



PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

Salesian Province of St. Joseph, Hyderabad



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FEBRUARY 2021

Lent: On track with Jesus

Dear confreres,

Greetings from Don Bosco Provincial House. On 1st February 2021, I have completed five years in the service of leadership of our beloved province. I thank the Lord for His closeness and guidance. I express my gratitude to you dear confreres for your collaboration, support and encouragement as we marched together in the past five years as brothers in faith and as sons of our father and founder, St. John Bosco. These five years have elicited glorious moments as well as challenges. God has hardwired us to welcome life with its joys and challenges and to move forward with greater hope (Strenna of the Rector Major 2021) and newness. This had been our experience in the past, rising from the ashes whenever confronted with seemingly hopeless situations.

On 17 February, we commence the annual season of Lent. It is an opportunity to renew ourselves and keep moving ahead with new Spiritual vigor. As Jesus retreated into the desert for forty days, it becomes for us too a time to retreat into our inner selves and re-centre our lives on Jesus, who alone can guarantee the charismatic identity of our Congregation and of each individual confrere. St Augustine invites, "Re-enter your heart! Where do you want to go, far from yourself? Re-enter from your wandering which has led you outside the way; return to the Lord. He is quick. First re-enter into your heart, you who have become a stranger to yourself, because of your wandering outside... Re-enter into your heart: there examine Him whom you perceived as God, because the image of God is there, Christ dwells in man's interior." We will be filled with Jesus to the extent that we create space for Him in our lives, by emptying ourselves of our ego, passions and pride.

This inner journey should help us to get in touch with the most profound parts of our inner selves without veils and pretenses. The wear and tear of life, at times blunts our consciences. We gradually lose the pristine clarity of the distinction between right and wrong. It can happen to us religious even though our very consecration and the community life should work as anti-virus that protects us from the malware of worldly afflictions. When we are corrupted by the viruses of this world, we do not think and act like religious and persons of faith. Unfortunately wickedness and passions take over. All our judgments and perceptions will be colored by who we truly are deep down.

Lent invites us to the sanctuary of our inner selves, to the core of our hearts to liberate ourselves of this clutter of sin, prejudices and ego. We have to move from being prisoners of externals and hypocrisy to our true authentic selves, where God is the centre and where He is the measure of all our thoughts and actions. When we live only in the external castle of our lives, we will be tied down to worldly ways and passions. This gradually clouds our thinking and keeps us away from God. The disordered appetites such as gossip, excessive curiosity about someone else's life,

excessive use of our phones, addiction to social media all draw us away from our authentic selves.

The three pillars of our Lenten journey, namely - prayer, fasting and almsgiving/charity should help us to reconnect ourselves with our inmost being and with Jesus our Saviour. Inviting us to pray, fast and give, Pope Francis says, "the path of poverty and self-denial (fasting), concern and loving care for the poor (almsgiving), and childlike dialogue with the Father (prayer) make it possible for us to live lives of sincere faith, living hope and effective charity."

Through PRAYER we enter into intimate communion with God. Some of us are satisfied with a few moments of daily prayer. It is important to spend time personally and as a community to pray in the given prescribed moments. Even this is difficult for some as we have certainly encountered non-praying religious. Those community moments and personal moments of prayer must lead us to intimate relationship with God who dwells in us. One of the greatest spiritual writers, Saint Teresa of Ávila, describes that all of us are capable of entering into the inner chamber/castle of our lives and encounter God. True prayer is an act of love between God and us. As we grow deeper in prayer and through which in our relationship with God, we no longer know about God, but experience Him face to face.

FASTING can have several meanings. I would like to propose that we fast from gossip and long conversations on the phone that do not help but rather contribute to insatiable curiosity about someone else. Unfortunately many of us do not filter the gossip that comes in. We allow it to ferment and are gradually intoxicated by it. It conditions our relationships and our perspectives. Saint Paul recommends that we cannot let evil talk come out of our mouths. Our speech has to be edifying so that it may impart grace to those who hear (cf. Ephesians 4:29). Pope Francis warns us of this terrorism of gossip that has the power to destroy and kill. Our tongue has the power to bless or curse God; it has power to resurrect a person or to kill him (cf. James 3:1-12). Jesus admonishes us to be on our guard in our speech, "I tell you, on the day of judgment, men will render an account for every careless word they utter" (Matthew 12:36).

