



SYRO-MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Pastoral Letter – 5

Trusting in God's grace, Mar Joseph Srampickal, the Bishop of the Syro Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain writing to all priests, religious and faithful of the Eparchy .

Holiness: The Power of God Revealed in Human Weakness

We are passing through a very spiritually nourishing time as we celebrate the feasts of St Thomas, the Apostle, who brought the light of faith to us, and of St Alphonsa of Immaculate conception, the noble fruit of his mission in India. After the Pilgrimage to Walsingham- one of the most important public witnesses to our faith- I was blessed to be able to visit the tombs of a few saints who were most influential in shaping Catholic spirituality in modern time, namely St Therese of Lisieux, St John Maria Vianney and St Margaret Mary Alacoque. I also spent some time prayerfully at the Shrines of Our Blessed Mother in Lourdes and La Salette. As I joined the thousands of pilgrims from all parts of the world, I thought gratefully of the eternal providence of God who lavishes on the world the light of holiness. In the light of these experiences, I would like to draw your attention to the insights of the Apostolic Exhortation “Gaudete et Exultate- Rejoice and be Glad’ of Pope Francis- published on March 19th, 2018.

Today, holiness is considered by many as unattractive, unattainable and unrealistic. Against this background, this exhortation presents holiness as the most desirable aim of our life. In the light of the Sacred Scriptures, together with the traditions and history of the Church, the Holy Father boldly and clearly teaches what it means to be holy in our times. This most desirable ideal of holiness alone is capable of providing us with a joy that is true and lasting. Hence, the very title of this apostolic teaching, “Rejoice and be Glad’ meaningfully and clearly defines its contents.

The call to holiness does not start at a particular point in our earthly life, the Holy Spirit through St Paul teaches us that it is there even before the foundation of the world. ‘He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him’ (Eph 1,4)

Christ is the head of the Church; therefore, she is the fullness of God's presence. Holiness is the reflection of God's presence in one's life (GE 7). One who summons us to holiness has designed and designated the Church for that very purpose.

The Grace which we have received through the Sacraments of Initiation becomes productive and proactive through the path of holiness. “In the Church, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness such as: scripture, sacraments, holy places, living communities, the witness of the saints and a multifaceted beauty that proceeds from God's love” (GE 15).

It is His resurrected life that Christ shares with us and it is His power that is being revealed through us, the fragile beings. Holiness is an encounter between human weakness and the power of God's grace. Therefore, “do not be dismayed, for the

power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this; and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life” (GE 15). “Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to His people” (GE 21). Since God’s plan for us and our ultimate goal in life is to attain holiness, “not to become a saint is the only great tragedy in human life” (GE 34).

The family is the cradle of holiness, it is a fertile land where it grows into perfection. Integrity and wholeness in a family is strongly and inseparably related to holiness. In the sacrament of holy matrimony, spouses are called to nurture the virtue of conjugal fidelity, which faces many challenges in the modern world. Wherever it is observed, as a sacred vow and divine mandate, the fragrance of holiness will waft from there.

Spouses should join hands as they walk along their path of joys and sorrows. They are to share equally the struggles and burdens of life. They need to kneel down before God who is the only answer to their unanswered questions. They should offer each other a shoulder to lean on in times of crises. They have to dream together about their children and their bright future; look after both parents; as well as assuring the well-being of their near and dear ones. When they do all these with undivided heart, their mutual commitment becomes a means to holiness.

In all such daily chores, the door to holiness is being opened wide before them. Their dining and praying together, daily reading of the scripture and other expressions of faith and love will transform their home into a family which emits the fragrance of holiness. This sacred incense of holiness will make a home ever memorable with unfading love. These spouses thus become true witnesses of a holy bond.

Guiding the children on the right path is another major responsibility that spouses are endowed with in the sacrament of holy matrimony. It may not be right to say that having children is a ‘fundamental right’ of the parents; on the other hand, they are precious and free gifts from God. Therefore, it is the supreme responsibility of the parents to bring up their children in faith and sanctity. When parents keep this obligation inviolate, the family becomes a nursery of holiness.

In my pastoral visits, I have proudly and joyfully observed the intelligence and all-round smartness of our children in the family and in society. All gifts and talents must be encouraged, however, the sole aim of their life is Jesus who called the children to Himself: ‘let the little children come to Me’ (Mt. 19,14) Our choices and priorities must help our children to reach Jesus, our aim.

Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church (GE 9). As members of the body of Christ, our own most attractive face is holiness itself. “Communion of Saints” is another name of the Holy Mother Church. When our life becomes holy, it brightens up the face of the Church and the face of Christ will shine more radiantly in the world.

It is worth quoting the reflection of Pope St John XXIII on his childhood home. He says: “At home we used to read biographies of saints. Our parents had made it compulsory that our days should not end without remembering God and the saints. It was the air of faith that I breathed in; it was the voice of Christ that my parents wanted me to hear” (Daily Piety 4). This brings out the significant role of family in nurturing holiness.

It is also commendable to recall the childhood memories of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. “Our mother had a habit of tracing the sign of the cross on our forehead whenever my brother George and I went out. Even now, we are under the protection of that cross” (In the Vineyard of Christ 97).

Let parents make sure that their children are under the divine protection of the holy cross and holy sacraments. It is an important responsibility and obligation of the parents to ensure that their children receive Jesus in the Holy Communion only after appropriate spiritual preparations.

The Faith journey, which we started at the time of our baptism, should be kept alive through the lifeline of the sacraments. By meaningful participation and reception of the holy sacraments, let us make use of the ‘opportunities of Grace’ offered by the Church. Let it become a stream of blessing to our families and children.

There is a saying, “Constant vigilance is the price of liberty”. It is very true about holiness as well. We need to be aware of the new faces of evil trying to creep into our lives. Sometimes we live without the awareness that we are the ‘temples of God’ and ‘body of Christ’. Often, our words and deeds do not resemble these images. Therefore, the scripture says: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cori 6,19).

Fathers of the Church interpret the human heart as the ‘sanctuary’ of this temple. We will have the experience of seeing God if we keep this sanctuary pure (Mt 5,8). St Paul reminds us: “So that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” (Phil 2,15). Let us not forget, it is only under the strong protection of the family bond, holiness is preserved unstained.

May God who is pleased to abide in saints, bless and sanctify us through His Word, and the Holy Spirit. To that end, let us seek the intercession of the Holy Virgin Mary, who is the Immaculate Conception and Queen of all saints and St. Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Yours in our Lord and our God,

+ *Joseph Srampickal*

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Preston, 28/07/2018

NB: This pastoral letter must be read in all your Parishes/ Missions/ Qurbana Centres during the Celebration of the Holy Qurbana before 30 September 2018.