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--Ben Bose

To All Consecrated People
--Pope Francis

Pahlavi Text and Imagery Context of the
"Persian Cross" in South-India: Part II
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Editorial

Specially Chosen

On Saturday, Feb. 14, 2015 Pope Francis added 20 new members to the College of Cardinals, warning the newly-minted “princes of the church” from around the globe not to let their new red hats go to their heads.

Rather than seeing themselves as a priestly elite maneuvering among themselves, Francis said, the cardinals should be “models of love and humility.” Above all, Pope Francis added, they should avoid “that smoldering anger which makes us brood over wrongs we have received.”

“No! This is unacceptable in a man of the church,” Francis warned the new cardinals arrayed before him in St. Peter’s Basilica. “Even if a momentary outburst is forgivable, this is not the case with rancoir. God save us from that!”

Francis seemed to be acting as both a spiritual director and a psychologist for the churchmen as he analyzed the perils of clerical privilege. He also probed how the cardinals — whom he chose precisely because they represent the furthest margins of the church — can avoid the very sins and attitudes that he wants to purge from the dysfunctional Vatican bureaucracy, reports Religion News Service.

“The cardinalate is certainly an honour, but it is not an honorific,” Francis told the new cardinals before each of them swore an oath of fidelity to the Pontiff and the Church. They then knelt before the pope while he placed the distinctive red biretta on their heads.

What Pope Francis has said about the cardinals is also applicable to all Christians. As specially chosen people, can we also be “models of love and humility,” rather than priestly elites maneuvering among themselves? As specially chosen people, can we gracefully give up “that smoldering anger which makes us brood over wrongs we have received”?

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor



A New Light to Enlighten the Indian Church: The Significance of Samuel Rayan S.J

Ben Bose

Neyyattinkara, Kerala

Samuel Rayan SJ (1920-) is a Catholic priest and a great Indian Christian theologian who is a Jesuit. He is an ardent protagonist of life and growth. His writings radiate the rays of social justice and express his love and care for the poor and downtrodden. Being a radical humanist, he is convinced that the human person in community is the object of God's special love. Rayan also speaks of the care of the earth, concern for life and commitment to people. Rayan's theologizing is deeply rooted in his life, his land and his commitment to Jesus.

Rayan was born on July 23, 1920, at Kumbalam, near Kollam, Kerala, South India. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1939. He was ordained a priest in 1955. He did his doctoral studies in Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome from 1958-60. He was appointed Chaplain of AICUF in Kerala, in 1961. He became Principal of Vdyajyoti,

Delhi in 1971 and taught as professor of Theology over there until December 2009 when he returned to Kerala where he now resides at Sameeksha, Kalady. For some years he was actively involved with the International Association of Catholic Theological Faculties. And he still continues to be a leading member of EATWOT, Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

The contributions of Samuel Rayan to Indian Christian Theology are highly appreciated and he is regarded as one of the first theologians who have adopted a new and different approach to theologizing. He has sought to understand and interpret the Christian faith in the light of the religious and secular realities of our country. Prof. Kurien Kunnumpuram states emphatically that Rayan's articles bear witness to three things: 1. His radical commitment to the person of Jesus. He is powerfully attracted to the fascinating personality of Jesus and has made an irrevocable commitment to him. 2. Rayan's amazing familiarity with the Bible, especially the Gospels. Many years of reading and reflection on the text have led to this familiarity. 3. Rayan's deep insights into the biblical text. The text seems to open up and reveal its depth to him. Long years of meditative reading of the Bible have enabled Rayan to gain such insights into it that are rarely found elsewhere.

Rayan's new perspectives on mission, promotion of justice and peace and work for a new society need to be highlighted. As a result the Dalits in India have got a lion's share of the experience of God's unconditional love and care. Thus, the Christian faith has offered them emancipation, a new awareness and a new identity. His visions of nature, woman and the Church bring out his concern for the preservation of nature, the empowerment of women and his quest for a meaningful understanding of the Church. Rayan's articles on doing theology raises certain meaningful questions such as 1. For whom are we

producing theology? 2. How do we see the reality and meaning of theology? But the task of theology is to clarify for each generation the implications and promises of the flesh-becoming of God's Word that should resonate with our life and faith. The aim of doing theology is to enable people to live authentically and joyfully as human beings and as Christian believers. Samuel Rayan has contributed to all the spheres of life and theology which challenge and motivate us to be better human beings.

The national seminar on "Samuel Rayan S.J. and his Contribution to Indian Christian Theology" was held on Dec 28-31, 2014 at Christ Hall, Kozhikode. It reflected on the scope of Indian Christian theology and the new openings or horizons based on Rayan's valuable insights. Many theologians from different parts of India presented papers on his theology and discussed its relevance in the pluralistic context of India. One of the major discussions paved way to think that Samuel Rayan is a prime path-finder of Dalits as he stood for an ethical fight against social evils and oppression and for the establishment of a just society. It is emphatically stated that the starting point of doing theology is not concepts but concrete reality, life and history. It is required to have a first-hand experience of life realities of subaltern people and their oppressions and sufferings. But this fact is often forgotten by theologians and their theology becomes bookish. This was challenged and questioned logically by the participants. For Samuel, the rootedness in reality is the external manifestation of faith in the God of justice. Further, the celebration of Eucharist is a promise to overcome oppression and division and to build a community of justice and equality.

Another powerful question was raised: Was Jesus aware of his divinity during his earthly life? But his Abba-experience explicates his relational aspects of life that he is

fully human and fully divine. Even then the sad part of the story is that the human face of Jesus is often forgotten. Thus there was a consensus that one should not just see Jesus in others, but be Jesus to others. Rayan's emphasis is on the historical Jesus, the real human being who is recognized as the supreme revelation of God, the compassionate. He is compassion enfleshed. Rayan's interpretation of Jesus Christ and his mission evolves from his basic conviction that God became a human to reveal to us how God is involved in the struggles and sufferings of humans to become authentically human. The commitment to Jesus demands a commitment to struggle with and for the poor and the exploited and all victims of social, cultural, religious and political discrimination and oppression.

The integral reflections of Rayan on the commercialization of the earth, the global imbalance and the ecological crisis are effective to show his concern for life and its growth. It was unanimously claimed that though Rayan's articles have been written decades ago, his views are ever-new and significant. He seems to have been ahead of his time in his reflections on serious concerns regarding ecological and environmental crisis, at same time to have a grass root level theologizing that might enable us to create an Indian Christian theology. In order to pay due respect to Dr Samuel Rayan and for his contributions to Indian Christian theology, it was suggested that we need to teach these reflections of theology in our theologates of India as well. Thus I would like to conclude by saying that Rayan has enkindled a new lamp to enlighten the Indian Christian Church. 🕯



To All Consecrated People On The Occasion Of The Year Of Consecrated Life

Pope Francis
Vatican

A Quick Summary

- ♣ 50th anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which speaks of the religious in its sixth chapter, and of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* on the renewal of religious life.
- ♣ Begins 30 November 2014, the First Sunday of Advent,
Ends 02 February 2016, Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

I. AIMS OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

1. *To look to the past with gratitude.* RECOUNT YOUR HISTORY – be inspired by it. Also confess our own weaknesses! Bear vigorous and joyful witness before the world to the holiness and VITALITY present in so many of us
2. *To live the present with passion.* LISTEN to the Spirit speaking to the Church today. Challenge of the Gospel – it

is demanding. It is a manual for daily living and the decisions we are called to make. CREATIVITY OF CHARITY is boundless – finding new ways of bringing the newness of the Gospel to every culture and every corner of society. Call to examine our fidelity to the mission entrusted to us. – same passion, closeness to the people sharing their joys and sorrows, keeping alive the charisms of the founders/foundresses, replicating the unity of the apostles with Christ and the fellowship of the first community in Jerusalem – one heart and one soul and to rejoice in the Lord's presence – becoming experts in communion (remember we live in a polarized society), called to offer a concrete model of community – acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts. Live the mysticism of encounter which entails “the ability to hear, to listen to other people; the ability to seek together ways and means”

3. ***To embrace the future with hope.*** Amid uncertainties of social irrelevance, decreasing vocations, aging members, etc...practise the virtue of hope, based on the One in whom we have put our trust, for whom nothing is impossible, be conscious that the Holy Spirit will spur us to do the right things. Do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency, and even less to trust in your own strength. Do not join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church. Set out anew. Young members, be engaged in dialogue with the previous generations, recapture their original idealism.

