

Dear Friends,

Last month, the Archdiocesan Board of Education (ABE) organized a very impressive programme for the meritorious students who secured 80% and above in this year's X Standard and PUC Examinations. This event was organized on 17th September at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral with the Holy Mass to pray for them and also to honour them with a certificate of appreciation and a cash award. We are happy to know that this year 506 students received the ABE awards; and it is heartening to know that the number is increasing every year. It gave us great joy to see smiles on the faces of the students who were present at the Mass and function with their parents, brothers and sisters and well-wishers. Although there is a considerable financial outlay for the Archdiocese to organize this programme and to give the meritorious students the cash awards, we are very happy to do it with a view to encouraging and recognizing the toppers who are not only a source of pride for their parents but also for all of us in the Archdiocese. We wish the toppers every success in their present studies and wish them a bright future!

We are once again reminded of the need to practice Marian Devotion in the month of October as it is called 'The Rosary Month'. I request all of you to recite daily the Holy Rosary both individually and collectively in your families, parishes and communities. The Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, "Rosarium Virginis Mariae" issued on October 16, 2002, which declared October 2002 to October 2003 the "Year of the Rosary", highlights the importance of praying the rosary. His Holiness encouraged all Christians to turn back to the prayer strongly recommended both by the latest Pontiffs and recent Marian apparitions. Paul VI called the Rosary a compendium of the Gospel. To make it more complete, Pope John Paul II added the 'Mysteries of Light' to cover Jesus' public life. Padre Pio called the Rosary beads a weapon of extraordinary power against Satan. Pope Francis said: "Mary joins us, she fights at our side. She supports Christians in the fight against the forces of evil, especially through prayer, through the rosary." Our Pope recites 15 decades of the Rosary every day, three times that which Our Lady asked for at Fatima.

Dear friends, last month, I had mentioned that we have started two new Commissions in the Archdiocese, namely Commissions for Differently Aabled and for Migrants and the Itinerants. Very often we ask ourselves or ask others why some are born with mental and physical defects. Allow me to explain to you with a parable.

Reflection: Every now and then a person was taking a perfectly good paper clip and he untwisted and reconfigured it for some purpose. Once he used untwisted paperclips to hang Christmas ornaments on the tree. Another time he untwisted and fashioned a paperclip into a hook to keep his file drawer from rolling open. Now if paperclips could see, or think and talk, they might be horrified and saddened to see a fellow paperclip so deformed. And perhaps he could try and explain that these "deformed" paperclips were actually not a disaster, they were quite useful and important to him in their "deformed" condition. But alas, the paperclips could not understand, they just "look" with sadness and horror on the deformed paperclips. After all how can you expect a paperclip to understand something other than clipping paper? They are just paperclips and couldn't understand deeper things beyond the world they knew, which is clipping paper.

We have often wondered if this isn't something of the truth about us in our understanding of things such as disability, birth defects, and personal challenges of some of our fellow human family members. As we look upon the disabled, the handicapped, those who struggle with deformity, mental illness, profound and/or mild mental disability we are often moved to sadness and even horror. And we easily ask, "Why does God allow this?!" We quickly conclude that such people's lives are unhappy or that they will never reach full potential.

And yet we wonder if we really know what we are talking about. How many of us can really say what our own purpose in God's plan is, let alone anyone else's? We are like paperclips in a drawer who know only one thing. Our minds are too small for us to ever understand the very special and significant role that even the most "impaired" in our world play. Perhaps in heaven we will realize what an indispensable and central role they had in God's plan and victory. Of all the paperclips in the drawer some of the most useful to us are the ones we twist and refashion.

I only wish that the example of a paperclip clarified our doubt and answered our question. We are surely more precious and important and God does not glibly use us like paperclips. But my example must be humble to illustrate what is too high to grasp: the knowledge of the dignity and essential purpose of every human being to God and his plan.

Our judgments in this matter cannot be much better than a paperclip in a drawer compared to God's omniscient wisdom. If it is absurd for us to think a paperclip could understand our ways is it really much less absurd to think we can understand all God's ways? And if we cannot understand his ways, why do we make judgments as to another person's role, usefulness, or status in God's eternal plan?

We too easily look down on the poor, but scripture says we should look up to them and that God is especially close to the poor, the suffering, the brokenhearted and the humble. Scripture says he uses the lowly to humble the proud. And yet we so easily look with pity on those we consider disadvantaged. All are equal in the eye of God. Let us therefore reach out God's unconditional love to all without any prejudice or discrimination.

With best wishes and God's blessings,

+ **Bernard Moras**

Archbishop of Bangalore