



Asian Journal of Religious Studies

“The Lord is truly among us.”

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Asian Journal for Religious Studies

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Editorial

Being Sinners Who Have Experienced Mercy

God did not choose perfect people to form his church, but rather sinners who have experienced his love and forgiveness, Pope Francis said.

The Gospel of Luke’s account of Jesus forgiving the sinful woman shows how his actions went against the general mentality of his time, a way of thinking that saw a “clear separation” between the pure and impure, the pope said Aug. 9, 2017 during his weekly general audience, as reported in Catholic News Service.

“There were some scribes, those who believed they were perfect,” the pope said. “And I think about so many Catholics who think they are perfect and scorn others. This is sad.”

Continuing his series of audience talks about Christian hope, the pope reflected on Jesus’ “scandalous gesture” of forgiving the sinful woman. The woman, he said, was one of many poor women who was visited secretly even by those who denounced her as sinful.

Although Jesus’ love toward the sick and the marginalized “baffles his contemporaries,” it reveals God’s heart as the place where suffering men and women can find love, compassion and healing, Pope Francis said.

“How many people continue today in a wayward life because they find no one willing to look at them in a different way, with the eyes—or better yet—with the heart of God, meaning with hope,” he said. But “Jesus sees the possibility of a resurrection even in those who have made so many wrong choices.”

Oftentimes, the pope continued, Christians become accustomed to having their sins forgiven and receiving God’s unconditional love while forgetting the heavy price Jesus paid by dying on the cross.

Christians are “all poor sinners” who need God’s mercy, “which strengthens us and gives us hope.”

By forgiving sinners, Jesus doesn’t seek to free them from a guilty conscience, but rather offers “people who have made mistakes the hope of a new life, a life marked by love,” the pope added.

The church is a people formed “of sinners who have experienced the mercy and forgiveness of God,” Pope Francis said. Christians are “all poor sinners” who need God’s mercy, “which strengthens us and gives us hope.”

May we always realise that we are sinners, blessed and graced, so that we will be compassionate to others.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ

The Editor

A Pioneer in Hindu-Christian Dialogue in Depth

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Brahmobandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) seemed to be a combination of opposites: Hinduism and Christianity, Eastern and Western culture, anti-British revolutionary, who emerged as a bold pioneer of independence of our motherland. Dr. Julius Lipner has written what is perhaps the best biography of this multi-faceted person: educationist, poet, religious enthusiast, philosopher, nationalist, theologian, writer, journalist and even athlete; there are few spheres he does not seem to have touched; and whatever he touched, he enriched.¹ But above all, he is a pioneer in modern Hindu-Christian dialogue in depth.

His Early Life

He was born Bhavani Charan Banerjea on February 11, 1861 in Khannyam, a small village about 36 miles north of Calcutta, in an orthodox Brahmin family. Throughout his early life, he became acquainted with popular Hinduism as well as the Sanskritic tradition and adhered firmly to his caste exigencies. His father was a police inspector employed by the British. He endeavoured to give Bhavani an English education in Protestant schools and colleges.²

In 1877, Bhavani decided to leave college and join the army; in his own words, “*to learn the art of fighting and drive out the English*”³ but did not get support. He resolved

not to marry or pass University examinations, but to liberate India at the risk of his own life.⁴

The Hindu Reformer

Slowly, Bhavani interacted with several of the leading figures of the Bengali Renaissance, such as Swami Vivekananda, Keshab Chandra Sen, Priya Nath Mullick, Ramakrishna Pramahansa and P.C. Majumdar.⁵ In 1882, he became a disciple of Keshab Chandra Sen, leader of the *Brahmo Samaj*, and continued after his death, under his successor, P. C. Mozumdar. Both Sen and Mozumdar were prominent social workers, inspired by the person of Jesus Christ, yet committed to Hindu reform, a combination which undoubtedly had an impact on Bhavani.⁶

Around 1889, an unexpected event, associated with his father's illness, turned the direction of Bhavani's life. His father had been transferred to Multan, in West Punjab; Bhavani rushed to Multan to nurse him and, as his father lay dying, he saw on his bookshelf Joseph Faa di Bruno's standard work on Catholicism entitled '*Catholic Belief*'. Bhavani read the book into the night and, after his father's death, took it with him⁷ and started giving more serious attention to the theological status of Christ⁸. He voluntarily stated attending classes being given every Sunday evening by Joseph Redman, a C. M. S. missionary and visited regularly a certain Rev Heaton who convinced him of the mystery of the resurrection of Christ and gradually helped him to accept that Christ is the co-eternal Son of the Father.⁹

The Christian Witness

In 1889, Bhavani gave a lecture seeking to demonstrate that "*Christ fulfilled the universal desire of the Hindus who had ever been looking forward to the advent of a sinless*

*Guru (a Sat Guru, a Nishkalanka Avatar)*¹⁰. Then in 1890, he founded a journal 'Harmony'. Here he shows his dependence on Thomistic thought, which he had already mastered. He distinguishes between natural religion derived from reason and supernatural religion (Catholic) derived from divine revelation, but not opposed to reason.

On 26th February 1891, Bhavani was accepted in the Church by Rev. Heaton, but did not join the Anglicans. Instead he met a Jesuit, Fr. Salinger and on 1st September 1891, he was united with the Catholic Church, for culturally, "the Catholics represented a Church which spanned East and West and was not identified with the British colonial powers, as was the Protestant Church" and theologically, "Catholics had a much more positive attitude towards India and the Hindu religion than was evident in the more confrontational, discontinuous approach which typified Protestants in the 19th century India". Asked by a census official whether he was a Roman Catholic or a Protestant he replied, "*Neither. Put me down as an Indian Catholic*"¹¹. This marks an early distinction between belief and behaviour, which would be the hallmark of his theology (i.e. *believe* as a Catholic, *behave* as a Hindu). In *Sophia*, the magazine that he founded with full support of Catholic authorities and edited, it is affirmed, "We are Hindu in so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal soul we are Catholic. We are Hindu-Catholic."¹²

From 1891 he experienced sustained persecution from his Hindu friends, but was comforted by the baptism of two of his close colleagues, Parmanand and Khemchand,¹³ and in 1893, a third Rewachand (known as Animananda), who became his biographer. Bhavani also adopted a new baptismal name: Theophilus, perhaps because of the opinion that St. Theophilus was the first to use the word "Trinity".

He added the second portion of his family name *Upadhyay*, which means teacher or sub-teacher. Theophilus (lover of God) means Brahmabandhab, in Bengali. It suggests an early love for the Trinity, an area in which he would later excel in the most important work of his life: the Sanskrit hymn, ‘*Vande, Sat-Chit-Anandam*’, in honour of the Trinity, which has immortalised his name¹⁴. He has also composed a lovely prayer adoring the Infinite Being.

The Theologian

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was of course well ahead of his times, even too much ahead, where dialogue in depth is concerned. He would be “glad to be called a Christian, if by that is meant allegiance to Jesus, the Redeemer of fallen humanity and the Source of all righteousness, to the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the human soul to make it a heavenly abode of the Father and the Son”. “But,” he continues, “People here understand by the term ‘Christian’ a man who drinks liquor and eats beef, who hates the scriptures of India as lies and her inspired men as imposters ... in this sense of the term, we are not Christian ... we mean to preach the reconciliation of all religions in Christ”¹⁵.

Upadhyay explored many great theological themes. He used Athanasius’ work on the divinity of Christ. He interacted positively and negatively with the Vedic tradition through 1896. During 1897 his focus shifted to the Vedantic tradition. It is then that he began to emphasise the theological potential of Sankara’s *advaitic* Vedantism as a starting point for Christian theology. His lectures sought to reconcile neo-Thomism with Sankara’s *Advaitism*. Gradually he comes to recognise that Sankara is the Indian counterpart to the Aristotle of the West.¹⁶ Prior to that, he had relied heav-

ily upon establishing primitive, universal theism to counter pantheistic tendencies in India.

