



Serving the Church and the Nation: Challenging Opportunities

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Introduction

The Second Vatican Council declared in its Pastoral Constitution, “The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1). Jesus Christ proclaimed the Kingdom of God (Mk 1: 14 -15), went about doing good (cf. Acts 10:38) and called upon his followers to pray and work (Mt 6: 9 -13) for the realization of the Kingdom of God. Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation (LG 48) tries to live that essential mission of Jesus in the human lives. In communion with the Universal Church, the Church in India, has reached out to the poor, the deprived, the sick and the suffering in India for many centuries.

Recent times have seen India and its Constitution being threatened by extremists. Importantly, the question ‘what it takes to be an Indian?’ has gained prominence for all Indians today especially for the Church in India as her identity and

loyalty are being challenged and questioned time and again and she can easily be implicated for lacking in nationalism and patriotism. Besides, the recent sex scandals rocking the Church in India, have also sent a wrong impression to the whole country. She is also being accused of favouring casteism, double standard, clericalism and of being patriarchal.

At this juncture, the Church needs to urgently clarify her relationship with the nation as well as to think of the measures to respond to the challenges both from within the Church and within the Country that are posed to her.

Foundational Basis for Church's Service

The church is called to be at the service of the nation drawing inspiration from her Lord who went about doing good; he healed the sick, forgave sinners and tax collectors, he drove out demons and paved out a new way of life for people to follow. The church strives to remain faithful to Jesus' way of life who came to serve and not to be served (cf. Mk 10:45).

Interestingly Jesus himself has defined the relationship between the Church and the nation in the following words, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22: 21). There is no distinction and partiality here. Everything is well distributed and Justice is established in the division. Thus, as members belonging to both the Country and the Church, every Christian is called to remain faithful to both the Church and the Country thus a missionary and a patriotic at the same time.

Prophetic Role is Equal to Patriotic Role

By baptism we are called to be prophets and by citizenship we are called to be patriots. But Prophetic role is in no way different from Patriotic role, because '*Constitutional con-*

cerns are Gospel concerns'. We in the Church are certainly committed to the values (*Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*) enshrined in the preamble of our Constitution. These two roles have to go hand in hand. In other words, Christians are called to internalise the Gospel values of justice, love and peace in the context of today's India. They have to practice the spirituality of Jesus as described in the Sermon on the Mount and promote pluralism: accepting, appreciating and celebrating diversity in every religion, culture and language etc.¹

In the recent times, three of the Bishops have exercised their prophetic role with great determination and without any fear. Thus it is time now for the leaders of the Church and laity to exercise this role effectively as Bishops Anil Couto, Thomas Macwan and Filipe Neri Ferrao did in their own dioceses.²

Is the Church in India Only for Conversion?

Very often the Church in India is accused of being anti-national, political, a foreigner (outsider), contract killers (spy) of Vatican Government³ and its missionary works are always directed towards the goal of conversion. Among all these accusations, what I find the most disheartening is the comment that Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS chief, made about the humanitarian works of Mother Teresa and her sisters. No doubt, these illogical accusations on the Church in India had been very much part of the agenda of RSS and the BJP Government and it is still going on. The one allegation that I wish to deal with here is the Patriotism of the Church in India.

At the time of Independence of India in 1947, only about 14% of the population were literate. If it has gone up to 55% of the population today, Christianity can be proud for having

played a role in it. The Catholic Church in India runs over 17,000 educational Institutions. What is impressive is that 70% of all these schools are in rural areas, serving the poor, especially the Dalits, the Adivasis and other disadvantaged groups. Nearly 50% of the Catholic institutions are only for the enlightenment of Indian women belonging to all religions, castes, tribes and different religions. It had also given its due attention to technical education, and runs today 1514 technical and vocational training institutions in the country. This made it possible for Dalits and Tribals not only to benefit by it but also to have social mobility in life.

