

PROCLAIM

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**The steadfast love of
the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come
to an end; they are new
every morning; great is
your faithfulness. "The
LORD is my portion,"
says my soul, "therefore
I will hope in him."**

- Lamentations 3:22-24

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Suffering brings God closer to us

We are in the holy season of Lent, and we shall soon enter the glorious season of Easter as well. In this liturgical season, we contemplate on two opposing realities: Death and Life --- temptations, suffering, struggles and victory on the one hand, Purity, Joy, Witnessing, and Life on the other. The season of Lent is one of melancholy while the season of Easter is one of happiness.

The liturgical calendar and seasons remind us that our life is a passage. We pass from one phase to another; one can never think of remaining in only one phase of life. A suffering man will see happiness in a little while and a joyful man might see suffering soon. The Passion and death of Christ is the most significant reminder that we have to pass through suffering in order to witness victory.



One needs to overcome temptations, undergo suffering in order to be victorious. James in his letter says, “Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him” [1: 12].

One of the most predominant temptations of the modern society is the temptation to avoid suffering and struggles. In one way or another, we are allergic to pain and do anything to avoid it. We want to bypass suffering to be happy and victorious. Christ enlightens us with his life of the cross that suffering, though unpleasant and difficult to bear, strengthens us. Without suffering and struggles, we become fragile in the world of uncertainties and challenges. A man who has never suffered in his early life will find it very hard to face the realities of life at a later stage.

We are strengthened because God becomes very close to us when we undergo suffering and are persecuted (Psalm 34: 17-18). On August 13, 2019, after a tragic accident that took away 43 lives in Genova, Pope Francis said: “God's answer to our pain is a closeness, a presence that accompanies us, that doesn't leave us alone. Jesus made himself the same as us and for this reason we have him near us, to cry with us in the most difficult moments of our lives. Let us look at him, entrust him with our questions, our sorrows, and our anger.”

Our suffering might make us feel that we are abandoned by God, but it takes time to realise that God actually accompanies us. Jesus was able to walk unwaveringly because the Father was with him. Jesus in turn walks with us in the moments of trials and difficulties. Therefore in the season of Lent let us overcome the temptation to avoid suffering because avoiding suffering distances us from the presence of God.

The resurrection of Jesus shows us that God is victorious over the sting of death (1Cor 15: 55). It also displays an important life lesson that one can become victorious over death and suffering when he/she allows God to be close with them by accepting suffering willingly.

The season of Easter does not simply give us hope and promises. It gives us a mandate --- a mandate to share with others the experience of the closeness of God in moments of trials and suffering.

Having realised how God was with Jesus in his suffering, all those who had met the risen Lord, shared the experience with others. They too become witnesses. They don't preach only about the life after death, they teach and preach the suffering Lord who became victorious. Hence we as members of the church should be willing not only to accept suffering and persecution thus experiencing the presence of the Lord in depth, but also to stand as witnesses and proclaimers of God's closeness that we experience in our difficulties.

Fr Dr Ambrose Pitchaimuthu
National Director (PMO-India)

The cornerstone of Christian life

Pope Francis' message for Lent 2020

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20)



sinking into the abyss of absurdity, and experiencing hell here on earth, as all too many tragic events in the personal and collective human experience sadly bear witness.

In this Lent of 2020, I would like to share with every Christian what I wrote to young people in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*: “Keep your eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of Christ crucified, let yourself be saved over and over again. And when you go to confess your sins, believe firmly in his mercy which frees you of your guilt.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year the Lord grants us, once again, a favourable time to prepare to celebrate with renewed hearts the great mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the cornerstone of our personal and communal Christian life. We must continually return to this mystery in mind and heart, for it will continue to grow within us in the measure that we are open to its spiritual power and respond with freedom and generosity.

01. The paschal mystery as the basis of conversion

Christian joy flows from listening to, and accepting, the Good News of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This kerygma sums up the mystery of a love “so real, so true, so concrete, that it invites us to a relationship of openness and fruitful dialogue” (*Christus Vivit*, 117). Whoever believes this message rejects the lie that our life is ours to do with as we will. Rather, life is born of the love of God our Father, from his desire to grant us life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10). If we listen instead to the tempting voice of the “father of lies” (Jn 8:44), we risk

Contemplate his blood poured out with such great love, and let yourself be cleansed by it. In this way, you can be reborn ever anew” (No. 123). Jesus' Pasch is not a past event; rather, through the power of the Holy Spirit it is ever present, enabling us to see and touch with faith the flesh of Christ in those who suffer.

2. The urgency of conversion

It is good to contemplate more deeply the paschal mystery through which God's mercy has



been bestowed upon us. Indeed, the experience of mercy is only possible in a “face to face” relationship with the crucified and risen Lord “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20), in a heartfelt dialogue between friends. That is why prayer is so important in Lent. Even more than a duty, prayer is an expression of our need to respond to God's love which always precedes and sustains us. Christians pray in the knowledge that, although unworthy, we are still loved.

Prayer can take any number of different forms, but what truly matters in God's eyes is that it penetrates deep within us and chips away at our hardness of heart, in order to convert us ever more fully to God and to his will. In this favourable season, then, may we allow ourselves to be led like Israel into the desert (cf. Hos 2:14), so that we can at last hear our Spouse's voice and allow it to resound ever more deeply within us. The more fully we are engaged with his word, the more we will experience the mercy he freely gives us. May we not let this time of grace pass in vain, in the foolish illusion that we can control the times and means of our conversion to him.

3. God's passionate will to dialogue with his children

The fact that the Lord once again offers us a favourable time for our conversion should never be taken for granted. This new opportunity ought to awaken in us a sense of gratitude and stir us from our sloth. Despite the sometimes tragic presence of evil in our lives, and in the life of the Church and the world, this opportunity to change our course expresses God's unwavering will not to interrupt his dialogue of salvation with us. In the crucified Jesus, who knew no sin, yet for our sake was made to be sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), this saving will led the

Father to burden his Son with the weight of our sins, thus, in the expression of Pope Benedict XVI, “turning God against himself” (Deus Caritas Est, 12). For God also loves his enemies (cf. Mt 5:43-48).

The dialogue that God wishes to establish with each of us through the paschal mystery of his Son has nothing to do with empty chatter, like that attributed to the ancient inhabitants of Athens, who “spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21). Such chatter, determined by an empty and superficial curiosity, characterizes worldliness in every age; in our own day, it can also result in improper use of the media.

4. A richness to be shared, not kept for oneself

Putting the paschal mystery at the centre of our lives means feeling compassion towards the wounds of the crucified Christ present in the many innocent victims of wars, in attacks on life, from that of the unborn to that of the elderly, and various forms of violence. They are likewise present in environmental disasters, the unequal distribution of the earth's goods, human trafficking in all its forms, and the unbridled thirst for profit, which is a form of idolatry.

