara), and Syro-Malabar (Thomas Chathamparampil, CMI, Prior General). Eucharistic liturgy in different rites was a unique experience for many participants, and thus an experience of unity in diversity of the Church and of the Church as a communion of Churches.

The conference also envisages follow up programmes by publishing the conference papers, and by making available the videos of the plenary sessions and short (video) interviews by experts. 

LATIN AMERICA: AN INKLING OF THE 'CHUNK' OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

As Latin America is home to more than 44 percent of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, it is quite a 'chunk' out of the Universal Church.



Alex Ozhukayil MCBS

Before being elected as the first ever Latin American Pope on March 23, 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio had spent 76 years almost continuously in Latin America. He acknowledged this in his opening greeting, saying he had been chosen from "the ends of the earth." Those 76 years lived in Argentina, replete with pastoral, educational and Episcopal ties, more or less explicitly deepened his knowledge of the Latin American regional context. They appear today as the fabric that supports and informs many of the messages the pope has addressed to that region, and also to the rest of the world.

It has been almost 10 years since we have one Latin American Pope. That one man who lived for such a long time in that region now addresses the whole world as the head of the Catholic Church. His attitudes, reflections and way of life bring freely to us a nutshell of that region. No one else can brief them to the rest of the world in a simple way as Pope Francis. It's interesting and worthwhile spending some time to get to know of

this wonderful region on the planet. In this article I would like to pen you in general about 'the ends of the earth' - the Americas, few things of the origin of Latin America and the arrival of Christianity in the region. As Latin America is home to more than 44 percent of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, it is quite a 'chunk' out of the Universal Church. The growth of the Catholic Church, the challenges and the resolutions in the present pastoral and missionary scenario in the Latin America are sequels to this article.

The Americas

The name 'America' is derived from that of the Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci, one of the earliest European explorers of the 'New World'. There is a confusion that the term 'America' generates. The term America originally was applied only to South America, but the designation soon was applied to the entire landmass. A first mistake involves mixing the terms "Latin America", "Hispanic America", "Iberia-America" and "South America". The first, by far the most popular, covers the twenty American countries with

languages derived from Latin, comprising a territorial range that goes from the extreme south to part of North America. The second is restricted to the eighteen nations originating from the former Spanish empire. The third adds Brazil to the so-called Hispanic America, drawing on a common Iberian ancestry. Finally, the fourth appeals to geographical criteria, referring to the twelve states located in the South American subcontinent, including Guyana and Suriname, whose cultural traditions are far different from that of the Latin family, a fact evidenced by their official languages derived from the branch Germanic. 'Latin America' is a cultural region in the Americas where Romance languages - languages derived from Latin - are predominantly spoken. As of March 2, 2020, the population of Latin America and the Caribbean was estimated at more than 652 million.

South America's 'Indians'

The Indigenous peoples of South America are the pre-



Colombian peoples of South America and their descendants. These peoples contrast with South Americans of European ancestry and those of African descent. The original natives of South America are believed to have descended from the same Asiatic peoples who migrated to North America and from Siberia during the most recent Ice Age. Few of the peoples, however, survived the arrival of the Europeans after 1500, most succumbing to disease on mixing with people of European (especially in Brazil) and African origin.

South America had an aboriginal population of more than 20 million and the greatest diversity of languages - more than 500 languages. These aboriginals in English are called 'Indians'. The South American Indian, is a member of any of the aboriginal peoples inhabiting the continent of South America. The Indians of Latin America still remain a significant part of the population of the region and in some of the countries (e.g., Peru and Venezuela) they are nearly or absolutely a majority. In South America, Indian populations declined rapidly

after coming into contact with the Europeans and, for the most part, have not increased appreciably since. The Spaniards imposed the Roman Catholic religion and tried to stamp out native beliefs and practices. By the privilege of the Padroado, granted by the Popes to the Crown of Portugal, missionaries reached Brazil too along with the Portuguese explorers.

