



Mar Raphael Thattil

Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

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PASTORAL LETTER

MAR RAPHAEL THATTIL

the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church,
to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Men and Women
and Lay Persons of the Syro-Malabar Church.

May the Grace of the Lord be with you all!

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

I am addressing you for the first time through this pastoral letter after assuming the Office of the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. The First Session of the XXXII Synod of Bishops, held at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church, Mount St. Thomas Kakkannad from 8 to 10, January 2024, elected me the Major Archbishop and His Holiness Pope Francis confirmed the election. I was enthroned as the Major Archbishop on 11 January. I take this occasion to express my gratitude to the whole Church, for having prayed for the election of the new Major Archbishop. I also express my deep appreciation and gratitude to Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal, the Curia Bishop, who being the Administrator of the Church convoked the Synod and executed everything regarding the election and enthronement in a very meticulous and grace filled manner.

The history of the Syro-Malabar Church is a miraculous story of Divine interventions. This community which was born from the missionary work of St. Thomas, the Apostle, had to pass through several harrowing instances of suffering and complicated situations down through the centuries. This community, which overcame the temptations to be separated from the Catholic communion, continued relentlessly its efforts to form and solidify its self identity. Even though the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy was established in 1923, all the canonical structures were developed only in 1992 when the Syro-Malabar Church was elevated to the Major Archiepiscopal Status. We should thank the Providence which guided our Church in the last two thousand years. On this occasion, I do remember in a special way the devoted service of His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Antony Padiyara, the first Major Archbishop, His Grace Mar Abraham Kattumana, the Pontifical Delegate, and His Beatitude Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayathil, the second Major Archbishop of our Church.

The services of His Beatitude Cardinal Mar George Alencherry, the third Major Archbishop of our Church, are unparalleled and unique. His life is marked with simplicity, pure love for the Church, unwavering commitment to the Gospel and tireless work. His foresight enabled the Syro-Malabar Church to get all-India jurisdiction and to get eparchies established in Melbourne, Mississauga, Great Britain, and the Apostolic Visitation in Europe, giving our Church a global dimension. It was



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his determination and able leadership that made possible the uniform mode of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* and the revision of the Liturgy of the Hours, at a time when the efforts for the liturgical reform were always complicated in our Church. We offer our gratitude to His Beatitude for his selfless commitment for the good of the Church.

His Holiness Pope Francis, in his letter confirming my election, asked me to care for the poor and the marginalized. Jesus identified himself with those who were deprived of food, water, clothing, shelter, land of their own, and freedom (Mt. 25:35-36). We must take every effort to live Pope Francis' vision, "the Church of the poor". Extravagance, luxury and ostentatious display are sins against the Gospels. The dream of simplicity that Jesus had about His Church should be reflected in all areas of the Church activities. The simplicity of the Gospels should be the guiding light of all our celebrations connected with parish feasts, marriages, ordinations and our constructions. Any institution that is not accessible to the poor has no right to be known as an institution of the Church.

We have to be consciously aware of the discrimination that is being experienced by the Christians in Kerala and in India as a whole. We have to preserve and protect all the constitutional provisions that guarantee the growth and development of our community as a minority group. Farmers, unorganized labourers and small-scale traders are all neglected in all sectors. As the government is failing to protect the lives of the people in the hilly areas of Kerala, many lives and their hard-earned work are lost on account of the attacks of wild animals. In all these cases, organized movements in a democratic way are becoming essential.

We should never forget that Christians are always the spokespersons of religious harmony. We believe that the redemption that was brought about by Jesus is for all. Hence there is no place for racism or separatism in Christian life. We have to work with great care not to lose the harmony and fraternal relationship with different religions.