Another significant field for which the Church has contributed is the healthcare system in India. Of the total, 85% of the healthcare institutions run by the Church in India are in remote villages which include - *Dispensaries, Rehabilitation Centres, Centres for Mental Health Care, Medical facility Centres, Leprosy Care Centres, Health care centres for the Aged, T. B., Terminally ill – HIV/AIDS Centres, Medical training Centres, Counselling Centres, Non – formal facility Centres*. The motive of this is to offer special attention to the poor and the downtrodden. Self-empowerment programmes are conducted by the Church to make the poor and marginalised stand on their feet.

With the accusation of being foreigners in our own Country, a Christian is forced to remind the accusers that Christianity has a long history of its presence in India. It took roots in India with the coming of St. Thomas to India in 52 AD, and it spread to a greater extent in India after St. Francis Xavier's arrival in the 16th century. However, Christians today form only 2.5% of the total population. This falsifies the claim that Church's sole motive of their presence is conversion. *(The statistics above were presented by Bishop. Ambrose of Tuticorin in the year 2008).*⁴

Patriotism and Nationalism in Today's India

The ideal meaning behind the terms 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' is being misinterpreted by fanatic organisations in today's India. They try to spread a culture of hatred, violence, discrimination and elimination of all those who refuse to accept their narrow world view and style of life. For them, being Indian means belonging to 'Hindutva' and being patriot or nationalist means mouthing slogans, hailing Mother India or shouting patriotic slogan. This misinterpretation of the term has been reflecting in the country for the past few decades.

When a group of nuns were gang-raped in Gajraula in 1990, the whole nation was shocked. All peace - loving citizens of their caste, colour and creed condemned the crime. But a prominent leader who belonged to a fanatic organisation proudly proclaimed: It was done by patriotic Hindu youths against anti-national activities of Christians.

On January 22, 1999, at midnight, Australian – born Graham Stewart Staines and his two sons, Philip and Timothy were burnt alive by a mob with shouts of "Zindabad!" It was a beastly act. Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee was sensitive to accept the shame: "My head hangs in shame". But some of the "responsible Union Ministers" were prompt to make irresponsible excuses saying, "It is an international conspiracy to destabilize the government"- Another expression of hypocrisy in the name of patriotism.⁵

I am also reminded of the violent attacks against the Christians in Kandhamal, Odisha 2008. And the recent one on 23rd December 2017 when two priests and 32 seminarians in Satna, Madhya Pradesh, were allegedly attacked under the pretext of forced conversion by the Bajrang Dal group.

Recently in Mumbai Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Gopal Shetty stoked up a controversy by saying that Christians are '*angrez*' (British) and did not contribute to the Indian freedom struggle - Another misunderstood version of Nationalism and Patriotism.⁶

The fanatic groups of today don't seem to understand that 'Lynching', 'Gau Rakshak', 'Love Jihad,' 'Cow Vigilantism', are not part of Indian nationalism but Hindutva nationalism. Indian Nationalism in its true sense refers to "An ideology based on the premise that an individual's loyalty and devotion to one's country should come above the interests and opinions of other citizens or the interests of a certain group of citizens".⁷ For example, today's present Government speaks of Digital India but there is no place for Dalit Reservation Policy only for the Dalit Christians.

Challenges within the Country

India is going through a crucial period perhaps a dark phase in its history after its independence. It has evolved into a great tourist place of lynching so much as it can be even addressed a nation of mob lynching. In this context, I have tried to point out a few challenges that the Church needs to look into.

- India presents a perpetual paradox where millions go to bed while the country has the third highest number of billionaires in the world. Presently, it looks like there is nothing to boast in her other than Corruption, illiteracy, child labour, increasing unemployment, rape, growing addiction to alcohol and drugs.