ALMSGIVING/CHARITY can assume greater significance in the context of Covid and post-Covid context of the world. In his (2021) Lenten message, Pope Francis has invited us to reach out to our brothers and sisters in need. He affirmed, "Love rejoices in seeing others grow. Hence it suffers when others are anguished, lonely, sick, homeless, despised or in need. Love is a leap of the heart; it brings us out of ourselves and creates bonds of sharing and communion."

"Love is a gift that gives meaning to our lives. It enables us to view those in need as members of our own family, as friends, brothers or sisters. A small amount, if given with love, never ends, but becomes a source of life and happiness." True love seeks the best for another, even if it is difficult or even it involves sacrifices. In some way most of us have reached out to our brothers and sisters in need during the pandemic. But the situation is far from over and charity consists in not merely sharing what we have with those in dire need, but we should be able to go one step further like Jesus our master, to sacrificial giving. We should be able to forego and sacrifice in order to share what we have saved with others. That giving becomes truly meaningful since it involves our being. Let us look up to Jesus and be inspired by him in his deep intimacy with the Father through prayer, fasting and selfless love.

LAUDATO SI' THIS MONTH - FEBRUARY

TEN GREEN COMMANDMENTS OF LAUDATO SI' - Green Commandment VII - Learn a New Way of Dwelling in Our Common Home

Continuing our reflection on Laudato Si' we shall now turn our attention to the 7th Green Commandment, which is about a new way of dwelling in our common home. Given the global character of the ecological crisis, the involvement and dedication of the entire human community is needed to protect the earth. Various levels of our involvement are proposed in this regard, which range from the international to the national and the local level commitments. It is also pointed out that various nations and communities have a common but differentiated responsibility when it comes to responding to the crisis of our common home. Therefore a new way of managing our planetary home, a new economics and a new way of governing our public institutions, a new political culture are proposed. We need a new economy, not built on the myth of infinite growth that excludes the poor, but one which respects the cycles of nature and at the service of the whole of humanity. We will need new politics, not subservient to economic interests and power lobbies, but at the service of the common good.

However, the problem is not always a clear-cut division between poor and rich countries. In fact, many developing countries have privileged groups of people with scandalous levels of consumption, and they need to be named and challenged. In India, for example, the considerably significant carbon footprint of a relatively small wealthy class (1% of the population) in the country is camouflaged by the 823 million poor population of the country, who keep the overall per capita emissions below 2 tons of CO₂ per year. The divide between the poor and the super-rich is conspicuous in most of the developing countries.

Pope Francis points to the need of poorer nations to develop less polluting forms of energy production like solar energy, and affirms that to do so they require the help of countries which have experienced great growth at the cost of the ongoing pollution of the planet. Such assistance would mean the establishment of mechanisms and subsidies which allow developing countries access to technology transfer, technical assistance and financial resources.

Today we stand in need of a new 'ecological' economics, respectful of the ecosystems and natural cycles of the planetary home where we dwell, and at the service of the whole of humanity. Ecological economics rejects the myth of infinite growth considered as sacrosanct in the reigning economic paradigm and which is also one of the main factors contributing to the pillage of our common home. Pope Francis criticizes the easy acceptance of the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of earth's good and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. The mainstream economists do not regard the market system of production and consumption as a subsystem within the global or local ecosystem. They treat economy as a self-contained arrangement separate from its external, natural surroundings and fail to ask how it depends on this larger context. Our current development model based on the economic paradigm of infinite growth is indeed bumping against concrete limits of a finite home planet.

The greatest of all common goods is our common planetary home where we live as a common family with our fellow human beings and the rest of the biotic community. Its care and protection becomes a real common good to be pursued on the part of humanity in our current era of planetary crisis.