II. EXPECTATIONS FOR THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

1. ***To be joyful.*** “Where there are religious, there is joy”. What brings us joy? Authentic fraternity, total self-giving in service to the Church, to families and young people, to the elderly and the poor. Discover PERFECT JOY in our

dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down etc. Going beyond the cult of efficiency, fitness and success- the world is such and ignores the poor

2. ***“To wake up the world”***- the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. “Radical evangelical living is not only for the religious: it is demanded of everyone. but the religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.” this is the priority that is needed right now: “to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy”.

Qualities of the prophets: gifted with the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events (they are like sentinels). They know God and they know their brothers and sisters. They are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. They are FREE, not bound to anyone but God, and no other vested interest in them. They are on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side. Find ways to create “ALTERNATE SPACES” where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive – a constant creativity is essential. At times of temptations to flee, remember, you are not alone, God is with you.

3. ***To be “experts in communion”*** – the great challenge today is to make the Church the home and the school of communion – avoid criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility – and open up the path of charity, mutual acceptance and concern – the MYSTIQUE OF LIVING TOGETHER. We need to ask ourselves about the way we relate to persons from different cultures, as our communities become increasingly international. How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co-responsible? Focus on Inter-Institute

Collaboration at the local and global levels, on projects involving formation, evangelization, and social action? STEP OUR MORE COURAGEOUSLY into this venture – this will help us go against the disease of self-absorption. Also call to true synergy with all other vocations – the priests, the lay faithful – spread the spirituality of communion.

4. ***“To go into all the world”*** – a whole world awaits us - men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine... **DON’T BE CLOSED IN ON YOURSELVES, DON’T BE STIFLED BY PETTY SQUABBLES, DON’T REMAIN A HOSTAGE TO YOUR OWN PROBLEMS.** Work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Restructure and repurpose according to the present demands of evangelization and charity and adjust apostolates to new needs
5. ***To ask what God and people are asking of us?*** **DURING THIS YEAR NO ONE CAN FEEL EXCUSED FROM SERIOUSLY EXAMINING HIS OR HER PRESENCE IN THE CHURCH’S LIFE AND FROM RESPONDING TO THE NEW DEMANDS CONSTANTLY BEING MADE ON US, TO THE CRY OF THE POOR.** Only by such concern for the needs of the world, and by docility to the promptings of the Spirit, will this Year of Consecrated Life become an authentic *kairos*, a time rich in God’s grace, a time of transformation.

6.

III. THE HORIZONS OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

1. Extends to *the laity, who share with them the same ideals, spirit and mission*. Celebrate it in your entire “family”. Arrange mutual enrichment and support programmes.
2. Extends to the *entire Church* -be increasingly aware of the gift which is the presence of our many consecrated men and women, heirs of the great saints who have written the history of Christianity. Be grateful to all the great people of these congregations. – Draw close to them, rejoice with them, share with them their difficulties and to assist them in their ministries and works
3. Extends to the consecrated men and women *outside* the Catholic fold – esp. to monasticism – inter-monastic dialogue is encouraged.

Summary by **Robin Seelan SJ**, Satyanilayam, Chennai 🌿




Pahlavi Text and Imagery Context of the “Persian Cross” in South-India: Part II

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(Continued from the earlier issue of AJRS)

B - Inculturated exegesis of the imagery setting

(1) Shape of the Cross: [see stylized presentation (a)]
The Holy Cross has short, almost equilateral arms with four flowery ends. It is a blossoming cross, celebrating joyous victory over death. It is a source of blessing, not very dissimilar from an ancient blissful symbol, called “svastikaḥ” (or in early Christian usage “crux gammata”, composed of four Greek capitals of the letter gamma Γ as ). In Delitzsch’s Hebrew New Testament the word for “cross” is “š^elâbh”, related to Arabic, and adopted in many languages, for instance in Urdu/Hindi as “salīb”. Another term in Indian languages is “sûlī”, although the Sanskrit “šûlâ” originally means a stake for cruel impalement. In the ancient Vedic “puruṣa-medhaḥ” (human sacrifice) the victim was tied to a wooden post, called “yûpaḥ”. Not finding a proper equivalent for cross, Sanskrit translators have used general words for pillar

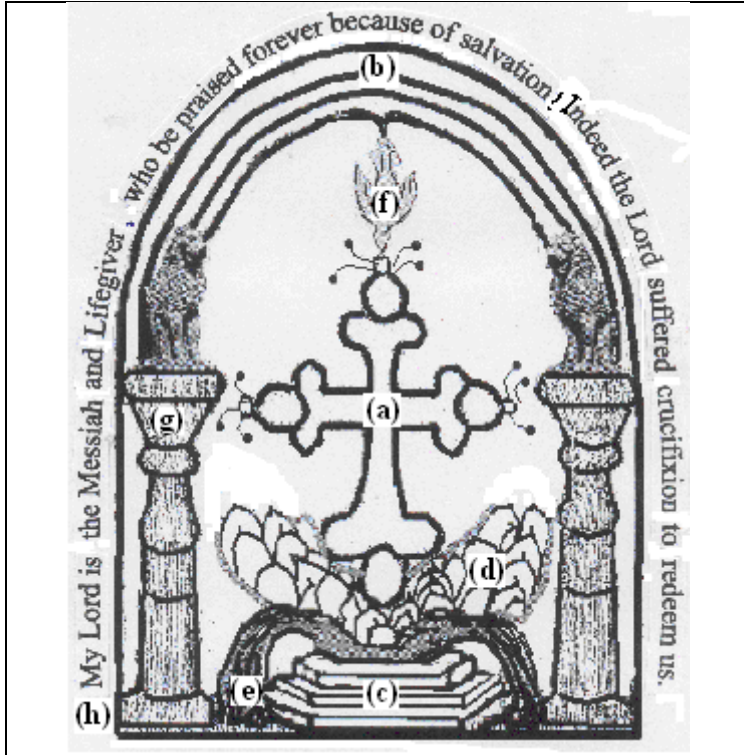
like “sthûṇâ, stambhaḥ”, or they created the neologist term “krûsaḥ”. It could be designated more easily as “taruḥ”, a tree – which is the very related term “dâru”, used in the Persian language of the inscription. But sacrificial death on a live tree is a contradiction; it cannot be the end. A budding tree-cross symbolizes “the tree of life” (Rev 22:2). The sacred tree is a primordial object of veneration in our common human heritage. Just to mention the wishful “kalpa”-tree in heaven which fulfils all desires, the “bodhi”-tree of enlightenment and the undecaying “akṣaya”-tree which withstands the onslaught of the cosmic deluge. Hence, in many a country of Asia, the rich symbolism of the cross with flowery design cannot be considered to be a foreign import.

