

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Balasore!

I. HOLY WEEK

With the celebration of Palm Sunday we have entered into an important period in the liturgical year, commonly and rightly called the 'Holy Week'. The high point within this week is the Easter Triduum that concludes the season of Lent and introduces us to the joy of the Easter Season. The Triduum (the three days) starts with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on the Holy Thursday, continues through the Good Friday service and Holy Saturday, and concludes with the evening prayer on Easter Sunday.

The Easter Triduum holds a special place in the liturgical year because during these days we commemorate the most important mysteries of Christian faith contained in the 'Christ Event'. Just as Sunday is the high point of the week throughout the year, Easter is the high point of the liturgical year as a whole. The meaning of Easter, the greatest feast of the Christians, is revealed and anticipated throughout the Triduum, which brings people of God into contact – through liturgy, symbol and sacrament – with the central events of the life of Christ: the Last Supper, trial, crucifixion and death, his time in the tomb and his resurrection from the dead. Let us make the celebration of these mysteries during the coming days more meaningful.

II. CATECHISM CLASSES

Shortly we will begin the summer vacation, with our schools and hostels remaining closed for over a month. Normally many of us too would like to take a few days off during the summer months. However, even during this season let us not forget to impart catholic education to our children through basic catechism. Not to be confined only to the summer time, providing catechetical instruction to our children throughout the year should be placed in our priority list. So may I request the parish priests to pay special attention to this ministry of ours. Please make use of the available human resources – Rev. Sisters, catechists and teachers – as well as teaching materials for the purpose. Remember that some of our children might be having no chance of getting the catholic instruction during the year, due to the fact that they reside in some hostels and study in the schools with no such facility. So please make use of the summer days in their home parishes for the purpose.

III. PIOUS ASSOCIATIONS

Pious associations and organizations are sure means of rejuvenating parish life. Hence it is highly recommended that we promote such associations in our parishes. Small Christian Communities (SCC), Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) and such lay organizations, when

properly encouraged and monitored, will fetch rich dividends in parish communities. Let us learn from the success stories that are plentifully available in many dioceses in our country and see if we could also bring more vitality to our parish life and activities through the promotion of such associations.

IV. RECOGNITION FOR JYOTHI HOSPITAL

CBCI – CARD (Catholic Bishops Conference of India & Coalition for Aids and Related Diseases) as sub-recipient to the Central Division, Ministry of Health and Family, has sought to facilitate the involvement of the Catholic Church network in Revised National Tuberculosis Programme (RNTCP) across 19 states of India for the last six year period. The objective of this project is to reduce the dreaded Tuberculosis in our country.

In this connection a two day meeting was organized on 25th and 26th February at the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, for the Bishops and Directors connected to this programme, by CBCI-CARD. One of the objectives of the meeting was to witness and analyze the performance of outstanding Catholic health facilities which have been selected for National level Recognition.

During the deliberation, every selected organization had a five minutes power-point presentation, showcasing the performance in the control of Tuberculosis in their respective places. Jyothi Hospital was represented by me as well as Fr. Paul Koonamparampath, the Chairman and Director of Jyothi hospital respectively.

The certificate of honour that our Hospital received from honourable minister Satyendra Kumar Jain, Minister of Health, Delhi, states: “This is to honour Jyothi Hospital, Odisha, for the outstanding contribution to ‘Tuberculosis control on the National stake holders’ meeting of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India- Coalition for AIDS and Related Diseases held at India International Centre, New Delhi on 26-02-2015”.

This award is a recognition of the good work done by Jyothi Hospital. Congratulations to Fr. Paul and his team of Sisters and others connected to the programme for this recognition gained at the national level.

V. MANOVIKAS, BETNA

Women and Child Development Department of Odisha State had organized a programme for the inmates of Child Care Institutions and ‘Special Schools’ on the 15th February, 2015 at Bhubaneswar. Out of the 28 Special Schools from 28 Districts, students of Manovikas Special School at Betna was awarded first prize for dance performance.

Congratulations to the Sisters and the inmates at Monaovikas for this recognition they received. Thanks for the ‘special service’ they do in the diocese.