The blessings that our Church has received from God are manifold. There are more than 50 lakhs of faithful in 35 Eparchies, Apostolic Visitation in Europe and in other unorganized communities. Also, the Church is blessed with many vocations to priesthood and to consecrated life. We are proud of our priests and consecrated persons who serve not only in our eparchies and institutions but also in other Churches and around the world. The Church wants her priests and religious to inculcate a more spiritual perspective in order to render their service more effectively and not losing the brightness of priesthood and consecrated life by the human shortcomings and proper character traits. The ten lakhs families of our Church are our strength. Only those families that grow in love and mutual respect can confront and survive the disintegration of this age.

The faith life of our youth and children is the blessing of the Lord to our Church. We have to walk with the youth and strengthen them to confront the challenges they face



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in life. The faith formation of the youth and children should be considered the responsibility of the whole Church. Our youth and children must grow in their conviction to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour in their own lives and to profess it before others. The faith formation should be focused on this goal.

God has blessed the Syro-Malabar Church abundantly to imbibe the missionary character of the Universal Church in all its dimensions. We have to remember in our prayers all our missionaries who work in our mission eparchies and the other mission areas. We know that there are organized attempts to drive out our missionaries by levelling baseless allegations and filing court cases against them who work in many undeveloped areas in India by establishing schools, orphanages and clinics in such areas, providing compassionate care and selfless love. The whole Church has to pray for these missionaries who are being persecuted for the sake of Gospel. Let us not forget that it is the duty of each one of us to give all possible support to their activities in the mission areas.

The Church in India is facing another phase of migration. The youths and young families are immigrating to foreign lands for higher education, better job opportunities and higher standard of life. The eparchies in India should join with the eparchies abroad to accompany the individuals and families who migrate and to give assistance to them. There are instances when the expatriates are deceived concerning the type of education or jobs offered to them before leaving India. I would urge all concerned to examine the cases of the young who leave their mother country immediately after the Plus Two and the tendency of placing a heavy debt burden on the families in order to send the children to abroad. We should explore the possibility for the opportunities for higher education and jobs in India itself.

God is opening new horizons before the Syro-Malabar Church. We should never forget that the great asset of the Church is its faith and communion. We should be guided by the vision of St. Pope John XXIII that in the growth and development of every individual Church, the faithfulness to the traditions (resourcement) as well as the openness to renewal (aggiornamento) are of prime importance. Traditionalism and liberalism are complementary in nature and therefore we should not approach them as causes of division. We should remember that it is the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, that becomes wounded when such wrong-headed people throw out accusations against one another through social media.

I am sure that you are aware of the crisis existing in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly regarding the implementation of the uniform mode of the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*. Let us pray fervently and work together to heal this wound in our Church. The Apostolic See has entrusted Archbishop Cyril Vasil' SJ, the Pontifical Delegate and Bishop Mar Bosco Puthur, the Apostolic Administrator, to find a solution to this problem. All are requested to cooperate with them in their effort to sustain unity in our Church. Nobody can step backward from the repeated exhortations given by the Holy Father to implement the decision of the Synod on the



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uniform mode of celebration. We have to remain in the communion of the Catholic Church by living total docility to the Holy Father.

Dearly beloved, I place my trust in your prayers, faith and love as the Lord entrusts me with the responsibility of shepherding the Syro-Malabar Church. Even when we pass through adversities, we should have the deep faith that “He never withdraws His mercy from us. Although he disciplines us with calamities, He does not forsake His own people” (2 Macc. 6:16). The words of Jesus “you did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn. 15: 16) strengthens us. May the deep conviction of St. Paul expressed through his words: “the one who calls you is faithful” (1 Thess. 5:24) make us bold! As the children of the Syro-Malabar Church, which is one among the Eastern Churches *sui iuris*, let us remain in love and unity to give the witness which our time demands from us in communion with the Universal Church and in docility to the Holy Father. I commend all of you to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the intercession of St. Thomas the Apostle, our Father in Faith. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Given this from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad on February 22, 2024.

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Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church



This Pastoral Letter shall be read in all the parish churches, institutions, religious houses, formation centres and the major seminaries of the Syro-Malabar Church during the Holy *Qurbana* on Sunday, March 10, 2024.