Today too, there is a need to appeal to men and women of good will to share, by almsgiving, their goods with those most in need, as a means of personally participating in the building of a better world. Charitable giving makes us more human, whereas hoarding risks making us less human, imprisoned by our own selfishness. We can and must go even further, and consider the structural aspects of our economic life. For this reason, in the midst of Lent this year, from 26 to 28 March, I have



The Lord is risen, Alleluia

By Fr John Rose



In the Resurrection account John 20:1-9, we find three of the people who loved Jesus are involved --- Mary Magdalene, John and Peter. They were the first to receive the good news of the resurrection Jesus. Let us meditate on these three people and the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene had come to the tomb, along with the other women, in order to anoint the body of Jesus. When she found the tomb open and empty, she rushed back and said to John and Peter, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and 'we' don't know where they have put him." She alone is mentioned in John's gospel because she was the most enthusiastic and most forward among the women disciples of Jesus.

She hastened early in

the morning to the tomb of Jesus both to weep and to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. She loved Jesus much because she was forgiven much by Jesus. She was drawn to Jesus both in his life and in his death. She ministered to him when he walked upon the earth, and when he died she remained close to his grave. Our hearts are always pulled towards those whom we love --- be they alive or dead. When alive, we seek their company, and when they are dead, we aspire to stay close to their remains.

She came to the tomb early in the morning. Those who love Christ must seek him early. We must approach and appeal to him before we approach others for help. We must seek him industriously; we must deny ourselves even eat and repose if we have to pursue him. A day thus begun will have a beautiful ending. Mary Magdalene sought Jesus early, and her life lit up for all eternity.

Easter Sunday was the first Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day. Mary Magdalene spent the early hours seeking and enquiring about Jesus. Christians must honor the Lord's Day by invoking Jesus' name and seeking after him. We must seek him with great reverence, for God has exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, and therefore, every knee should bend and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:9ff).

Notwithstanding her dark past, Mary Magdalene was the first one to see the risen



Lord. This singular privilege was given to her because she loved Jesus much. Love covers a multitude of sins. When we love Jesus wholeheartedly, our past sins would be buried, and we shall be counted among the blessed of the Lord.

John and Peter



After discovering the tomb empty, Mary Magdalene rushed to and informed John and Peter about it. Possibly all the disciples stayed together. It is wonderful to note that Peter who denied his Master was also found with the other disciples. He had not deserted the company of the other disciples of his master. Keeping close in the company of the believers is not only comforting but also prophylactic. It acts like an antidote to sin. It will keep us away from falling into greater evil.

John, being the younger, outran Peter and reached the tomb first, but he did not enter until Peter arrived and entered. They saw the linen cloth and the others cloths on the ground. When Peter saw the cloths, he wondered (Lk 24:12), but John believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. He was the first one to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The common factor between John (who was the first one to believe in the resurrection of Jesus) and Mary Magdalene (who was the first one to see the risen Lord) was love. Both loved Jesus exceedingly, and Jesus granted them that singular

privilege because of their love.

Jesus left his grave cloths behind in the tomb because he had no use for those rags. We do not know in what clothes he appeared to his disciples, but definitely not in his grave cloths. It is said that only ghosts appear in their grave cloths. The

appearance of Jesus was not a ghost. He was truly risen from the dead, and death had no more dominion over him. When Lazarus came out of his tomb, he came out with his grave cloths because he had a use for them later. But Jesus is risen and alive forever more, and he is clothed in the garments of glory forever.

Meaning of Resurrection in Jesus' life

The resurrection of Jesus is one of the central mysteries of Christian faith. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, the whole fabric of Christian faith would fall and crumble down. St Paul said to the Corinthians, "If Christ is not risen from the dead, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). The death and the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. Our present justification and our future glorification hinges upon this Paschal Mystery.

St Paul said, "If Christ is not raised, your faith is in vain, you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:16). Not only our justification (forgiveness) but also our glorification --- our hope of eternal life --- depends on the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of our Lord gives us the hope that one day we shall also be like our Lord. St Paul said, "If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom 10:9) May our confession that Lord Jesus is risen from the dead grant us a share in his eternal life.

— **Courtesy: Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore (John's Sunday Homilies, Cycle – C) ♦**

On our Lenten journey

By Mahesh H Lobo

We have begun our journey. On Ash Wednesday we started this journey with the emblem of our faith – the Cross – being marked on our forehead. We were reminded of what we are – where we came from and where we are going to.

Yes, we began with the sign of the cross made on our foreheads with ashes, inviting us to repent and believe in the Gospel. The journey begins with repentance.

Dictionaries define "repent" as "to feel sorry for sin and seek forgiveness." But the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) shows that repentance is more than this. The process of repentance includes:

- x The recognition and acceptance of personal responsibility for sin.
- x A sincere feeling of remorse and sorrow for having sinned.
- x A conscious decision to stop the wrongdoing.
- x An actual "turning away from" the sin. This is a change of direction in behavior.
- x A confession of sin and a humble request for forgiveness. The request for forgiveness is made to the one who has been hurt by the sin.
- x An offer to make amends for the hurt that was caused by the sin.

Repentance is not just an intellectual exercise of "feeling sorry" for sins. Repentance involves a "turning" or "reorientation" of one's life. The evidence of that change is seen in the "fruit," or how a person lives. John the Baptist told those who came to confess their sins that they must "bear fruit that befits (evidences) repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

The parable of the "prodigal son" teaches us that we are sinning against God "our Father" if we squander the life that we have received. God expects us to invest ourselves to produce something good in the world. In a word, repentance is redirecting our life and moving towards our destination – to Calvary and to Easter Morn.

Beginning of Lent, on Ash Wednesday, through

Prophet Joel and Evangelist Matthew, we are invited to fast, give alms and pray.

First of all we need to fast. It is not just physical. We have our passions besides the passion for food. They aren't sinful in themselves, but we can allow them to become inordinate or gratify them in unlawful ways. Remember that we, like Jesus, are called to fast. Our fast is from sinful things like injustice, unrighteousness, sexual impurity, unlawful pleasures, various types of addictions and excessive indulgence. Either we can gratify these passions and desires or reject



them to serve God. The devil tempts us to reject our call and to use our power to gratify our passions by lying, cheating, stealing, venting our anger, fornicating, and being gluttonous or greedy. We need to stand up.



There is a tendency in us to be presumptuous. We believe that we can do and live the way we like, yet God will forgive us, he will not consider our sins, but will be merciful to us. It is important to trust God, but we cannot do it recklessly. God has given us common sense as well as the teaching through his Word and through His Church. We need to be obedient to His Commandments. We cannot live as if there is no sin and evil in this world.

The Word of God clearly tells us: *Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart* (Gal 6:7).

There is a craving in us for possessions. Jesus was offered worldly possessions for a little bit of



diversion, instead of worshiping God, He had to worship the devil, just once! Jesus was quite clear and he took his stand. We would like to have the cake and eat it too. A little diversion, shifting our priorities for a short time, giving prime place to someone or something just for a short time!

