

Your Grace, Your Excellencies, Monsignori, Rev. Fathers, Sisters, Deacon Jerry, the family members of Deacon Jerry, seminarians and my dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

We are witnessing to a profound experience of grace. God in his infinite love and abundant mercy is calling one of our beloved sons to be a priest to serve His people through His Church. In the relatively short history of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in America, this manifests in the first place, the greatness of the love and providence that we as a Church experience from God. With a deep sense of our unworthiness before God and with a heart filled with gratitude, I wish to reflect on some practical orientations that a Malankara Catholic priest needs to assume in our context.

First of all, as we all know, the true strength of a Christian priest, no matter which ecclesial entity he belongs to, comes from his intimate relationship with Christ. As an intimate following of Jesus Christ, Catholic priesthood is an invitation to go through the destiny of Jesus Christ, a life that climaxed in the total abandonment on the cross and which was vindicated in the trans-historical event of the resurrection. The strength that the priest needs to live this call can come only from his constant closeness to his Master. In today's first reading we heard St. Paul telling us so passionately that no reality whatsoever can ever separate him from the love of Christ. Pope Francis says: "The touchstone of how deeply a priest is living his vocation is the extent to which he seeks Christ in his daily life." This underlies the importance of a serious prayer life, both personal and ecclesial.

Secondly, the Church believes that the priest is called to be a minister and steward of the Divine Mysteries. As we know, priesthood is a sacrament in the Church. One major theme underlying today's liturgical celebration concerns sacraments and the sacramentality associated with the order of priesthood. The prayers and symbols of this liturgy eloquently proclaim that this young person Jerry, through this sacrament of priesthood is invested with the special responsibility of administering the sacraments for the people of God. This is his primary responsibility. Consequently, meaningful and joyful celebration of the liturgy is an essential part of a Malankara Catholic priest, not only because it enriches his own spirituality, but also because the religiosity and spirituality of our faithful are so much linked to the celebration of the liturgy and the prayers of the Church. This special ecclesial belongingness and liturgical affinity of our people is a great

blessing and every effort must be made from the part of our pastors to protect and promote it even further.

Thirdly, Malankara priesthood, by its very nature, has to be missionary. This is what Servant of God Mar Ivanios, the great Father of our Church taught us. This calls for pastoral closeness from the part of our priests to the people. If we examine the short history of our parishes here, as well as in India, we realize that the priest's closeness to our people has been a major factor not only in the formation and growth of our parishes, but also in their vitality and vibrancy. In our tradition, family visit is considered to be a vital aspect of our pastoral care. As Pope Francis reminds us, a priest is not just a manager, but he is through and through a pastor, a full time pastor, a shepherd living with the smell of the sheep. The priest is not just a functionary, but he is essentially a missionary, commissioned to make present God's unconditional and saving love among his people through his own life and actions. In our context here, the priest needs to be close to the young and to the elderly in a special way, because, again as Pope Francis says, the young are our wings and the elderly are our roots. Without the roots and the wings, our life does not mean much. The elderly are the ones who painstakingly planted our faith here. The young are the ones who have to take it forward.

Fourthly, Jerry Mathew is receiving the sacrament of priesthood in the Jubilee Year of Mercy. A priest in the first place is called to be a sacrament of God's mercy. During the Sedro prayer of our ordination liturgy, the bishop entreats for the new priest as follows, "O Lord God, make this servant a compassionate priest so that he may open the door of your mercy to his brethren." Being transformed constantly through the personal experience of God's mercy in his life, a priest is called to be a sacrament of this mercy to all whom he is called to serve. This sacrament of priesthood itself is an act of divine mercy. In today's Gospel we heard Jesus telling his disciples, "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain". We are chosen not because we are worthy, but because the Lord is merciful. Humanly speaking none of us is worthy to receive this sacrament which enables the human person, weak and unworthy as he is, to be a minister and steward of the Divine Mysteries. And as a priest passes each day of his priesthood, he will increasingly realize that he is wholly sustained by divine mercy, and by divine mercy alone. This constant personal experience of God's caring and forgiving mercy

makes it imperative for the priest to be a source and sacrament of this mercy to his people, to faithfully dispense that mercy, both sacramentally and in his daily living.

Servant of God Mar Ivanios bequeathed to us a deeply integral picture of who a priest should be, through his genuine love for Jesus Christ, reflected through his intense prayer life, liturgical fervor, simple living, missionary zeal and the profound acts of mercy. May his example be a guiding factor in Jerry's life as a priest.

We are happy that God is calling Jerry to be His priest. As we know, Jerry is the second person to be ordained a priest from and for a Catholic Church of Indian origin in America, the first one being our own Father Michael. We are proud to have Jerry in the Church. We thank God for this young man's unwavering commitment to Christ and to His Church; we thank God for all the personal gifts that he is blessed with. I am confident in the Lord, that his priestly ministry will be a blessing to the Malankara Catholic Church and also to the American Catholic Church. So also, I hope that his example will inspire many more young men and women in this country to dedicate their lives to the service of the Lord.

The Eparchy is deeply indebted to the dear parents and family members of Deacon Jerry, especially his father Mr. Thomas Mathew, his mother Mrs. Gracy Mathew and his brother Jebby for having made such a wonderful sacrifice for the Church. I thank the family for having nurtured him as a child of God and for having offered him for the service of the Church. Jerry's parents have given him a wonderful example of what it is to be passionately belonging to the Lord and to His Church. As we know, family is the nursery of vocations. Our primary responsibility as parents and family members is to create an atmosphere in our families, where our children can grow as God's children, where our children can imbibe the values of the Gospel. I hope and pray that more parents and families among us will be instrumental in inspiring their children to embrace priestly and religious life in the Church. I also congratulate our parish community in Detroit that prepared the context for the faith formation of Jerry Mathew.

We are very happy today at the presence of His Grace Thomas Mar Koorilos, the Archbishop of Tiruvalla, His Excellency Yoohanon Mar Chrysostom, Bishop of Pathanamthitta and His

Excellency the Most Rev. James Massa, the Auxiliary Bishop and the Vicar General of the Diocese of Brooklyn. Bishop Massa has been Jerry's professor and mentor in the seminary. We thank all of you for your valuable presence and prayers.

I also wish to thank the seminary faculties of the St. Mary's Malankara Seminary in Trivandrum and St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie where Jerry received his philosophical and theological formation respectively. In a special way, I wish to thank Msgr. Peter Vaccari, Rector of the Dunwoodie seminary, who is present here today. We deeply appreciate your very personal and paternal care of our seminarians. Let us pray that God may make Jerry a priest after the heart of Jesus.