(2) Floral protrusions: To specify this kind of cross as “blossomed”, one could use the Sanskrit term “su-puṣṭita” (well-flowered) or, with powerful connotation, “su-dalita” (the root “dal-” having two opposite meanings: to crush or to bloom). As a matter of fact, many are not only socially stigmatized as “dalita-s”, marginalized and outcaste, but oppressed and depressed in several ways, yearning for liberation. The liberative cross instills a radical existential dignity of all humans as being “su-dalita” and urges for its concrete realization. The cross is also called “Nasrani Cross”, and by coincidence, the term “Nasrani” (for Christian) expresses the blossoming of new life in the Messiah, because it refers to the prophetic text of Isaiah 11:1, which has been applied to the Messiah, coming forth from the roots of Jesse as a (royal, Davidic) “new shoot” – “nêṣer” in Hebrew, translated “branch” in English, but “anthos”, that is “flower” in the Greek Septuagint and “flos” in the

Latin Vulgate. Therefore, the Hebrew translator of the Greek New Testament opted for spelling the name of Jesus the Nazarean as “Yêšûa’ han-Nâṣ^erî” (written with ṣâdhê), relying thereby on a possible interpretation of Nazareth as a flower-city (“Puṣpa-nagaram” in Sanskrit) rather than a Nazarite city (“naz^erî”, written with zayin, meaning consecrated, separated by vow, see Numbers 6:1-21). Hence, the reference to Christians as “Nâṣ^erîm” in Acts 24:5 would give them the nomination and responsibility of being a “su-dalita” people, according to another text of Isaiah: “Your people shall all be righteous. They are the shoot (nêṣer) that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified” (60:21). Their ensign is the “sudalita” cross, lifted up for the benefit of all nations (62:10), spreading the fragrance of divine benevolence. The appellation “sudalita” makes them all equally fellow-pilgrims on the Noble Path, advancing together in mutual service and love.

Stylized presentation of the symbols carved on the Persian Cross at St Thomas Mount, Chennai with running English translation of the inscription

- (a) Flowery Cross
- (b) Arch with three layers
- (c) Pedestal with three steps
- (d) Lotus-like flower
- (e) Flow of water
- (f) Descending dove
- (g) Twin pillars with lion capital
- (h) Proposed translation



(3) Empty cross: Also typical for this early cross is the absence of any figure of the Crucified Nazarean. This implies a double truth: he is fully human, as proven by his inhuman death on the cross; but he is also uniquely human, because his sacrificial surrender unto death is believed to have turned into life, as indicated by the empty tomb. It underscores the true humanity of Jesus, albeit through transformation, resurrection – while the mystery of his personhood is to be acknowledged (see below). According to the Pahlavi inscription, the Lord endured real suffering on the tree; but it was for life-giving redemption. In him, the first Adam died to sin, but

the new Adam rose to life. There is hope and expectation for our broken humanity. According to the Puruṣa-sūktā of Ṛigveda, the Primeval Man was sacrificed for the sake of creating a universe of harmonious differentiations, with an idealized human complementarity of social functions represented by “mouth, arms, thighs and feet” (10:90:12). But in reality humanity fragmented into disunity, injustice and a rigid oppressive caste-system. Through the sacrifice of the uniquely Human, the Lord “Su-mukun-dah” (good-salvation-giver, which is the Sanskrit equivalent of his name Yêṣûa’), the wall of division was pulled down and the curtain of separation torn apart: a new humanity of unity and dignity was created, into which the firstfruits, the first “su-dalita” followers of the risen “Su-Guru” (good-Master) were initiated. A few centuries later, the symbol of the flowering cross emerged in the East. The so-called “Persian Cross” was designed, hewn and inscribed even before the spread of Islam. Does the emptiness of this cross, without any human representation, suggests a “replacement”, if we may use an expression of the Holy Quran, Surat 4:157-8 ? It is quite meaningful to say that God could not have allowed the prophet Messiah to be cursed on the tree and to be annihilated, and therefore the Almighty had him “replaced” and lifted him up to heavenly life! But, according to Nazarene interpretation, it was in the same person that the old Man was put to death and “replaced” by the new Man of righteousness.

The foundation of our faith is first to accept Jesus as a fully human being and never to diminish his humanity. Yet, the empty cross leads to silence, so that a deep mystery might be revealed. By not presenting a crucifix with a realistic portrayal of the Messiah suffering on the Cross, the accusation is precluded that

he is being worshipped as “a god”. There is no idol. He is not the “avatâra” of some pre-existing divine being, neither is he divinized on the cross. If one were to use the term “person” univocally, without proper knowledge, and say that the second divine “Person”, the eternal “Son of God” descended in our midst and underwent crucifixion, then the concrete “person” suffering before our eyes would not be the truly human Jesus of Nazareth. There would be only an appearance, an apparent human being, the result of “lîlâ”, a divine play of love. In fact, the New Testament does not use the term “Son of God” apart from its application to the human Jesus, and never in the sense of a pre-incarnational, eternal, uncreated “Son of God”, and certainly not as a distinct autonomous divine “Person”. Due to misunderstanding the Cross has been a cause of religious divide, whereas Christian faith has always upheld absolute monotheism, “one Godhead, one might, one majesty, one power, one glory, one Lordship, one kingdom, one will and truth” (Tome of pope Damasus, after the Council of Constantinople, 382 – we have to restrict ourselves to an early dogmatic expression, which predates the lower sixth century limit of the inscription). The silent empty Thomas-Cross needs further clarification, because some have cast doubt about the orthodoxy of its imagery, especially whether the descending dove would not suggest adoptionism.

(4) The explanatory text: The most likely meaning (as justified above) of the Pahlavi inscription surrounding the cross [see stylized presentation (h)] maintains that the Messiah is the Giver of life, the Bringer of salvation – which could not be proclaimed about any human being as such, though innocent, dying in utter wretchedness.

The inscription begins with the title “My Lord”, echoing the exclamation of the doubting Thomas, when identifying the Crucified one: “My Lord and my God!” (Jo 20:28). The believing Thomas does not make Jesus into another Lord-God. It is his response to the unexpected manifestation of God’s closeness in the very apparition of the Master, whose wounds he was invited to touch. This surrender of faith was uttered supposedly by a Jewish disciple and recorded by a Jewish evangelist, both remaining strict monotheists. God’s truthfulness and loving mercy were fully recognized in the human Master, as being totally united with God. But no second divinity is constituted by the mystery that a created, human person is fully united to God, being totally assumed by God. The disciple Thomas acknowledged that one, and only one divine Lordship was revealed to him in the resurrected Master, marked with the scars of his suffering out of love. The empty cross declares blessed those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. So also the community is invited to realize and experience that the life-giving God is manifested in the concretely human Messiah, who is identified with the dual messianic title of “Son of Man” as the universally human representative and “Son of God” because of his unique, loving and obedient relationship to God, as his (motherly) Father, the Parent of all fellow-humans. All of us are called finally to share in this relationship of oneness with God, as “participants of the divine nature” (2 Pe 1:4), through growing faithfulness to the voice of the Spirit in our hearts and through increasing love for one another. The mystery is that the “Word” of God, without division, without otherness, without alteration, spoke in creation, events and prophetic utterances and finally the perfect human was assumed by God as his total self-expression from the

very moment of his conception and birth, throughout his hidden Nazareth life, more forcefully in his baptism and ministry, and most explicitly as suffering and exalted Servant in his death and resurrection. As it is testified in the inscription, for all this the Lord “is ever to be praised” and all this he underwent “in order to redeem us”.