The Word of God is pretty clear on this: *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him* (1 John 2:15). *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You*

cannot serve both God and Money (Matt 6:24). We cannot have both, worldly possessions and its pleasures and God. We need to make our choice. We have to take our stand and be firm on it. It is true that we need goods and services of this world to survive and live in this world. Our prayer could be: *Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest in my poverty I steal or in my riches I say "Who is the Lord?"* (Pr 30:8-9)

Secondly we are invited to give alms. On this journey there are a number of people we encounter who need our attention, time and service. We need to be good Samaritans on this journey. It is easier to hand over a few coins here and there than to wipe the tears of the distressed and weeping; offering a helping hand to those who are in need of support and encouragement; to teach the ignorant; to be in solidarity with the oppressed and down trodden; to take care of the sick; to give our time to our aging parents; etc.

And then we are called to pray. It is not just mumbling a few formal prayers, but rather being prayerful --- ie: being connected with God, our Father, at all times. Participation in the daily Eucharistic celebration, spending time in front of the Blessed Sacrament (Eucharistic Adoration), reading the Word of God are some of the better ways of spending time during this journey through Lent.

Lent is a time to bring about a change in our disposition and attitudes and not just in external practices, but that we become a new human being passing through the tomb, being unbound by Jesus and let us go to the world to witness Jesus – who is Resurrection and Life. ♦

A Journey Through Lent

Seeing what really matters in life

Pope Francis' homily at the Holy Mass celebrated on 1st February 2020, the 24th World Day for Consecrated Life, in the Vatican Basilica

“My eyes have seen your salvation” (Lk 2:30). These are the words of Simeon, whom the Gospel presents as a simple man: “righteous and devout”, says the text (v. 25). But among all at the temple that day, he alone saw Jesus as the Saviour. What did he see? A child: a small, vulnerable, simple child. But in him, he saw salvation, for the Holy Spirit allowed him to recognize in that tender newborn “the Lord's Christ” (v. 26). Taking him in his arms, he sensed by faith that in him God was bringing his promises to fulfillment. And that he, Simeon, could now go in peace: he had seen the grace that was worth more than life (cf. Ps 63:4), and there was nothing further to wait for.

You too, dear consecrated brothers and sisters, you are simple men and women who caught sight of the treasure worth more than any worldly good. And so you left behind precious things, such as possessions, such as making a family for yourselves. Why did you do this? Because you fell in love with Jesus, you saw everything in him and enraptured by his gaze, you left the rest behind. Religious life is this vision. It means seeing what really matters in life. It means welcoming the Lord's gift with open arms, as Simeon did. This is what the eyes of consecrated men and women behold: the grace of God poured into their hands. The consecrated person is one who every day looks at himself or herself and says: “Everything is gift, all is grace”. Dear brothers and sisters, we did not deserve religious life; it is a gift of love that we have received.

My eyes have seen your salvation. These are the words we repeat each evening at Night Prayer. With them, we bring our day to an end, saying:



“Lord, my salvation comes from you, my hands are not empty, but are full of your grace”. Knowing how to see grace is the starting point. Looking back, rereading one's own history and seeing there God's faithful gift: not only in life's grand moments but

also in our fragility and weakness, in our insignificance. The tempter, the devil focuses on our “poverty”, our empty hands: “In all these years you haven't got any better, you haven't achieved what you could have, they haven't let you do what you were meant to do, you haven't always been faithful, you are not capable...” and so on. Each of us knows this story and these words very well. We see this is true in part, and so we go back to thoughts and feelings that disorient us. Thus we risk losing our bearings, the gratuitous love of God. For God loves us always, and gives himself to



us, even in our poverty. Saint Jerome offered much to the Lord and the Lord asked for more. He said to the Lord: “But Lord, I have given you everything, everything, what else is lacking?” “Your sins, your poverty, offer me your poverty”. When we keep our gaze fixed on him, we open ourselves to his forgiveness that renews us, and we are reassured



by his faithfulness. We can ask ourselves today: “To whom do I turn my gaze: to the Lord, or to myself?” Whoever experiences God's grace above all else can discover the antidote to distrust and to looking at things in a worldly way.

There is a temptation that looms over religious life: seeing things in a worldly way. This entails no longer seeing God's grace as the driving force in life, then going off in search of something to substitute for it: a bit of fame, a consoling affection, finally getting to do what I want. But when a consecrated life no longer revolves around God's grace, it turns in upon itself. It loses its passion, it grows slack, becomes stagnant. And we know what happens then: we start to demand our own space, our own rights, we let ourselves get dragged into gossip and slander, we take offense at every small thing that does not go our way, and we pour forth litanies of lamentation – lamentation, “Father Lamentation”, “Sister Lamentation” – about our brothers, our sisters, our communities, the Church, society. We no longer see the Lord in everything, but only the dynamics of the world and our hearts grow numb. Then we become creatures of habit, pragmatic, while inside us sadness and distrust grow, that turn into resignation. This is what a worldly gaze leads to. The Great Saint Teresa once said to the sisters: “woe to the sister who repeats these words, 'they have treated me unjustly', woe to her!”

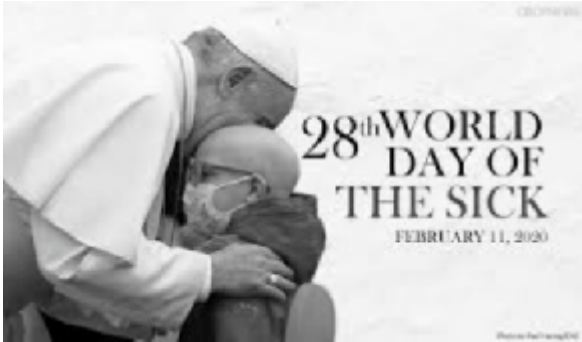
To have the right kind of view on life, we ask to be able to perceive God's grace for us, like Simeon. The Gospel says three times that he was intimately familiar with the Holy Spirit, who was upon him,

inspired him, roused him (cf. v. 25-27). He was intimately familiar with the Holy Spirit, with the love of God. If consecrated life remains steadfast in love for the Lord, it perceives beauty. It sees that poverty is not some colossal effort, but rather a higher freedom that God gives to us and others as real wealth. It sees that chastity is not austere sterility, but the way to love without possessing. It sees that obedience is not a discipline, but is victory over our own chaos, in the way of Jesus. In one of the regions affected by an earthquake in Italy – speaking of poverty and community life – there was a Benedictine monastery that was destroyed and another monastery that invited the Sisters to come and stay with them. But they were only there for a short while: they were not happy, they were thinking about their monastery, about the people there. In the end, they decided to go back to their monastery, which is now two caravans. Instead of staying in this big, comfortable monastery; they were like flies there, all of them together, but happy in their poverty. This happened just last year. It is a beautiful thing!