CLOSURE OF GERINI CASE

Our Rector Major has thus communicated to us regarding the Gerini case, that has reached its conclusion in a verdict given on January 02, 2021 by the Supreme Court in Rome, "This is a reason for great joy, because at last we will be able to devote all our energies to the one thing that really counts for each one of us: the Salesian mission at the service of the young, in fidelity to the Lord. This case has, in fact, absorbed a great amount of energy and consumed considerable economic resources, causing much suffering to many persons. From now on it will remain only a bad memory of the past." "Sacro Cuore" in Rome will continue to be the headquarters (Sede Centrale) for the whole Salesian Congregation. We join our beloved Rector Major and his councilors in giving thanks to the Lord for the definitive conclusion and closure of the infamous Gerini case. We once again pledge our unwavering support and our prayerful accompaniment to our Rector Major and his Council that they may always be assisted with the strength of the Holy Spirit in realizing the charisma of Don Bosco for the salvation of young and all those entrusted to our pastoral care.

SPIRITUALITY DAYS OF SALESIAN FAMILY 2021

The Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family 2021 took place from 15 to 17 January, which shed light on the message of the Rector Major's Strenna for 2021: "Moved by hope: See, I am making all things new" (Rev 21,5)". As already mentioned, this year the Days were held online and, despite the great geographical distances, the time zone differences and the linguistic challenges, the Salesian Family showed great communion and closeness and transformed a difficulty into an opportunity. The spirituality days were coordinated and organized at international, regional and provincial levels with the animation of Fr Albert Johnson at the regional level in the capacity of the regional delegate of the Salesian Family. I thank Fr Garlapati Michael Kishore for representing our Province as the Province Delegate for the Salesian Family. I would like to share with you some of the priorities and lines of action that have particular and practical relevance for our region emerging from the celebration of the Salesian Family Spirituality Days 2021.

Priority 1- Communion among the SF members with a spirit of openness and forgiveness which should be lived through the Annual Salesian Family Days. Visible expression of our communion with the Consecrated and lay groups itself is a sign of hope.

Priority 2 - Giving God experience to young people and helping them to find solace through their faith in Jesus Christ. To this end, we strive to accompany the young and their families with the school of prayer.

Priority 3 - Responding appropriately to the aspirations of young people who are poor and joining hands together to alleviate their suffering with a special focus on migrants, job placement and to take appropriate steps to eradicate economic poverty.

ONLINE RETREATS

We are all required to attend either of the two online retreats in this month of February 2021. The first online retreat will be held from February 15-20 and the second online retreat will be held from February 22-27, 2021. Both the retreats will be preached by Fr George Palamattathil SDB from INS Province. I thank you for sending in time your community preference for the annual retreat. The lists of participants of the two retreats and the time-table for the same have already been sent to the communities. I urge every confrere to follow the time-table of the retreat so that we can draw maximum spiritual nourishment and renewal which can lead to even more radical discipleship in serving Christ in the poor and abandoned youth in the spirit of St. John Bosco.

SPCSA IN BANGALORE

I will be attending the SPCSA council and assembly from February 25 to March 01, 2021 being convoked by our regional for South Asia, Fr Biju Michael at the Salesian Provincial House, Bangalore. February 27 and 28 are set aside for the General SPCSA Assembly while the other days will see the participation of Provincials of South Asia Region along with the delegates of various departments in the SPCSA Council. It is the first physical meeting with our new regional and I would like to request you to accompany us and support us with your valuable prayers that we may be inspired with creative proposals and decisions for the temporal and spiritual welfare of young people through our various services across the region of South Asia.