Quoting Aquinas, Upadhyay rightly holds that evil is a negation or lack of good. Sin, moral evil, is a reality from which the only escape and sure refuge is Christ. “He who takes his stand on this rock of righteousness, leaving his tempest-tossed frail bark of self, will no more be swallowed up by the depthless abyss of sin”, he says. He refutes the theory of transmigration of souls on the grounds of the permanent identity and immortality of the soul; and so he comes to the end of human and Salvation. He does not argue; he just explains, but he does that superbly¹⁷.

Naturally Upadhyay went too far at times. But these are minor aberrations in a vast scheme of his work and thought. In 1904, Upadhyay delivered an extremely controversial lecture in Bengali on *The True Nature of Krishna*, which showed how he understood the relationship between a Hindu *avatar* and the incarnation of Christ.¹⁸ His comparison between “Avatar” and “Incarnation” could have been deeper. For though the Hindi translation of Incarnation is Avatar and the English translation of Avatar is Incarnation, their meanings are actually radically different. For while Avatar is a manifestation of God or of divine power in a human being, Incarnation is *Sharirdharan*: taking a body, actually becoming human, human enough to suffer and die¹⁹.

The Nationalist

From 1904, Upadhyay threw himself wholeheartedly into the nationalist movement. In July, he wrote a letter saying that he had not abandoned the faith. He then started a new daily Bengali newspaper *Sandhya* which continued till his death. On August 7, 1904 he officially united with the *Swadeshi* movement, a nationalist confrontational move-

ment against Viceroy Lord Curzon's Partition of Bengal, which roused popular anger against the British presence in India. Upadhyay's *Sandhya* became one of its leading journalistic voices.²⁰

After this, Upadhyay wrote some of his most scathing articles against the British, one of them, "*Blooming the Sedition: the Firinghi in a fix*". The *firinghi* was a racially offensive word, he often applied to the British. The police searched the *Sandhya* offices and arrested Upadhyay, charging him with sedition against the British government. Upadhyay refused to appear in court saying that it was his humble share of the God-appointed mission of fighting for *Swaraj*. While the trial was still on, he fell ill and was rushed to the Campbell Medical College in Calcutta, where he received a hernia operation, from which he developed a tetanus infection and had a painful death on October 27, 1907.²¹

Conclusion

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay has been compared to St Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian of the West. The writings of both Upadhyay (who died at the age of 49), and Aquinas (who died at the age of 48) were misunderstood and severely criticised; it took long before Aquinas' work was recognized and appreciated. Upadhyay is slowly beginning to emerge from the mist. However, Upadhyay has opened the eyes of the Christians to the need of adaptation to Indian culture and ethos. His advice to missionaries is *interesting*. "The itinerant missionaries should be thoroughly Hindu in their mode of living. They should, if necessary, be strict vegetarians and teetotallers, and put on the yellow *sanyasi* garb. The central mission should adopt the policy of the glorious old Fathers of the South (a reference to Di No-

bili and Beschi), well versed in Sanskrit, for one ignorant of Sanskrit, will hardly be able to face his opponents.

Notes

- 1 Satya Manthan Sanstha, Varanasi, UP, *Some Eminent Missionaries of India*, 2001, p 44
- 2 Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, Madras: CLS for CISRS, 1969 p.27
- 3 B. Animananda, , *The Blade*, Roy and Son, Calcutta, n. d., p 14
- 4 Ibidem, p 18
- 5 Cfr C. Fonseca, "A Prophet disowned" *Vidyajyoti*, (April 1980), p 177ff
- 6 B. Animananda, *The Blade*, op cit., p 31
- 7 C. Fonseca, op cit., p 178
- 8 J Lipner & Gispert-Sauch, *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Vol I. Bangalore: U.T.C, 1991, p xxxi
- 9 T. C. Tennent, *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations*, ISPCK, Delhi 2005, p 18.
- 10 B. Animananda, *The Blade*, op cit., p 20
- 11 Ibidem p 39
- 12 T. C. Tennent, op cit., p 20
- 13 B. Animananda, *The Blade*, op cit., p 47
- 14 T. C. Tennent, op cit., p 21
- 15 B. Animananda, *The Blade*, op cit., p 39
- 16 *Sophia*, July 1897, Vols. 4, 8 and 9.
- 17 Satya Manthan Sanstha op cit. p 47
- 18 B Animananda, *The Blade*, p 123-130
- 19 Satya Manthan Sanstha op cit. p 47
- 20 C. Fonseca, Upadhyaya Brahmabandav: The Political Years, *Indian Church History Review* (April 1981), p 18-29.
- 21 T. C. Tennent, op cit., p 27; B. Animananda, *The Blade* p 168

Thoughts for Teachers

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These thoughts are primarily meant for professional teachers. But probably they are relevant to all adults who in one way or another are teachers in life if not in the classroom. Then why should we exclude children who are in some way teachers? As C.P. Varkey has pointed out, “the role of the teacher in education will remain paramount. He or she alone can create the congenial climate for learning”.¹ Child psychologist Dr. Haim Gonott, who was once a teacher, agrees with C.P. Varkey. In his book, *Teacher and Child*, he declares: “I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized.”²

Recently I came across a letter an anonymous student wrote to an unknown teacher. Most of my reflections here are related to what the student wrote in that letter.

1. The letter begins with a plea: “Try to be a human being, not just a teaching machine. Do not teach only the subject, but rather teach us students. Let me feel that you are inter-

ested in me as a human being, not just a number in your note-book”.

There are three important points in this plea. 1) A teacher is not meant to be a teaching machine but a real human being. He/she must be someone who is kind, compassionate, friendly, available and approachable. He/she must show real warmth in his/her interactions with students. 2) He/She has to adopt a personal approach in his/her teaching. Just as good doctors do not just deal with the illness of a patient but rather treat a patient who is ill, so a good teacher does not teach some subjects, but rather teaches students. He/she looks upon them as real human persons who have come to the school to learn. 3) A good teacher must be able to take real interest in students as human beings and sincerely try to communicate to them his/her interest.

2. Our anonymous student makes some concrete suggestions about the method of teaching: “Help me to think, to learn and to judge for myself, not just memorize ready-made answers. Help me rather to find the answers myself, even though this way may be more painful for me”.

Here the student is suggesting that in the process of education he/she should not be looked upon as a passive recipient of the teacher’s gift of knowledge, but as an active participant in the quest for knowledge. Many years ago Paulo Freire spoke of the ‘banking concept of education’ according to which the teacher ‘deposits’ knowledge in the minds of the students.³ What takes place is a mere transfer of knowledge. The students do not perform acts of cognition. Teaching must be a process of empowering students. They have to be helped to learn how to learn. The teacher has to create conditions in which students experience the

joy of search and the wonder of personal discovery. There is a Chinese proverb which says:

Tell me, I shall forget

Show me, I may remember

Involve me, I shall understand

3. The student now makes a request: “Do not expect of me what is beyond my talent or power”.

It is very important for a teacher to realize that his/her students are not equally gifted. Hence the teacher has to have a personalized approach to students. While it is necessary to challenge students to do their best, a teacher has to be patient and understanding towards weak students. An old teacher once remarked: I get my joy by teaching bright students; I earn my salary by teaching average students, and I win heaven by teaching dull students.

4. The student is aware of the need for some discipline: “Be strict with me provided that you are just. I know that I need it though outwardly I may rebel against it”.

I would like to make three comments on this suggestion of the student. 1. Some order is necessary in a classroom because it creates a climate of openness and discipline which makes teaching and learning easy. 2. Teachers should not unnecessarily curtail the freedom of students. For real learning takes place only in a relaxed atmosphere of freedom. 3. Most children are naturally good. If you have a sense of humour you can deal competently with the pranks of children. When a newly appointed teacher went to his class he saw on the blackboard written in bold letters: **Welcome to the Donkey**. The teacher read it and was a bit confused. Then he regained his composure and wrote

underneath: Mr. C. V. Jose. The children had a hearty laugh. That was the end of the whole affair.⁴

5. The student now makes an earnest request: “Listen seriously to the questions I may ask, however foolish they may sound to you”.