My eyes have seen your salvation. Simeon sees Jesus as small, humble, the one who has come to serve, not to be served, and defines himself as servant. Indeed he says: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace” (v. 29). Those who see things as Jesus does, learn how to live in order to serve. They do not wait for others to take the initiative, but themselves go out in search of their neighbor, as did Simeon who sought out Jesus in the temple. Where is one's neighbor to be found in the consecrated life? This is the question: Where is one's neighbor to be found? First of all in one's own community. The grace must be sought to know how to seek out Jesus in the brothers and sisters we have been given. And that is precisely where we can begin to put charity into practice: in the place where you live, by welcoming brothers and sisters in their poverty, as Simeon welcomed Jesus meek and poor. Today, so many see in other people only hindrances and complications. We need to have a gaze that seeks out our neighbor, that brings those who are far-off closer. Men and

Not just curing but also caring

Pope Francis's message for 28th World Day of the Sick celebrated on 11th February



1. Jesus' words, “Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28) point to the mysterious path of grace that is revealed to the simple and gives new strength to those who are weary and tired. These words of Christ express the solidarity of the Son of Man with all those who are hurt and afflicted. How many people suffer in both body and soul! Jesus urges everyone to draw near to him – “Come to me!” – and he promises them comfort and repose. “When Jesus says this, he has before him the people he meets every day on the streets of Galilee: very many simple people, the poor, the sick, sinners, those who are marginalized *by the burden of the law and the oppressive social system*...

..... Jesus repeats these words to the sick, the oppressed, and the poor. For they realize that they depend entirely on God and, beneath the burden of their trials, stand in need of his healing. Jesus does not make demands of those who endure situations of frailty, suffering and weakness, but offers his mercy and his comforting presence. He looks upon a wounded humanity with eyes that gaze into the heart of each person. That gaze is not one of indifference; rather, it embraces people in their entirety, each person in his or her health condition, discarding no one, but rather inviting everyone to share in his life and to experience his tender love.

2. Why does Jesus have these feelings? Because he himself became frail, endured human suffering and received comfort from his Father. Indeed, only those who personally experience suffering are then able to comfort others. There are so many kinds of

grave suffering: incurable and chronic diseases, psychological diseases, situations calling for rehabilitation or palliative care, numerous forms of disability, children's or geriatric diseases... At times human warmth is lacking in our approach to these. What is needed is a personalized approach to the sick, not just of *curing* but also of *caring*, in view of an integral human healing. In experiencing illness, individuals not only feel threatened in their physical integrity, but also in the relational, intellectual, affective and spiritual dimensions of their lives. For this reason, in addition to therapy and support, they expect care and attention. In a word, love.....

3. Dear brothers and sisters who are ill, your sickness makes you in a particular way one of those “who labour and are burdened”, and thus attract the eyes and heart of Jesus. In him, you will find light to brighten your darkest moments and hope to soothe your distress. He urges you: “Come to me”. In him, you will find strength to face all the worries and questions that assail you during this “dark night” of body and soul. Christ did not give us prescriptions, but through his passion, death and resurrection he frees us from the grip of evil.



In your experience of illness, you certainly need a place to find rest. The Church desires to become more and more the “inn” of the Good Samaritan who is Christ (cf. Lk 10:34), that is, a home where you can encounter his grace, which

finds expression in closeness, acceptance and relief. In this home, you can meet people who, healed in their frailty by God's mercy, will help you bear your cross and enable your suffering to give you a new perspective. You will be able to look beyond your illness to a greater horizon of new light and fresh strength for your lives.

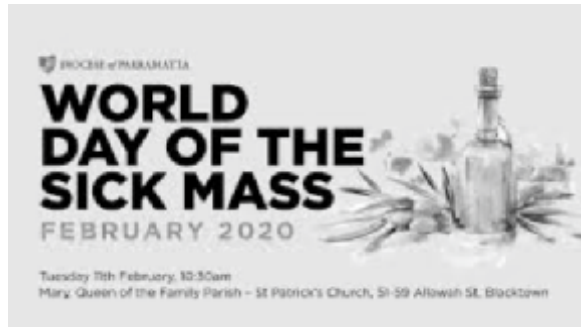
A key role in this effort to offer rest and renewal to our sick brothers and sisters is played by healthcare workers: physicians, nurses, medical and administrative professionals, assistants and volunteers. Thanks to their expertise, they can make patients feel the presence of Christ who consoles and cares for the sick, and heals every hurt. Yet they too are men and women with their own frailties and even illnesses. They show how true it is that “once Christ's comfort and rest is received, we are called in turn to become rest and comfort for our brothers and sisters, with a docile and humble attitude in imitation of the Teacher” (*Angelus*, 6 July 2014).



4. Dear healthcare professionals, let us always remember that diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic treatments, research, care and rehabilitation are always in the service of the sick person; indeed the noun “person” takes priority over the adjective “sick”. In your work, may you always strive to promote the dignity and life of each person, and reject any compromise in the direction of euthanasia, assisted suicide or

suppression of life, even in the case of terminal illness.

When confronted with the limitations and even failures of medical science before increasingly problematic clinical cases and bleak diagnoses, you are called to be open to the



transcendent dimension of your profession that reveals its ultimate meaning. Let us remember that life is sacred and belongs to God; hence it is inviolable and no one can claim the right to dispose of it freely (cf. *Donum Vitae*, 5; *Evangelium*

Vitae, 29-53). Life must be welcomed, protected, respected and served from its beginning to its end: both human reason and faith in God, the author of life, require this. In some cases, conscientious objection becomes a necessary decision if you are to be consistent with your “yes” to life and to the human person. Your professionalism, sustained by Christian charity, will be the best service you can offer for the safeguarding of the truest human right, the right to life. When you can no longer provide a cure, you will still be able to provide care and healing, through gestures and procedures that give comfort and relief to the sick.

5. On this XXVIII World Day of the Sick, I think of our many brothers and sisters throughout the world who have no access to medical care because they live in poverty. For this reason, I urge healthcare institutions and government leaders throughout the world not to neglect social justice out of a preoccupation for financial concerns. It is my hope that, by joining the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, efforts will be made to cooperate in ensuring that everyone has access to suitable treatments for preserving and restoring their health. I offer heartfelt thanks to all those volunteers who serve the sick, often compensating for structural shortcomings, while reflecting the image of Christ, the Good Samaritan, by their acts of tender love and closeness. ♦

Christian doctrine is a dynamic reality

Extract from Pope Francis' address to the participants in the plenary session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 30th January in the Vatican

..... Christian Doctrine isn't a rigid system closed in itself, but neither is it an ideology that changes with the passing of seasons. It is a dynamic reality that, remaining faithful to its foundation, is renewed from generation to generation and can be summed up in a face, in a body and in a name: Jesus Christ Risen.



Thanks to the Risen Lord, the faith opens us to our neighbour and to his needs, from the littlest to the greatest. Therefore, the transmission of the faith calls for taking into account its recipient, that he be known and loved actively. In this perspective, your commitment is significant to reflect, in the course of this Plenary, on the care of people in the critical and terminal phases of life.

The present socio-cultural context is eroding progressively awareness regarding what makes human life precious. It, in fact, is valued ever more often by reason of its efficiency and usefulness, to the point of considering “discarded lives” or “unworthy lives” those that don't respond to such criteria. In this situation of loss of authentic values, the imperative human and Christian duties of solidarity and fraternity also fail. In reality, a society merits the qualification of “civil” if it develops antibodies against the throwaway culture; if it recognizes the intangible value of human life; if solidarity is actively practiced and safeguarded as foundation of coexistence.

