



## **SYRO-MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN**

### **Pastoral Letter -1**

“Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert” (Lk 4, 1).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I begin writing this very first pastoral letter while attending the Eparchial annual retreat for priests at Divine Retreat Centre, Ramsgate, Kent, formerly a Benedictine Abbey. It was on this coast of English Channel that St Augustine of Canterbury landed in AD 597 and started his mission to evangelise the Anglo Saxons. Fourteen centuries later, from this historic ground hallowed by the prayers of many saintly people, I invite the members of the eparchy of Great Britain to reflect upon our mission, as we begin our Lenten journey this week. Jesus discerned the Father’s will about Him, His mission in intimate moments of prayer and conformed to God’s plan resisting temptations of this world.

When someone finds his/her life in the light of God’s plan and conforms to God’s will, history meets salvation history. The real temptation is to deny such a higher dimension to our life and to bind ourselves to the confinements of our immediate surroundings and their demands. Jesus’ reply to the tempter ‘man does not live on bread alone but on every word, that comes out of the mouth of God’ (Mt 4, 4) powerfully expresses the truth about us and points to the goal of our life. I am glad to say that in my pilgrim journeys to our communities and families these days I have found faithful who have realised a greater call within the limits of their life situations and responded generously to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. We gratefully recognise the founding of the Eparchy of Great Britain is God’s response to that generosity.

The motto of my episcopacy ‘**do the work of an evangelist**’ (2 Tim 4, 5) and the motto of the Eparchy ‘**deep calls to deep**’ (Ps 42, 7) enable us to understand our mission as part of a great continuity. We share the mission of Christ, the one sent by the Father. ‘As the Father sent me, so am I sending you’ (Jn 20, 21). Through the work of the Apostles and missionaries -be it St. Thomas or St. Augustine- we have come to know Jesus and His Gospel. In our baptism, we have received a share in the mission of Christ. The spirit of the Gospel has touched the depths of the culture of England and it strikes a chord with our own deep spiritual heritage and our Eparchy will embody the finest values of these great traditions.

One of the most wonderful things about our Eparchy is the youthfulness of its members. A great majority of our men and women are below 50 years of age. We are also blessed with thousands of teenagers and children who are aflame with the love of God and are deeply into

spiritual life. I would like to greet them especially and offer my support to their great commitment to Jesus and to His Church amidst challenging situations. These brilliant young people, gifted in many ways are the future of the Church. I thank you and all those who helped you to grow in your spiritual life: the parents, priests, and catechists. Our local bishops and priests were immensely helpful in attending to our pastoral needs. Our indebtedness to them will be expressed in our contribution to the life and mission of the Mother Church. The bishops and priests of different dioceses have shared with me the same hope as I visited them before the Episcopal ordination.

How do we live out our mission as a community of faithful that has the rich patrimony of the Eastern Christian liturgy and spiritual tradition? Many of you would remember the words of our Major Archbishop, his Beatitude Mar George Cardinal Alencherry at the episcopal ordination: “to this day, you were faithful scattered in different places of the Great Britain, now you have become the faithful of an Eparchy, under a Bishop”. Certainly, we had our communities, we had our celebrations and we had our faith formation programmes. I am thankful to the priests and lay leaders who have been working hard, from the very beginning of their arrival to Great Britain to organise communities that bear the distinctive marks of our faith and tradition.

Now we have been blessed with a greater opportunity to organise our initiatives with a new orientation. As a first step to this, in consultation with the Eparchial curia I have identified the major pastoral areas and have appointed priests working in the Eparchy as chairmen for these commissions. We also understand that there should be more involvement of women in the life of the Church and to facilitate this we have formed the Eparchial Women’s forum. Through the effective functioning of the Commissions, we would like to focus mainly on two aspects of our ecclesial life.

I Faith formation of the Young people in the present day context of Great Britain.

II Formation and development of Basic Ecclesial communities for celebrating, living and sharing the faith.

From communities, we have to grow into the status of the parishes, where our liturgy is regularly celebrated and introduced to the young people. We have to make use of all possible means to present our faith as meaningful, relevant and enjoyable to our future generations. Only then the law of prayer becomes the law of faith, which in turn becomes the law of Christian life. We have great models of Syro-Malabar migrant communities, moving to different parts of Kerala first, then to various parts of India and then to many countries outside. Their faith made them strong, and they built up churches, schools and hospitals and established the communities on strong foundations.

We the Syro-Malabar faithful were called ‘the people of fasting’ due to the tradition of different fasts round the liturgical seasons. I have noticed that the whole family, even the children in their own way live the spirit of Lenten sacrifice. Pope Francis in his message for lent this year writes ‘lent is the favourable season for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbour.’ The prayers of Holy Qurbana in

the season of lent remind us to make the Lenten season 'fruitful' by sincere prayer, love of our brothers and sisters and by self-denial. St Alphonsa of Immaculate conception, the patroness of our eparchy is a shining example of this prayer translated into real life.

**'Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi'**(EMCC) the instruction of the Pontifical Council for Migrants understands the experience of migrants as a great Christian symbol which is essentially related to the passion of Christ. "Christian life is essentially a living through the Passover with Christ, or a journey, a sublime migration towards total Communion of the Kingdom of God" (EMCC 101). As we embark on the Lenten journey, let us try to see our life in the light of the Word of God. Our faith is also rooted in a zealous dynamism that is connected to the passion of Christ. We have received our faith from St Thomas, who wanted to go and die with the Lord (Jn 11,16). May the prayers of Mary our Blessed Mother, help us discern our mission in the scope of God's plan for us, especially in the context of our Eparchy.

Yours in our Lord and our God,

*Mar Joseph Srampickal*

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Preston, 24/02/2017