- People with narrow minded nationalism claim to be super nationalistic and condemn the others to be lacking in nationalism and patriotism.
- Unnecessary and petty news items are sensationalized by the media. This clearly shows the dictatorship of ruling party of a section of a media.
- Even the educational system is being manipulated by the political leaders of so called Hindutva philosophy.
- The Constitution of India (Article 25) provides the fundamental human right of every person to convert to whichever religion he\she wants, but the freedom is being solemnly violated.
- In recent times, India is also facing widespread intolerance, religious fanaticism and fundamentalism, attacks and atrocities against intellectuals, social activists, religious personnel and institutions.
- Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution are violated, esp. minority rights (*denial of SC status to Christian Dalits*).
- There are also many examples which indicate growing corruption, criminalization and terrorism. As said earlier, Mob lynching has become the order of the day in India. 80% of those killed in cow related lynching is Muslims.⁸

Challenges within the Church

In recent times, the Catholic Church in our country and elsewhere has been in the news for wrong reasons. The various news items have caused a lot of anguish, anxiety, disappointment and embarrassment to the faithful. Besides

this, the Church in India needs to look for challenges from within the Church in order to proclaim Christ truly in her words and deeds. Hence, I have tried to express a few challenges and possibilities to respond to them.

- *Lumen Gentium* describes the family as the ‘domestic Church’ because it is the first place where baptized Christians learn and practice their faith. Unfortunately, the families today are suffering from relationship break ups, increasing number of divorces, abortions and lack of understanding of marriage as a sacrament. All these hamper the essential mission of the Church.
- Materialism, consumerism and addiction to social media have crept into the families and have caused a great decline in spiritual and moral values of our Christian brothers and sisters.
- There is also growing indifference and lack of commitment to the Christian vocation. It is unfortunate that some of our Christians may not even know their essential role of being a Christian.
- There is also growing insensitivity from the part of the Church regarding caste, language, creed, status and religion. It is very sad that this caste factor is very much seen in religious congregations and dioceses.
- Across the world the Church has had to face a lot of sharp criticism regarding the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. In India quite a few priests have been accused of sexual harassment or misconduct.⁹ The recent case involving a bishop and a nun was quite shocking and has sent a bad impression about the Church.

- Very often allegations are heard regarding financial misappropriation and incompetent management of religious institutions. Recent allegation against a Cardinal and a group of priests received a lot of media attention.¹⁰
- Frankly speaking, the church in India has not really done anything seriously to Ecumenical unity.
- She seems to have become excessively preoccupied with institutionalization and clericalism.
- The members of the Church suffer from insufficient zeal and fear to proclaim Christ's universality and his uniqueness as the Saviour.

Opportunities for Various Ministries in the Church

The present day challenges in India offer a new set of opportunities for the Indian church to carry on various ministries. Therefore, the Church in India is called to exercise her prophetic role responding to the unjust situations, indicating that it is time to do something more than what we have always been doing. Most importantly, it is time for priests and the religious to venture into secular professions by becoming doctors, engineers, secular subject professors, scientists and Socio - Political analysts etc. so that we are able to respond to the call of our Divine master to serve everyone in his own example.

Simultaneously, the Church also needs to take some measures to make her mission clear to everyone. There needs to be lot of transparency from the part of the ecclesiastical authorities. It is time to go back to the fundamentals and root ourselves there. Here are a few practical suggestions for us to be more involved in the service of our nation.

Family Life

The well-being of the Church and the society at large are intimately linked with the nurturing of the family. Families are the fundamental ‘building block’ of society; similarly, families provide a foundation for the continuation and strength of the Church among the lay faithful. It is the life-line of the Church and society (*Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 32, 38). However, in recent times “married love is too often dishonoured by selfishness, hedonism and unlawful contraceptive practices” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no, 47).

- Thus the Church needs to encourage visiting of Parish Priests to the families. Organising Marriage Encounter and Marriage Enrich Programmes become a must in order to avoid future marital conflicts and to foster values of Christian Marriage amidst the couples.
- The families should be directed to live in unity and to reach out to others. Seminars could be held in order to give a wakeup call to the families of the challenges that the media and society pose for family life. e.g. prolife issues in human sexuality, pornography and marital infidelity. So that they are ready to face them effectively.
- The prime importance of the Church is also to stress upon family values and encourage family prayer, family meals, family outings and use of Bible sharing methods through Small Christian Communities.
- The Church needs to create facilities for the care of the elderly so that they are respected and well protected at home instead of being dumped in old age homes.