It is very important for the teacher to take every student and his/her questions seriously, He/she should not in any way ridicule a student whose questions may appear stupid. Every genuine question manifests the earnest quest of a young mind for clarity and certitude. Because of this the teacher should take his/her questions seriously and respond to them carefully.

6. Finally the student politely reminds the teacher that he has to be a constant learner: “Please keep studying yourself and do not mechanically use in the class the same yellow notes you wrote twenty years ago”.

We live in a world that is changing fast. In the world today there is an explosion of knowledge. In order to be a competent teacher in this time of change, a person has to be continuous learner. Some years back a group of German university students wrote: Today we are being taught by teachers of yesterday according to the knowledge and methods of day before yesterday for our life tomorrow”. I think that there is some truth in what these students are saying.

Recently a suggestion has been mooted that universities should recall the degree conferred on a person if he/she has not updated himself/herself during the last five years. Maybe this suggestion should be taken seriously by the Vice-Chancellors of our universities.

Thirty-seven years ago Pope John Paul II exhorted the Professors of the Gregorian University: “Strive to be constantly creative; do not be too easily satisfied with what was good enough for the past. Have the courage to explore new paths...”⁵

By way of conclusion I would like to request the teachers to bear in mind three things:

1. The goal of education. It is significant that most of the leading educationists of all lands have believed the full flowering of the human on the earth to be the goal of education. A UNESCO study speaks of the development of the complete man or woman. “The physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a complete man or woman is a broad definition of the fundamental aim for education. We find this a pedagogic ideal throughout history, in almost all countries, among philosophers and moralists, and among most theoreticians and visionaries of education. It has been one of the fundamental themes of humanist thought in all times. It may have been applied imperfectly, but it has been fruit-

Help your students to become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make children more humane

ful and helped to inspire many of the noblest educational enterprises”.⁶

2. The danger of faulty education. Some years back a Headmaster wrote to every teacher of the school:

Dear Teacher, I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:

Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education. My requests: Help your students to become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make children more humane.⁷

3. The value of good education. Way back in 1966 the Kothari Commission on Education observed: “The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms...” A few months before that Vatican II made this remarkable statement: “We can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping”.⁸

The teachers of today are called to render that service to the generation next.

Notes

1. C.P. Varkey, *Gently And Firmly*, Mumbai; St Pauls, 1995, p. 13.
2. As quoted by C. P. Varkey in *Gently And Firmly*, p. 13.
3. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1978, pp. 45 – 55.
4. As reported by C.P. Varkey, *Gently and Firmly*, p. 14.
5. Souvenir of the Pope’s visit: *John Paul II at the Gregorian University and the Biblical Institute, Rome*, 1979, p. 27.
6. E. Faure and Others, *Learning to Be*, Delhi, Unesco, 1973, p. 156.
7. As quoted by C.P. Varkey, *Gently And Firmly*, pp. 19- 20.
8. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Rome, 1965, n. 31.

Mary, Full of Grace: The Meaning and Implications of This Greeting- I

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This article in its first part attempts to bring out the meaning of ‘full of Grace’ through an exegetical study of Lk 1,28 in its literary and historical context. The second part of the article studies the ecclesiastical tradition which interprets and lives the significance of this divine greeting especially in connection with the various Marian dogmas and devotions. Finally, based on Bible and tradition, the article discusses the theological and anthropological implications of this significant divine salutation for our lives today.

1. The Meaning of *Kecharitoméne*

The annunciation scene (Lk 1,26-38) begins with an angelic greeting, *rejoice! full of grace (chaire, kecharitoméne* Lk 1,28), which is unique and never heard before and so is admittedly very difficult to translate its comprehensive meaning¹. This solemn greeting, which is very melodious and rhythmic play of words in Greek, introduces the great mystery of incarnation. This greeting also has a mystery aspect in the sense we may not fully comprehend it but we can understand and explain it to a certain extent. According to evangelist Luke, Mary herself was troubled by this

greeting as she could not understand its meaning: “But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be” (Lk 1,29). That is why after two thousand years we ponder with Mary the meaning and implication of that extraordinary greeting. Though a perfect translation may not be possible, we have to try to find out the closest possible translation of this divine greeting which renders its meaning both from the biblical and the philological perspectives.

1.1 From a Biblical Perspective

First of all, let us analyse the biblical context of this divine salutation, viz., the annunciation scene (Lk 1,26-38). The annunciation scene consists of a solemn introduction (Lk 1,26-27) and three dialogues between the angel Gabriel and Mary (Lk 1, 28-38)². Unlike the annunciation to Zechariah, in this episode, the dialogues are more important than the experience of the vision. Zechariah was troubled because his prayer for a child has been heard (Lk 1,13). The word that causes trouble to Mary in the annunciation scene is the meaning of the angelic salutation, *kecharitoméne*: “But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be” (Lk 1,29). The explanatory words of the angel in v. 30 are related to the expression, *kecharitoméne*. Mary should not be afraid because she has found favour with God.

What does it mean to say that one has found favour with God? In Gen 6,8 we read, ‘But Noah found favour in the sight of God’. In Ex 33,12, Moses is said to have found favour with God. St. Stephen, the first martyr of the Church, in his speech refers to David as one ‘who found favour with God and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob (Acts 7,46). In the annuncia-

tion scene (Lk 1,26-38) we see that Mary, David and the house of Jacob have been given a decisive role. Both in the historical context and in the literary context the words of the angel to Mary, ‘You have found favour with God’ suggests that Mary is chosen by God to have an important role in realizing the graces promised to David. From this point of view, the greeting *kecharitoméne* may mean that Mary is processed and inserted by God into the unique state of grace to fulfil the promises to David. The angelic greeting, full of grace’ is related to her belongingness to the house of David and the promises made to David (2 Sam 7,4-17). The angel repeats the same promises made to David: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1,32-33).

1.2 In Relation to *Chaire*

The meaning of *kecharitoméne* is closely linked with the word *chaire*. The two Greek terms *chaire* and *kecharitoméne* in the angelic salutation are very much interconnected. Mary is invited to rejoice as she is loved by God and filled with His grace in view of her divine motherhood. As for Mary, the divine grace is the source of true joy for the people of God of all times. The Greek imperative *chaire* (meaning rejoice) was the ordinary greeting used in the daily life of the New Testament times. In the Old Testament *chaire* appears in the context where Zion is invited to the future Messianic joy (Joel 2,21-23; Zeph 3,14; Zech 9,9)³. The joy that was announced by the prophets to the people of Israel - the woman Zion - is now focused on one person who in a way represents the desires and hopes of Israel⁴. We have examples for this greeting, used both in the singular and plural forms in the Gospels. In Mt 26,49, Judas greets

Jesus by saying: *chaire* Rabbi. In Mt 28,9, Jesus greets the women on their return from the tomb: *chairete*. The early Christians did not very often use the greeting *chaire*. They used another theologically significant term, *charis* (grace) usually combined with *eirene* (peace).⁵ Then why did Luke use the common greeting *chaire* instead of the usual Christian greeting *charis*? The early Christian readers would have appreciated the word play in the salutation, using *chaire* for

charis. They would have also recognised the use of *charis* in *kecharitoméne*. This would lead them to ponder over the nuances of the fully and singularly graced status of Mary. To address Mary, *kecharitoméne* is more than a qualitative description of Mary,

Mary has been transformed by the grace of God in view of the task which she awaits, that of becoming the mother of the Son of God while remaining a virgin.

more than a title. It is a God given singular status that Mary has in the salvation history. Mary has been transformed by the grace of God in view of the task which she awaits, that of becoming the mother of the Son of God while remaining a virgin. Mary is the recipient of this unique gift and privilege in the history of salvation.

