



*To the Major Archbishop, the Vicar of the Major Archbishop,
the Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful
of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly*

This sacred time of preparation for Easter invites us to resume in a more authentic and responsible way our journey of following the Lord, who walks toward the humiliation and suffering of his Passion, consenting to drink from a bitter chalice in fulfillment of the Father's will, which is the salvation of humanity.

Christ takes a step back from any human claim to achievement, success or messianic glory so that humanity may advance and enter into the fullness of the covenant. He triumphs with a love that is humble and lowly: on the cross he is stripped of everything, but no one can take away that which is most important to him, his relationship with the Father. The response of the Father is Easter morning with Jesus' triumph over sin and death. The "Alleluia" that the diverse liturgical traditions sing is not directed against something or someone but a hymn of praise and communion to the Holy Trinity by a humanity raised up with Christ.

As a Church, all of us – bishops, priests, deacons, and lay faithful – are often tempted to forget the essence of the mystery that we are celebrating: we speak about Jesus and we know many things about him in theory. We need, however, to live with him and, like him, to accept the path of humiliation and the way of the cross. We cannot live divided. We cannot create division. We cannot allow ourselves to be a source of scandal.

The Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church, the superior authority of your Church for defining its liturgy, has determined not

only to approve certain liturgical texts but also the form of celebration in the way that it had been proposed some years ago. Fully aware of the different traditions associated with the diverse contexts of your Church, all were asked to take a step back from their respective styles of celebration in order to offer a sign of communion born of the fact that everyone involved sacrificed something particularly their own, out of love and witness to something greater.

As of 28 November 2021, the date chosen for the implementation of the Holy Qurbana, thirty-four Eparchies decided to enact the synodal decision. Regrettably, this was not the case with yourselves. You chose instead to continue following your particular liturgical form, albeit after careful reflection, in isolation from the rest of the Syro-Malabar Church. Nonetheless, it is good for us, as believers in Christ, to ask ourselves about our behaviour, how we express dissent, how we accept even difficulty and humiliation, how we take steps back. This, not in accordance with human criteria of victory or defeat, or in terms of one group versus another, but by looking to the Lord and being willing not only to celebrate his paschal mystery but also to experience it together with him, beginning with the anxiety and suffering of his passion.

I am writing to you, therefore, with a paternal exhortation to adhere promptly to the synodal decision concerning the form of celebration of the Holy Qurbana prior to Easter 2022, as determined by the Synod. It is possible that some parishes will need more time in order to carry out a more ample catechesis, as was done elsewhere, so that everyone will be prepared to accept the changes. This is understandable, as long as it does not call into question the synodal decision. As provided for in law, it is possible to ask for the necessary dispensation from the Major Archbishop, who is the Metropolitan of the Archeparchy, or with the approval of the Major Archbishop, from his Vicar. The dispensation would be given only for a determined amount of time in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

I realize that I am asking you to take a difficult and painful step, but I am certain that I will find in you examples of priests and lay faithful who are ready to listen to the voice of the Lord and trust in the counsel and plea of the Pope. This has been a distinguishing characteristic of the Syro-Malabar Church throughout the centuries. Your faithfulness has allowed you to overcome numerous historical misunderstandings and in our time has led to a flourishing of vocations and missionary zeal. The Lord will not forget the sacrifice that you are making and, in the end, will open your hearts to the abundance of his blessings. Then the words of the Psalm will be fulfilled, "Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves" (126:6). If we sow in the Lord, we can reap with him. If we sow the wind, we will reap the whirlwind: above all the scandal of division and of a counter-witness given in such a very delicate situation as that in which you find yourselves.

With confidence in your fidelity and obedience, and recalling in particular the obligations assumed at priestly ordination, I invoke upon all of you the Lord's blessing and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Francis

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 25 March 2022
Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord