

The Shepherd Speaks

1. The Sacred Season and the Holy Week Celebrations

This Sacred Season of Lent culminates in the Celebration of the Holy Week and the Easter Triduum. And, therefore, it is very much important to understand the significance of these celebrations. Please read the following reflections very prayerfully:

i. Chrism Mass

The Chrism Mass reminds us of our oneness in Christ through Baptism and its holy anointing, made possible by the ministry of the Bishop and his priests. The Chrism Mass is also a key moment in which the unity of the Bishop with his priests (together, they form the presbyterate) is manifested and renewed. During the liturgy, deacons and priests also renew their vow of obedience to the local Bishop and their commitment to serve God's people. During this Mass, the Oils are blessed and distributed to the parishes of the Archdiocese for use in the coming year.

The following statement from the Second Vatican Council can help us understand the significance of the Chrism Mass for the Church:

“The Bishop is to be considered the high priest of his flock from whom the life of his people in Christ is in some way derived and on whom it in some way depends. Therefore, all should hold in the greatest esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centered around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church. They must be convinced that the principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the Bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.”

(Second Vatican Council. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium), No. 41)

This year, the Chrism Mass will be celebrated on 22nd March, 2018 at 5.00 p.m. at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral. The Archdiocesan Clergy and all the Religious Priests, especially those who are working in our parishes and institutions are expected to take part in it, and the people of God are also exhorted to participate in it.

ii. Palm Sunday

On Palm Sunday, we commemorate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem before his crucifixion. As Jesus rode into the city on a small donkey, the Jews gathered around him, throwing cloaks and palm branches on the road and exclaiming praises as he passed by. So at Palm Sunday Mass, there is a blessing of palms which the faithful hold as they process into church. The blessed palms are later kept in the home as a witness to faith in Jesus Christ. During Palm Sunday Mass, the Gospel account of the Passion of Christ is announced.

Palms Sunday is also celebrated as World Youth Sunday, and this Year the Pope has invited more than 300 Youth to celebrate it in Rome and also to prepare for the Forthcoming Synod in Rome in October this year. The 33rd World Youth Day 2018 will also be celebrated at the Archdiocesan level on 25th March 2018, Palm Sunday, on the theme, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God” (Lk. 1: 30).

The Pope notes that the forthcoming celebration marks another step in preparation for the International World Youth Day which is due to take place in Panama in January, 2019. It also precedes the Synod of Bishops on the theme of youth which is scheduled for October this year, highlighting the importance of young people in the life of the whole Church.

The full Message of the Holy Father is presented in this Issue. Please read it attentively.

iii. Holy Thursday

On Holy Thursday, we celebrate a special Mass of the Lord's Supper that commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper. On the night before Jesus Christ was crucified, he changed bread and wine into his own Body and Blood, and he commanded the Apostles and their successors through the centuries to act in his stead and re-present this sacrifice.

So at every Mass, by way of transubstantiation, the bread and wine offered by the priest becomes Christ's Body and Blood again.

Just as Christ did for his 12 Apostles at the Last Supper and as he commanded them to do likewise, during the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the priest who represents Christ ceremoniously washes the feet of 12 people in the congregation.

After the Last Supper and before he was arrested and condemned to death, Jesus went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, accompanied by two of the disciples. So after the Holy Thursday Mass, the remaining sacred hosts are carried out of the sanctuary to an "altar of repose," and the people go with the Eucharistic Christ in a procession to the altar of repose. People stay for a time, adoring the wondrous sacrament that Jesus instituted that day 2,000 years ago.

iv. A Vacant Church.

The Mass of the Lord's Supper finished, the church now without the Eucharist is truly empty. So the tabernacle light the tabernacle door is left open, exposing the vacant space inside. The altar is stripped bare of its linens and candles, Holy water is removed from the church's fonts and the sacraments are not celebrated until the Easter vigil. Like the first Christians bereft of Jesus and mourning the two days after the crucifixion, the church stands unadorned until the Easter vigil Mass.

v. Good Friday

Good Friday is a day of strict fasting and abstinence. Those over 18 and under the age of 60 are required to fast, which means that they can eat only one complete meal and two smaller ones during the day, with no food in between. We refrain from eating any meat, or any food made with meat, on Good Friday.

The Stations of the Cross devotion is centered on the Passion of Christ. While many pray the meditative prayer on their own throughout the year, it can be an especially poignant experience during Holy Week, when the entire Church recalls the way of Jesus' suffering and death. By praying the Stations of the Cross, a person makes a spiritual pilgrimage to the principal scenes of the salvific Passion of the Lord, aided by artistic representations of those scenes. On Good Friday, the church gathers for the Liturgy of the Lord's Passion, which includes a reading of a Gospel account of the Passion, Holy Communion (consecrated at Mass on Thursday night) and veneration of the Cross. The faithful process to the cross at the foot of the sanctuary, as if to receive communion. There each person reverences the crucifix with a kiss or a bow. Ceremonies usually take place at 3 p.m. the hour at which Christ died on the cross.

vi. Holy Saturday

On this day, the Church waits at the Lord's tomb, and meditates on His Passion and Death and His descent into Hell. With prayer and fasting we await His glorious Easter resurrection. Mary is also a Holy Saturday symbol. According to Catholic tradition, Mary represents the entire body of

the Church. As she waited in faith for the victorious triumph of Her Son over death on the first Holy Saturday, so we too wait with Mary on the present Holy Saturday.

vii. Happy Easter - The Paschal Season Christ is truly Risen, Alleluia!