SICK CONFRERES

I would like to invite you all dear confreres to join me in giving thanks and praise to the Lord for the speedy recovery that our sick and ailing confreres have been enjoying. I would like to extend my appreciation and gratitude to communities for generously and expediently reaching out especially to those confreres infected with Corona virus. All of them have recovered well and are doing fine. However, they have to reckon with some after effects of Covid-19 infection and I still commend them to your valuable prayers that they may totally regain their health and strength to continue to serve in the Lord's vineyard. As you know, we celebrated the World Day of the Sick on the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11. I have shared a few reflections of our Holy Father Pope Francis in the conclusion of this circular in this regard. Let me also quote from our Constitution - Article 53. "The community surrounds its sick and aged confreres with care and affection. They in their turn, accepting their condition and serving the community in whatever way they can, are a source of blessing for it; they enrich its family spirit and deepen its unity. Their life takes on a new apostolic significance: for as they offer their limitations and sufferings in a spirit of faith for their brothers and for the young, they are united with the redeeming passion of the Lord, and continue to share in the salesian mission." The health condition of Fr Joseph Abraham and Fr Thomas Santiago, our Vice Provincial is stable and they are making steady progress with regular reviews and necessary post operation medical attention. Fr Pallithanam Thomas is well on the road to recovery after suffering from Covid infection and a neck injury sustained from a fall. Fr MT Sebastian has been consulting the Doctor for tests and reviews based on which the required medical intervention will be planned. I commend them all to your prayerful accompaniment and fraternal closeness.

LEADERS' MEET/JUBILEE OF CONFRERES

As life is limping back to normal across the country, if not in all parts of the world, I am pleased to announce to you that we will be organizing the first ever physical meeting of the Leaders (Rectors, Parish Priests, In-charges and Commission, sector, centre Heads) in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. This meeting is scheduled for March 16 and 17, 2021 at Don Bosco Provincial House, Hyderabad. This meeting will prove to be very crucial and significant both in terms of chalking out a concrete plan for the new academic year based on the new normal as well as renewing and rededicating ourselves to the ever more urgent call of reaching out to those young people and families, who had to bear the brunt of this on-going pandemic. The list of participants along with the agenda will be sent to you in advance. I request everyone to be present for the meeting so that our collective efforts at restarting and reopening our institutions across the Province for the temporal and spiritual welfare of our young people and their families may be successful, fruitful and beneficial.

I would like to also communicate that the province level jubilee celebration of our Confreres will be held on March 16th evening at our Provincial House. While I personally congratulate our jubilarians on reaching such a mile stone in their religious and priestly journey, I would like to invite you to come and share in the joy and thanksgiving of our Confreres on this occasion. I extend my deepest appreciation and prayerful congratulations to the following jubilarians:

- Fr Vatti Rayappa - Silver Jubilee of Priestly Ordination
- Fr Gangarapu Anil Kumar - Silver Jubilee of Religious Profession
- Fr Sangipagi Shantha Murthy - Silver Jubilee of Religious Profession
- Fr Yerramaneni Balaswamy - Silver Jubilee of Religious Profession
- Br Castilino Vincent Francis - Silver Jubilee of Religious Profession
- Fr Miryala Bala Kishroe - Silver Jubilee of Religious Profession

UPCOMING PROVINCE MEETINGS/EVENTS

February 01	WEBINAR Acting: Green Commandment VII: "Learn a New Way of Dwelling in Our Common Home," by Rev. Fr Mallavarapu Rayanna, Rector, St John's Regional Seminary, Kondadaba.
February 17-19	Provincial Council Meeting
February 15-20	ONLINE RETREAT I
February 22-27	ONLINE RETREAT II
February 25-March 01	SPCSA Council and Assembly - Bangalore
March 16-17	Meeting of Rectors, Parish Priests, In-charges and Commission Heads
March 16	Silver Jubilee of Priestly Ordination and Religious Profession of Confreres

SALESIAN SANCTITY IN FEBRUARY

February 01	Commemoration of all Deceased Salesian Confreres
February 07	Blessed Pius IX
February 09	Blessed Eusebia Palomino Yenes, FMA
February 24	Commemoration of Mary Help of Christians
February 25	Sts Louis Versiglia, Bishop and Callistus Caravario, Priest, Salesian Protomartyrs
February 28	Commemoration of St John Bosco

CONDOLENCES

We offer our heartfelt condolences:

- To Fr Alex Jayaraj and to the bereaved family members at the death of his mother, Mrs Antoniamma, who passed away on February 03, 2021
- To the Provincial and the Confreres of the Province of Dimapur at the demise of Fr Pulinthanathumalayil Cyriac (PC), who breathed his last on February 04, 2021.

CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church marks the World Day of the Sick on 11 February, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. It was instituted by Pope Saint John Paul II on 13 May 1992. The theme of this year's observance is, "You have but one teacher and you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8), which calls for "a trust-based relationship to guide care for the sick". Pope Francis says that the annual day "is an opportunity to devote special attention to the sick and to those who provide them with assistance and care both in healthcare institutions and within families and communities." He expresses his

spiritual closeness and the Church's loving concern for those suffering the corona virus pandemic, especially the poor and the marginalized.

In his message for the 29th World Day of the Sick on 11 February, Pope Francis urges a path of healing grounded in a trusting and interpersonal relationship between the sick and those who care for them. "A society is all the more human to the degree that it cares effectively for its most frail and suffering members, in a spirit of fraternal love." Pope Francis makes the point in his message for this year's World Day of the Sick.

Fighting hypocrisy - Drawing attention to the theme of this year's observance, the Pope warns Christians about the danger of "self-idolatry" when our "faith is reduced to empty words and we are unconcerned with the lives and needs of others." Noting that Jesus criticizes those who "preach but do not practice", the Pope says "none of us is immune to the grave evil of hypocrisy, which prevents us from flourishing as children of the one Father, called to live universal fraternity."

Sickness and faith - Sickness, the Pope notes, makes us realize our own vulnerability and our innate need of others. It raises the question of life's meaning, which we bring before God in faith, in order to seek a new and deeper direction in our lives. In this regard, the Pope holds out the biblical figure of Job as a model. Abandoned by his wife and friends in his misfortune, he says, Job feels forlorn and misunderstood. Yet, he rejects hypocrisy and chooses the path of honesty towards God and others. The Lord hears Job's cries and confirms that his suffering is not a punishment or a state of separation from God, much less a sign of God's indifference.

Closeness between the "sick" and carers - The Pope says that sickness has many faces. They are the sick, as well as all those who are ignored, excluded and are a prey to social injustices that deny their fundamental rights. The current pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in our healthcare systems and exposed inefficiencies in the care of the sick, with the elderly, weak and vulnerable people not always granted access to care, or in an equitable manner. The pandemic has also highlighted the dedication and generosity of healthcare personnel, volunteers, support staff, priests, men and women religious. The Holy Father pays them homage, saying they are "a silent multitude of men and women" who "chose not to look the other way but to share the suffering of patients, whom they saw as neighbors and members of our one human family." "Such closeness," the Pope remarks, "is a precious balm that provides support and consolation to the sick in their suffering." As Christians, he says, we experience that closeness as a sign of the love of Jesus Christ, the Good Samaritan, who draws near with compassion to every man and woman wounded by sin. He says that as a community, we too are called to be merciful like the Father and to love in particular our frail, infirm and suffering brothers and sisters, leaving no one behind, especially those most in need.

Fraternal solidarity and relationship - Pope Francis then speaks about the importance of fraternal solidarity towards our neighbors, which takes a variety of forms. "Serving means caring for the vulnerable of our families, our society, our people." We are called to set aside our own wishes and desires, the pursuit of power, and look to the faces of the most vulnerable, touching their flesh, sensing their closeness and helping them. For a therapy to be effective the Pope points out, "it must be relational, as it enables a holistic approach to the patient." This path of healing grounded in a trusting interpersonal relationship, he emphasizes, can help doctors,

nurses, professionals and volunteers in caring for the sick. This relationship between the sick and carers, based on mutual trust and respect, openness and availability, he says, will help to overcome defensive attitudes, respect the dignity of the sick, safeguard the professionalism of healthcare workers and foster a good relationship with the families of patients. Jesus, the Pope concludes, proves this by healing “not by magic but as the result of an encounter, an interpersonal relationship.”

Yours in the Lord,



Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar SDB,
Provincial