Roman Catholic Church in Latin America

The colonial era in Latin America began in the 15th - 16th centuries. Both Portugal and Spain embarked on voyages of overseas exploration, following the Christian Reconquista of Iberia from the Muslims. The Roman Catholic Church soon established many missions in Latin America. Roman Catholicism is still the chief religion in most Latin American countries, though the number of protestants and Evangelicals has grown. Catholics in Latin America are a living, passionate and dynamic community, with great respect for human dignity, highly valuing the family and having a profound sense of community. All

these things are very positive. For the last five centuries the Catholic Church has enjoyed a religious monopoly in Latin America. Now, the accelerated rate at which its numbers are falling and the loss of influence that it is experiencing are both plain to see. In the early 1970s, 90% of Latin Americans considered themselves Catholic. Today, that number is at best 60%. Still Latin America is the most catholic region of the world. Despite its strength, the Church in Latin America is facing new challenges. There are major issues with poverty in the region, inequality and violent crime.

The Continent of Hope

On 12th December 2014, on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of all the Americas, the pope said in his homily that Latin America is the continent of hope. "Because it expects new models of development that combine Christian tradition and civil progress, justice and equality with reconciliation, scientific and technological development with human wisdom". Of course, Latin America is the continent of hope.

COMP



360 MILLION CHRISTIANS SUFFER HIGH LEVELS OF PERSECUTION

The Report of the “Open Doors” Evangelical Organization reveals that one out of every seven Christians worldwide is persecuted or discriminated because of his/her faith. More than 360 million Christians experience high levels of persecution and discrimination, according to the World Watch List of Persecution 2023. According to Ted Blake, Director of Open Doors in Spain, this figure is one out of five in Africa, two out of five in Asia and one out of 15 in Latin America. Sub-Saharan Africa is facing an enormous humanitarian disaster given the wave of religious violence, whose epicentre is in Nigeria. North Korea occupies the first place in the persecution of Christians, with the highest levels of persecution in its history. The other countries occupying the first places in the Report are: Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan. The total number of murdered Christians due to their faith decreased is 5,621. The total number of attacked churches under different levels of violence is 2,110. ■

CONSECRATED MEN AND WOMEN HAVE SPECIAL ROLE IN CHURCH'S MISSION: POPE

Pope Francis sends a message to the world's religious men and women for the World Day for Consecrated Life, and highlights the importance of their rich charisms on behalf of the mission of the Church. As the Church marks the 27th World Day for Consecrated Life, Pope Francis has encouraged world's religious men and women to go forward in their “prophetic mission” with the richness of their charisms. The annual observance was instituted in 1997 by Pope Saint John Paul II, and is celebrated on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2 February. The theme chosen this year was: “Brothers and Sisters for the mission”. In Rome, the Day was marked by a Eucharistic celebration in St Mary Major Basilica presided by the Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, who read out a message by Pope Francis addressed to consecrated men and women.. ■

US PANEL NOMINATES CARDINAL ZEN FOR NOBEL

A parliamentary commission on China in the United States has nominated six pro-democracy campaigners of Hong Kong including outspoken Cardinal Joseph Zen and jailed Catholic media tycoon Jimmy Lai for the Nobel Peace Prize. The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China announced the nomination in a press statement on Feb. 2, hailing the nominees as “ardent champions” of human rights and rule of law in the city. ■

POPE CALLS FOR GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AFTER CATASTROPHIC QUAKE IN TURKEY, SYRIA

Pope Francis appealed for global solidarity with Turkey and Syria following a devastating earthquake and thanked those risking their lives to help. About 41,000 people have been confirmed dead following Monday's 7.8 magnitude earthquake. The tragedy has sent shockwaves across the globe and world powers expressed condolences and promised to offer aid. ■

