

By the Grace of God and by the approval of Holy See, Thomas Mar Eusebius, Bishop of the Apostolic Exarchate of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in USA extends cordial greetings to all the priests, religious and faithful of the Exarchate.

Prot. No. EPL 2/2014

Praise be to the Most Holy Trinity.

Dear Reverend Fathers, Sisters and Lay faithful,

In a few days, we shall celebrate the great **Feast of Yaldo**, the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The past couple of weeks, we have been on an intense spiritual preparation for celebrating this feast. Through the journey of the Advent we have attempted an immersion into the great mystery of Incarnation. This mystery, which is the pillar of our Christian Faith, is replete with many pertinent messages for us who are called to live this faith in the specific socio-cultural context of today. One distinctiveness of the context in which we celebrate Christmas this year is the Church's renewed emphasis on the topic of 'family'. An extra-ordinary Synod of Bishops has just been concluded in Rome, dedicated exclusively to the topic of family, and serious preparations are underway for an Ordinary Synod of Bishops in a couple of months on the same topic. The Universal Church wants every one of its members to reflect seriously on the importance of family and on the crisis that family is going through in the contemporary culture. We in the Exarchate had three Regional Family Conferences conducted successfully on the same topic.

Everything about Christmas has a family aspect. This incomprehensible mystery is unraveled in the simple context of a family. The eternal Word of God comes down to be born in a human family. He who carries everything, is carried in the womb of a humble woman for 9 months. He who gives life to everything, allows himself to be born as the son of loving parents. He who sustains everything, is suckled by his mother and he who nurtures everything with love, is fondled by his father. And the life-journey thereafter of this incarnate Word of God is wrapped fully in elements and values that are typically of the family. In this sense, the Incarnation signifies in great measure, the divine reaffirmation and sanctification of the family.

Thus one of the Christmas highlights is the family. This is of exceptional significance in the times in which we live. The most serious crisis that we are facing today in our society is the crisis of family. The human society has to be built on a sound family philosophy. The cultural journey of humanity hitherto has been sustained primarily by perennial family values. Unfortunately, in the contemporary culture, these values are called into question. The sanctity of family is sadly undervalued. The traditional concept of marriage as the unique and unbreakable union between a man and women is seriously attacked. The sublime values of parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood, etc. are scornfully set aside. Family as the sanctuary of life is threatened. The significance of family itself is questioned. In short, one social institution that receives the biggest cultural blow today is the family. But if the traditional family values are not protected and promoted, humanity itself has no future.

Christmas invites us in a very special way to face and overcome this threat. We need to renew our own commitment to the values on which our families have to be rooted. We need to resist the current of the contemporary culture that destabilizes the family. But the present day crisis of the family is primarily a crisis of faith. In the onslaught of secularism and materialism, faith in the family has weakened, if not disappeared altogether. All our concerns and criteria have been, by and large, captured by material, secular considerations. Unfortunately, our day to day life assumes very little or no dimension of the transcendence. This is the root cause of the family crisis that we face today, because the meaning and quality of genuine family relationships are derived from a genuine family spirituality. That is why the family is called the

domestic church. So we are required, in the first place, to rediscover our personal and family relation to God. And this is the challenge of Christmas. The eternal Son of God, who came to be born in a family, came primarily to reestablish our relation with God, to convince us that our life has its ultimate source of meaning and purpose in its rootedness in God and that family plays a crucial role in the sustenance, promotion and celebration of this rootedness in God.

As a practical response to this basic demand of Christmas, let us renew our family vows which is primarily to God and to every member in the family. Let us try to maintain the sanctity of our families by keeping them as true temples of God where God is truly the Head. This is to be done through our uncompromising commitment to the Gospel values, through regular family prayers and meaningful participation in the sacraments of the Church. In this sense, our families will turn to be true schools of faith where our children learn to love and worship God. So also, let us try to safeguard the sanctity of our relationships within the families, with every member of the family, which would make our families true homes of love. Let us also promote our families as true sanctuaries of life, where life originates by the grace of God and where life is protected and promoted from its inception to its natural end. In all this, our model is the simple family of Nazareth, the great gift of Christmas. I wish all of you and our families a blessed Christmas and God's continued blessings in the New Year.

The present **Pastoral Council** of the Exarchate is completing its term of three years this year. As we know, in carrying out the specific mission entrusted to us by God as an Exarchate, this important representative body plays a crucial role. Personally for me, the pastoral council has been of enormous support and assistance, especially in the planning and execution of our common projects and in the major decision making of the Exarchate. The creative suggestions and interventions of the pastoral council have greatly enhanced our ecclesial life and its quality. I take this opportunity to thank sincerely all the members of the pastoral council and in a special way, Mr. Philip John, who served commendably as its secretary. The new pastoral council is to take charge on January 10, 2015. I extend my sincere congratulations to all the new members and I thank all our parishes for having elected them responsibly. I earnestly solicit the whole-hearted cooperation of all the new members in the exercise of our God-given ecclesial mission.

The next **Syro-Malankara Catholic Convention** of North America is to be held from August 6 to 9 at a beautiful Convention Center in Virginia, near Washington. We can rest assured that all efforts will be made to make this Convention a truly enriching ecclesial experience. However, the first element that makes the convention a success is the number of participation. Therefore I earnestly request all our families to ensure your participation in the convention at the earliest.

Wishing God's abundant blessings on each of you, your families and our communities and invoking the powerful intercession of Mother Mary and all the Saints,
Yours lovingly in our Lord,

+ Thomas Mar Eusebius

December 18, 2014
Exarchial Chancery,
1500 De Paul Street, Elmont, NY 11003

This circular is to be read in all our churches on Sunday, December 21, 2014