When sickness knocks at the door of our life, the need emerges increasingly to have next to us someone who looks at us in the eyes, who holds our hand, who manifests his tenderness and takes care of us, as the Good Samaritan of the evangelical parable (Cf. Message to the 28th World Day of the

Sick, February 2020).

The subject of the care of the sick, in the critical and terminal phases of life, calls into question the task of the Church to rewrite the “grammar” of taking charge and taking care of the suffering person. The example of the Good Samaritan teaches that it's

necessary to convert the heart's gaze, because very often one who looks doesn't see. Why? Why? — because compassion is lacking. There comes to mind that, many times the Gospel, speaking of Jesus before a suffering person, says: “He took pity on him,” “He took pity on him” . . . A refrain of Jesus' person. Without compassion, one who looks is not involved in what he observes and moves on. Instead, one who has a compassionate heart is touched and involved, stops and takes care <of the patient>.

It is necessary to create around the sick person a true and proper human platform of relations that, while fostering medical care, open to hope, especially in those limit-situations in which the physical ailment is accompanied by emotional discomfort and spiritual anguish.

The relational approach — and not merely clinical — with the patient, considered in the uniqueness and totality of his person, imposes the duty never to abandon anyone in the presence of incurable illnesses. Human life, given its eternal destiny, keeps all its value and all its dignity in any condition, also of precariousness and fragility, and, as such, is always worthy of the greatest consideration. Saint Teresa of Calcutta, who lived the style of proximity and sharing, keeping up to the end the recognition and respect of human dignity, and rendering dying more human, said

thus;” One who in the path of life has lighted even just one torch in someone's dark hour has not lived in vain.”

In this connection, I think of how much good hospices do for palliative care, where the terminally sick are accompanied by qualified medical, psychological and spiritual support, so that they can live with dignity, comforted by the closeness of dear persons, the final phase of their earthly life. I hope that such centers will continue to be places in which the “therapy of dignity” is practiced with commitment, thus nourishing love and respect for life.

Moreover, I appreciate the study you have undertaken regarding the revision of the norms on *Delicta Graviora* reserved to your Dicastery, contained in John Paul II's *Motu Proprio Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*. Your commitment is placed in the right direction to update the normative in view of greater efficiency

in the procedures, to make it more orderly and organic, in the light of the new situations and problems in the present socio-cultural context. At the same time, I exhort you to continue firmly in this task, to offer a valid contribution, in a realm in which the Church is directly involved, to proceed with rigour and transparency in protecting the sanctity of the Sacraments and violated human dignity, specially of little ones.

Finally, I congratulate you for the recent publication of the document elaborated by the Pontifical Biblical Commission regarding fundamental topics of biblical anthropology. Reflected further with it is a global vision of the divine plan, initiated with Creation and which finds its fulfilment in Christ, the New Man, who constitutes “the key, the center and the end of the whole of human history” (Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 10). ♦

Continued from Page 8: Seeing what really matters in life



women religious, who live to imitate Jesus, are called to bring their own gaze into the world, a gaze of compassion, a gaze that goes in search of those far-off; a gaze that does not condemn, but encourages, frees, consoles; a gaze of compassion. That repeated phrase in the Gospel, which, speaking about Jesus, says: “He had compassion”. This is the stooping down of Jesus towards each one of us.

My eyes have seen your salvation. The eyes of Simeon saw salvation because they were expecting it (cf. v. 25). They were eyes that were waiting, full

of hope. They were looking for the light and then saw the light of the nations (cf. v. 32). They were aged eyes but burning with hope. The gaze of consecrated men and women can only be one of hope. Knowing how to hope. Looking around, it is easy to lose hope: things that don't work, the decline in vocations... There is always the temptation to have a worldly gaze, one devoid of hope. But let us look to the Gospel and see Simeon and Anna: they were elderly, alone, yet they had not lost hope, because they remained in communion with the Lord. Anna “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (v. 37). Here is the secret: never to alienate oneself from the Lord, who is the source of hope. We become blind if we do not look to the Lord every day if we do not adore him. To adore the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for the gift of the consecrated life and ask of him a new way of looking, that knows how to see grace, how to look for one's neighbor, how to hope. Then our eyes too will see salvation. ♦



convened a meeting in Assisi with young economists, entrepreneurs and change-makers, with the aim of shaping a more just and inclusive economy. As the Church's magisterium has often

repeated, political life represents an eminent form of charity (cf. Pius XI, Address to the Italian Federation of Catholic University Students, 18 December 1927). The same holds true for economic life, which can be approached in the same evangelical spirit, the spirit of the Beatitudes.

I ask Mary Most Holy to pray that our Lenten celebration will open our hearts to hear God's call to be reconciled to himself, to fix our gaze on the paschal mystery, and to be converted to an open and sincere dialogue with him. In this way, we will become what Christ asks his disciples to be: the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt 5:13-14).

-Francis ♦

New lectionary from Palm Sunday

Bengaluru [CNA]: The Church in India will begin to officially use the New English Lectionary, prepared according to the Indian Liturgical Calendar, from 5 April 2020, which marks Palm Sunday. The new three-volume English Lectionary incorporates special readings for the Solemnities, Feasts and Memorials of Indian Saints and votive Masses for India.

The new Lectionary for India was released on Tuesday by Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Bombay in the presence of Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal Giambattista Diquattro and Archbishop of Goa Filipe Neri Ferrao during the 32 Plenary Assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) at St John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru.

“This new Lectionary is an invitation for each of us to deepen our understanding of the Word of God and thereby participate in the liturgy actively, fully and consciously lifting ourselves up to the Lord,” said Cardinal Gracias.

He requested the bishops to give adequate instruction to the faithful regarding the new Lectionary, so that its use will result in a more profound understanding and appreciation of the Word of God in the Holy Mass as well as in other liturgical celebrations and thus lead to a fruitful nurturing of the faith in all our Churches.

Archbishop Ferrao, who is also president of the CCBI, said, “The publication of the New Lectionary by the CCBI is a landmark in the history of the Church in our country. It is a valuable contribution of the church in India to the Universal Church testifying to our biblical scholarship and liturgical competence.”

During the releasing ceremony, the Lectionary was introduced to the Bishops by Rev Dr Ayres Fernandes, executive secretary of the CCBI Commission for Liturgy, and Mr Nigel Fernandes, the CEO of Asian Trading Corporation.

Sacrament of Holy Orders

Rite of Ordination - I

By Fr Dr S Joseph Lionel



must have complete view of the liturgical rites.

The rite communicates that through ordination the new priest is drawn into the realm of the sacred, the realm of mystery. As a bearer of this transcendent mystery, he initiates others also into the mystery through his ministry. Some distinctive actions such as prostration of the candidate during invocation of saints, the laying on of hands, the

The celebration of the Rite of Ordination is always an impressive event. The very sight of it is breathtaking. The gathering of a large number of Christian faithful in the diocesan cathedral, the number of priests with the bishop, the incense, the procession, the sacred music, and the entire festive spirit tell that something special is happening for the Christian community here. The words that accompany the actions are richly clear in theological content.

invocation to the Holy Spirit, solemn prayer of consecration, anointing with oil, and distinctive vesture of his sacred office, build up this sense of mystery.