1.3 In the List of God-given Names

The very significant name of Mary given by God through the archangel Gabriel is *kecharitoméne* (Lk 1,28). For the Hebrews, name indicates the character, nature and qualities of a person or their roles in the history of salvation. In the angelic salutation (Lk 1,28) Mary's name is not mentioned but the Angel addresses her as 'Full of Grace'. The mystery of Mary is summed up in this God given name. According to Dave Armstrong, "it was as if the angel was addressing

Abraham, ‘Hail, full of faith,’ or Solomon, ‘Hail, full of wisdom,’ (characteristics for which they are noteworthy)”.⁶ The angel greets Mary not with her name but with a new title ‘full of grace’. Pope St. John Paul II reflecting on this gospel passage said that ‘full of grace’ is “the name Mary possesses in the eyes of God”.⁷

1.4 From a Philological Perspective

Now let us examine from a philological perspective the meaning of *kecharitoméne*. *Kecharitoméne* is the perfect passive participle of the Greek verb “*charitoô*” which means *I bestow grace*. The verb “*charitoô*” has a causative value⁸ and so it means that Mary is actually processed or formed by the benevolence of God⁹. The verb is in the passive form referring to the divine act. Moreover, the choice of the perfect tense points out that Mary is already under the influence of God’s favour and continues to be in this condition. The perfect form of the verb indicates the enduring effect of the divine act on Mary who has been fully graced. Mary has been in a state of grace (sinlessness) from the moment of her existence. The perfect passive participle would mean having been graced with a nuance of fullness¹⁰. Hence, the translations *full of grace* or *fully graced* are appropriate grammatically.

1.5 In Relation to *Charis*

In Lk 1,30 the noun *charis* again appears: “Thou hast found grace with God: behold, you will conceive a child, you will give him the name Jesus.” This time the meaning of *kecharitoméne* is explained as a functional

God’s grace had a transforming effect on Mary, preparing her to accept the divine commission to conceive and bring forth the Messiah in her womb.

grace to become the mother of God's Son. God's grace had a transforming effect on Mary, preparing her to accept the divine commission to conceive and bring forth the Messiah in her womb. It is interesting to note that the name Mary is not used in the angelic salutation. Instead, the angel salutes her with the beautiful title, *rejoice, full of grace*. The use of *charis* in Lk 1,30 helps us to clarify the meaning of the verb *kecharitoméne* in terms of grace. Though it is very difficult to translate the full meaning contained in the greeting addressed to Mary, the English translation *full of grace* which is a verbatim translation of the *gratia plena* found in the Latin Vulgate, which we use in the prayer *Hail Mary* is doing justice to the Greek verb than some other translations which we find in different versions of the Bible.

When we translate *kecharitoméne* as 'full of grace', we emphasise both the divine act and the intention of the divine act for which Mary has been graced¹¹. She has been fully graced to conceive and bring forth the Son of the Most High. God's grace had a transforming effect on Mary preparing her for accepting the vocation¹² as the mother of the Son of God.

1.6 In the Theology of Grace

The most common meaning of the term *grace* is beauty and graciousness. It can also mean mercy, favour, and benevolence. In the Bible we find both these meanings. The first meaning of grace can be seen in Ps 45,2 where we read about the beauty of the royal spouse the following: 'You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever'. Here the beauty of the spouse is seen as the effect of divine grace. A good wife is said to be graceful in Prov 5,19. The second meaning of grace is found in Ex 33,19 where God says, 'I will be gra-

cious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy'. From this verse it is clear that God's grace is a free, gratuitous gift. In Ex 34, 6 God's character is said to be 'abounding in grace and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousand generations'. Here also grace denotes favour and benevolence. In Mary we can see both these meanings. She is full of grace and she has found favour in the eyes of God. Her beauty consists in her holiness, in her perfect sanctity. In CCC No. 1997, we read, "Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an "adopted son" he can henceforth call God "Father," in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church".

We have a tendency to think about grace as an abstract concept. This thinking is not right. Pope Benedict XVI sees grace as a relational

She is full of grace and she has found favour in the eyes of God. Her beauty consists in her holiness, in her perfect sanctity.

term. He writes on grace as follows: "it (grace) does not predicate something about an I, but something about a connection between I and Thou, between God and man. He goes on interpreting the meaning of "Full of grace": "Full of grace" could therefore also be translated as: "You are full of the Holy Spirit; your life is intimately connected with God." Grace in the proper and deepest sense of the word is not something that comes from God; it is God himself. "Full of grace" therefore means, once again, that Mary is a wholly open human being, one who has opened herself entirely, one who has placed herself in God's hands boldly, limitlessly, and without fear for her own fate. It means that

she lives wholly by and in relation to God.”¹³

(To be continued in the next issue)

Notes

- 1 Luke uses the expression *pleres charitos* (full of grace) to describe Stephen (Acts 6,8), the first martyr of the early church. But he uses a unique expression *kecharitomenē* for Mary.
- 2 The structure of the annunciation scene (Lk 1,26-38) is as follows:
God sends the angel Gabriel (Lk 1,26-27)
The angel speaks (v. 28)
Mary's response: silence
The angel speaks (vv. 30-33)
Mary's response: a question
The angel speaks (vv. 35-37)
Mary's response: Fiat (v. 38)
- 3 M. THURIAN, *Mary. Mother of the Lord. Figure of the Church*, N. B. CRYER (Trans.), London 1963, 20: “Mary is the one ‘Filled-with-Grace,’ and she may well rejoice at the joy proclaimed by the prophets to her who should become the Mother of the Messiah, that Daughter of Zion, the symbol of the people who wait for their God, which the Virgin has become by pure grace”.
- 4 The invitation to joy and a message of Messianic joy rebounds not only in the infancy narrative but also throughout the third gospel (Lk 1,46; 2,10). *Chiare* (rejoice) is “the word with which the prophets introduce the joyful tidings to Israel that God is coming to them, that their restoration is at hand (see Zeph 3,14; Zech 9,9; see also Joel2,21.23). Now Mary becomes the recipient of this messianic cry of joy. She is not addressed as a private individual, but as the representative of God's people. In her Israel experienced the saving presence of God”. S. MULLOOPARAMBIL (ed.), *Dynamism of the Word of God and Biblical Personalities*, Bangalore 2009, 173.
- 5 We have many examples for this in the Pauline letters (1Cor 1,3; 2Cor 13,13; 1Thess 1,1; 1Tim 1,2; 2Tim 1,2). Cf. also Rev 1,4.
- 6 D. ARMSTRONG, *A Biblical Defence of Catholicism*, 1st Books Library 2001, 128.
- 7 JOHN PAUL II, Catechesis given to General Audience on 8 May 1996.

- 8 The verb “*charitoō*” is very rarely used in the NT. This verb is used only twice in the NT, in Lk 1,28 and in Eph 1,6. In both cases the verb is used as causative, viz., they indicate an action which effects something in the object. This verb in its aorist form (*echaritosen*) appears in Eph 1,6 and indicates the abundance of grace granted to us by the Father in his beloved Son. The Christians have been transformed by grace in the sense that they find redemption by his blood through the remission of sins. This grace takes away sins and redeems the human person. The past perfect participial form of the verb used in Lk 1,28 indicates that the action of the grace of God had already brought about a transformation in Mary. She had been transformed by grace of God in view of her vocation to be the mother of God’s Son, while remaining a virgin. Cf. IGNACE DE LA POTTERIE, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, B. BUBY (Trans.), New York 1992, 17-19.
- 9 Both the noun and the verb forms of *charis* in the Bible, refer to God in most cases.
- 10 It is important to note that all the Greek denominative verbs in ‘oō’ have a sense of fullness and abundance.
- 11 We find different translations of *kecharitoméne* in different versions of the Bible. Most of the translations use either grace or favour to translate this verb. I am for the translations with ‘grace’ in the context of Lk 1,28. Grace implies a free gift, often connected to an interior gift of some kind. Favours can be external, deserved or gained. In the angelic greeting we have the angel speaking of a gift that Mary had already received, even before the annunciation took place.
- 12 The German Bible Scholar Klemens Stock considers the annunciation episode as having the literary form of biblical vocation narratives. In this episode Mary is called to participate in a unique way to collaborate in the divine plan of salvation for the Incarnation of His only Son. He observes many similarities between the vocation story of Gideon (Judges 6,11-24) and Mary (Lk 1,26-38). Cf. K. STOCK, “Die Berufung Marias (Lk1,26-38)”, *Biblica* 61 (1980) 457-491.
- 13 JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER & HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, A. WALKER (Trans.), San Francisco 2005, 61-69.

