



## SYRO-MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Pastoral Letter -2

### **THE WORD WHO CREATES, RENEWS AND BUILDS US UP AS THE HOLY CHURCH**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is my joy, in the context of the forthcoming Eparchial Bible Convention and Bible *Kalotsavam*, to reflect on the WORD, to prepare ourselves for the days of renewal and celebration and to continue 'the work of an Evangelist' (2 Tim 4: 5) in our families and the communities.

God created everything with His Word, in particular God created humans in His own image and likeness and formed them by God's wisdom (Wis 9:1). The opening chapters of Genesis inform us that human beings rebelled against God's plan and fell into sin. However, God was so gracious and merciful that He sent His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16) to restore the dignity of the human race, lost by sin. The uniqueness of Christianity is manifested in this salvific event which is Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, the culmination of revelation, the fulfilment of God's promises and the mediator of the encounter between man and God. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux says, 'Christianity is the religion of Word of God, not of "a written or a mute word but of the incarnate and living Word'. Today we encounter the incarnate Word in the Church as the people of God called together. *Ekklesia* in Greek means the assembly of people called by the Word. This salvation is available to all who believe in Him; and to all those who accept Jesus as the Son of God (Jn 1:12) and the living and eternal Word of God (1 Pet 1:23). Indeed, the Church is built upon the Word of God, and the people of God have always found strength in the Word of God; and today also, the ecclesial community grows by reading, hearing, celebrating and studying the Word of God (VD 3). Let us be open to all the opportunities for a personal encounter with Christ.

Echoing the invitation of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, I would like to invite all the faithful of our Syro-Malabar Eparchy 'to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or an openness to letting him encounter us'. This encounter leads us to experience the joy of the Gospel. Pope Francis continues, 'those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. (EG 1). The challenge of our time is to accept this personal invitation to be open to the Word. The interior life of an individual is often caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. In the business of one's life, God's voice is no longer heard, the joy of His love is no longer felt and the desire to do good fades. The first Bible Convention of the Eparchy will provide opportunities to be open to Jesus Christ and His Words to enhance our personal relationship with Him.

Whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting with open arms to embrace us (Lk 15:11-24). It is so encouraging to see that God is never tired of forgiving us; we are the ones who become tired of seeking his mercy (EG 3). When one is in distress the Word of God gives hope that 'the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.' (Lam 3: 22-23a). The Word of God is the seed which falls on good ground and produces a thirty, sixty or hundredfold harvest. The ground is a clean and pure heart which absorbs the Word of God and patiently produces abundant fruits (Lk 8:15). It was in the immaculate heart, in a spirit of total self-giving and obedience that the Blessed Virgin Mary first received the Word.

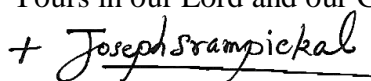
We cannot come to understand the meaning of the Word unless we are open to the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the hearts of believers (VD 15). As the Word of God became flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, so the Word of God in our time is brought forth from the womb of the Church by the power of that same Spirit. In fact, the proper human response to God is our faith, which is born from what is heard; and what is heard comes from the Word of Christ proclaimed (Rom 10:17). Man's sin is essentially his disobedience and refusal 'to hear' the Word of God. The radical obedience of Jesus even unto His death on the Cross (Phil 2:8) completely unmasks this sin. It is important to acknowledge that the root of sin lies in the refusal to hear the Word of the Lord. To accept in Jesus, God's mercy and forgiveness opens us to experience salvation (VD 26). What took place for Virgin Mary can take place daily in each one of us at the hearing of the Word and in the celebration of the Sacraments. Every christian believer, as Saint Ambrose reminds us, in some way interiorly conceives and gives birth to the Word of God: even though there is only one Mother of Christ in the flesh, in the faith Christ is the progeny of us all.

As I conclude this pastoral letter, I am reminded of the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel, "being a christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." A renewed encounter – with God's love, can liberate us from our narrowness and self-absorption. Anyone who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. This will lead us to reach out to others and seek their good. St. Paul explains this by these verses, "the love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14); "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel, excluding no one. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but "by attraction" (EG 15). The relevance of the presence of Syro-Malabar Catholics in Great Britain is that our family life and the Gospel witness should inspire and attract other people to seek God and experience His merciful love. We must remember that "heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk 15:7).

As I have informed you, the First Eparchial Bible Convention is from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017 and First Eparchial Bible *Kalotsavam* at Bristol is on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2017 respectively. I do wish and pray that these days be days of experiencing the power, glory and beauty of the Word of God; days of renewal and celebration. Our first Bible Convention will be conducted over eight days in eight cities in Great Britain. This convention named as *Abhishekagni* will be led by Rev. Fr. Xavier Khan Vattayil, the director of Sehion Ministries, Attappadi. I pray that all Syro Malabar faithful become one in the Word of God and in the Church through these days. I do encourage each member/family of our Eparchy to participate at least in one of these eight days of Bible Convention in your respective regions, or wherever possible. Also, I earnestly invite all the priests in charge of our Qurbana centres/Parishes to do the necessary arrangements in order that all the members of our Qurbana centres/Parishes will attend one of these eight days. Bible *Kalotsavam* is envisaged to attract our children to new ways of experiencing the beauty of the Word of God and to give expressions to their creative artistic and literary forms. Since it has a catechetical, formative and witnessing value, I encourage parents, teachers and priests to ensure maximum participation from each community.

May the Incarnated Word of God renew us each day and build up our Syro-Malabar Eparchy.

Yours in our Lord and our God,

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Mar Joseph Srampickal  
Bishop, Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain

Preston, 30/09/2017