VI. VOCATION CAMPS

During the summer days, when the schools and hostels are closed, it is customary in the dioceses to conduct ‘vocation camps’ to facilitate promotions to priesthood and religious life.

These camps are meant not just to allow the candidates to select seminaries and formation houses in the diocese or congregations, but to get proper orientation to living as priests and religious. Hence it is mandatory that anyone, boy or girl, aspiring to join Diocese or Religious Congregation attend the vocation camp, and get a certificate to that effect from the persons concerned. Hereby Parish priests are reminded to promote vocations from their respective parishes.

This year the Diocese of Balasore is organizing a vocation camp for the girls at our Pastoral Centre, Kuruda, from the **10th to the 12th** of April. Girls who have passed Matriculation or +2, can attend the camp. Please ensure that the girls reach our Pastoral centre, or the Cathedral premises, on the evening before the camp begins.

Vocation camp for the boys will be held at the Pastoral Centre from the 17th till 23rd of May. Information regarding these camps will be given to you by Fr. Sangram Murmu, the Vocation promoter of the Diocese.

VII. ABOUT 'BIBLE PROCESSIONS'

An important part of the Liturgy of the Word during solemn liturgical celebrations is the 'Bible Procession'. What I intent to note here is not about the procession itself, but about what happens to that Bible immediately after the procession. And this has been noted by others too, but not reflected on.

It so happens that after the Bible has been brought ceremoniously in procession, which often includes a dance, it is kept on the stand, garlanded and given *arati* by the main celebrant. However, the fate of the Bible immediately after that ceremony is at times uncertain and much less honourable. The one who comes for the 'first reading' removes it quite unceremoniously and deposits on the window nearby, or inside the ambo (reading stand or lectern), and at times even on the floor, where it remains totally forgotten during the rest of the Mass. All the honour and respect it received a few minutes ago is very quickly forgotten and is a thing of the past! For the Bible that is really a fall from grace!

In order to avoid this anomaly, and to continue to give the Word of God its due respect during the Mass, and even afterwards, I would suggest the following (choose one or the other):

1. Make sure that the readings of the day are done from the Bible brought in procession
2. Prepare a well decorated stand in front of the ambo, and keep the Bible brought in procession on that stand. Readings of the day can be had from other lectionaries.

Either way we continue to honour the Word of God throughout the Eucharistic Celebration.

VIII. FR. JOHN VICTOR, C.M.

Fr. John Victor, C.M., a newly ordained priest from the Southern Province of the C.M., has been appointed as Assistant at St. Thomas Catholic Church, Jaleswar. Fr. Victor, who hails from Pondichery, had expressed his willingness to render his missionary service here and so,

heeding to my request, Fr. Provincial of the Southern Indian Province has allowed him to work in the Diocese for a year. We welcome Fr. Victor and wish him all the best in his ministry.

IX. BISHOP'S PROGRAMME

APRIL 2015

1-5	Balasore	Holy Week
7	Bhubaneswar	OCBC Meeting
9	Balasore	BSSS Meeting
12	Keonjhar	Parish Pastoral Visit
18	Keutinimari	First Profession – UMI Sisters
19	Barbil	Parish Pastoral Visit
21 st April – 11 th May	Kerala	

EASTER MESSAGE - 2015

The Empty Tomb, Women and Bodily Resurrection

Here is a curious fact. People flock and queue up to visit the tombs of famous people whose mortal remains are expected to be in those places of internment. But by far the largest crowd has visited, and continue to do so, a tomb which is empty – the empty tomb of Jesus! And it has been empty for nearly two thousand years! And it had been empty from the beginning!

It would have been impossible for the faith in the Resurrection to survive with a tomb still containing the body of Jesus. Had the tomb not been empty, the Christian theology would have taken an entirely different route than it did, trying to explain how resurrection could still be possible, even when the body remained in the tomb. But never in its history had the Christian theology to face such a problem. It seems inconceivable that St. Paul's teaching on bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15) could have taken the direction that it did, had the tomb not been empty from the beginning.