“Church Needs to Become More Pro-Poor and Pro-Marginalized,” Jose Thayil

Rev Fr Jose Thayil SJ just completed 65 years and has retired from Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth. AJRS interviewed him on this occasion. He continues to be the Rector of Papal Seminary, till December 3, 2017.

AJRS: Once you became 65 years young, you have reached the auspicious moment of looking back at your life in order to go forward. Can you please highlight some of the main events of your life?

Don't regret over the past mistakes, but go ahead with optimism and hope. Becoming 65 years young is not a time to retire from life, but to start experimenting in new areas. Old is Gold.

AJRS: You are retiring from JDV, after teaching there for about eleven years. Prior to that you have been teaching at Regional Theology Centre (RTC), Patna for 15 years. What, do you think, are some of the challenges that Indian theology faces?

Indian theology needs to become more contextualized. Some attempts were made in the Regional Theology Centers. Now that many RTCs are closed down, these attempts are also given up. Indian theology needs to respond to the socio-economic and political situations of India. Indian theology needs to take into consideration the multi-religious aspect of India and the rich cultural heritage.

AJRS: You have been the rector of Papal Seminary for about seven years. A rare privilege indeed! You have been an active member of ARMS and you are currently its President. Earlier you had been the moderator of philosophy students at Papal Seminary. What are your impressions of the young seminarians?

Seminary formation has to take place in an atmosphere of freedom. Otherwise seminarian will follow rules and regulations out of fear and not out of conviction. Seminar-ians by and large are very good people. They need constant support and encouragement to bring out the best in them. Personal accompaniment is very essential for giving them the right motivation to become good and dedicated priests.

AJRS: Right from the beginning you have been working for human dignity and upliftment of children. Can you please throw some light on your doctoral dissertation and its relevance for our times.

My doctoral dissertation was on “Child labour in India and the Social Teachings of the Church”. Children are the future of any society or nation. Therefore they have to be taken care with utmost care. In India we still find many child labourers in factories, workshops, agricultural labour, housework, etc. Therefore, children are not able to enjoy their childhood and get the necessary education. Many parents are happy to send their children for some work in order to get some additional income to run the house. Many children are also physically abused by their parents, relatives, teachers and so on. Children have their own dignity and they are not to be treated as future adults, but as children in their own situation with their own rights.

AJRS: In your own way, you have changed the landscape of both JDV and PS. Your love for animals and your com-

mitment to a green environment, together with the activities of Tarumitra, have fostered the greening of the campus. Please tell us the lessons you have learnt from your ecological commitment.

Ecological concern should not be equated with just planting of trees and taking care of them. That is only one of the aspects of eco-preservation. One of my concerns was to reduce electricity consumption from the electricity department (Grid). Most of the electricity that they produce is through thermal power generation. Though electricity does not pollute where it is used, it is a great pollutant where it is produced through thermal power generation. Solar electricity generation is one of the ways to reduce air pollution. In Papal Seminary, we have already installed 15 Kilo Watt solar power generating unit and we plan to install two more 15 Kilowatt solar power generating units. Thus we hope to take care of half of our electricity requirement through Solar power generating units. Most of the cooking in PS is done through steam cooking. Steam is more efficient in cooking and cooking gas is used only for frying purposes.

AJRS: For many years, you have been relating to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in various ways. You have interacted with many young priests in various parts of India. What are some of your dreams for the Indian Church?

I would dream of a Church where the Bishops, clergy, religious and the lay leaders would be more prophetic, challenging the unjust practices of our politicians and church leaders. I would also dream of a church where there would be greater equality between church hierarchy and the laity, men and women, religious superiors and subjects, etc. The church has to be more open to people of other faiths and positively try to become agents of peace and harmony.

Church needs to become more pro-poor and pro-marginalized.

AJRS: When you look back to your past and forward to your future, what are some of the lessons that you have learnt, which could be valuable to the young religious of today?

I believe that the church leaders have to practice what they preach. People can't be taught human or Christian values, they have to be caught by them. Young religious have to be optimistic about themselves, others, the world

The church has to be more open to people of other faiths and positively try to become agents of peace and harmony. Church needs to become more pro-poor and pro-marginalized.

and the different situations. Young religious should not be caught up in the electronic media culture, but should find sufficient time for things that are most important for their life.

AJRS: To the readers of Asian Journal of Religious Studies, do you have any special message?

Asian Journal of Religious Studies is catering to the needs of the simple priests, religious and lay people. This journal tries to impart some human and Christian values through its short articles. My suggestion to the readers of this magazine is that they try to put into practice some of the values that the articles place before them. May the good Lord bless you all abundantly.

Adieu to Prof. Dr. Fr. Lorenzo Fernando

Fr. Lorenzo Fernando was born in 1946 in Periyathazhai in the diocese of Tuticorin. He studied his philosophy and theology at the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Francis Xavier also known by the Indian name Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV), Pune. He obtained his licentiate in Philosophy and Master's degree in Theology from the Pontifical Athenaeum, Pune. He also obtained a Master's degree in sociology from the Savitribai Phule University of Pune. While he was student of Theology, he was recruited to be on the teaching staff of Theology in the Pontifical Athenaeum and to be a formator in the Papal Seminary.

After his ordination to priesthood in 1975, he served in the diocese only for a year as the Pontifical Athenaeum in Pune needed his teaching service. In order to qualify him to be a full-fledged faculty member, he pursued his doctorate in Theology with specialization in Catechetics at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome. On his completion of his doctorate, he returned to India in 1983 and joined the Papal Seminary community as a formator and began teaching in the Pontifical Athenaeum. Known for his erudite knowledge in Theology, he was raised to the rank of the Professor of Theology in 1994 by the Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome. He has taught in the Pontifical Athenaeum for 28 years until his age of retirement (65 years) in 2011.

When his home diocese needed him, he willingly served the diocese as the Vicar General for one year. His relentless commitment to teaching ministry brought him back to the Papal Seminary

He has a long standing connection to the Papal Seminary and its Athenaeum for many years. He has occupied many important positions in the Seminary and its Athenaeum. Notable among them is his service to the Athenaeum as the Dean of Theology for two full terms. In fact when he retired at the age of 65, he was the Dean of Theology. He is known for his organizational skills especially for organizing liturgical events. He is meticulous in planning liturgy as we have witnessed it during the Centenary of the Papal Seminary in 1993. He was also the master of ceremony of the release of the Stamp by the Government of Indian Union to mark the centenary celebration presided over by Saint Mother Teresa.

He is also a renowned Theologian and his expertise was sought in many institutions of Theology in India. He

He is known for his organizational skills especially for organizing liturgical events. He is meticulous in planning liturgy.

is the author of the book entitled ***Anthropological Method and Attitudinal Change*** and also of the book entitled ***Word in the World***. He is the co-editor of the book entitled ***Quest for an Indian Church***. He has published many articles in theological journals and he has presented research papers in national and international conferences. When he breathed his last and left for his eternal abode, he was the Rector of the MMI College of Theology and Philosophy, Palanchur, Chennai.