Hence, true “darśanam” (contemplation) of this Cross is directed to the human as mystery of manifested divine Love. In an attitude of “Suguru-bhakti” (devotion to the Good Master) the controversy about which of the two natures, human or divine, prevails becomes irrelevant. The Nestorian, Monophysite and Latin christologies of double nature, single nature and joined nature are silenced before the Cross. They are like the subtle “vâda-s” or theories of Indian religious philosophy – whether there is “dvaita” dualism (of Absolute Self and relative self), “advaita” monism (only one Reality) or composite “dvaitâdvaita” relationship. The supplementary artistic imagery, carved in relief around the cross, is intended to help a better understanding of the mystery.

(5) The pedestal beneath consists of three steps or layers [see stylized presentation (c)]. They remind us of the steps leading gradually from Solomon’s temple court to the inner sanctuary. They represent the whole created world in ascending order: matter, life and mind; like the three “guṇa-s” or essential qualities of inert “tamas”, dynamic “rajas” and spiritual “sattvam”; they cover all regions of earthly “bhûr”, airy “bhuvā” and atmospheric “svah”, leading from unreal to real, from dark to light and from death to immortality. When a Vedic “vedikâ”

or altar is prepared, bricks are arranged in layers, symbolizing cosmic elements and spheres, numbered according to the type of sacrifice. Here, the cross is planted on top, as it was on Calvary hill. The created humanity of Jesus summarizes, draws and lifts up the whole of universal creation (Eph 1:10). We share in his humanity and are called to love one another as he loved us, with all our strength, with all our heart and with all our mind!

(6) The arch above [see (b)] has also threefold layers; but they are enclosed in a central parenthesis as one. They represent the heavenly realm, the eternal, uncreated, divine. It reflects faith in the undivided Unity of Trinity, not unlike the Indian concept of Absolute oneness of Brahman, as mono-syllabic AUM (A-U-M) and fulness of “Sat-Cit-Ânanda” (Being-Self-Bliss). The arch overshadows the Cross, because without division or alteration the perfectly human Jesus was to be God’s fullest Self-Wording of love. The unspeakable mystery of the living God could be expressed in mystic language as a perennial “inner” breathing, where “Sat”, the Source of its own Being, exhales Self “Cit” as its own eternal Word (Śabdaḥ), and inhales Self again in eternal blissful “Âtmânanda” while returning to never decreasing fullness, from fullness to fullness (pūrṇam). God is pure Love and his immutable selfgiving is revealed so to speak in the once-for-all process of “outer” breathing, where exhalation is the self-expression of “Sat” until it reaches the final point of creation, the perfect Human, being assumed by the divine Word. The inhalation is then the re-creation from essential creaturely limitedness towards the plenitude of spiritual fulfilment; yet, in reality, due to the option of our freedom for sinful enslavement, it is a redemptive recreation of all humanity by the sanctifying

Spirit towards final self-realization in sharing the life of God! The turning point from exhalation to inhalation consists of three main stages in the life of Jesus, who is the perfect-human-united-to-the-divine: first, the conception leading to nativity; secondly, baptism as inauguration of the Messianic ministry and thirdly, the passover from crucifixion to resurrection. Each time the Holy Spirit is powerfully present, as shown in the following three representations engraved below and above the cross.

(7) Figurative flowering: The base is adorned with an opened lotus-like flower.[(d)] Certainly, a white lotus evokes purity, even when floating on the surface of a muddy pool; and among other meanings it symbolizes the enlightenment of Lord Buddha; it is also pictured as the lotus-seat (padmâsana) of goddess Lakṣmî and it is chosen as the national flower of Mother India. But, in relation to the mystery of the Crucified One, the lotus suggests the beginning of the great turning point from creation to recreation, when the humble virgin of Nazareth accepted that she may conceive through the Holy Spirit, so that instantly the “union without confusion of the perfect humanity with the perfect divinity” may be realized (Formula of Union, after the Council of Ephesus, 433). Her child was named “The Lord saves” (Su-Mukunda) and “God with us” (Sahadeva). The Word of God, speaking in many ways, finally came to total self-expression in an individual historical person; but it does not mean that, in the same sense of “person”, it was an autonomous Divine “Person” before (a second God!).

(8) The flow of water: The same Spirit was seen descending “like a dove” on the Son of Man, who after being immersed in the river was confirmed through the heavenly voice to be the appointed, anointed Messiah at the start of his public ministry. Thus, at the base of the cross, on both sides of the lotus, water seems to be flowing like a river [see (e)]. Symbols have multiple meanings. In India, specially at the “tri-veṅī sangam” or triple confluence of holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and invisible Sarasvati, a cleansing bath in the sacred water gives an experience of rebirth to the pilgrims. Water flows like a life-giving river from the new Temple (Ez 47). Both, living water and life-blood came forth from the pierced heart of the crucified Messiah. They represent baptismal cleansing and eucharistic revivification. Thus, the Cross is a “sacramental” sign. We are invited to believe and drink from the living water, which flows from the pierced side of the new Adam (Jo 7:38).

(9) Descent of a bird: Anyone commenting on the Cross will tell that a dove is seen descending on its summit [see (f)] and that it means the power of the Holy Spirit, bestowed on and by the Crucified Lord. Thus, he is declared “Mṛtyum-jayaḥ” (Conqueror of death), because in fulfilment of his great sacrifice of loving obedience, in name of all humanity, he gave up the Spirit (Jo 19:30) and being accepted by the heavenly Father, the risen Lord breathed on the disciples (20:22) and bequeathed his “Prāṇātmā” to the community at Pentecost. But nowhere in new-testamental context is the similitude of a “dove” mentioned any longer. However, in Indian sacrificial context, such a symbol is prominent. The “su-parṇaḥ” (well-winged) flying bird is imagined to bring the offering to the Supreme Lord and to bring back the blessing of “amṛtam” (nectar) to the sacrificer. Likewise, in eastern

liturgy at the Holy Qurban, the Holy Spirit is invoked to descend and consecrate our offering in memory of the once-for-all sacrifice of our Lord. From excavations at Kauśāmbî, near Allahabad, it appears that in the ancient “puruṣa-medhaḥ” (human sacrifice) the whole sacrificial area was delineated as a huge swift-flying bird of prey, called “śyenah”. More interesting is the symbolic use of the bird “suparṇah” in Ṛgveda 1:35:7 for the beneficiary rays of the Sun : “The well-winged bird (suparṇah) has verily enlightened the atmospheric regions, as divine spirit (asuraḥ) of deep inspiration (literally, profound vibration) and good guidance”. The Holy Spirit is such all-pervading and penetrating inner voice for all humankind, which is being recreated and guided to reach its ultimate destiny in God.