Again, it would have been impossible for the disciples to proclaim the resurrection in Jerusalem had the tomb not been empty. The empty tomb is a *sine qua non* of the resurrection. The notion that Jesus rose from the dead with a new body while his old body lay in the grave is a purely modern conception. Jewish mentality would never have accepted a division of two bodies - one in the tomb and one in the risen life. When therefore the disciples began to preach the resurrection in Jerusalem, and people responded, and the religious authorities stood helplessly by, the tomb must have been empty. The fact that the Christian fellowship, founded

on belief in Jesus' resurrection, could come into existence and flourish in the very city where he was executed and buried seems to be clear evidence for the historicity of the empty tomb.

Now, the fact that the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid was empty was discovered first by Mary of Magdala, commonly named Mary Magdalene, and her women companions. Why is that despite the low status of women in Jewish society, and their lack of qualification to serve as legal witnesses, they and not the male disciples were made discoverers of the empty tomb? The answer is simple: the women were in fact the ones who made this discovery. Furthermore, the listing of the women's names show that these persons were known well in the early of Christian community, and so could not be associated with a false report.

It is worth noting that in almost every society and culture women have been entrusted with the care of bodies. They birth them. They feed them. They wash them. They mend them. They comfort them. So it is not surprising that it is women who arrive at the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body for burial. It is obvious. The women who fed him and washed him and looked after him in life come to care for his body one last time. And this is where the story is transformed. This is where it ceases to be ordinary. The body of Jesus is not there. He is risen.

Why is the concept of 'bodily resurrection' important in Christian faith? If the presence of the body is important after the resurrection, it is so before the resurrection too. The doctrine of the bodily resurrection is important for all Christians because it protects us against a spirit-matter dualism that has occasionally cropped up throughout the history of the church. In the history of Christian spirituality this dualism has manifested in extreme forms of asceticism that seek to deny the body. When the redemption of the whole creation takes a backseat to the redemption only of souls, we betray the implications of the bodily resurrection. God is concerned with the redemption of both soul and body.

Bodily Resurrection means that Jesus is precisely who he claims to be, and that he has accomplished precisely what he intended to accomplish. It means that for one brief span in human history God walked among us, taking our mortal nature, to teach us about the Kingdom of God and to show us how to live it by acts of justice, mercy, and love. It means that we are loved so much that death and brutality and evil are conquered. It means that we are not mourning the end of something but anticipating the beginning of something new ... the Kingdom of Love made manifest and complete here on earth.

The women coming to tend to the body of their Lord and Teacher and Friend came with one last act of tenderness. What they find instead is a new beginning – an empty tomb! It is these women who have walked with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem who are the first witnesses to his Resurrection. It is these women, who have stood at the foot of the Cross and who did not hide from the danger of being associated with Jesus (like Peter and others) and who did not abandon him in his final hour, who are rewarded with the first glimpses of their risen Lord. They were witnesses to his teaching and healing. They were witnesses to his torture and execution. Finally they are witnesses to his triumph: He stands before them — his body

transformed and brilliant — and commissions them to start telling the world about what they have seen. They are the first witnesses and proclaimers of the Resurrection.

Like these women, all of us who claim Jesus as our Lord and Teacher and Friend are called to do the same. We are all called to be bearers of good news in a dark and troubled world. The truth of the matter is that there are still women as well as men witnesses to the Resurrection wandering in this world. Like the first women at the tomb on Easter morning, they have beheld cruelty, brutality, and despair. They have also been gifted with a vision of triumph and transformation and they have been compelled by the same commission to share this precious vision with others.

To conclude, through Mary of Nazareth we came face to face with the mystery of **virginal conception** of the body of Jesus, and through Mary of Magdala the mystery of his **bodily resurrection**. Through the **first Mary** Jesus was presented to the world as a human being like us all, except sin, and who told us what love is all about; and through the **second Mary** Jesus is proclaimed as one who has glorified creation and humanity by transforming his own body which had undergone suffering and death. He did that by loving his own to the very end (Jn 13:1). Resurrection of the Body tells that God's love endures forever! (Ps 118:2).

Happy Easter! May the Blessings of the Risen Lord be always with us!

With Regards and Blessings

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Bishop of Balasore