



SYRO-MALABAR LITURGY FOR SUNDAY JUNE 16, 2019

Homily of His Eminence, Leonardo Cardinal Sandri,
Prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches

I. Introduction

Your Excellency,

Reverend Fathers,

Esteemed Religious Sisters and Brothers,

Beloved Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle of Chicago,

It was with great joy that I accepted the invitation of His Excellency, Bishop Angadiath, to participate in this Sacred Liturgy during my pastoral voyage in the United States of America. The daily work of the Congregation for Eastern Churches tries to make concrete the closeness of Pope Francis, who, as Bishop of Rome, is entrusted with the care of all the churches. Therefore, I am deeply grateful for this occasion, which allows me to voice the high regard of our Congregation for the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. In my own name and on behalf of the Archbishop Secretary, the Undersecretary and all our Collaborators, I am pleased to express profound affection for this portion of the People of God, the Syro-Malabar faithful who live in the United States.

II. Joel 2:18-26

In the liturgical readings that Divine Providence has assigned for this Sunday, the Lord addresses many of the circumstances of the Church's life in our times. The Old Testament selection from the Prophet Joel (2:18-26) speaks about the sufferings that the People of God undergo through calamities such as famine and disease, as well as attacking armies. Even today the lands of the Bible are being torn apart by processes and situations of great injustice, which make it seem almost rash to hope for peace. At the beginning of the prayer meeting last July 7 with the Heads of the Eastern Churches of the Middle East, Pope Francis said: "This region so full of light, especially in recent years, has been covered by dark clouds of war, violence and destruction, instances of occupation and varieties of fundamentalism, forced migration and neglect. All this has taken place amid the complicit silence of many. ... There is the danger that the presence of our brothers and sisters in the faith will disappear, disfiguring the very face of the region. For a Middle East without Christians would not be the Middle East."



In other parts of the world too, human catastrophes are created by self-seeking behaviours, manipulative leaders, hidden economic interests, hostile powers, conflicting factions, government corruption, and natural disasters. Yet, through the Prophet Joel, God promises that He will have mercy on His People, who will always have reason to praise Him. Even in the face of terrible trials, those who trust in faithfulness of the Lord will not be put to shame. The luminous example of the early Christians, as well as of the many martyrs throughout Church history, particularly of the Oriental Catholic Churches, encourages us that this promise of the Lord will never fail. Even in the last century, especially in Eastern Europe, many faithful heroically endured the great persecutions, as did the seven Romanian Greek-Catholic Bishops who the Holy Father beatified last month. Their resilience could not be broken by the oppression of tyrants, and their witness exhorts all of us to persevere in faith, for we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us (Phil 4:13).

III. Acts 4:8-22

In the Second Reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, we see the how St. Peter braves persecution to preach about our Lord Jesus Christ, for there is salvation in no one else. As the current Successor of St. Peter, the Pope Francis tirelessly calls all Catholics to the joyful task of evangelization. In 2017, the Holy Father granted the long-desired all-India jurisdiction, so as to give even greater encouragement to the missionary spirit of the Syro-Malabar Church. You are called not only to support missionary work in India and throughout the world, but also to be active agents of the New Evangelization here in the United States, helping all to rediscover the beauty of faith in Christ and friendship with Him.

This call is particularly addressed to young people in the recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus vivit*, “Christ is alive”. The Holy Father insightfully speaks of how only youth who have deep roots and strong relationships with their elders will have the necessary boldness and discernment to embrace the call to holiness. Do not be afraid to be generous if God calls you to the priesthood or the religious life. Christian marriage too is a noble vocation, and your Church is rightly renowned for its faith-filled family life. Dear young men and women of the Syro-Malabar Church, treasure your beautiful tradition and try to be deeply rooted in this precious patrimony, without being a closed community, but rather as full members of the nation in which you live, sharing your living faith with American society!

IV. Rom 5:1-5

The Epistle reading from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans impresses upon us the full depth of the salvation won for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. This text of the Apostle shows how the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are woven through the



Christian life. We have already received peace with God through Christ, but in this earthly life there always remain tribulations. In all afflictions, the true follower of Christ remains faithful and hopeful. We manage to rise above suffering, because “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Enduring suffering, as we know, is a necessary and normal means to grow in virtue and proven character. When we live by faith, hope and charity, we realize an even deeper meaning of such difficulties, namely that they allow us to unite ourselves with the Cross of Christ.

St. Paul says that suffering, when seen with such supernatural outlook, is not simply endured but even becomes our boast, because we know that it does not separate us from God’s love. It can instead help *our* love for God grow stronger. For the love which is poured into our hearts, is, at one and the same time, God’s love for us – manifested in the sending of the Holy Spirit – and the love which God places in our souls to enable us to love Him. St. Augustine explains this as follows: “To love God is entirely a gift of God. He without being loved, loves us and enabled us to love Him. We were loved when we were still displeasing to Him, so that we might be given something whereby we might please Him. So it is that the Spirit of the Father and the Son, whom we love with the Father and the Son, pours charity into our hearts” (*In Ioann. Evang.* 102,5).

V. John 16: 12-15

“The Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 234). This is who God really is. God is love! This Mystery of eternal love between the three Divine Persons is the deepest foundation of the Christian life, and the communion of the Church gives us a joyful foretaste of eternal communion with the Blessed Trinity.

Since God is love, let us therefore strive to model our relations after the pattern of Trinitarian love that we experience in the Church: the compassionate mercy of God the Father, the sacrificial obedience of God the Son, and the Holy Spirit who brings harmony. The Holy Spirit guides us in this truth, so that we glorify Jesus and the Father, without seeking our own glory. This is the ultimate guarantee that Church unity will prevail over conflict (Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 226-228). We should not be swayed by worldly and self-seeking patterns of behaviour, but actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Unlike the political ideologies that seek power in this world, we know that it is not in our power to bring heaven on earth, but God has nevertheless made our hearts into a “little heaven” by His grace. Therefore, imitating St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, we too can pray, “O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me to forget myself entirely, that I may be



entirely established in you, as still and as peaceful if my soul were already in eternity. Give peace to my soul; make it your heaven.”

VI. Conclusion

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, although there may be scandals and suffering in the Church during her journey through human history, but the Bride of Christ can always count on the faithfulness and mercy of her Divine Bridegroom, who redeemed her by His Blood. Heaven has already committed everything to the Church, and so should we commit ourselves to cooperate actively in the work of salvation.

The ongoing effort of renewal will be principally done by the Holy Spirit, with the intercession of the saints. Let us entrust our sanctification to the prayers of the Mary, the most pleasing daughter of the Father, who by the Holy Spirit brought forth into our world the eternal light that dispels our darkness. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary triumph in the hearts of all men and women, to the praise and glory of the undivided and eternal Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.