

Homily – Blessing of CMI Aspirants’ House, Bamini – 06.09.2017

(CMI Marthoma Province, Chanda)

Beloved friends in the Lord Jesus Christ,

I am happy to celebrate this Divine Liturgy with you as we bless and inaugurate the new aspirants’ house to train our future missionaries.

On this auspicious occasion, I gratefully remember the pioneering CMI missionaries and present CMI missionaries in Chanda for their sacrifice, presence and support.

Blessing and inauguration of a formation house necessarily invites us to read a few Church documents for our reflection. Latest of which is *Ratio Fundamentalis* and others are *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *Christina Sapientia*, *Optatum Totius*, *Vita Consecrata*, Charter of Priestly Formation of CBCI and Syro-Malabar Church etc.. These documents speak about five dimensions of priestly formation, namely, Human, Spiritual, Pastoral, Intellectual and missionary formation. Interestingly *Pastores Dabo Vobis* lay a greater emphasis on human formation which includes emotional maturity, integrity in human relations, self-esteem, social consciousness etc. All documents agree in one point ultimately what is important is configuration of formee into Christ. It is a ceaseless prayer as St. Paul puts it of as a woman in travail until Christ is formed in the formees. One should be able to claim that ‘it is not I but Christ lives in me’ (Gal 2:20), I greatly desire that Christ be the way, the life and the truth (Jn 14:6) in every formation activity in this new House. St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias’ love for the church and St. Thomas More’s witness of Christ through his martyrdom be guiding principles in imparting formation in this house. As *Pastores Dabo Vobis* reminds us the primary agent in missionary formation is Holy Spirit. Discernment of the spirit be the first and foremost concern in our formation curriculum. I wish every best to the formation team here – Fr. Anish, the rector and others, I thank benefactors who generously contributed, the engineers, the architect, skilled and unskilled labourers for their sincere works. Let this institution become a witness of Christian presence and Christian values in our diocese. May God bless everyone of them.

The gospel passage is chosen not just for this context, but for a wider context – missionary challenges in the present socio-political and religious scenario in India.

The gospel of today Jn. Chapter 2: 1-11 is the turning of water into wine, the first miracle of Jesus. The evangelist end the story with the following comment: “This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him” (Jn. 2:11). As per the gospel narration the miracle was possible when the servants did what they could/should at the intervention of Blessed Virgin Mary “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn. 2:5). I think this should become a great strategy of our mission work. Doing whatever our Lord tells us. It asserts categorically that we have to set aside all our personal motives/hidden agendas and listening and doing only what our Lord wants. Three ways of knowing his mind: i) Prayer, ii) listen to our superiors and iii) a process of discernment in reflection, dialogue and discussion. Whatever be the case we need a genuine spiritual discernment to know what is truly the will of God.

In the socio-cultural, religious and political context of India today, we need a deeper reflection of our commitment, discernment and spiritual orientation in religious life as well as our social involvements. Sr. Prabha SJB was a healthy person and she was teacher at Alipur school. Cancer was diagnosed and she died within a month. A healthy person – active and dynamic in public life – dies of heart attack. An athlete in the mid of his/her career get paralysed or done with brain haemorrhage. These happen even in developed countries where there is regular medical check up, balanced diet and directed exercises. However healthy we are, whatever good care we take of our body, we are not sure of our own self. I think this analogy is very well applicable to our mission work. We are not sure how good and effective is our mission work. We may think that everything is going on well and there, it can happen something – may be disastrous or even fatal – and we have to pay the price very heavily.

My reflection was drawn in this direction in the context of today's socio-cultural, religious and political situation in India. Jesus reminds us: (Mt. 10:16) "be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves". It is not enough that we do our mission work simply but live simply and witness Christ's values by our life.

To achieve this we need to adapt certain mission strategies. I say this because the present political context in India is very antagonist and we need to focus a greater attention to manoeuvring of different situations by political parties: (let me quote a few instances)

1. The highest four constitutional heads of our country now are people of the same ideology: The president, the vice president, the prime minister and the *Lok Sabha* speaker.
2. Unholy political alignment are fortifying position of present federal regime for next general elections.
3. Sweeping victories of recent assembly elections – even being second in row, they manoeuvred to form governments in some states.
4. Saffronisation of education.
5. Constitutional machineries are strategically used to curry their favour.
6. Exploitation of religious sentimentalism.
7. Lynching for carrying beef or killing cows. Surprisingly hardly any reaction at the death of hundreds of children in Gorakpur hospital – cow is more secured than human beings.

These are but a few of the observations wherein the ruling regime can slowly move towards even constitutional amendments. We have to be shrewd as serpents (Mt. 10:16). Christ's message of love and compassion and Mary's advice 'do whatever he tells you' are still relevant and we need great hope to look forward and go ahead.