OVER 100 PRIESTS, NUNS PERSECUTED IN 2022

More than 100 priests and nuns were kidnapped, arrested, or killed worldwide in 2022, says a report referring to data from a papal foundation. Nigeria led the list as “one of the most dangerous countries in which to serve the Church” with the brutal murder of four priests last year, the Catholic Peace Broadcasting Corporation (CPBC) of South Korea reported on Feb. 7. The report uses data collected by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), a papal charity recording persecution of Christians globally, published in December. The report pointed out that it was “almost impossible” to know the number of Catholic bishops and priests detained in China in 2022. The ACN report also highlighted the murders of five women religious while they were engaged in their missionary activities. They were Sister Luisa Dell'Orto, in Haiti, in June; Sisters Mary Daniel Abut and Regina Roba, in South Sudan, in August; Sister Mari de Coppi, in Mozambique, in September; and Sister Marie-Sylvie Vakatsuraki, who was killed in October, in the DRC. In 2002 a total of 42 priests were kidnapped in different countries, of whom 36 have been released. ■



Bibin Ezhuplackal MCBS

CATECHISM OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Robert Cardinal Sarah

Robert Cardinal Sarah, a Guinean prelate of the Catholic Church, the Prefect emeritus of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in his authoritative book on the spiritual life - Catechism of the Spiritual Life - illustrates how to enter into and progress through the spiritual life. He records that the goal of this book is "to accompany all those who have set their hearts on responding to God's love with a full, happy, fruitful life that will culminate in the eternal happiness of contemplating Him." Written as a catechism of the spiritual life, this book is structured around the sacraments, prayer, asceticism and liturgy and infused with a single goal: to make us all aware that our Baptism is the beginning of a great conversion - the great return to the Father.

Cardinal Sarah invites you to journey with him through the Gospels and to discover the origin and meaning of each of the sacraments and how they are essential to helping you grow in your personal relationship with Jesus, foster your contemplative life, and flourish in communion with the Holy Trinity. You will learn about the mysteries of our Faith - from the importance of being baptized shortly after birth, and thereby "plunged into the paschal mystery," to receiving confirmation as a child so as to be open to the liberating action of the Holy Spirit.

The author reminds us that from the earliest centuries, Christians were willing to die in order to receive our Lord and celebrate the sacred mysteries and that God is always with us in His Sacrament of Love, waiting for us to receive Him with affection and dwell in His Presence. The sacraments, Cardinal Sarah makes clear, provide our itinerary to Heaven.

THE CORE OF CHRISTIANITY: REDISCOVERING AUTHENTIC UNITY AND PERSONAL WHOLENESS IN CHRIST

Neil T. Anderson

Neil T. Anderson is the founder and president of Freedom in Christ Ministries. He was formerly the chairman of the Practical Theology Department at Talbot School of Theology. He holds five degrees from Talbot, Pepperdine University and Arizona State University and has authored several bestselling books on spiritual freedom, including *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*. This bestselling author whose 2.5 million books are sold out has a passion for the Church and a desire to encourage each Christian's personal journey closer to the Heart of Jesus and His will. In his new book - *The Core of Christianity: Rediscovering Authentic Unity and Personal Wholeness in Christ* - Anderson addresses four tendencies that mislead Christians. He offers crystal clear biblical paths that readers can follow to overcome them.

1. Legalism--by growing in knowledge of God's truth and practicing grace

2. Liberalism--by respecting the authority of Scripture and refuting humanistic deception

3. Spiritism--by using spiritual discernment and resisting popular New Age beliefs and practices

4. False prophets--by relying on the Holy Spirit and not mistaking giftedness for divine authority

Anderson offers wisdom and direction to bring certainty and focus to a believer's life. Readers will learn to avoid the pitfalls of worldly teachings as they study key verses, find balance between extremes, follow God's will, and embrace examples of Christ-centered living. This is a well-written book especially from the observable position of Christian behaviour or tendencies as highlighted through grid approach to understanding the various practices and perspectives of individuals and groups. Neil used personal experiences to ultimately tie together the various elements into a clear picture of who God is, what He does and our response to Him and His church.

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Dr Paul Kunjanayil MCBS

MT
17:1-9

MARCH 5, 2023
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

BE TRANSFIGURED!