(10) Twin pillars with lion capital: Two identical pillars have been carved, at the left and right side of the cross, with capitals surmounted by single lions facing each other [see (g)]. Immediately we think of the lion-capital on pillars, erected by the Mauryan emperor Aśoka. The pillar at Sarnath, with four lions seated back-to-back, has been accepted as India’s state emblem. A single lion capital, found for instance at Vaisali (Bihar), is less common. Such pillars in isolated position represent imperial power; but, since they also carry aloft a “dharma-cakra” (Wheel of the Law), they are meant to propagate righteous behaviour through the revolving discipline of the noble truths. In 1 Tim 3:15 the Church of the living God is called “the pillar and bulwark of the Truth”. However, when two pillars with a lion capital, or occasionally with an elephant capital, flank the entry to a shrine or temple, they serve as protectors and guardians. Sometimes mythic sphinxes and winged lions are sculptured

for the purpose. Two guardian cherubim were placed face-to-face at the two extremes of the ark of the covenant; overshadowing the mercy seat with their protective wings. They stand in attendance because of the Holy-Holy-Holy Presence. Here, the pillars support the three-layered arch of the Divine mystery of Oneness. But the person enthroned on the cross does not need protection; he himself is the royal Messiah. The mighty lion evokes victory, as in Rev 5:5: “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has conquered”. Those who stand near the cross are the disciples, the royal priestly people. Their leaders are the pillars of the Church (Gal 2:9), especially the two martyred witnesses mentioned in Revelation, ch 11. If the apostle Thomas, meaning the Twin (“yamalaḥ” in Sanskrit – hence his Indian name as teacher “Yamal-âcârya” or apostle “Yamala-dûta”) was really martyred on St Thomas Mount near the “bleeding cross” of his Master, the twin pillars could be taken to mean that his witness deserves to be doubly reliable – since only “the testimony of two” is considered valid (Jo 8:17) and Thomas the Twin had wanted “to die with him” (11:16).

Our findings on the Pahlavi Text and our propositions on the Imagery Context of the blossomed “su-dalita” Cross should encourage the followers of “Śrî-Sumukunda”, as well as all “Suguru-bhakta” devotees and seekers, to obtain a blessed “darśanam” (contemplation) at such place of pilgrimage, wherever the Cross is venerated. What was legendary before, has become legible. Since the inscription is now relatively certain, a replica of the Cross could be displayed with a plain vernacular translation and a clearer depiction of the symbols and their possible meanings. Thanks be to God for having entrusted to the Indian community such a wondrous sign of universal salvation. Our gratitude to all those who have preserved for us this precious rock of faith, embedded in the soil of Indian

culture. Its message and symbolization may find reverberations in the “soul” of Asia at large!

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The Power and Problem of Stem Cells in Regenerative Medicine

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“With regard to fundamental organismal existence (and inviolable moral standing), the act of fertilization is a leap from zero to everything.” William B. Hurlbut²

An ancient Greek myth informs us that Prometheus transgressed the law of the gods when he gave fire to humanity. As a punishment for his act, he was chained to a rock, and an eagle was sent every day to eat his liver.

¹ The author teaches Bioethics and Social Ethics at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. For a detailed study on this subject, please see J. Charles Davis, *The Ethics of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: Proposals for a Legal Framework for India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Ltd. 2014); also “Embryos: Humans or Biomaterials? Ethics and Law,” in Scaria Kannizakonil (ed.), *New Horizons in Christian Ethics: Reflections from India* (Bangalore: ATC, 2014): 411-430.

² William B. Hurlbut, “Framing the Future: Embryonic Stem Cells, Ethics and the Emerging Era of Developmental Biology,” *PediatricResearch* 59: 4/2 (April 2006): 4R-12R, 8R.

However, his liver regenerated during the night and he survived.³ This idea of regeneration has been in history for quite some centuries. The regenerative medicine has the goal to develop a form of medical therapy that regenerates the damaged tissues. Regenerative medicine can not only stop the deterioration but also provide the power of organ renewal. For example, the damaged heart muscle can be regenerated or renewed with healthy heart muscle. This is exactly the promise of embryonic pluripotent stem cells.

The use of stem cells raised high hopes in diagnosis and treatment of incurable diseases in a predictable span of time. Scientists conceived the idea to regenerate not only the heart but also the brain, pancreas, liver, and spinal nervous system. It is a marvellous science certainly. What are stem cells? Stem cells are those cells that can make more cells. They are the progenitor cells from which tissues stem. They are unspecialized or undifferentiated cells which are not yet assigned to specific tasks and can thus in principle give rise to many different specific cell tissue types such as skin, liver, kidney, heart, etc. They are thus originator cells that can give rise to multiple tissue types. They “have the unique property of being able to either reproduce themselves (a process called self-renewal) or differentiate into a variety of more specialized cells.”⁴

³ Steinar Funderud, “Stem Cells: Sources and Clinical Applications,” in: Lars Østnor (ed.), *Stem Cells, Human Embryos and Ethics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Norway: Springer, 2008), 21.

⁴ Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Human Stem Cell Research, *Opportunities for Health and Ethical Perspective: A Discussion Paper* (Ottawa: CIHR, 2001), 1.

There are generally two types of stem cells: embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells such as nerve or bone marrow stem cells. The history of research with adult stem cells began around 1960s, when researchers discovered stem cells in the bone marrow. Since then, many more adult stem cells have been identified in many parts of the body and are being used in research as well as in clinical application to cure diseases. The success stories of using adult stem cells are many and are non-controversial and scientists are encouraged to carry on. Umbilical cord blood also contains stem cells and research with them does not involve any ethical controversy either. However, human embryonic stem cell (hESC) research raises an ethical problem, because *embryos die while extracting their inner cell mass* which contain embryonic stem cells.

A fertilized egg is totipotent. It means it is totally potent. It can become all cell tissues of the body including forming a complete organism. If a totipotent cell is implanted into the womb of a mother, it will grow into a baby. Pluripotent stem cells are capable of giving rise to all tissues of the body except forming an embryo. They cannot form a baby if implanted into the womb, because they are unable to give rise to extraembryonic tissues like placenta which are essential for fetal development. Multipotent stem cells are present in born individuals. They are also called somatic stem cells. Their potential lineages are less plastic and more determined. They can produce tissues of specific types. These are found in our mature human body and in the umbilical cord blood. They can no longer become all but a few types of tissues.

A unipotent stem cell is capable of creating only one kind of tissue.

The plasticity of adult stem cells is far less than that of the embryonic stem cells. Embryonic stem cells can be also cultured in large numbers. Their capacity for self-renewal and multiplication is higher. However, a potential advantage of using stem cells from an adult or umbilical cord blood is that the patient's own cells could be harvested in culture and then reintroduced into the patient. The use of one's own stem cells in therapy would not be rejected by the immune system. The use of embryonic stem cells can cause immuno-incompatibility and would need immunosuppressive drugs. Transplant rejection is possible in implant of alien tissues.

Scientists postulated to achieve new insights with the use of embryonic stem cells not only for basic research in discovering (mal)developments of cells, but also for unearthing new opportunities in drug testing or regenerative cell therapies in medicine for incurable diseases, such as, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Proponents argue that IVF surplus embryos can be used for research because there are high-ranking noble goals, while opponents argue that embryos are humans who cannot be instrumentalized as a mere means to any end.

The surplus embryos do not turn to be objects because they are not implanted. The status of non-implantation itself is a moral wrong, since the original intention was to get a baby. Since they are no more required or anyway they are going to be discarded from cryopreservation, does it mean that they become objects? In the first place, creating more embryos than required is wrong. In the Catholic Church, the very use of IVF for getting babies is

wrong, since it attacks the very definition and purpose of marriage. And IVF brings out a baby as a “product” rather than a gift of God. One should not forget that only God creates and humans only beget.

The developmental biology asserts the statement of Hurlbut that the act of fertilization is a leap from zero to everything. With the joining of gametes, namely, the sperm and the ovum, a new being comes into existence. It is a complete living organism, which is integrated, self-developing and self-maintaining unity under inbuilt immanent plan. Nothing is added to the ontological and moral status of the embryo, except nutrition, warmth and place that even an adult human being needs for development.