Many bishops of India know him personally; some of them are his classmates, others colleagues and a few of

them are his own students including Rt. Rev. Christu Das, the present auxiliary bishop of Trivandrum. Most Rev. Thomas Dabre, Bishop of Poona (Pune) and Most Rev. Lourdes Daniel, Bishop of Nasik were his colleagues in the Papal Seminary as staff members for many years. To pay homage to Fr. Lorenzo and his unbroken connection to the Papal Seminary, on 29 June 2017, the Papal Seminary community had a special requiem Mass presided over by Bishop Thomas Dabre.

Fr. Lorenzo has always been human and humane. Students felt comfortable in his presence. He led a very simple life that is a source of inspiration for many of us in campus. He was deeply committed to pastoral ministry. Most Rev. Valerian D'Souza, bishop emeritus of Poona once fondly recalled the commitment Fr. Lorenzo showed as a seminarian in pastoral ministry. Bishop Valerian was the then Parish Priest of Cathedral and Fr. Lorenzo as a young seminarian did his weekend pastoral ministry in Cathedral. The young seminarian Lorenzo realized that from the neighbouring slum, the Tamil speaking faithful hesitated to attend Mass in the Cathedral as they felt a sense of inferiority before the English speaking parishioners. The young seminarian pleaded their case to have a regular Tamil Mass in the slum itself and got permission from the parish priest of Cathedral and arranged priests for regular Sunday Tamil Mass. And today that slum has grown into a little town Wanworie and thanks to his initiative there is regular Mass even today. This is just one example to show how humane he was even as a seminarian.

Though he was away from Tamilnadu for many years, he was never alienated from Tamil culture and People. He was the Animator of St. Mary's Tamil Academy in the Papal Seminary for many years. He was an effective preacher

both in Tamil and English. He is well-known among people in all the parishes in Pune, especially the Tamil parishes. His interest in literature was a source of inspiration for many students of the Papal Seminary, thanks to which we witness a good collection of Tamil books in our Academy library here. No doubt he lived a saintly life with a compassionate heart for the poor. Looking back in time, I can say that his life is a model for Christian discipleship. Thank you Fr. Lorenzo for all that you have been to us and with heart full of gratitude we say to you, “Adieu!” (*Nishant A. Irudayadason*, Papal Seminary, Pune)

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Fr. Lorenzo: The Person

Fr. Lorenzo is known to his companions and students as a simple person. In his introduction to the funeral Mass, the Bishop of Palayankottai, Bishop Irudhayaraj observed that Fr. Lorenzo always felt positive above life and ministry. Even if someone said something to tease him, Fr. Lorenzo would not be offended but take it positively and went about doing his work unaffected.

In Papal seminary, his former students remember him for simplicity, his warm smile, readiness to render his help to those who approached him. He was a kind and sympathetic person. With pride and joy he taught his students how to celebrate sacred liturgy. Besides teaching sacred theology

in JDV, he was also a visiting professor to various seminaries in India. Besides, Fr. Lorenzo was involved in preaching retreat to religious sisters regularly.

He himself would be fully involved in arranging novenas and liturgical celebration during annual Vailankanni feast that were held in Papal seminary in his time. Comparing Fr. Lorenzo to the young generation of priests and seminarians who continued to celebrate the same feast at Papal Seminary chapel, which in his days was a special pride of the Papal seminary and the Tamil Academy, **Fr. Paul Parathazham**, a longtime companion of Fr. Lorenzo and a professor in JDV, observed: “During the days of novenas and feast, Fr. Lorenzo would be not just busy, but turn into be an another ‘being’, vibrant and full of life, radiating a sense of joy and fulfillment”. Fr. Lorenzo took pride in celebrating the liturgies in a proper manner and taught students how to celebrate devotedly.

Fr. Cedric Pieris, a priest of Tuticorin diocese who delivered eulogy during the funeral mass of Fr. Lorenzo observed that human qualities of Fr. Lorenzo reminded him of what St. Paul wrote in his letters to Colossians 3: 2. He also added that the quality of the life of priests and seminarians whom Fr. Lorenzo formed bears witness to his personality.

Fr. Lorenzo: A Priest

Fr. Lorenzo, according to his companions in his diocese of Tuticorin was a happy priest, deeply committed to his priestly ministry, and joyously served his parishioners with a great sense of duty and devotion. He served as priest in **Koothankuzhi** parish, and later on he served as Vicar General in the diocese of Tuticorin. He was also the Rector of Little Flower Minor Seminary in the diocese. His major part of his priestly ministry was spent, almost 28 years as

professor in Papal Seminary Pune. Towards the end of his life, he was the Rector of MMI Seminary, Chennai. Out of 42 years of his priestly life, most part was spent in teaching and forming young seminarians.

His Last Days

Fr. Lorenzo was suffering from high diabetics and he collapsed suddenly. In spite of medical care, his health was deteriorating. Finally on he breathed his last on June 26, 2017.

His funeral was arranged in the small chapel in the Bishop's house of Tuticorin, and well attended by priests from the diocese of Tuticorin and neighboring dioceses. Also present were his close relatives, his past students and seminarians from MMI seminary where he was Rector and professor till a few weeks before his death. We believe the Good Lord has welcomed you to his heavenly glory

Good Bye dear Fr. Fr. Lorenzo Fernando. (*Joe Francis*, Papal Seminary, Pune 411014)

*We are sad to announce the demise of **Rev Fr Noel Sheth S.J.** Former Rector, Papal Seminary, on July 7, 2017. Obituary will appear in the next issue of AJRS.*

Homily Notes

September 3, 2017: XXII Sunday of the Year
Jer 20: 7-9; Rom 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27

Following Jesus

“If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mt: 16:24).

“Deny” and “cross” both words seem to be risky and challenging in the Christian life. Cross symbolizes that the cross of Christ was a cross of love and a manifestation of God’s love for lost humanity. Moreover, the way of Christian is the way of the cross, a way of self service and self giving. The word “deny” implies that one should say yes to God and no to oneself. It means to dethrone earthly desires, affections and sufferings in order to enthrone God’s love. As a Christian you and I should face these two tasks in our daily lives. The more a person denies his wealth the more that person grows spiritually and he or she will become more human. God’s generosity is beyond our shallow calculations and shabby expectations. Let’s try to be more human to be the face of Christ for others by denying ourselves and to take up our own cross with Jesus.

In the first reading, we see that God instigates the spirit in our hearts: His mission which we can’t refuse at any cost. Most importantly, when we speak what he has asked us to speak, we are becoming His voice. We are really carrying not only His Words but also His feelings, moods, attitudes etc. when I turn out from the mission He has entrusted me, my wholeness will be made stumble and something like the burning fire start to gnaw my bones. Thus, my wholeness itself stands as a witness for the mission for which I am entrusted.

In the second reading, St. Paul speaks of spiritual worship which presents our bodies as holy, living sacrifice. He reminds us not to go one with the world rather always seek the will of God and discern it for our lives. All people are one in Christ and the gifts which we are gifted depend on the grace given by God.

-Selvam

September 8, 2017: Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary

Micah 5: 1-4a; Ps 12:6ab.6c; Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23

Mary: Born to Be the Part of Salvation

One's existence should not be a burden to the universe rather it should become a grace to the universe. All Generations will call me blessed (Lk 1:48). Blessed are you among women and blessed is the Fruit of your womb (Lk 1:42). Birthday of Mother Mary is a birthday very dear to us because she is our mother and she is the one who intercedes for us. Every human being is born into this world in time and space. In these two space and time, we specifically call time as a birthday and it is the day that the life of being is begun in this cosmos. Birthday of Mary is the happiest day for all and one day she will be the mother of Christ and the mother of the universe. In this day, Anna actualizes the fruit of her hard work and love, prayer are fulfilled in the form of Mary. Our life should become a blessing to the society like Mary. God has a plan for every one of us, we have to realize and recognize that plan of God to fulfill as Mary had done it. God had a special plan for Mary from the beginning of the history of salvation. Through the birth of Mary the roots of salvation has sprouted. We can play a special role either in the family or in the society but Mother Mary played a graceful role in the universe and in the salvation history by giving birth to the Son of God. Our birthday brings happiness to our family but Mary's birthday brings happiness not only to her family but also to the universe.