Mt 17:1-9 begins with the time reference “after six days.” The beginning of the Bible narrates the creation of the world and everything in it in six days and the rest of God on the seventh day (Gen 1:31-2:2; Ex 20:11). Later the Jewish traditions connected God’s rest to the eternal bliss in heaven. The same tradition is present also in early Christianity (Heb 4:8-11). The people of Israel were allowed to gather manna for six days and on the sixth day, they gathered twice as much food that on the seventh day there would be none (Ex 16:22-26). The people could work six days, but on the seventh day they had to rest (Ex 20:9-10). During the feast of the unleavened bread the people continued to eat unleavened bread for six days, and on the seventh day there had been a solemn assembly for the Lord (Deut 16:8). All the warriors among the Israelites had to march around the city of Jericho circling it once for six days, before its conquest on the seventh day (Josh 6:1-7). Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den and he remained there for six days before his miraculous feeding and redemption (Dan 14:31-42). Thus “six days” in the Bible has always been a preparation for something magnificent which is to take place on the seventh day.

The transfiguration of Jesus was something marvellous both for Jesus and his disciples. It took place “after six days.” The evangelist gives

BE TRANSFIGURED!

time references to Jesus’ activity in the immediate context of this gospel passage only thrice. The first instance is found in 15:32. Here Jesus called his disciples to him and spoke out his compassion for the crowd who had been “with him for three days” and were hungry (15:32). The second and the third instances deal with the prediction of Jesus’ resurrection on the “third day” which was to follow his great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and his death on the cross (16:21; 17:23). In short during the six days, Jesus lived pouring out his compassion for the people and preparing himself to fulfill the will of the Father undertaking suffering and death on the cross. Further, in all these instances the disciples were directly involved. Jesus had been training them for the great mission which would be entrusted to them at the end of the Gospel (28:16-20). After the model of their Master, they should become people of compassion and persons who are ready to sacrifice their lives at the service of their brothers and sisters.

Jesus who was compassionate to people and ready to undergo the suffering on the cross according to the will of God for the redemption of humanity was transfigured before the disciples. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Personally, it was for him the approval of the Father: “This is my son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” It might have given him the motivation he needed to confront the cross. The disciples who received the training of Jesus could behold his transfiguration.

In the voice, “Listen to him” was the imperative directed to them to conform themselves to the person and the ministry of the Son.

Lent is the season for repairing and restoring the mantle of our discipleship. It is a period for regaining the approval of the Father by coming back to the track of doing his will. It is the time to grow in compassion for others. In the words of Pope Francis “God’s compassion is not pity; the two things have nothing to do with each other. I can feel sorry for a little dog who is dying, or about a situation; and I can feel sorry for a person: I feel sorry, I’m sorry that this is happening. Instead, God’s compassion is to place himself in the difficulty, to put himself in the situation of the other, with his Fatherly heart; this is why he sent his Son” (Morning meditation in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Friday, 30 October 2015). Let this lent be an occasion for us to come out of mere feeling pity for others and to put ourselves in the situation of others to help them, and thereby to participate in the transfiguration of the Lord.

JOHN
4:5-42

MARCH 12, 2023
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

IN JESUS WE HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE

Jesus met the Samaritan woman while he travelled back from Judea to Galilee through Samaria. The meeting point was a well, in Sychar (Shechem), the present day Nablus in the West Bank which is charged with historical significance. The city makes its earliest appearance in biblical history in connection with Abram’s arrival in the land (Gen 12:6-7). When Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, he settled down at Shechem and purchased land from the sons of Hamor (33:18-19). The unfortunate incident of Dinah occurred here and following this Simeon and Levi destroyed the city (Gen 34). Joseph was buried in the plot of ground that his father Jacob had purchased here (Josh 24:32). After the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Shechem lay in the tribal territory of Ephraim near their border