As Jerome Lejeune, a developmental geneticist, Nobel Prize laureate states, “Each of us has a unique beginning, the moment of conception. As soon as the 23 chromosomes carried by the sperm encounter the 23 chromosomes carried by the ovum, the whole information necessary and sufficient to spell out all the characteristics of the new being is gathered, a new being is defined which has never occurred before and will never occur again... It is a very specialized individual.”⁵ This human individual that begins the existence at conception or fertilization develops itself as human and never unto human.

⁵ Jerome Lejeune gave his testimony in *Davis vs Davis*, Circuit Court for Blount County, State of Tennessee at Maryville, Tennessee, 1989. Reprinted in: Martin Palmer (ed.), *A Symphony of the preborn child: Part Two* (Hagertown, MD: NAACP, 1989), 9-10.

A fertilized egg is a human being, which has inbuilt natural provisions for development after nuclei have emerged. There is really no difference between a human being and human person. Were we not humans at some point of time or when we were embryos and how can a non-human turn into a human? Social and legal functions; qualities and abilities, which can vary according to persons, cannot be used to justify a graded moral status to any human being including the unborn humans.

The media have oversold the promises of pluripotent embryonic stem cell research, whereas there are not even one successful therapy of using embryonic stem cells, while there are thousands of success stories with the use of adult stem cells. In fact, there have been adverse results with the use of embryonic stem cells. For example, after embryonic stem cell treatment to cure a brain tumour, the patient grew into a monster. To-date the pluripotent embryonic stem cell research is only a promise. The promise of regenerative treatment for almost all diseases with the use of stem cells obtained from human embryo that first began in 1988 has also caused many countries to spend billions of money, but it has not achieved any success. On the other hand, adult stem cells have been promising and result-giving. The latest induced Pluripotent Stem (iPS) Cell research is great alternative besides adult and umbilical cord blood stem cells, which are ethically non-problematic.

In the induced Pluripotent Stem Cell research, an adult cell of the human body can be reprogrammed to an embryo-like stage, from which pluripotent stem cells can be obtained. This research is still in the process of achieving its goal. The co-winner of Nobel Prize for Medicine for his discovery of iPS cells, said the following after looking at an embryo through a microscope: “When I saw the embryo, I

suddenly realized there was such a small difference between it and my daughters.. There is no way now to get around some use of embryos, but my goal is to avoid using them.”⁶

An unborn human embryo, whether in vivo or in vitro, is always human and a human. He is an individual and a member of human species. He grows as human and as a human and as a human individual and not unto human or unto a human or unto a member of any other species other than *homo sapiens*. No human embryo should ever be used as a mere means even for a noble cause. Dignity is intrinsic to humans from the moment of conception. Dignity is inviolable. In religious sense, dignity is also described as sanctity. This dignity or sanctity is at all-time present in human existence.

Science and technologies have limits. Scientific freedom is not unlimited. No medical ethics teaches that one human life should be saved at the cost of killing another life. The principle *first do no harm (primum nil nocere* –non-maleficence) has precedence over the principle of doing good (beneficence). In India, embryonic stem cell research is booming without binding legislations. In country like India, where basic health care is not adequately given to all, unethical researches costing billions of rupees must be legally stopped. A society will perish sooner than later without ethic 🌱

⁶ Martin Fackler, Risk Taking is in His Genes, *The New York Times* (December 11, 2007).



Homily Notes

Mar 2, 2015: Second Sunday of Lent
Gen 22: 1-18; Rom 8: 31-34; Mark 9: 2-10
Transformed and Transfigured

Today's readings are an invitation as well as a challenge to put our faith in the loving promises of a merciful God and transform our lives by renewing them during Lent. Our transformed lives will enable us to radiate the glory and grace of the transfigured Lord around us by our Spirit filled lives. The first reading tells us how God saved the life of Abraham's son Isaac as a reward for Abraham's faith. The link of this story with the Gospel reading emphasizes God's infinite love as seen in the redemptive sacrifice of his own Son for the salvation of the world. That is why Paul recalls in the second reading that God the Father did not spare his own Son from death. What an irony and paradox! God spared Abraham's son, but not his own! Why? It is because God loves us with his everlasting love. Describing Jesus' transfiguration, today's gospel shows us a glimpse of the heavenly glory waiting for those who do God's will by putting their staunch faith in Him.

The primary purpose of Jesus' transfiguration was to consult his heavenly Father and ascertain His suffering, death and resurrection. The secondary aim was to make his chosen

disciples aware of his divine glory so that they might discard their worldly ambitions about a conquering political Messiah and to strengthen them in their time of trial. The Transfiguration establishes Jesus' glorious identity as the beloved Son of God, and places his divine Sonship in the context of Jewish expectations about the Kingdom and the resurrection

In each Holy Mass, the bread and wine we offer on the altar become transfigured and transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. In other words, our Divine Lord is transfigured before our eyes, taking the form of bread and wine. Hence, just as Jesus' transfiguration strengthened the apostles in their time of trial, each holy Mass should be our source of heavenly strength against temptations, and our renewal during Lent. In addition, our holy communion with the transfigured Jesus should be the source of our daily transfiguration, transforming our minds and hearts to do more good by humble and selfless service to others.

-Jesuraja Fernando

Mar 8, 2015: Third Sunday of Lent
Ex 20: 1-17; I Cor 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

Cleansing Our Hearts

Today's readings challenge us to keep our covenant agreement with Jesus Christ, just as the Israelites tried to keep the agreements of the Old Testament covenant with Yahweh by promising to obey the Ten Commandments. Today's first reading teaches us that the Ten Commandments are the basis of our religious and spiritual life, just as they formed the rules of life of the Israelites resulting from their covenant with Yahweh at Mount Sinai. The second reading reminds us that we must preach the divine folly of the crucified Christ and the spirit of the cross, especially during the Lenten season. The message of the cross is God's wisdom and power and, foolish as it may seem, it is greater than the Law, greater than

the temple, greater than worldly wisdom or human strength. Today's gospel gives the dramatic account of Jesus' cleansing the Temple of its merchants and money-changers, followed by a prediction of his death and resurrection.

St. Paul reminds us that we are God's temples because the Spirit of God dwells in us. Hence we have no right to desecrate God's temple by impurity and injustice. We are expected to cleanse our hearts of pride, hatred, jealousy and all evil thoughts, desires and planning. Reminiscent of what Jesus did in cleansing the temple, we, as 21st century disciples, must cleanse ourselves of attitudes and behaviors that prevent us from seeing and responding to hurt wherever we find it. Let us welcome Jesus into our hearts and lives during Lent by repentance and renewal of our lives. We will drive out the wild animals that do not belong to the holy temple of our body by making a whip of chords by our fasting, penance and alms giving during Lent and by going to confession to receive God's loving forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation. **-Arun Chakkalakkal**

Mar 15, 2015: IV Sunday of Lent
II Chr 36: 14-16, 19-23; Eph 2: 4-10; John 3: 14-21
Eternal Life as Free Gift

The central theme of today's readings is that our salvation is a free gift of a merciful God given to us through Jesus His Son. As an act of love and gratitude to God who is "*rich in mercy*" and as an expression of our faith, we are invited to share his sufferings by doing penance during Lent so that we may inherit our eternal salvation and the glory of his resurrection in heaven. As we continue our Lenten observance in the fourth week, the Sacred Liturgy invites us to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's grace, mercy and salvation. In the first reading from the Second Book of Chronicles, we learn the compassion and patience of God. God allowed Cyrus the Great, a pagan conqueror to become the instrument of His mercy and salvation to His chosen people who were in exile in

Babylon. Today's gospel has a parallel theme but on a much higher level. Jesus, the Son of God, becomes the agent of God's salvation, not just for one sinful nation but for the sinfulness of the whole world. Through John 3/16 the gospel teaches us that God expressed His love, mercy and compassion for us by giving His only Son for our salvation. In the second reading Paul tells us that God is so rich in mercy that He grants us eternal salvation and eternal life as a free gift through Christ Jesus.