The rite enshrines the understanding of Vatican II that priesthood involves more than cultic role, without minimizing it. His role, as bearer of

The rite is a grand public display of the biblical and theological understanding of priesthood. That is why the *Introduction* to the rite gives specific instruction for three aspects of preparation: 1) the day of ordination should be preferably a Sunday, or another suitable day, to facilitate attendance of a large number of people; 2) it must be in cathedral or other suitable space, large enough to accommodate people; and 3) the faithful



mystery, is more evident in the words of the rite referring to his sacramental function, especially the Eucharist where he acts *in persona Christi* (in

the person of Christ). Since he is able to act *in persona Christi*, he can act *in persona ecclesiae* (on behalf of Christ's Church).

In his proclamation of the Gospel the priest speaks Christ's own word, standing between the living Word of God and a living community of believers. The rite in no way suggests that he is holier than the people for whom he will minister. In fact, the text admonishes him to "be model of right conduct." Nevertheless, the rite certainly indicates that he is set apart for the sacred.

This consecration and setting apart for the sacred are not meant to frighten the new priest to be withdrawn from reality or make him scrupulous. The consecration enables him to face the challenges of the world, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, because the words of Jesus assures that he has indeed prayed for every priest that they may be consecrated in truth (Jn 17:18-19).

The efficacy of Jesus's prayer was attested at Pentecost (Acts 2). Those who were chosen, consecrated, and sent by Jesus, failed at crucial moments. Yet they remained faithful to the mission. They recovered with the power of the Holy Spirit and renewed their commitment with new vigor to carry out the mission even to the point of sacrificing their lives in martyrdom.

Both priests and people must bear in mind the fact that though priests perform the most sacred of actions in the liturgy, he remains a sinner in need of the grace that he mediates in the very celebration. That is why Paul, a dynamic apostle who had accomplished the proclamation of the Gospel in unimaginable measure, understood himself always as an "earthen vessel" (II Cor 4:7).



The liturgical text expresses how the priest is always challenged. While embracing the sacred mission he must also understand his humanity and need for God's grace. The understanding of the challenges in priestly ministry is not to motivate him to withdraw from the call, but to make him all the more thankful to God for calling him to have a share in Christ's mission.

The attitude of gratitude must manifest in a vigorous commitment to the mission that Christ is so gracious enough to share with this ordinary human being, "an earthen vessel." This priestly spirituality can be actualized not with bloated ego but only in humility. It is manifested in the rite during the full prostration of the candidate as a gesture of surrender to God's will.

It is also important to observe that the rite does not indicate that the priest simply receives some functions to play in the Church. The rite makes it clear that the priest is transformed into the priestly character we discussed earlier. The external actions and words, during the prayer of consecration, anointing, laying on of hands, new vesture, welcome the priest into the presbyteral brotherhood, and show that he has received a new spiritual identity. "In fact, priesthood is first a matter of *being* before it is a matter of *doing*." In other words, "Who we are" comes before "what functions we perform." ♦

St Toribio Alfonso de Mogrovejo

1538 – 1606

Feast Day : 23 March

During the sixteenth century, in the Spanish colonies of the Americas, many colonists, giving vent to their avarice, debauchery, and cruelty, abused the native peoples, treating them little better than dumb animals. The Indians were tied to the land like serfs and this indigenous labor force was passed down



from one generation of owners to the next. They were cruelly overworked, often being treated no better than slaves, many of them dying from such abuse.

At the same time, there were great men who rose up and condemned this unjust and abusive structure. The church too through its official teaching tried its best to change this system and free the native people from the clutches of the colonists. In his bull, *Sublimis Deus* (1537), Pope Paul III, in opposition to certain theories of the time, stated clearly that the natives cannot be enslaved and their property cannot be confiscated

In the late sixteenth century Philip II chose Toribio de Mogrovejo to bring about a change in the Peruvian Society. He was a model bishop, following closely the directives of Trent by building and organizing a solid ecclesiastical structure in Peru through provincial councils, archdiocesan synods, and pastoral visitations. In order to form an educated and virtuous clergy, he also built the first great seminary in the New World. At the same time, Toribio was a zealous missionary, protecting the Indians and making great personal sacrifices on his journeys to bring the faith to pagan Indians or to fortify the faith of those already baptized.

Toribio Alfonso de Mogrovejo was born in 1538 at Mayorga in Spain. His father was Don Louis Alfonso, mayor of the said city, and his mother was Anna de Roblès y Moran y

Villaquexida. At the age of twelve, he was sent to the University of Valladolid to be educated in the humanities. He then went to study law at the University of Salamanca.

Even though Toribio was a layman, Philip II appointed him chief judge of the Inquisitorial Court of Granada

and proposed him to be the Archbishop of Lima. Pope Gregory XIII named Toribio to this office in 1579. In short order, he received all the major orders, eventually being consecrated a bishop in Seville. He then set out for the New World.

After making his solemn entrance into Lima on 24 May 1581, Toribio wasted no time in surveying the ecclesiastical landscape of his archdiocese, holding an archdiocesan synod within months of his arrival. Encompassing about 400 miles along the coast, his archdiocese was one of the largest in the world, extending from Central America, down into what is now Argentina and Chile.

One of Toribio's greatest accomplishments was overseeing the Third Provincial Council of Lima (1582-1583), one of the most important and far-ranging councils held in the Americas. As the metropolitan, Toribio was the president of the council, but he was also the guiding spirit of the assembly. He was personally involved in drawing up the most important documents of the council himself. Among other things, Toribio worked to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent in the Americas. In particular, this council focused on the reformation of the clergy and the means of evangelizing the Indians and forming them into good Christians.

Unlike earlier provincial councils, the Third Council of Lima made no essential distinctions

SAINT OF THE MONTH - II

St Zita of Lucca

1218 - 1272

Feast Day: 27 April

On April 27 the Catholic Church honors Saint Zita, a 13th century Italian woman whose humble and patient service to God has made her a patron saint of maids and other domestic workers.

Zita was born into a very poor but pious Christian family. Her elder sister became a Cistercian nun and her uncle Graziano was a hermit whom the local people regarded as a saint. Zita herself always tried to do God's will obediently whenever it was pointed out to her by her mother.

At the age of twelve Zita became a domestic servant for a wealthy Fainelli family in Lucca, eight miles from her home at Monte Sagrati. As things turned out, she stayed with that family for the last forty-eight years of her life. She looked at it as a way to serve God. She often gave her own food, and sometimes that of her master, to those poorer than she, which caused her to get in frequent trouble with her employers and the other servants in the house who resented her. However, she did such a fine job that she was eventually placed in charge of the house, and entrusted with its keys.