Renewal of Consecrated Persons

The Catholic Church in India is blessed with over one hundred and twenty-five thousand religious priests, religious brothers and religious sisters who serve the Church significantly through a large network of educational, health and social service institutions.¹¹ Even as I greatly appreciate the selfless and dedicated life of the consecrated persons, in recent times, there is a decrease in the number of candidates opting for consecrated life.

A fresh and creative and a self-critical approach is needed in order to make this gift of God more attractive and relevant. I am of the opinion that priestly life needs a thorough renewal and updating. When we talk about empowering women, Why don't we talk about sisters? We need to open up more responsibilities for the sisters otherwise many of their services will be limited to decorating the altar and lighting up the candles.

- Thus the Consecrated need to go back to the vision of their founders and rededicate themselves to pastoral ministry with a clear shift of emphasis from maintenance to mission. This consecrated life should be a combination of contemplation and active service as recommended by St. John Paul II.
- Consecrated life should be Christ centered, simple and commitment to the poor. This just can't happen in overnight, so focus should be laid on their training as well. For Pope Francis, Religious life is life of prophetic mission in the context of peripheries and a strong commitment to community life.¹²
- "*Peace and Reconciliation Committees*" need to be appointed in the various regions, together with the dioceses

of the region, so that we can settle matters amicably and justly without going to the courts unnecessarily.¹³

The Lay Faithful and the Mission of the Church

The lay faithful have a distinct role in the spreading of the Gospel, which the Church really needs them to carry out with the authority, creativity, and power that the Holy Spirit has given them in Baptism. *Lumen Gentium* no. 31 states: “the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in [all] secular professions and occupations.... They are called there by God that by exercising their function and led by the spirit of the Gospel that may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven”. The laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 2).

- The Church needs to accept the dignity, role and importance of the role of the lay faithful in the Church.
- The laity should be motivated to involve themselves in the Church through the Small Christian Communities.
- Some of the capable members in the Parish could be asked to undertake faith formation and professional training programmes.
- Our laity may be carefully encouraged to take up important leadership positions in the Parliament, Assemblies, Civil Services, Entrepreneurship in business and in the Judiciary.
- The dignity of labour should be manifested by the Church in terms of providing just wages and social security.

- The lay faithful in need of help are to be given sufficient help (both moral and financial) so that they are able to achieve their dreams and in turn contribute to the mission of the Church.
- We need Catechesis which will put Social Justice at center stage in our Christian communities. It is heartening to learn that all Catholic schools now educate their students on the Indian Constitution. Unfortunately, the laity is poorly informed of these important studies that reinforce Jesus's option for the Poor.
- The day to day struggles of the human community should be integrated into our religious service to make it more relevant and meaningful especially the Eucharist.

The Marginalised and Weaker Sections within the Christian Community

The Church commits herself to the liberation of the weaker sections like tribals, women and dalits. She wants to reach out more to unorganised groups like fisher-people, farmers, migrants, domestic workers, victims of trafficking through advocacy and networking with NGO's and other like-minded groups and individuals dedicated to the cause of the poor. Realizing that caste system is a reality, which has also crept in certain parts of the country, we need to pursue with the Government that Christian dalits be treated on par with other dalits professing Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Faiths. Thus,

- It is the need of the hour that the policy (*ref: CBCI website*) drafted by CBCI in empowering the Dalits should be powerfully implemented collectively and unitedly.

- The Church needs to urgently introduce positive measures to integrate Christians of Dalit origin along with others in the Church through education and employments.
- She needs to also strengthen advocacy on the socio-political, economic and cultural rights of Tribals enshrined in the Constitution of India. She should strive to foster advocacy and networking to address the issue of land alienation, induced displacement, human trafficking and migration. She is called to show sensitivity to the differently abled by providing facilities that suit their needs.
- A serious study needs to be done by the Church on how she can prevent suicide of our farmers as the suicide rates increase every year.
- The Church could foster gender equity and provide a greater role for women in our collaborative structures or institutions. She needs to also establish Cells to address women's issues to protect their rights.

