

Circular - *Ad limina* Visit

George Cardinal Alencherry, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church,
to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Men and Women Religious
and Lay Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church.
May the Grace of the Lord be with you all!

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

The *ad limina apostolorum* visit of the Syro-Malabar Bishops was held at the Vatican from October 3-14, 2019. The visit started with the Holy Qurbana offered by the bishops at the tomb of St. Peter at 8 am on 3 October. The very meaning of *ad limina apostolorum* is that the bishops who are the successors of the apostles are at the place of the apostles, Peter and Paul who were martyred in Rome.

The most important part of the *ad limina* visit was the meeting with the Holy Father, Pope Francis. The meeting took place on 3 October from 10.30 am to 12.30 p.m. We were received in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Palace. We were seated in two lines. When the Holy Father came, he saw that his chair was placed a little far from the bishops and he then asked the priest-translator to move the chair close to the bishops. He did also help in moving the chair. In the Hall, there were forty eight bishops, the translator and the Holy Father, and nobody else. It was very cordial and fruitful.

At the outset, I offered our gratitude to the Holy Father for what he is doing for the Church in common and specially to the Syro-Malabar Church. I requested the Holy Father to give the Syro-Malabar Church the permission to render pastoral service to the people of our Church *sui iuris* in the Gulf countries. At the request of the Holy Father, Archbishop Mar Moolakkatt was appointed the moderator of the meeting and he invited all the bishops who raised their hands to speak one after another. The Holy Father responded to each question individually. The following are the ideas and action plans that were formulated in the meeting with the Holy Father:

1. There is the need to do the possible so that the priests get a deeper awareness of their vocation and mission. When he was requested to give a special message for the priests, he brought to our attention the letter he wrote on 4 August 2019 for priests. The Holy Father shared four major ideas: Priests should live in a close relationship with God; they should foster a close relationship with their respective bishops; the bishops should love them and deal with them with great sensitivity and regard; the priests should develop cordial relationship with the laity and they should be discharging their duties with great commitment.
2. For the faithful in the Gulf countries, arrangements are being made to give them pastoral care according to their Church traditions and faith heritage.

3. Pope responded positively to the suggestion of the bishops to hold a special Synod for the Oriental Catholic Churches.
4. The Holy Father, in response to the request of the Bishops to have a church and a rectory in order to coordinate the activities of the ten Syro-Malabar Centres in Rome, asked Mar Stephen Chirappanath, the Procurator and Apostolic Visitor of Europe, to bring this request to his attention later.
5. The Holy Father has asked us to speed up programmes for evangelization as the Church has got now the permission to engage in pastoral activities in the whole of India. Evangelization does not mean just an increase of the number of Catholics but the development of committed Christians who can attract people to Christ through their exemplary lives. The Holy Father added that suffering and martyrdom are integral parts of the ministry of evangelization.
6. Lastly, we asked for details of the Amazon Synod to be held soon in Rome. The Pope spoke about the misinformation that was making rounds at that time in the media. He asked us to pray for the successful completion of the Synod. All of us were edified and had very cordial feelings after the meeting with the Holy Father.

All the bishops stayed at the international Seminary of *Maria Mater Ecclesiae* under the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ. The seminarians from Asia and Latin America reside at this college. From Kerala itself, 25 students are now staying there for their priestly formation.

The *ad limina* visit was a time of special blessings for us bishops. The programmes of the visit cemented more deeply the unity and fraternity that augmented among the bishops during the August Synod. The visit to the Oriental Congregation after the meeting with the Holy Father was very fruitful. We expressed our gratitude to Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, the Prefect of the Congregation for his decisive interventions in favour of our Church in recent times. He expressed his satisfaction at the success of the August Synod and encouraged us to go forward in peace and unity. The bishops exchanged their views visiting the other Congregations too. The visits to the various offices were concluded on 11 October.

The transportation arrangements for visits to the different Congregations and the Pontifical Councils were made by the priests of the *Opera della Chiesa*. Their services to the bishops who come to Rome are inestimable.

There are four major basilicas in Rome: St. Peter's, St. John the Lateran, Mary Major and St. Paul's Outside the Wall. In three of them, all the bishops offered Holy Masses for the intentions of the Church. A prayer vigil was held at the Mary Major Basilica on the day before the canonization of Sr. Mariam Thresia. Cardinal Becciu, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Cause of Saints was the main celebrant at the prayer vigil.

All the bishops participated in the canonization ceremony on 13 October after the *ad limina* visit. On that day, the Holy Father raised Sr. Mariam Thresia to the status of sainthood along with four others including Cardinal Newman. The Canonization ceremony that included Holy Mass by the Holy Father was attended by Sri. V. Muraleedharan, the Hon. Minister of State, Sri. Syam Kumar, the Manipur cabinet minister and Sri. Siby George, the Indian Ambassador

to the Vatican, as members of the Indian delegation. All the bishops joined together to offer a Holy Qurbana of thanksgiving at St. Anastasia Basilica in Rome on the following day after canonization.

The concluding part of the Silver Jubilee celebration of the establishment of the community of the Syro-Malabar faithful in Rome was held on Sunday, 6 October at the Marian pilgrim Centre of *Divino Amore*. All the bishops participated in the Holy Mass and the meeting held on that day.

Another important event during the days of *ad limina* visit was the blessing of the *Procura* known as *Domus Mar Thoma*. All the bishops were concelebrants at the mass. After the Holy Mass, Cardinal Sandri inaugurated the *Procura*. He and I jointly blessed the *Procura*. Many of the faithful and distinguished guests from various Congregations and religious superiors participated in the function which concluded with a lunch. This house will be useful for the various activities of our Church in Rome. Its construction and renovation were done with the help and contributions of many people. The leadership of Mar Stephen Chirappanath, the Apostolic Visitator in Rome as well as the Procurator of the Church deserves our gratitude. We are grateful to God Almighty for making it possible for us to have this common house in Rome. The contribution of the faithful in the procurement of this house is being acknowledged here with great gratitude.

The *ad limina* visit was an occasion of great spiritual and ecclesial experience for all the bishops. The Bishops could witness the working of the Universal Church and broaden their outlook based on that knowledge. The pilgrimage to Assisi was another event of great spiritual blessings. We offered a Holy Mass together at the church where the relics of St. Francis Assisi are kept. We remember with special gratitude the service rendered by the priests of the Franciscan Conventual Monastery. All the programmes connected to the *ad limina* visit came to an end on 14 October.

You have come to know about all these, I am sure, through the print and visual media. May the Lord bless you to discharge your great service to the Lord with more faith and deep attachment to the Church. May Holy Mother and St. Mariam Thresia, the new saint from our Church, may intercede for you and your families.

Yours cordially in Christ Jesus,

George Cardinal Alencherry
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad, on 1 November 2019.

NB: *This Circular shall be made known to the Priests, Religious and Laity of all the Archeparchies/Eparchies of Syro-Malabar Church through appropriate means. It could also be read out in the churches.*