Zita's employers lived near a church where she managed – by waking up extremely early in the morning – to attend daily Mass. She looked upon her work primarily as a means of serving God, and kept herself mindful of his presence during long hours of exhausting tasks. She received her strength from the Holy Eucharist and also from her time spent in prayer to carry out her household duties so perfectly that the other servants were jealous of her. Her presence in the Fatinelli household, however, was inexplicably unwelcome and met with harsh treatment for a number of years. Zita suffered hostility and abuse from her employers, including fits of rage and beatings



Indeed, her work was part of her religion! She used to say: "a servant is not holy if she is not busy; lazy people of our position is fake holiness." At first, her employers were upset by her generous gifts of food to the poor, but in time, they were completely won over by her patience and goodness and she became a very close friend. She would go to a nearby monastery to pray in private.

Zita maintained her humility when she was promoted to a position of responsibility within the Fatinelli home. She continued to view her earthly responsibilities as a service to God, and to seek his presence through prayer and fasting. She also refused to hold a grudge against those who once mistreated her. Within her new household role, Zita was faithful to Christ's admonition that superiors should conduct themselves as the servants of all. She was kind to those under her direction, and mindful of the poor through frequent almsgiving to the point of personal sacrifice.

Throughout her life, Zita found a source of strength and consolation in the Mass and Holy Communion, which frequently moved her to tears. Despite her many responsibilities, she frequently set aside time to recall God's presence through contemplative prayer in the course of the day.

One anecdote relates a story of Zita giving her own food or that of her master to the poor. On one morning, Zita left her chore of baking bread to tend to someone in need. Some of the other servants made sure the Fatinelli family was aware of what happened; when they went to investigate, they claimed to have found angels in the Fatinelli kitchen, baking the bread for her.

After foretelling her own death and



spiritually preparing for it, Zita died in Lucca on 27 April 1271 of natural causes and was buried in the church of San Frediano in Lucca. Her tomb was re-discovered in 1580. Many residents regarded her as a saint and began to seek her intercession, to which a large number of miracles were attributed. Some writers, especially Dante in his *Divine*

Lucca as “Santa Zita” in her honor.

The Fatinelli family, which had once caused Zita such extreme suffering, eventually contributed to the cause of her canonization. The earliest account of her life was found in a manuscript belonging to the family, and published in 1688.

The Church's liturgical veneration of St Zita was introduced in the early 1500s, and confirmed by Pope Innocent XII in 1696. In 1580, her body was exhumed and found to be miraculously incorrupt, but it has since been mummified. It is venerated today in the Basilica of St. Frediano, where she attended Mass during her life.

Source: www.catholicnewsagency.com/saint; www.franciscanmedia.org/saint; www.catholicireland.net/saintoftheday ♦

Comedy *Inferno*, began referring to the city of

Continued from Page 18 : St Toribio Alfonso de Mogrovejo

between the Spaniards and the Indians. They were to be treated as equals. Therefore, it noted that the Indians, like the Spanish, had the right to receive both the sacraments of the Eucharist and Extreme Unction. In order to educate the Indians about the faith in their indigenous languages, the council produced a trilingual catechism in Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara. These reforms created violent opposition even among many of the clergy.

To the indigenous Peruvians, the archbishop was a herald of the Gospel who held their lives as more precious than their country's supplies of gold and silver. But to the many colonists whose behavior showed no sign of their Catholic origins, he was a prophetic scourge – whose efforts to awaken the public conscience earned him rebukes and opposition.

Toribio saw himself as the “Protector of the Indians.” He was very zealous that the Indians learn the Christian faith and, at the same time, were not overworked. He mandated religious

instructions to the Native Indians on Wednesdays and Fridays every week. Utilizing canonical penalties when appropriate, he protected the Indians from both their masters and public officials. In particular, Toribio fought the corruption of the oppressive magistrates who ruled over the native communities, who refused to utilize the communal financial funds of the natives for their set purpose.



While conducting one of his visitations, Toribio was taken ill at Pascamayo, eventually making his way to Saña. Having received viaticum and the last rites, Toribio died at Saña on 23 March 1606, repeating the very words of Christ, “Into thy hands, I commend my spirit.”

Toribio was beatified by Innocent XI in 1697 and canonized by Benedict XIII in 1726. John Paul II named him the Patron of Latin American Bishops in 1983.

Source: www.crisismagazine.com/2014; www.catholicnewsagency.com ♦

The Elephant and the Fly

By Remez Sasson

One day, a disciple and his teacher were walking through the forest. The disciple was disturbed by the fact that his mind was in constant unrest.

He asked his teacher why most people's minds are restless, and only few possess a calm mind. "What can one do to still the mind?"

The teacher looked at the disciple, smiled and said, "I will tell you a story."

"On one beautiful day, an elephant was standing by the shade of a tree, eating its leaves. Suddenly, a small fly came buzzing and landed on



movements around me affect my behavior."

"What is your secret? How can you stay so calm and still?"

The elephant stopped eating and said, "My five senses do not disturb my peace, because they do not rule my attention. I am in control of my mind and my

thoughts, and therefore, I can direct my attention where I want, and ignore any disturbances, including your buzz."

"Now that I am eating, I am completely immersed in the act of eating. In this way, I can enjoy my food and chew it better. I am in control of my attention, and therefore, I can stay peaceful."

Upon hearing these words, the disciple's eyes opened wide, and a smile appeared on his face. He looked at his teacher and said:

"I understand! My mind will always be in constant unrest, if my five senses, and whatever is happening in the world around me, are in control of it. On the other hand, if I am in command of my five senses, able to disregard sense impressions, and able to control my thoughts, my mind will become calm, and I will be able to disregard its restlessness."

"Yes, that's right," answered the teacher, "The mind is restless and goes wherever the attention goes. Control your attention, and you control your mind."

Source: www.succe-sconsciousness.com/inspiring-stories. ♦



the elephant's ear. The elephant stayed calm and continued to eat, not heeding the fly."

"The fly flew around the elephant's ear, buzzing noisily, yet the elephant seemed to be unaffected. This bewildered the fly, and it asked, 'Are you deaf?'"

"No!" The elephant answered.

"Why aren't you bothered by my buzz?" The fly asked.

"Why are you so restless and noisy? Why can't you stay still just for a few moments?" Asked the elephant, and peacefully continued eating the leaves.

The fly answered, "Everything I see, hear and feel attracts my attention, and all noises and

News Round-Up

Remove India's anxieties, bishops tell government

BANGALORE: Catholic bishops in India have asked the government to take steps to alleviate the fears and anxieties of Indians over a controversial citizenship law accused of being discriminative.

The bishops made the call after their week-long biennial meeting that ended Feb. 19. “We, the Catholic bishops of India, affirm that religion shall not be a criterion for determining Indian citizenship. The authorities should come forward with sincere and effective means to erase the sense of fear, anxiety and uncertainty spreading in the nation, especially among the religious minorities,” their statement said.

The joint statement of 192 Catholic bishops was referring to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which aims to grant citizenship to illegal migrants. The law amended in December says migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan will be given citizenship if they are not Muslims.