Youth Apostolate

India is predominantly young. So is the Church in India. There is an urgent need to prepare tomorrow's leaders today. Thus,

- The Christian Youth are to be motivated and encouraged to enter into active politics and Civil Services in order to give a new phase of life for true leadership. They are to be trained to become leaders who are committed to safeguard the constitutional values and secular democracy.
- Today's youth seem to be lacking interest in religion. They are in the streets due to various reasons and the church needs to scout for them and bring them back to God.

- The Church should also initiate measures to promote youth apostolate at all levels, such as Jesus Youth in all the parishes and institutions. The priests should update themselves keeping in mind the current trends in India in order to understand the youth of the time better and thereby guide them effectively.
- In this modern world, Faith formation for youth through YOUCAT, DOCAT and Youth Bible is a must. The Church should guide the youth in Christian moral values.
- They should be taught to enhance critical thinking and problem solving in order to especially avoid suicide and other damage to their lives.

Ecumenism

Our common faith in God through Baptism is the foundation for us to overcome divisions among Christians and to promote mutual relations, friendship and collaboration. “The restoration is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.... However, many Christians.... differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 1). Therefore, the need of the hour is to take initiatives to foster better cooperation among Christians through dialogue and common ecumenical services.

- The Church needs to create ecumenical bodies such as Inter-Church Councils and United Christian Groups at Regional and National Level.¹⁴
- The church should make time to dialogue with ecumenical groups to study social and legal issues (such

as environmental issues, human rights and legal issues) becomes necessary so that we can work together for the betterment of the weaker sections of the country.

- The Church needs to organise special programmes for training seminarians, priests, religious and laity in Ecumenism.
- The church should reach out and dialogue with fundamentalist groups and sects.
- The Church should promote Spiritual Ecumenism – common prayers using common ecumenical Bibles and sharing spiritual riches.

Inter-Religious Dialogue

Inter-religious Dialogue has become an urgent priority today. The goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace, and harmony and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love. *Redemptoris Missio* clearly states that “inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelising mission”. “In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue...Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue. Dialogue is a path toward the Kingdom” (*Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 56, 57).

- Church as being called to a voice for the voiceless could also collaborate with the people of other faiths who are committed to the same ideals of a free, fraternal, secular non-exploitative society. The church, using the Catholic Guilds and Associations, can positively promote dialogue with businessman, politicians and journalists.¹⁵

- The Church needs to introduce Formation Programmes on inter-religious dialogue in our institutions, seminaries and formation houses. Catechism classes in schools and Parishes can incorporate Inter-Religious Dialogue as a subject matter.
- A collaborative organization comprising various religions and communities can be established as a means to work for peaceful existence of pluralistic religions.

Casteism and Gender Equality

The other area of concern is *casteism*. Sadly, though Christianity does not accept caste in principle, in practice it is rampant not only with the lay faithful but also with the ecclesiastical authorities. The Church in India should also strive for *gender equality*. Sadly, the Church within itself is fighting for the same. The recent sex scandals reveal the prevalence of gender difference in the Catholic Church. No doubt, the Church is both human and divine but that can't be taken as an excuse to such scandals. CBCI and CCBI should initiate necessary steps to prevent such happenings in future.

The recent petition made to the Government to do away with the sacrament of Reconciliation is against religious freedom in the Constitution. It is an indicator that the Church needs to be more careful. If the Church itself is busy fighting for her own cause, how can she remain faithful to her patriotic spirit?

Constitutional and Judicial Bodies

The law of the Constitution is being manipulated by the present Government which became vividly evident post the Press conference of three supreme Judges.¹⁶ When such

things occur, the Church should be the first one to step out in the streets to condemn and work towards it.

The Education Apostolate

The focus of the education ministry should be to inculcate in the students the values of an inclusive, pluralistic and harmonious India as envisaged in the Constitution for millions of children and young people who are brainwashed with an ideology of hatred and exclusion. If the Church does not act seriously, there is a grave danger in future for its own existence. With the current trends, Darwinian Theory may be replaced with an article of a particular faith. And the Ancient innovations might be attributed to Indians without any credible proof. In short, the dark age of India has dawned.