with Manasseh (Josh 17:7). It was a city of refuge (Josh 20:7) and a Levitical city (21:21). Joshua led Israel to renew its covenant with God there (Josh 24:1-17). The city lies between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal where the people of Israel stood in groups for the blessing and curse (Deut 11:29; 27:12-13; Josh 8:30-35). Rehoboam, successor to King Solomon, went to Shechem to be crowned king over all Israel (1 Kings 12:1). Later, when the nation was divided into two kingdoms, Shechem became the first capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:25). Following the Northern Kingdom's fall to Assyria (721 B.C.), exiles from many nations settled in Samaria (Ezra 4:9-10). Though they acknowledge the Lord, in whose land they dwelt, as one among the gods to be feared (2 Kings 17:24-28), and the Jews considered them as pagans and intentionally avoided any contact with them. (John 4:7). Even though the way from Galilee to Jerusalem through Samaria was the easiest and shortest, the Jews preferred the longer route beyond the river Jordan through Peraea when they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The image of Sychar was never appealing to the Jews in the days of Jesus, so also the life of the Samaritan woman. Her life was seemingly scandalous since the one with whom she now lived was not her husband. Jesus stands before her as a mere man, a Jew: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (v. 9). Two aspects reveal themselves here. First, the relationship between Jews and Samaritans is obviously problematic. Second, and even more striking, the roles of male and female are being challenged. Notice how she describes herself as a "Samaritan woman," but Jesus simply as a Jew. Jesus' response completely avoids the issue of race or gender and turns immediately to the issue at hand: that a "gift of God" is available for you (v. 10). During their conversation she moves from misunderstanding to a right understanding of Jesus, prophet (v. 19) and Messiah (v. 26). Just a meeting with Jesus, however, was capable of rewriting her history. The Samaritan community also joined in this faith journey of the woman and finally received Jesus as the Saviour of the world (v. 42).

Lent is the best time to remove the bruises and scars of our sinful and corrupted past. We might have a graceful beginning and continuation in the journey of our faith. There may also have been times when we remained lukewarm in our spiritual attitudes. Meeting with Jesus is the best and only way to healing for the wounded past. Just as the

Samaritan woman progressed in her faith in Jesus, we have grown in our faith and personal relationship with Jesus. Never let our sins and weaknesses become obstacles in this process. "God always forgives everything. He never tires of this. It's we who get tired of asking for forgiveness" (Pope Francis). Therefore let us meet Jesus frequently at the confessional, at the table of the Eucharist and in our personal prayer. Let us also never put off forgiving others and asking their forgiveness.



MARCH 19, 2023
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LIGHT FOR THE BLIND EYES

To all who received Jesus and to all who believed in his name, Jesus gave power to become children of God (Jn 1:12). In today's reading this reality is beautifully exemplified by the story of the heal-



Dr Thomas Vadakkal

ing of the man blind from birth (Jn 9:1-41). This story begins by a question of the disciples to Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v.2). Their question assumes, as per the Jewish belief, that the man's blindness could be punishment for sin, either his own or his parents. Nonetheless, the supposition of the disciples is instantly dismissed by Jesus, who offers a quite different outlook - this happened so that the *works of God might be revealed* in him. Instead of treating the man's blindness as an occasion for speculating about blame, Jesus views it as an occasion for carrying out his mission of performing God's life-giving works and overcoming the blindness and thus making the blind man a child of God. This event is truly the manifestation of the divine power of God. Moreover, this miracle testifies the divine character of Jesus and undoubtedly discloses that Jesus is the true light of the world (v.5) and those who come to him will receive light removing the darkness in their lives.

How did this man become the child of God? Whoever receives Jesus and believes his name will be child of God (Jn 1:12). Firstly, the blind man obeyed the words of Jesus who spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on his eyes (v.6). Jesus asked this blind man to go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam (which

means Sent). Without asking anything in return to the instruction of Jesus this man received the words of Jesus close to his heart and went to the pool and washed and came back able to see. Secondly, he expressed his deep faith in Jesus Christ. When Jesus heard that the Jewish authorities had driven the healed man out of the Synagogue, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (v.35). Immediately he said, "Lord, I believe," accompanying the act of worshipping Jesus. After the acclamation of Jesus as Lord (*Kyrios*) that indicates the divine nature of Jesus, he paid homage and offered worship to Jesus (v.38). The Johannine use of the verb 'to worship' (*proskunein*) points to his acceptance of Jesus as God, truly the Son of God.



the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (10:37-38). Following this, John the Evangelist presents the raising of Lazarus from the grave and such a great sign clearly establishes that Jesus is in fact the eternal Son of God, who came in human flesh, as he claimed. This miracle is certainly an invitation to believe in Jesus since he has done the works of the Father as a Son. Martha's reply to the question of Jesus makes it explicit: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (v.26).

