



Prot. No. 1008/2020

**Circular of the Major Archbishop after the XXVIII Synod
of the Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church, Session II,
held online from 18 to 21 August 2020**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Second Session of the XXVIII Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church took place in August 2020 from 18-21. This is the first time in the history of the Church that the Synod was held on line, of course with the guidelines given by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches. Sixty two Bishops, including the *Emeriti*, ranging from the Bishops working in India and the Bishops from the US, Canada, UK, Australia and Italy participated in the Synod. The Synod which discussed ecclesiastical, political and agricultural topics took practical decisions concerning them.

Pastoral Ministry during the time of the Covid

The Government was informed by the Church that it was giving total support for the measures the Government has taken in its fight against the spread of the pandemic. The Synod remembered all the people who lost their lives because of the pandemic and shared the pain of the members of their families. The Synod also acknowledged the sacrificial role the medical staff and the police played during these critical times.

The Synod noted that Covid-19 had a very bad impact on the pastoral ministry of the Church just as it affected badly the other sectors of the society. The administration of sacraments as well as catechetical instruction was done on line. It is worth noting that many have converted their homes into domestic churches and have grown in their faith through their online participation in the Eucharist. Of course, it is not proper if this habit prevents them from participating in the Holy *Qurbana* when the churches are opening and functioning. Participation in the Eucharist celebrated in the churches is more fruitful and the online participation will never be a match to it. The Synod reminded the faithful of the need to participate in the Holy *Qurbana* celebrated in their respective churches at least once in a week in areas that are not declared as containment zones.

Sicknesses and pandemics should lead us to undergo spiritual transformation to experience the presence of the Lord and not to despair and depression. This should be our attitude during this crisis created by Covid. You have been informed through a Circular about the special observance of the Eight Day Lent as a way to strengthen our spiritual protection against the Covid. Along with that, the faithful are requested that



Friday, September 4th, should be observed as a day of fast. The bishops and the priests are asked to celebrate the Holy *Qurbana* on that day with the above intention. We shall continue our prayers for God's mercy at this time when powerful nations and great scientists get perplexed before the might of this pandemic. We shall hope that the special intervention of the Providence will help mankind to find a speedy remedy against the pandemic.

Cremation

Although the burial of the dead is a common practice in the Church, it is permitted to cremate dead bodies in special circumstances by the Church. It was very exemplary on the part of many eparchies for having formed organizations of trained volunteers to cremate or bury the dead bodies in this time of the pandemic. The Synod proposed that it would be more beneficial for the eparchies to establish crematoriums for their use. After performing all the due funeral prayers, the bodies can be cremated and then the ashes collected after the cremation can be kept in the cemeteries.

Discrimination in the policies of the Government

The Synod protested against the policy of the Government of Kerala which has retained 80:20 ratio in granting financial benefits to the minorities. The injustice prevalent in electing the district level representatives is to be rectified. The 10% reservation granted to the economically backward people in the forward communities should be implemented in all selections including the PSC and other similar bodies in a time-bound manner. The Synod also decided to ask the Government to appoint a special commission to study the problems faced by the Syro-Malabar community in the economic, social and cultural fields, taking into account the changing circumstances.

Crisis in the Agricultural Sector

The farmers are going through a critical situation because of the frequently happening natural disasters and the attacks of wild animals. The great price-fall of agricultural produce is affecting the very life of farmers. The Synod opposed the policy on the part of the authorities to include the inhabited regions into eco-sensitive areas and to adopt very restrictive measures on the basis of the reports of Gadgil-Kasturi Rangan Commissions.

The Synod also asked the Government to make arrangements for the proper burial of the body of late Sri P. P. Mathai from Chittar, Pathanamathitta District, who lost his life in mysterious circumstances when he was in the custody of the forest guards and to do justice to his family. The Central and State governments should cancel at least



the interest of the loans taken by the farmers. The Government has also to take creative steps so that the wild life should not trespass into agricultural lands, endangering the life and property of the farmers. Support prices should be given to rubber and other agricultural produce, protecting the farmers, thus, from huge losses.

Help for the poor

The organizations of the Church were asked to take practical measures to ensure that the poor are fed during these acute times. In this dire time of Covid, we shall follow the example of Jesus and be on the side of the poor thereby putting into practice the vision of Pope Francis to become a Church of the poor for the poor. The Church is giving its full support for the policies of the State government in battling the impact of the pandemic. The Church through its various agencies of different eparchies and religious Congregations has already spent Rs. 53.3 crores for helping the poor during this time of crisis.

The Synod observed that hunger and poverty are on the increase in the society during this time when the Covid is spreading fast alarmingly. It looks like that these problems cannot be resolved through the resources of the State government alone. Hence the Church should pay special attention to the needs of the poor. All the parishes and church agencies should view with sympathy and concern the poverty-stricken situation of the poor irrespective of their religion or caste. The Synod urges the faithful to find ways in which the poor can be fed.

Steps have to be taken by parishes to find families in their midst who are experiencing hunger. Arrangements have to be made to provide food for them. Some parishes have already started providing kits containing rice, beans and other food materials in the vestibule of the church. This arrangement should be started in all our parishes. In this way, the needy can collect food materials without getting anybody's permission.

Providing meals to the hungry is the most efficient method to express our brotherliness and humaneness. We shall today listen to the cry of the poor in order to hear the words of the Lord at the last Judgment: "I was hungry; you gave me food" (Mt. 25:35). The care that Jesus gave to the poor should be realized practically in every parish. The Synod of Bishops reminds all the parishes and institutions of the Church that it is their duty to use their income to satiate the hunger of the poor.

Formation of Seminarians

The Synod discussed the problems concerning the formation of the seminarians and the steps to be taken for their training. The Synod entrusted the Bishops and the Major Superiors of the religious congregations with the responsibility to fix the time of the



ordination of deacons depending on the completion of their training. As the priestly training is very important, the Synod decided to hold wider consultations in the ecclesiastical forums in the selection and appointment of teachers in seminaries.

Liturgy of the Hours

The Synod accepted the suggestions proposed by the Liturgical Commission for the reform of the Liturgy of the Hours. The reformed draft text of the Liturgy of the Hours will be placed at the next Synod for a detailed discussion. The Synod decided to strengthen the efforts for the unity and solidarity of the Church in all fields.

Condolences

The Synod remembered all those persons who lost their lives and property in the heavy rains and landslides that happened at Pettimudi in the district of Idukki and the persons who died in the tragic plane accident at Karipoor airport and offered prayers for them.

Conclusion

The Synod urges everyone to pray hard and engage in acts of mercy in these times when people are caught in the vicious grip of the pandemic and experiencing great suffering. We shall ask for the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of St. Thomas the Apostle and of all the saints and all the blessed of the Church.

Yours cordially in Christ,



Cardinal George Alencherry
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, on 01 September 2020.

N.B. This Circular is to be read out during the Holy Qurbana on Sunday, 06 September 2020, in all the churches and chapels of the Syro-Malabar Church where there is Sunday Qurbana for the public, respecting the regulations given by the governments. Copy of this Circular is to be made available through opportune means to those faithful who cannot participate in the celebration of Holy Qurbana in churches