- Thus, education institutions need to rise above the maintenance mode to impart holistic education with a heart for the poor and the marginalised. The CBCI Education Policy clearly stated: “The Catholic educational institutions are to provide inclusive and holistic education for the marginalized and girls enabling them to live life to the full and responsibly, thus transforming the individual and society”
- The Church should have recourse to the legal action when Constitutional provisions are violated and the appointment\ approval of staff, issue of minority certificate, grant in aid, scholarships and other support systems are denied.
- It should promote Faith Formation of Christian students and value education. She needs to reach out to those living in “social and geographical periphery” and providing quality of education in the slums and rural areas especially to the back ward girl children.¹⁷

- She needs to positively promote higher education institutions, keeping in mind the goal to form persons of character and conviction who, in the future, will be capable of delivering quality leadership and administrative service upholding the constitutional values and socialistic, secular and democratic character of our country (*National Education Coordinators' Meet, 18 December 2015*).
- The main task of the Church is to maintain a great networking with local, district and state leaders and administrators and befriending people of the neighbourhood and all people of good will to ensure administrative autonomy proper to the Minority institutions.
- The church institutions really need to ensure administrative transparency, financial accountability to promote the kingdom values.

Threat to Freedom of Speech in Media

Another issue is that the space for freedom of speech in *media* is shrinking. M. M Kalburgi, Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Parsekar, Gauri Lankesh have fallen to the bullets of right-wing Hindutva outfits. Since 1992, 47 journalists have been killed. Loyalties of many of the print and electronic media have been purchased.¹⁸ Can the Church in India do something about it?

Care of the Earth, Our Common Home

The ruthless exploitation of the earth's resources has adverse effects on humanity. Pope Francis affirmed: "As stewards of God's creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that calling" (*Speech, Manila, Philippines, January 18, 2015*). In this

regard, we must go to the heart of the ecological degradation and advocate an education in ecological responsibility because “we are really responsible for all.”

- Every Diocese and Parish have to draw up an Environment (Green) Policy and organise programmes for protecting the environment and fostering love for nature. Christian institutions should facilitate Environmental Education at different levels and nurture students to plant trees and care for them. I would like to appreciate the initiative of Bombay Arch-diocese with its Green Diocese Initiative to take care of our Common Home.
- She needs to encourage the use of solar energy, rain water harvesting, and use of bio-gas plants for cooking. She should encourage organic farming and say no to plastic and pesticides as well as opt for recycling process.

Renewal of the Shepherds

Bishops and priests, while being administrators, should be first and foremost, shepherds of the flock, available and service minded. Their lifestyle should be an example of simplicity and spirituality that can be an inspiration to everyone and should reflect the life style of the Good Shepherd.

- They should rediscover the fundamentals of our Christian beginning and thereby give importance to the Word of God and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42).
- They have to shun excessive institutionalization, clericalism and extravaganza. The apostolates such as healthcare, social development and education are to be employed in the process of evangelization.

- The church should think about refashioning the formation of priests and religious which will enable them to respond to the challenges of our times with faith and courage. The recent sex scandal witnessed many priests representing the Church in media who, I believe personally could not reflect the genuine voice of the Church.
- There should be uncompromised transparency and accountability at all levels of Church's administration.

Conclusion

All the above stated challenges in the Indian Church are beckoning everyone to look forward to a new way of life in the Church. Both Mother Teresa and Pope Francis are exemplary models for living with such a vision and mission. Heeding to the call of God, Mother Teresa took up on a new way of life – for the poorest of the poor and made a radical decision for living her religious\ consecrated life in a thoroughly new way. So also, the life style of Pope Francis challenges us to be authentic in our Christian Vocation by freeing ourselves of traditional structures, institutionalism by shedding comforts, privileges of office and status, embodying the gracious mercifulness and love of Christ and bringing the joy of the Gospel to one and all.

“All of us are asked to obey his call (Lord's) to go forth from our own comfort zones in order to reach all the “peripheries” in the light of the Gospel” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 20). We are also challenged and inspired by the exemplary lives of Indian saints, namely, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Francis Xavier, St. Gonsalo Garcia, St. Alphonsa, St. Kuriakose, St. Euphrasia, St. Joseph Vaz, St. Mother Teresa and many others.

Notes

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