Many of the Jews, most likely the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection, had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their lost brother (v.19). Even Martha also had a strong belief in the resurrection of all on the last day (v.24). In the context of the death of Lazarus, by giving him life Jesus demonstrates that he is the resurrection and life (v.25), who has power over death. Here he asserts his authority over the grave and his power to give life. In addition, here Jesus teaches them that everyone who lives and believes in Him will never die. Also, it reveals that Jesus is the giver of life on the one hand; and he is life on the other hand. At the outset of this story, it is said that Jesus loved these three: Martha, Mary and Lazarus (vv. 3, 5). The delay of Jesus to come in order to accomplish the will of God does not mean that Jesus' heart was cold and indifferent towards his friends. When Jesus saw Martha and others were weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved (v.33) and began to weep. Jesus is one who sympathizes with his people out of His genuine concern.

JN
11, 1-45 **MARCH 26, 2023**
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

JESUS GIVES LAZARUS LIFE

The reading of the day, Jesus giving life to Lazarus (Jn 11:1-45), represents the climax to the powerful acts of Jesus that usually are designated as signs (*semeion*). Yes, today's gospel speaks about the life-giving sign of Jesus which indeed manifests the glory of God. The name *Lazarus* is likely an abbreviated form of the more familiar Hebrew name "Eleazar," which means "God assists" or "God is my Help." In the raising of Lazarus, Jesus demonstrates that He is the Son of God (v.4) and He is the Resurrection and the Life (v.25) and He has love for the Other (v.36). The gospel of the day is more Christological in nature in the sense that it explains various central characteristics of Jesus.

Earlier in this gospel Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews who always used to accuse him for blasphemy that "if I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that

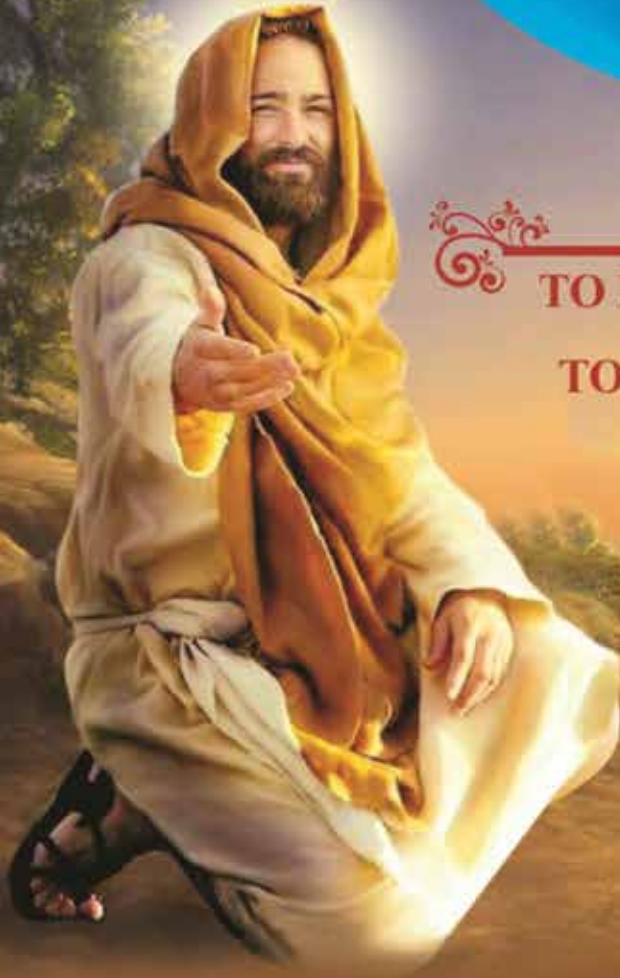
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