Church traditionally celebrates September 8th as the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary and after that on 8th December we celebrate her immaculate conception. She is the child of St. Joachim and St. Anne. Saint Augustine described Mother Mary as the

flower of the field from who bloomed the precious lily of the valley. On the nativity of our Lady we can think how great the joy of this day was, not only for Joachim and Anna but also for God. The most joyful person would be Jesus. St. Paul tells us that he has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and immaculate in his sight. Philosopher Heidegger says as long as life exists so also death. Death is inevitable of every human being before we die we have to do the best. in order to be the faithful of god, our behavior should be the behavior of sinless the is the gift that we are giving to Mary on this day . She always did selfless service to God. When we think of Mother Mary, she evokes a lot of feelings and emotions by revealing her virtues of life-giving, care providing, consoling functions.

The greatness of Mother Mary doesn't stem from her personal reputation rather it is the fruitfulness of her preserving and faithful consent do to God's will and the glory that comes from being united to her son. We are blessed because the mother of God is gifted to all and she leads us to her son. She is constantly telling us to do whatever He tells us (John 2:5). On this day we have to ask ourselves: Do we pray like Mary? Are we ready to do God's will? If not let us ask the lord to grant us the grace to be a true faithful like Mary our mother. May all our lives of sanctity be our gift to our heavenly Mother on her birthday.

-Songa

Sept 14, 2017: Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Num 21:4b-9; Phil 2:6-11; John 3:13-17

Salvific Value of Suffering

The immediate idea that comes to our mind when we think of the Cross is that of suffering. The solemnity of the Exaltation of the Cross is not merely the exaltation of suffering, but the exaltation of the One who suffered, Jesus Christ. The cross has no value; the cross has no glory and fame; the cross has no meaning, without the One who was crucified, without him who shed his precious blood for the sins of all human beings.

In today's first reading, Moses intercedes for the people who sinned against God, and God saves them from the poisonous serpents. Moses pointed to the bronze serpent erected for the people and they were saved only because they repented and turned to God in faith and humility. The second reading invites us to imitate the One who is the best example of humility. He is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel tells us that the Crucified Christ was prefigured in the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses. Jesus however is much superior to Moses because Jesus offered himself to be lifted up. The suffering that Jesus endured was not without any cause. The cause was noble and divine. God willed that His Son should suffer. Jesus emptied Himself so that all of us might enjoy the fullness of life. The suffering which accompanies the cross is sanctified by Christ. So, we don't need to panic about the sufferings in following Jesus Christ, our Lord. Suffering is the mark of discipleship that Jesus asks of us – “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me” (Mt. 16: 24).

In the words of Thomas A Kempis – “Why then are you afraid to take up that cross, which leads to the Kingdom? In the cross there is salvation; in the cross there is life; in the cross there is protection from your enemies; in the cross there is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the cross there is strength of mind; in the cross there is spiritual joy; in the cross there is the compendium of virtue; in the cross there is the perfection of sanctity.” Therefore, there is no other way for us to attain eternal life, but only in taking up our cross and following Jesus, the Crucified and Resurrected Christ, our Lord.

-Denu Sangma

September 17, 2017: XXIV Sunday of the Year

Sir 27:30-28:7; Rom 14:7-9; Mt 18:21-35

Be Merciful and Forgiving

What is your reaction when somebody frowns at you for no fault of your own or how quick are you to forgive your enemy? Do you hold on to or keep an account of the taunts and insults?

These are the questions that can help us to calculate our HQ (Happiness Quotient). My friend sent me a text message that read like this, “Generally we believe our memory is weak, but when we want to forget someone’s mistake, then we realize how powerful our memory is.” Isn’t it true?

Here is a story from the life of Buddha that will teach us how to be cool and serene on the face of anger, insult and mockery.

A man came and spat on Buddha’s face while he was meditating. He wiped it off and asked the man, “What next? The man was a little puzzled because he himself never expected that when you spit in someone’s face he should ask “What next?” Buddha was neither angry, nor in any way offended. There was no reaction on his part. But Buddha’s disciples became angry and insisted on punishing the man. The man went home perplexed and guilty. Fully tense and in remorse, he could not sleep the whole night. The next morning he went back to Buddha and threw himself at his feet and cried saying, “Forgive me for what I did yesterday.” Buddha, full of compassion took him by the river and said, “Every human being is like this river that goes on flowing, never the same again. The man you spit upon is not me. I look just like him. The river has flowed so much. So I cannot forgive you because I have no grudge against you.

If we meditate on the readings of today, the book of Sirach calls anger and wrath as abominations which a sinner holds on to. We are called to forgive and forget one another’s faults and wrongdoings for there is someone up there, the Lord Almighty, who will keep an account of our anger and wrath. Our job is to be merciful and patient like the king that Jesus mentions in the parable who felt pity for his slave and forgave his debt. If God can remove our transgressions so far, as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12) then why can’t we do likewise with our neighbours? We need to give time to people before branding them as ‘enemy’ to realize his or her faults, for everyone deserves a second chance to change and rectify ones behaviour. Don’t expect the other to

change immediately. Wait, relax, don't react, and don't lose your temper!

-Heston Ferrao

Sept 24, XXV Sunday of the Year

Is 55: 6-9; Phil 1: 20c-24.27a; Mt 20: 1-16a

Mysterious Ways of God

The readings of the day, speak to us about the mysterious ways of God and the vast abyss between the human ways of thinking and that of God. In the first reading taken from the Book of Isaiah, we see the prophet telling the people that the difference between the ways and thoughts of the humans and those of God is like the distance between the heavens and the earth. This calls for amending our ways and turning back to the Lord who is rich in forgiveness.

In the second reading, we see the zeal of the Apostle Paul, in serving the Lord. So much is his love for Jesus that he could say that life for him is Christ. He is caught up between two things at the dusk of his life as he became old: To live and serve Christ or to be gone and be united with Him. Finally, he says that staying alive for the sake of the his faithful is more urgent need, thus setting an example that it is more important for every Christian to win more souls for Christ, than to be united with him.

The Gospel reading of the day is one of the most challenging parables for every Christians. The average daily wage of a worker during Jesus' time was said to be one denarius a day. So, a worker who works the whole day would earn one denarius at the end of the day. The Landlord is not being unjust in giving one denarius to those who came in the morning and had agreed upon one denarius with the Landlord. If we read the whole parable from the perspective of the workers who were hired in the evening, we would know their agony. They were standing in the marketplace from the morning till evening, yet could not find any work. It is therefore, no fault of theirs that they were not hired. At the end of the day they too need to feed their hungry wives and children.

It is in this context, that the generosity of the Landlord and his justice comes into play, hiring servants even at the evening, shows the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God and the universality of salvation. Further, like Jesus said, the Father who clothes the lilies of the field knows how to take care of his children. The hiring of the workers indicates the mission; those who were hired in the morning indicate the Scribes and the Pharisees who are jealous of the generosity of Jesus and his love for the poor and the marginalized. The workers hired at the end of the day indicate the sinners, poor and the Samaritans. Can we be generous like our Father? Can we stop grumbling and complaining like the workers hired in the morning? Can we wait the whole day patiently for doing the work of the Father? **-Bhanu Yeshwanth**

October 1, 2017: XXVI Sunday of the Year
Ezek 18:25-28; Phil 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

The Parable of the Two Sons

The parable that we see in today's Gospel is an elaboration of what Jesus teaches in Mt 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in Heaven."

This parable sets before us a picture of two very imperfect sets of people, of whom one set were none the less better than the other. Neither son in the story was the kind of son to bring full joy to his father. But the one who in the end obeyed was considered better than the other.