The crucifix – the symbol of the “lifted up” Jesus - holds a central place in our churches because it is a forceful reminder not only of God's love and mercy, but also of the price of our salvation. Hence no Christian home should be without this symbol of God's love. It invites us to be generous and compassionate. It inspires us to remove the suffering of other people's misery. It encourages us not only to feel deep sorrow for another's suffering but also to try our best to remove that suffering. Hence let us love the cross, wear its image and carry our own daily cross with joy. **-Arun Vincent**

Mar 22, 2015: V Sunday of Lent
Jer 31: 31-34; Heb 5: 7-9; John 12: 20-33

Dying to Self

Lent's fifth Sunday's readings present us with a challenge: Just as Jesus became the 'Promised Messiah of Glory' and the 'conquering Son of Man' by offering his life for others, we too must possess heaven by dying to self and spending our lives in self-giving, sacrificial service. Today's readings focus on the upcoming death of Jesus, which is interpreted not only as a priestly sacrifice (Heb 5) but also as the moment of his “exaltation” and “glorification” (Jn 12). The first reading from the book of Jeremiah explains how God will replace the Old Covenant of Judgment with a New Covenant of Forgiveness of sins. In the second reading, St. Paul tells the

Hebrews that it is by his suffering and death, in obedience to his Father's will, that Jesus established the New Covenant. Using metaphors of the 'sown wheat grain' and the 'spent life', in today's gospel, Jesus teaches the same lesson.

The "hour" is referring to Jesus' way of glorifying his heavenly Father and of being glorified by his Father. It is also the way by which he draws all people into the saving action of God. Jesus' being "lifted up" on the cross to glorify his Father reminds us that we too can glorify God by wholeheartedly accepting our crosses from our loving heavenly Father.

Jesus explains to his apostles that it is by his suffering and death that he is bringing life and liberation to the sinful world, just as a grain of wheat sown in the field grows into a plant and produces many new grains. In the same way, it is by the self-sacrificial lives of holy men and women that life and salvation came to mankind. When we "die" to our selfishness, we "rise" to new life in Jesus Christ. To be buried in the earth means avoiding sin, accepting suffering and living for others.

We know that the world owes everything to people who spent their time and talents for God and for their fellow human beings. Mother Teresa, for instance, gave up her comfortable teaching career and with just 5 rupees in her pocket began her challenging life for the 'poorest of the poor' in the crowded streets of Calcutta. Thus, she became, in the words of the Secretary General of the U.N., "the most powerful woman in the world". We see similar cases in the history of great saints, scientists and benefactors of mankind in all walks of life.

-Sibin Francis

Mar 29, 2015: Palm Sunday
Is 50: 4-7; Philip 2: 8-9; Mark: 11: 1-10
Weeping Over Me

Today's first reading is the third Servant Song. Jesus saw some aspects of his own life and mission foreshadowed in the "Servant Songs." The church holds this to be a time of solemn meditation. In today's psalm, the psalmist puts his trust in Yahweh for deliverance and salvation. The context of this day's worship also conveys Jesus' confidence in God's protection in the midst of his trial and crucifixion. The second reading is an ancient Christian hymn representing a very early Christian understanding of who Jesus is, and of how his mission saves us from sin and death. It is a message that Paul received from those who had been converted to Christ. "Jesus was divine from all eternity. But he didn't cling to that. Rather, he emptied himself and became human. He accepted further humbling by obeying the human condition even unto death by crucifixion. Therefore God highly exalted him, giving him the highest title in the universe." Today's Gospel describes the royal reception, which Jesus received from his admirers, who paraded with him for a distance of two miles: from the Mount of Olives to the city of Jerusalem.

Does Jesus weep over me? There is a Jewish saying, "Heaven rejoices over a repentant sinner and sheds tears over a non-repentant, hardhearted one." Are we ready to imitate the prodigal son and return to God, our loving Father, through the sacrament of reconciliation during this last week of Lent and participate fully in the joy of Christ's resurrection?

Am I a barren fig tree? God expects me to produce fruits of holiness, purity, justice, humility, obedience, charity, and forgiveness. Am I a barren fig tree? Or do I continue to produce bitter fruits of impurity, injustice, pride, hatred, jealousy and selfishness?

Do I expect Jesus to cleanse my heart with his whip? Jesus cannot tolerate the desecration of the temple of his Holy Spirit in me by my addiction to uncharitable, unjust and impure thoughts words and deeds; neither does he approve of my calculation of loss and gain in my relationship with God.

-**Johnson S**

Apr 5, 2015: Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34, 37-43; Col 3:1-4; John 20: 1-9

Resurrection People

Easter is the greatest and the most important feast in the Church. "Easter" literally means "the feast of fresh flowers."

We celebrate it with pride and jubilation for three reasons.

1) The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian faith. It is the greatest of the miracles--it proves that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul writes: " *If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your faith is in vain... And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion and you are still lost in your sins... But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (I Cor 15/14, 17, 20). Without the Resurrection, Jesus would have remained for ever a good person who met a tragic end. People would remember some of his teachings and a handful of people might try to live according to his teachings. All the basic doctrines of Christianity are based on the truth of the Resurrection. "*Jesus is Lord, he is risen*" (Rom.10: 9) was the central theme of the 'kerygma' (or 'preaching') of the apostles. There is a story of two women who stood before Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. One asked, "Why can't we build structures like this anymore?" Her friend answered, "The people who built this had faith. Today we have only opinions. And you can't build a cathedral with opinions."

2) Easter is the guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus assured Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: "*I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live even though he dies*" (Jn 11/25-26). Christ will raise us up on the last day;

but it is also true, in a sense, that we have already risen with Christ. By virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ.

3) We are to be resurrection people: Easter, the feast of the resurrection, gives us the joyful message that we are a 'resurrection people.' This means that we are not supposed to lie buried in the tomb of our sins and evil habits. It gives us the good news that no tomb can hold us down anymore - neither the tomb of despair, discouragement, doubt nor death. Instead, we are expected to live a joyful and peaceful life, constantly experiencing the real presence of the resurrected Lord in all the events of our lives. *"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad"* (Psalm 118:24).

-Vanathu Antony

II Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

Acts 4: 32-35; I John 5: 1-6; John 20: 19-31

Serving with Love

The readings for this Sunday are about mercy, trust and the forgiveness of sins. In the Psalm we repeatedly see several times, "His mercy endures forever." *"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever!"* (Ps 117:1).

Besides mentioning the word, our readings illustrate mercy in action. How does God reveal His mercy? He does so, first and foremost, by sending His only-begotten Son, to become our Savior and Lord by his suffering, death and resurrection.

Divine mercy is given to us in each celebration of the sacraments. Today, as we recall Jesus' appearance to the disciples on that first Easter evening, we are vividly reminded of the Sacrament of Reconciliation--the power to forgive sins which Our Lord gave to his apostles. "Whose sins you forgive

are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20-23). Today’s gospel also emphasizes the importance of faith in the all-pervading presence of the Risen Lord of mercy. To believe without having seen is every Christian’s experience. We are invited to liberate ourselves from doubts and hesitation, and surrender our lives to the risen Lord of mercy. Let us ask God to open our hearts so that we might receive into our hearts his Mercy - his Holy Spirit.