The bishops also deliberated on the new form of nationalism, especially targeting those people questioning the ruling dispensation and its policies. The bishops asked “authorities to ensure that pseudo-nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of totalitarianism.” ♦

Cardinal Gracias elected president of CBCI

MUMBAI: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has reelected Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the archbishop of Bombay, as president of the conference for a second term. The election was held on February 17.

Gracias turned 75 in December. In accord with canon law, he has already submitted his resignation to the pope, but is expected to continue as Archbishop of Bombay for the foreseeable future.

The cardinal is also one of the members of the Council of Cardinal Advisers who advise Pope Francis on the governance of the universal Church and on the preparation of a new governing constitution for the Roman Curia. ♦

Justice for Indian Christians wrongly accused of conversion

NEW DELHI: Church leaders and activists in India are celebrating the acquittal of eight Christians who had been falsely accused of kidnapping 60 children for the purpose of converting them to Christianity. The six men and two women were freed on Feb. 18 by the criminal court in Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh.

“Justice has finally been done,” said Tehmina Arora, director of the legal team of Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a Christian forum that took up the case. “But we must not forget the toll that such false cases take on families. No one should be targeted for their faith. The anti-conversion laws are tools to harass and target Christians and should be repealed since they restrict the freedom of religion guaranteed under the constitution of India.” ♦

Seven Kandhamal victims at CBCI plenary

BANGALORE: They spoke of their experience and witnessed their faith in Christ before the Indian Bishops: the seven innocent men - involved in the story of the anti-Christian massacres that took place in 2008 in Kandhamal, Orissa – who returned to freedom after an unjust 10-year detention, were invited to the 34th Plenary Assembly of the Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) in Bangalore.

Christian journalist and activist Anto Akkara, who



has visited Kandhamal 25 times, illustrated why seven innocent Christians --- six of whom are illiterate, one with mental problems --- were kept in prison. They were able to testify their profound faith, despite the difficulties and trials in years of unjust imprisonment.

The seven innocents were unjustly sentenced to life imprisonment and imprisoned in 2008 for the alleged murder of Saraswati. The appeal process against the conviction has been ongoing before the Orissa High Court since 2015. After carefully investigating the case, Akkara revealed the conspiracy in his investigative book "Who Killed Swami Laxmanananda?", published in 2016, and in the same year launched an online signature campaign (www.release7innocents.com) to request the release of the seven. The results of that investigation were presented in court. The seven were recently released on bail.

Akkara urged the Indian Bishops to take their situation to heart and to help them concretely, both materially and spiritually. "Faith must lead to action", he said. ♦

Muslims help rebuild church



LAHORE (Pakistan): In a rare display of interfaith harmony, Muslim villagers are helping Christians rebuild a Catholic church in the Pakistani city of Gujranwala.

The foundation stone of St. Mary's Church, which is being rebuilt to accommodate more worshipers, was laid by Father Samran Anwar, parish priest of St. Joseph's Parish, in the Butranwali district of Gujranwala in November last year.

Around 50 Christian families are estimated to be living in the Muslim-majority community where the church is being rebuilt.

"It is an example of true love and brotherhood that Muslim people have opened their hearts and are financing the construction work," Father Samran said.

Local Muslims said they were helping in order to maintain a long community tradition of living in peace with one another. A Muslim resident who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue said he had contributed 60,000 rupees to the cause. ♦

Biden touts Catholic faith in his campaign

Washington DC (CNA).- Presidential candidate Joe Biden highlighted his Catholic faith in a new campaign.

Biden, a Catholic, said that "faith is what has gotten me through difficult times in my life," including the deaths of his first wife, eldest daughter in a car accident, and his son Beau's death from brain cancer.

As Biden is speaking, the ad displays black-and-white pictures of the former vice president with various religious figures, including Pope Francis. "Personally for me, faith, it's all about hope and purpose and strength, and for me, my religion is just an enormous sense of solace," he added. "I go to Mass and I say the rosary. I find it to be incredibly comforting," Biden said. ♦

Mass in Swiss cathedral after 500 yrs

Geneva, Switzerland: The first Catholic Mass in nearly five hundred years will be celebrated at the Cathedral of Saint-Pierre de Genève on February 29, in a decision announced by the Diocese of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg's episcopal vicariate for the city.

The cathedral was the seat of the Catholic bishops of Geneva from the fourth century until the Protestant Reformation. The last Mass celebrated at the cathedral took place in 1535. After the Reformation, the building was taken over by John Calvin's Reformed Protestant Church, which

destroyed the cathedral's statues and paintings, and banned Catholic worship.

Fr. Pascal Desthieux, the Catholic episcopal vicar for Geneva, described the cathedral as the “central and symbolic location of Geneva's Christian history” in a letter published on the vicariate's website. Following the reformation, the cathedral became a location “emblematic of the Calvinist reform,” he said.

John Calvin, the founder of Calvinism, lived in Geneva, and the city was a destination for French Protestants who were forced to flee France due to persecution. Saint-Pierre de Genève was Calvin's home church and his chair is displayed next to the cathedral's pulpit. ♦

Kidnapped Nigerian priest has been released

LAGOS (Nigeria): The Nigerian priest who was abducted on Feb 13 by gunmen last week has been freed. Fr. Nicholas Oboh was kidnapped last week in the southwest region of Nigeria and was freed Tuesday evening, his diocese reported.

Nigerian media reported that several children were kidnapped at the same time Oboh was abducted. The condition and circumstances of those children are not yet known.

Oboh's kidnapping is the latest in a series of abductions and killings in Nigeria which have involved Catholics and other Christians; clergy, seminarians, and lay people. ♦

Chinese media: Recent meeting of Sino-Vatican diplomats was pope's idea

BEIJING (China): Chinese state media have reported that Pope Francis initiated the 14 February high-level meeting between officials from the Holy See and China.

The Vatican's secretary for relations with states, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, met with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference — the first meeting between foreign ministers of the two states, according to the state-run media Xinhua.

The two diplomats reportedly discussed the 2018 Vatican-China agreement on the ordination of bishops. Although the text of the agreement was not made public, it reportedly allows for the Communist regime to vet candidates for bishop before the Vatican makes appointments in the country. The provisional agreement will expire in August.

The *South China Morning Post*, a news outlet sympathetic to the Chinese government, reported that, according to “sources,” Pope Francis had initiated the high-level meeting in Munich.

China is home to an estimated 10.5 million Catholics, and around 6 million are estimated to be members of the state-sanctioned Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA). Prior to the 2018 agreement, the CPCA ordained bishops illicitly at the direction of the Chinese Communist Party .

Despite the agreement, millions of Chinese Catholics remain part of the underground Church, which has always been loyal to Rome and persecuted by the government.

The Vatican hoped that the 2018 agreement would unify the two national and underground Churches though unifying their leadership. ♦

Holy Father's Prayer Intentions

March: Catholics in China

We pray that the Church in China may persevere in its faithfulness to the Gospel and grow in unity.

April: Freedom from Addiction

We pray that those suffering from addiction may be helped and accompanied.