Firstly, it tells us that there are two very common classes of people in this world. First, there are the people who promise anything; make great declarations of piety and fidelity; but their practice lags far behind. Second, there are those whose practice is far better than what they speak. They claim to be tough, hard-headed, but somehow they are found doing kind and generous things, may be in secret as if they were ashamed of it. So, when it comes to the bit, they live more Christian lives than many professing Christians. All of us might have encountered these two sets of people in our lives. But the real point of the parable is that

the really good man or woman is the one in who words and deeds meet and match.

Secondly, promises can never take the place of performance, and fine words are never a substitute for fine deeds. Christian way cannot be complete with mere promises and pompous declarations alone, performance also matters. Our promises don't count unless they are performed.

Thirdly, both these sons in the parable are two possibilities in each one of us. Sometimes we say 'yes' to God, but then get distracted or tired and our 'yes' accidentally turns into a 'no.' And sometimes we start with a loud 'NO' and then we better ourselves and turn it round into the beginning of a 'yes'- maybe a little shaky at first, but a beginning. And that can make our God proud of us, because the change of our heart matters more to our God than what we were in the past.

God wants to change our hearts so that we will show by our speech and by our actions that we respect his will and we are ready to do what he commands. That's why Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in Heaven."

-Arun Abraham CST

Oct 8, 2017: XXVII Sunday of the Year

Is 5: 1-7; Phil 4:6-9; Mt 21: 33- 44

Serving in the Vineyard of the Lord

Today's readings explain to us the real nature and purpose of the Kingdom of God. The word of the Lord speaks of two vineyards today: one which the Lord directly maintained and another one that he had entrusted to the tenants to take care. The first vineyard which the Lord directly nurtured has got much resemblance with the house of Israel, the vineyard which the lord made up on the hill (Is 5:1). He planted with the choice vines as YHWH chose Israel. He had made the watch tower over them. The watch tower directly pointing out the presence of the Lord

amidst them as it was in the Ark of the Covenant. The Lord chose his people from the wicked and unformed and then he himself formed them to a great nation as the vineyards story tells in the book of Isaiah (Is 5:2). But the fruit which given by the vines were wild grapes (Is 5:2). The second vineyard (Mt 21:33) which the Gospel presents to us is a good one. It represents the word of God and the tenants that the owner appoints to guard his vineyard were we ourselves. God has handed over to us the mission of spreading its fruit. But we all failed to do our duties and forget the one who created us. That is how we all want to become god for ourselves.

We were unformed. God made us formed. We were fools. God made us wise. We were bad workers in the vineyard. God made us His sons and daughters. He had given us family, social status, circle of relationships, etc. God has given us everything that helps to grow and we had grown. After growing what we made ready to our Lord as the fruit? Is it really a good fruit or the wild fruit? He had given us the word that which provides good fruits and the mission to spread God's message to the world. Though we fail to do the will of God, still we have the hope. "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanks giving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4: 6-7).

-Vipin Raj

October 15, 2017: XXVIII Sunday of the Year

Is 25: 6-10a; Phil 4: 12-14, 19-20; Matthew 22: 1-14

Being Part of a Community

The mother church today welcomes each one of us to reflect on the gratuitous gift of being in the community of the chosen, the great banquet of a communion.

The readings of today from Isaiah, Paul's letter, and Matthew, all three, share with us a vision of how our gracious God wants to show his care for us. They all use images of bounty, a feast of rich food, green pastures and restful waters, being well-fed,

and then finally a royal marriage feast. A common theme that runs throughout all the readings is about being a part of a community. A communion which has certain conditions that needs to be fulfilled.

God of the Old Testament who is usually portrayed as a punishing father has a new face in today's reading. He is shown as one who is ready to wipe away all the tears and pains of his children, a compassionate father who is very inclusive to love without discrimination. But to be a part in his chosen flock one has to have the wedding garment. The pre-condition of the wedding garment here today our mother church thinks that our Abba Father expects us to wear is the garment of faith; the faith in that compassionate father who sacrificed his son for us. He expects us to wear the garment of humanity when we come to the banquet which would show us how humane and inclusive are we when it comes to the needs of our fellow brethren, how compassionate are we to understand the needs and shortcomings of our neighbours. He expects us to wear the garment of love which shows how ready we are to forgive and forget the mistakes done by others and done to others and come together and live in love.

Let us reflect on this gift of life as we are part of the great banquet of this world hosted by the Lord. Are we wearing the garment that our loving Father expects of us when we live in a community of differences? Am I concerned about my neighbour who faces great tyranny and suffers daily different types of atrocities in my society?

-Jerine Joyson

October 22, 2017: XXIX Sunday of the Year

Is. 45:1, 4-6; 1 Thess. 1: 1-5; Mt. 22: 15-22

Give to God What Belongs to God

“To give to God what belongs to God is to share the goods of the earth.” Today's liturgy of the word invites us to reflect on our belongingness to God and world. In the first reading from the Book of Isaiah, 45:1, 4-6, the Lord God addresses His anointed one, Cyrus. By His infinite power, nations had been subdued and kings stripped of their robes. Doors had been opened for

His anointed one and the gates shall not be closed. He loved, His servant Jacob and Israel His chosen, He calls us by our names. Though we do not know Him, He surnames us. Through our Baptism, He has opened the doors to Heaven for us to enter, promising never to close them. How true it is that we know very little about God the Father. Even though we do not know Him, he remembers each and every one of our names, knowing us personally. We belong to Him and He wants us!

In the second reading from the First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, 1 Thess. 1:1-5 we learn more about the greatness of God. Saint Paul gives thanks to God in prayer for all the blessings that the Thessalonians had received. He mentioned their works of faith, their labour of love and their steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ. The labour of love is a reflection of active charity. As such, the prayer of thanksgiving to God embraces the virtues of faith, hope and charity that had been bestowed upon the Thessalonians. Paul also emphasized that it was not just his words that transformed the Thessalonians, but the “power” of the Holy Spirit. Giving credit where it rightfully belongs, Paul made it clear that it was the Holy Spirit who was responsible for all the spiritual manifestations of righteousness. Paul is a holy example to all of us. He shined as a saintly model who always acknowledged that there is only One God and we belong to him.

In the Gospel reading Jesus is being asked about taxes and politics and shifts things further. He knows he is being trapped by the Herodians. He moves on to higher questions. Where do we belong; to the world or to God? This belonging is the centre of our human family and community is that we are God’s. God doesn’t want to control us but to love us. But there’s a saying – belonging to God means belonging to each other. We have rights and duties of love. Give to others what belongs to others; give to the poor what belongs to the poor. Our work for hunger, education etc is not a charity for people; it is justice. Everyone has a right to the food of the earth and the food of the mind. It’s not charity when people are given food, education, a home, freedom of religion, freedom of speech – it is justice. To give to God what belongs to

God is to share the goods of the earth with one another!

Today's message is: let us appreciate what God has given us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, let us preserve our gifts and blessings with all our souls, our minds, our spirits, our hearts and our strength. In the Most Holy Name of Jesus, let us keep these gifts stainless so that one day, when we will appear before the Lord God, we will proudly give Him back what He gave us. Then, we will rightfully inherit the assurance of our salvation.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we thank you for the word that has enabled us to understand better our belongingness to God. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which Your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, Your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. Amen.

-Ciril Vallomkunnel

October 29, 2017: XXX Sunday of the Year
Ex 22:20-26; 1Thess 1:5-10; Matt 22:34-40

Loving Neighbours is Equivalent to Loving God

Jesus was tested many times during his life on earth. Just after his baptism, he was led by Satan and tested for three times in different places. Even human beings tested the Lord. The people of his time, especially the Sadducees and the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus, because they felt threatened by him. Therefore, they looked for the opportunities that Jesus would speak against the law of the scripture and become a blasphemer. Jesus the almighty and the source of all knowledge and wisdom gains victory over all the tests put before him.

Actually, the whole scripture is the law given by the good Lord. The first reading of today clearly states that one is not supposed to oppress any alien or stranger, not to abuse any widow or orphan and not to exploit any poor, but the Jews used to do so. Their observation on the law was very shallow. They were not interested in taking care of the poor brothers and sisters who