Living faith enables us to see the risen Lord in every one and gives us the willingness to render them loving service. (“Faith without actions is dead” James 2:17). It was this faith in the Lord and obedience to his missionary command that prompted St. Thomas to travel to India to preach the gospel among the Hindus, establish seven Christian communities (known later as “St. Thomas Christians”) and eventually face martyrdom. The Fathers of the Church prescribe the following traditional means to grow in the living and dynamic faith of St. Thomas the Apostle. a) Know Jesus personally and intimately by the daily and meditative reading of the Bible. b) Strengthen your faith by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal and community prayer. c) Share in the divine life of Jesus by frequenting the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. Mother Teresa presents it this way: “If we pray, we will believe; if we believe, we will love; if we love, we will serve. Only then we put our love of God into action.”

-Vibin Varghese

Apr 19, 2015: III Sunday of Easter
ACTS. 3: 13-15, 17-19; I JN 2:1-5; LUKE 24: 35-48

The Living Presence of the Lord

Today’s readings reminds us that our faith in the living presence of the risen Lord should strengthen our hope in His promises, call us to true repentance of our sins and lead us to witnessing to Christ by our works of *charity*. They also remind us that the purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection was to save us from sins. Hence they challenge us to make our

witnessing to the risen Lord more effectively by repenting of our sins, renewing our lives, and meeting Jesus in the Word of God and at the Eucharistic Table. Today's gospel leads us to reflect on faith, doubts and crises. It explains how Jesus convinces his disciples of his resurrection and how he commands them to be his witnesses throughout the world. He prepares them to receive God's power through the Holy Spirit and he directs them to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins. The first reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes how Peter fulfilled the commandment of preaching given by Jesus. He began his preaching mission in Jerusalem where he presented Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. He also asks the Jews to turn toward God so that their sins might be wiped away. In the second reading, John tells us that true knowledge and love of God consists in acknowledging that Jesus is the expiation for our sins, in witnessing to Him in our lives and in obeying His commandments.

Renew the "Upper Room Experience" in the Holy Mass: The same Jesus who, in the upper room of the Cenacle, prepared his disciples for their preaching and witnessing mission, is present with us in the Eucharistic celebration. He invites us to share in the "Liturgy of the Word of God" and in "The Liturgy of Bread and Wine." In the first part of the Mass, Jesus speaks to us through the "Word of God." In the second part, He becomes our spiritual food and drink. Thus, today's gospel scene is repeated every Sunday on our altars. Like the early disciples, we come together to repent for our sins, listen to God's words and offer ourselves to God along with our gifts of bread and wine. We also give thanks, share in the spiritual food Jesus supplies, and are sent to share his message with the entire world.

-Tony Jose

Apr 26, 2015: IV Sunday of Easter
ACTS 4: 8-12; I JN 3: 1-2; 14-17; JOHN. 10:11-1

Shepherds that Serve

The fourth Sunday of Easter is known as Good Shepherd Sunday and the “World Day of Prayer for Vocations.” The scripture lessons are about shepherds. Each year on this Sunday we reflect on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, devotedly taking care of his flock. The earliest Christians had seen Jesus as the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish dream of a good shepherd. They also wished to include the gentiles as part of God’s flock. In today’s first reading, Peter asserts unequivocally before the Jewish assembly that there is no salvation except through Christ the Good Shepherd whom the Jewish leaders rejected and crucified and in whose name they preach and heal. In the second reading, St. John tells us how Yahweh the Good Shepherd of the Old Testament expressed His love for us through His Son Jesus, the Good Shepherd by making us His children. The Gospel text offers us both comfort and challenge. The comforting good news is that Jesus the Good shepherd knows us, provides for us and loves us. The challenge is that we should be good shepherds to those entrusted to our care.

Let us become good shepherds: Every one who is entrusted with the care of other is a shepherd. We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them, spending our time and talents for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. Parents must be especially careful of their duties as shepherds by becoming role models to their children by their exemplary lives.

-Vipin Raj



Book Reviews

Papal Seminary Brothers, *Sing and Worship*, Papal Seminary of St. Francis Xavier, Pune, 2014, p. 462 (767 songs).

Papal seminary of St. Francis Xavier, Pune has brought out a New Hymn Book titled: “Sing and worship.” The aim is to foster active participation in the liturgy through varieties of hymns. Since the revision of the Liturgy by the former Pope, Benedict XVI, there was a felt need to have a compendium of prayers and other related hymns for the convenience of the community worship. As a result, the following brothers Vekupa Rhakho George, Neil CG and Sebi Victor, Bala Francis, Romel Saldanha, Vikas Jaison, Tony Tom, Nibin and Litsuvi Christopher under the leadership of Frs. Vincent Crasta SJ and Arun SJ took up the task for the publication. The content of the book includes Papal seminary Anthem, pictures of the Saints Francis Xavier, John Mary Vianney, Papal Seminary Community Photo and Front view of the Seminary. A brief history of the seminary compiled by Lt. Fr Lionel Macarenas SJ, is also incorporated. It comprised of 767 hymns covering all the liturgical seasons of the year. The last hymn in the cover page is a prayerful hymn for the Pope. It is collected from various existing hymn books like; All You Hills, Earthen Vessel, Joyful Melodies, Sacred Melodies, Symphonies of Love, With Joyful Lips and Worship. It also

includes Mass prayers, Way of the Cross, Holy Rosary, Benediction and other popular prayers of the Catholic Church. It was released on the 9th of December 2014 by the Rector of Papal Seminary, Fr. Jose Thayil SJ and the first copy was handed over to the Bishop of Poona, Rt. Rev. Thomas Dabre. To assist in learning the hymns, a DVD of the entire hymns is in the making and is at its final stage. - **Vekupa Rhakho**

Jacob Parappally, MSFS. *The Way of the Cross for Today.* Asian Trading Corporation, Bengaluru pp. 36, 2014.

This new book by Jacob Parappally MSFS meditates the passion, death and resurrection of Christ from today's perspective. It is historical to meditate on the passion of Christ, the agony he underwent, the torture and death, it is theological to refer to the scriptures and to justify that he had to undergo such suffering for our sake and it is divine will. But it is contextual to see Christ continue to suffer in the thirsty, naked, crippled and imprisoned (Mt 25:31-46). It is with Jesus that Fr. Jacob invites us to walk the way of the Cross with. It is with this "Immanuel" (Mt 1:23), that the author invites to identify in the million, suffering the lack of love and life. The author provides statistical accounts of our broken and breaking world all in the name of 'God', greed and grade. The author presents to us the stark reality of the oppression, subjugation, violence and inhuman atrocities that are amidst us to see Jesus suffering in them. It is a contextual way of the cross who wants to experience Jesus today, here and now and who wants to be the todays, Veroinicas, Simon of Cyrene. the choice is our whether to become Judas the Betrayer or Jesus the redemptive sufferer. ☩

-Bala Francis

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WHY God GAVE US FRIENDS

GOD knew that everyone needs
companionship and cheer,
He knew that people need someone
whose thoughts are always near.

He knew they need someone kind
to lend a helping hand.
Someone to gladly take the time
to care and understand.

GOD knew that we all need someone
to share each happy day,
to be a source of courage
when troubles come our way.

Someone to be true to us,
whether near or far apart.
Someone whose love we'll always
Hold and treasure in our hearts.

That's Why GOD Gave Us Friends

-- Author Unknown



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