The Resurrection of Jesus is one fact that strengthens our faith, kindles our hope and motivates us to go and serve others with the spirit of the Risen Lord, beginning with the proclamation of the Good News. Fortunately this year the Paschal season coincides well with the holiday season, with families relaxing in their homes with the near and dear ones. For the discerning Pastors, it is also a good time to build up strong rapport with the people at the time of blessing of the houses and even otherwise visiting them in the families and groups. Keeping the children and youth active with creative camps, holiday get-togethers of families and wards creates occasions of lively bonding, in which atmosphere, prayer and devotional exercises also find meaning and relevance.

2. Minority Benefits for the School level Students and Higher Education Candidates

Genuine efforts are made by the Minority Department of the Government to offer subsidies and provide incentives for education of children at school level and college level. Time and again, it has been repeated that the children in the Parishes should be encouraged to avail of such scholarships, for which the family income certificate is a must. Pious Association should be requested to help such families to get the income certificate, Aadhar card, Voter's card, Election card etc. The summer vacation is the best time to try and get these basic documents in order to avail of the incentives and other subsidies of the Government.

3. Admissions to the Minor Seminary

Candidates seeking admission to Bhakthi Bhavan (Archdiocesan Minor Seminary) are expected to submit their applications to the Director, Bhakthi Bhavan as soon as the results of the X Std./PUC/Graduation are announced. Application forms are available with the Rector and also at the Reception Desk - Archbishop's House. Each candidate should fill the prescribed form in his own handwriting, attach the marks card and a letter of recommendation from the Parish Priest, and submit/send it to the Rector. After scrutinizing the applications, the candidates will be called for an interview at the Archbishop's House. The interview is scheduled for the 2nd week of May 2018.

Reflection: In Phoenix, Arizona, a 26-year-old mother stared down at her 6 year old son, who was dying of terminal leukaemia. Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any parent, she wanted her son to grow up & fulfil all his dreams.

Now that was no longer possible. The leukaemia would see to that. But she still wanted her son's dream to come true. She took her son's hand and asked, "Billy, did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grew up?"

Did you ever dream and wish what you would do with your life?"

Mommy, "I always wanted to be a fireman when I grew up."

Mom smiled back and said, "Let's see if we can make your wish come true."

Later that day she went to her local fire department in Phoenix, Arizona, where she met Fireman Bob, who had a heart as big as Phoenix.

She explained her son's final wish and asked if it might be possible to give her 6 year old son a ride around the block on a fire engine.

Fireman Bob said, "Look, we can do better than that. If you'll have your son ready at seven o'clock Wednesday morning, we'll make him an honorary fireman for the whole day."

He can come down to the fire station, eat with us, go out on all the fire calls, the whole nine yards! And if you'll give us his sizes, we'll get a real fire uniform for him, with a real fire hat - not a toy -- one-with the emblem of the Phoenix Fire Department on it, a yellow slicker like we wear and rubber boots.

They're all manufactured right here in Phoenix, so we can get them fast."

Three days later Fireman Bob picked up Billy, dressed him in his uniform and escorted him from his hospital bed to the waiting hook and ladder truck.

Billy got to sit on the back of the truck and help steer it back to the fire station.

He was in heaven. There were three fire calls in Phoenix that day and Billy got to go out on all three calls. He rode in the different fire engines, the paramedic's van, and even the fire chief's car. He was also videotaped for the local news program.

Having his dream come true, with all the Love and attention that was lavished upon him, so deeply touched Billy, that he lived three months longer than any doctor thought possible.

One night all of his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse, who believed in the hospice concept - that no one should die alone, began to call the family members to the hospital. Then she remembered the day Billy had spent as a fireman, so she called the Fire Chief and asked if it would be possible to send a fireman in uniform to the hospital to be with Billy as he made his transition. The chief replied, "We can do better than that.

We'll be there in five minutes. Will you please do me a favour? When you hear the sirens screaming and see the lights flashing, will you announce over the PA system, that there is not a fire?

It's the department coming to see one of its finest members one more time. And will you open the window to his room? About five minutes later a hook and ladder truck arrived at the hospital and extended its ladder up to Billy's third floor open window - 16 fire-fighters climbed up the ladder into Billy's room. With his mother's permission, they hugged him and held him and told him how much they LOVED him.

With his dying breath, Billy looked up at the fire chief and said, "Chief, am I really a fireman now?"

"Billy, you are, and the Head Chief, Jesus, is holding your hand," the chief said.

With those words, Billy smiled and said, "I know, He's been holding my hand all day, and the angels have been singing.." He closed his eyes one last time.

This beautiful incident conveys to us that we need to make our dreams a reality. Not the dreams of becoming rich, popular and celebrities, but everyone's the only dream should be: *"I want to become like my Divine Master: Jesus Christ!"* The Lent and the Easter Seasons are the best times for us to strip off our old selves and put on Jesus Christ, and to proudly say with St. Paul: *"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."* (Galatians 2:20)

Dear Friends, I extend to all of you my best wishes for a joyful and blessings-filled Easter. Please extend my Easter wishes to all your dear parishioners and members of your religious communities and family.

Alleluia! Let's rise to give glory to the living God

**+ Bernard Moras
Archbishop of Bangalore**