

Dear Friends,

We will be celebrating on 15th August the 68th anniversary of our country's Independence. On the same day, we rejoice in a special way, celebrating the solemnity of the Glorious Assumption of Mary, our Heavenly Mother. We are really happy and humbly proud that we are Indians, and that we are citizens of independent India.

India is stepping into 69th year of its journey as free India. While we count the progress made, we are also saddened to see and hear various kinds of evils affecting its citizens. The continuous atrocities on girl children and women are on the increase. Was this the dream of our freedom fighters? Dear brothers and sisters, we who serve our people through the various apostolates and very especially through educational institutions have a vital role to play towards the true freedom of our country where everybody holds their head high and walks without fear. Let us pray with Rabindranath Tagore, a great mystic "Into that Heaven of freedom my Father, let my country awake".

Sixty eight years ago, India got political freedom from foreign rule. On 15th August 1947, India got de facto and de jure freedom for self-governance. Patriotic and courageous Indians, men and women under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, had suffered much and even sacrificed their lives for this political freedom.

India is blessed with rich natural resources. People speak different languages, follow different religious beliefs and practices and belong to different cultural backgrounds. There is a beautiful unity in diversity. For the past 68 years, India has seen tremendous developments in science and technologies, in trade and industries. There is also a big growth in the population. India is one of the fast developing countries in the world.

How is independent India doing? Is India really and fully free? Is India free from corruption, crimes, violence, indiscipline, inefficiency, poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination, unjust systems and oppressive structures? Is human life in India valued as God's precious gift? Are human rights protected in India? Do women and girl children feel safe and secure in India? A simple analysis of the Indian realities in the economic, social, moral and spiritual spheres prove that India does not enjoy real and full freedom.

"There is enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed." said Mahatma Gandhi. Unfortunately, the various resources in India are not equitably distributed. There is too much in the hands of a few and too little in the hands of many. Every day the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. Everyday thousands of children die of malnutrition; thousands of poor people die of hunger and lack of medical care. Right to life involves also right to nutritious food, clean water, decent dress and healthy surroundings. Greed and selfishness are the two important factors that perpetuate poverty and hunger. Economic freedom begins by eradicating,

or at least by reducing, poverty and hunger. Concern for the poor, caring for the poor and sharing our wealth with the poor is the best way to work for economic freedom.

Every human person is called to live with the God-given dignity. Every human person should enjoy equality of dignity and equal opportunities for education, employment and promotion. Unjust systems, oppressive structures and discriminating factors are real hindrance to social freedom.

The real crises facing our country today are not political and economic, but moral and spiritual. All-pervasive corruption, dishonesty, insincerity, irresponsibility, lack of transparency and accountability, falsehood, violence, crimes against human dignity, human life, human rights seriously hinder moral and spiritual freedom.

Freedom is not meant to do anything one wants. Freedom is meant to be good and to do good; to be right and to do right. Freedom should enable us to do our duties perfectly well for our families, our society and our nation.

Mahatma Gandhi used the values of Truth and non-violence (Satya and Ahimsa) to get political freedom for our country. In our struggle for full, real and true freedom, along with these two values, we should also include the spiritual values of Renunciation and Service (Tyaga and Seva) and above all Love (Prema).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is Love and Truth. He is the supreme model of non-violence, renunciation and service. Human persons can enjoy full and true freedom only in Christ and through Christ. Loving our enemies, doing good to those who do harm to us, overcoming evil through good is possible only with the light and strength of the Gospel of Christ. By perfectly living the eternal and supreme values of the Gospel, such as, Love, Truth, Justice, Peace, Unity, solidarity, equality, fraternity, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, Caring, Sharing, Non-violence, Renunciation and selfless service, we Indians can enjoy true, full and real freedom such as political, economic, social, moral and spiritual. Let us live the values of the Gospel. Let us enjoy the joy and peace of the Gospel and share them with others. With Mary let us carry the Lord Jesus Christ to the heart of India and bring India to the feet of Christ.