I suggest the following six strategies to put into effect very urgently in our missionary commitment. They are not new, but we need a renewed efforts.

1. Political discernment:
 - A political shrewdness is the need of the hour.
 - To read the signs of the times in Indian politics helps us to be better guides in political consciousness to our people.

- We must be able to discern the hidden agendas of political parties and respond to it tactfully.
- We have to build up a row of political lay leaders to stand for the Church and Christ's values in public spheres.
- The Vatican II documents: *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* clearly exhorts Christians (the laity) to take active role in public affairs with Christian values – we the missionaries have to prepare them and guide them to play their role better.

2. Revamping the spirit of evangelisation:-

- Church by her very nature is missionary (*Ad Gentes*) – send out to preach good news.
- Village visit and home mission need to be frequented.
- Family prayer and unity of family members need to be made strong.
- Sunday mass need to be more organised. Passingly let me mention that the next year 2018 is going to be the Year of Holy Eucharist in our diocese – *Aaradhana Varsh 2018*. Details are to be worked out.
- Whether Sundays or weekdays – no Holy Qurbana should go without preaching. Avail every opportunity to communicate God's message of love and compassion.
- St. Paul says: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel....." (1 Cor. 1:17). We know Paul did not belittle the importance of the sacraments but laid a paramount importance on preaching.
- Mind you preaching in and out of season is our primary duty. However, we need to do it prudently.

3. Dialogue style in human relations:

- In the past three years I know there have been a few problems in our schools. Most of them were due to lack of proper dialogue style or imprudence in handling the situation.
- We need to adapt a method of dialogue to take the other into confidence. Meet persons with respect and greater understanding.
- Follow the legal procedures discerningly.
- I know even then things can go out of our control. On such occasions we cannot help but leave it to our fate.

4. Simplicity in life style:

- This was one of the themes of the Fourth Major Archiepiscopal Assembly – August 2016.
- Even though he had everything, Jesus Christ emptied himself, accepting the life of a servant (Phil 2:6-7). He was born in the manger as the incarnation of humility and simplicity (Lk 2:7).
- "Members of the Church should be witnesses to a life of simplicity. The simple life-style of bishops, priests and the religious should become a source of inspiration for the laity to lead a simple life style" (*United Onward*, Pastoral Exhortation of Major Archbishop - #5)
- Indeed our life should become a genuine witness.

5. Empowerment of the Christians of the land:

- It is our duty to create a row of Church leaders as well as leaders of society from the land.
- Let us help not only vocation promotion but also vocational discernment from the land of Chanda.
- Vocational discernment (i.e. choosing a professional life-path) is a part of the theme of the Synod on Youth, October 2018
- Talent Club for Capacity Building (TCCB), Post-metric hostel in new style, dairy farm project are but simple steps in this direction.

6. Unity among missionaries:

- We need continuous co-ordinated efforts to keep the unity of the missionaries in Chanda.
- There should be united witness of Christian values and gospel message.
- This should be manifested in the parish core-team, in the congregation level and in the diocese as a whole.
- We know our own family members put how much efforts to keep the unity of the family.
- Sacrifice and give and take attitude help the core-team to keep unity at different levels.
- Keep aside our likes and dislikes, personal agendas and work for common good and to establish God's kingdom on earth.

So dear fathers, brothers and sisters political discernment, Revamping the spirit of evangelisation, Dialogue style in human relations, Simplicity in life style, Empowerment of the Christians of the land, Unity among missionaries are the six strategies we need to adopt with urgency in our missionary commitment - Let us keep also these six points in our minds and be boosted to be effective ministers of God's message of love. I think these six points as resolutions will make us better missionaries and well equipped to meet the challenges of the times. Our commitment to Christ, Church, congregation, diocese, society and others to a great extent decided by these six points of concern. Our human relations, political discernment, social interactions, religious life and spiritual orientations are decided by these. Let us resolve to strengthen them so as to make us effective and efficient ministers of Christ's love – ultimately what is important is not to be successful but to be faithful. Let us always follow the advice of Blessed Virgin Mary 'Do whatever he tells you". May St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias and patron of this House St. Thomas More, intercede for us. Before I wind up let me share with you two quotes; one from Gandiji and the other from Martin Luther.

"I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet" – Gandiji

"We are not the Lord of the nations,

We are not the slave of the nations,

But we are the conscience of the nations" – Martin Luther

As we continue the holy Qurbana, let us pray for God's enlightenment on our national leaders and ourselves and pray for right discernment on every occasions of challenges, crisis and problems.

God bless you all.