



SYRO-MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Pastoral Letter – 4

Trusting in God's grace, Mar Joseph Srampickal, the Bishop of the Syro Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain writing to all priests, religious and faithful.

The happiness we are seeking has a Name and a Face: It is 'Jesus of Nazareth'

Liturgically we enter into the season of Resurrection on Easter Sunday. The first question asked by the risen Lord is, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" (Jn 20:15). God the Father, raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, to wipe away the tears of those who cry, and to love those who mourn because there is no one to love them.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI addressed the youth, "The happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist. Only he gives the fullness of life to humanity! With Mary, say your own "yes" to God, for he wishes to give Himself to you."

The *Regina Caeli* that we pray during the *season of Resurrection* also reminds us of the same: "Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia... Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia!... For the Lord is truly risen, alleluia!... O God who gave joy to the world through the resurrection of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, grant, we beseech you, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, his mother, we may obtain the joys of everlasting life, through the same Christ our Lord." Jesus of Nazareth who surpassed death gives joy to every generation beyond the barriers of space and time. At Cana Jesus says to Mary: "My time has not yet come" (Jn 2:4) and this "time" is accomplished in the event of Resurrection. It is the same message that Jesus gave at his farewell discourse: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you..that your joy may be full" (Jn 16:22, 24). The resurrection of Jesus is the mystery of faith that fills us 'with the spiritual joy' which no one can take away from us.

Jesus, "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20) is the foundation of our faith, reason of our hope, subject of our love, and our joy itself. Jesus' passion, death, and absence were the causes of the disciples' sorrow. On the contrary, the victory of Jesus over sin, death, Satan and the world, through his Resurrection, is the reason for their unending joy. Since Jesus' resurrection is the foundation of our faith, the joy of His resurrection is the joy of our faith. In the Acts of the Apostles, the jailer with all his household rejoiced greatly, having believed in Jesus (Acts 16:34). St. Paul says to the jailer: "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). The joy of the one who believes in Jesus is that of encountering and experiencing salvation.

When Mother Mary and St. Joseph brought Jesus to be presented in the temple at Jerusalem, Simeon, righteous and devout, prompted by the Holy Spirit, took Jesus in his arms and blessed God and said, "My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for all peoples" (Lk 2:30-31). The Holy Spirit reminds us through St. Paul: "Rejoice always, ...for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thes 5:16-17). "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil 4:4). The author of the Letter to Hebrews asserts that 'God has anointed Jesus with the oil of gladness' (Heb 1:9).

The famous Italian theologian, Fr. Ermes Ronchi, has well said: "The one who believes in Jesus shall be joyful always" Joy is the sign by which we can identify a true believer. St. John Chrysostom the father of the Church from Antioch, in his Easter homily, invites the people:

“Come all of you and enter into the joy of Christ... Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the tomb. Let no one fear death, for the death of our Saviour has set us free.”

The annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been fulfilled in and through the Resurrection of Jesus. The magnificat of Mary is a prophecy and foretaste of the Resurrection of the Lord: “My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. He has shown strength with his arm” (Lk 1: 47, 49, and 51). Mother Mary is the true symbol of humanity, especially of every Christian who is called to be always ‘happy’. Joy is the right of anyone who can say “Amen” to Jesus after the model of Mary.

The Liturgy of the Syro Malabar Church, especially the Holy Qurbana, repeatedly reminds us that our ‘joy’ is in the Lord. In the *Madbahaa* hymn of our *Raza*, we sing: “Our heart will always rejoice in the Lord” (Ps 33:21). During the fourth *G’hantha*, we pray: “Lord, we stand before you at this time rejoicing and glorifying, commemorating and celebrating this great, awesome, holy, life-giving, and divine mystery of the passion, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ”. Following *Epiclesis*, we also pray: “We offer you thanksgiving with joy and hope, in your Church redeemed by the precious Blood of Your Anointed One”. In the Final blessing (*Huthama*) of the morning prayer (*Sapra*) on ordinary days, we pray: “give joy to the just” and in the evening prayer (*Ramsa*) we pray: “Lord give us your enduring love, peace, longing for wisdom, life and joy.”

Since Jesus is “the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8), we should attain the same Christ experience of the apostles and of the saints. I pray that we will be able to encounter Jesus, who reveals to us the face of God’s love, open our hearts towards him in and through the church, particularly in the Holy Qurbana. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI reminds us again: “Christ takes from you nothing that is beautiful and great, but brings everything to perfection for the glory of God, the happiness of men and women, and the salvation of the world. The encounter with Jesus Christ will allow you to experience in your hearts the joy of his living and life-giving presence”.

Family as the domestic church, has to be a tent of joy that expresses faith, hope of resurrection, love, salvation, life and mercy. Let the joy that was received by the first witnesses of resurrection, fill the hearts of all faithful of the Syro Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain. I pray that the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the mother of God and of the Church, and the intercession of the Apostles, help us to attain Joy.

Let us pray with St. Alphonsa of Immaculate Conception, the patroness of our Eparchy: “My Jesus, who is ineffable sweetness, transform all the worldly consolations into bitterness for me. Oh, my Jesus, Sun of Righteousness, by Thy Divine rays, clarify my thoughts, illumine my mind, cleanse my heart, consume me in the fire of Thy love, and thus unite me with Thee for ever and ever.” Amen.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Yours in our Lord and our God,

+ *Joseph Srampickal*

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Preston, 25/03/2018

NB: This pastoral letter must be read in all your Qurbana Centres/Parish during the Celebration of the Holy Qurbana before 29 April 2018.