

# IJ MATTERS



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## SHRINE HAPPENINGS IN OCTOBER 2025

October begins with the feast of St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897). She was a Discalced Carmelite nun and known as the “Little Flower”, the Little Flower of Jesus, St Therese of the Child Jesus or the Holy Face. She lived for a mere 24 years on this earth and has left such a lasting legacy, that she is regarded as a Doctor of the Church. Even through her short life, she teaches us many lessons for a fulfilled life. The first is that it is not the number of years that each of us lives that matters, but **HOW** we live each moment of the time given to us. Her relationship with God is summarised in this sentence, “I cannot fear a God who became so small for me. He is only love and mercy”. For her, God was not someone to be feared but loved, because God first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). This love of God was a tangible love which manifested itself in her “Little way”. This “way” was to do every act with love. It created her heaven here on earth, which enabled her to say “I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth”. Many of us imagine that heaven is accessible only after death. Therese was able to bring heaven down to earth. This did not mean that her life was a bed of roses. As a matter of fact, she had many health challenges and finally died after contracting tuberculosis. Yet, even as she faced these challenges, she could feel and experience God’s mercy and love.

On the day following the memorial of St. Therese is the memorial of the Guardian Angels. These messengers of God are a reminder that God reveals himself not as a God who created the world and left it to its own design. Rather, our God is a God who intervenes when necessary through his angels who are messengers of Hope. The prayer to the Guardian Angeles is a simple, yet profound prayer. This is how the prayer goes:

“Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God’s love directs **YOU** here. Ever this **day/noon/eve/night** be at my side, to guard and light, to **LOVE** and guide. Amen”.

The bold font indicates the changes in the original prayer. The prayer begins by calling the angel of God. The word Angel from the Greek “Angellos” means “Messenger”. Thus, the angel is a messenger of God. The understanding in tradition is that God has assigned each of us an angel. This angel is known as our “Guardian” angel. This shows the love, care and concern of God for each one of us, because every one of us is special and unique in the eyes of God. It is this love of God which directs the angel to me (The original reads “directs me here”. However, the prayer is addressed to my guardian angel, and thus, God’s love directs the angel to my side). The prayer may be said many times during the day. The times of the day represented by day/noon/eve/night are indicative of this. The prayer asks that I become aware of my guardian angel who guards me from all harm and lights my way. This means that my angel fills me with wisdom, discernment and right judgement to enable me to make the right choices/decisions. Because “rule” could communicate domination, I have substituted it with love. Finally, my guardian angel guides my words and actions all through the day. When I speak and when I act, my angel guides me to speak and act with words and actions that build up and enhance.

On October 4 each year, we celebrate the feast and life of an extraordinary Saint in Francis of Assisi. At a time when we are struggling to cope with how to respond to environmental challenges, the feast of St. Francis Of Assisi (1181/1182 - 1226) comes as (literally) a breath of fresh air. St. Francis realised that the easiest way to see, feel and touch God was through all of God's creation. For him, the sun was a brother and the moon a sister. Animals and plants were friends who had to be nurtured and not feared. In his response to creation, Francis went back to the origin as narrated in Genesis and God's command to the human race to live in harmony with the rest of creation (Gen 1:28-30).

We get so caught up today with wanting to have more that we might lose sight of the meaning of life itself. The desire to acquire more and more and be regarded as successful based on what we possess sometimes leads to missing out on so much that life has to offer. This then is the challenge that the feast of this extraordinary Saint offers us, namely that we learn to love and live with our environment. Today more than ever we need to go back to our origins and the response of St. Francis to creation if we are to save our world. It is indeed fitting that St. Francis is the patron of animals and environment. To listen to my Homily on St. Francis of Assisi click on the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=namWRXcBGo8>

The feast of our Lady of the Rosary, is celebrated on October 7 each year. It was formerly known as the Feast of Our Lady of Victory. Legend has it that Our Lady appeared to St. Dominic in 1208, and gave him the Rosary to be used as a tool against all kinds of challenges. Our Lady of the Rosary, also known as Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, is a title of the Blessed Virgin Mary in relation to the Rosary. The development of the Rosary as a form of prayer owes much to the followers of St. Dominic. On October 13, 1917, Our Lady of Fatima told the children, "I am the Lady of the Rosary".

When we think of or reflect on Mary, the phrase that comes to mind to describe her whole life is the one she used in her response to angel Gabriel, namely: Let it be done to me according to your word". This communicates a "passive activity" or an active passivity". Mary will not assume or presume that it is she who would do. Rather she will cede the initiative to God. She will let God do in her. This was Mary's constant response to every situation in her life, especially when she could not understand why things were happening the way they were. Our Lady of the Rosary invites us to this same response.

To listen to my Homily on Our Lady of the Rosary, click on the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0eaRxF8CAc>

The International day for Eradication of Poverty is celebrated every year on October 17, 2025 (see below the article of Fr. Wesley). In this context, the first encyclical of Pope Leo XIV titled "Dilexit Te" (I have loved you) {I have prepared a summary of the encyclical} exhorts those of us who profess to be disciples of Jesus, to show our concern for the poor in action.

On October 18, we celebrate the feast of the Evangelist St. Luke. His Gospel is the longest of all the four Gospels. It is known as the Gospel of Prayer {Luke shows Jesus praying more times than the other Evangelists; the Gospel of Women {Luke specifically mentions

that Jesus had women disciples; the Gospel of the Poor {In Luke's Sermon on the Plain it is the poor (not the poor in spirit) who are Blessed, the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus and of the rich fool are found only in the Gospel of Luke. {See my article on St Luke below}. To hear my article on the Feast of St. Luke click on the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QtOcN5euuM>

The support staff of our School went on a one-day pilgrimage/outing to Mumbai. They visited The Mount Mary's Basilica and St. Xavier's College. After a visit to the Gateway of India, they returned spiritually and physically nourished.





Fr. Augustine continues to excel at Table-tennis. He took part in a District level tournament (Sunday, October 12, 2025) and won the title in both the categories in which he participated. While we congratulate him, we also acknowledge that he engages in Inter-

religious dialogue in action. This is because most of those who participate are from other faiths.



We thank each of you profusely for your generosity to the Infant Jesus. Rest assured of our constant prayers for you all. May the Infant Jesus bless you abundantly and may Joseph and Mary keep interceding.

Fr. Errol Fernandes SJ

October 2025

## **POVERTY IS NOT MERELY A LACK OF INCOME, BUT A DENIAL OF DIGNITY AND OPPORTUNITY**

“Slaps, Punches and Pushes: iPhone 17 Frenzy Turns Violent at Mumbai Apple Store,” read a recent newspaper headline. At the Bandra Kurla Complex, people queued through the night, some even fighting, to purchase the newly launched iPhone 17, priced at nearly ₹83,000 and exceeding a lakh for premium models. Meanwhile, hundreds of kilometers away in rural Bihar, farmers stood in scorching heat for hours, waiting for a 50-kg bag of urea worth barely ₹268—not for luxury, but for survival. These two queues, so different yet so revealing, expose the deep fault line running through our nation: the widening divide between the India that consumes and the India that struggles to subsist. As we observe the World Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we are invited to look beyond the glitter of consumerism and to rediscover the Gospel’s call to justice, compassion, and solidarity with the poor—those who still stand waiting for life’s most basic needs.

The World Day for the Eradication of Poverty, observed every year on 17 October, reminds the global community of its moral and social duty to end poverty in all its forms. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty originated in 1987 when a massive gathering in Paris proclaimed poverty as a violation of human rights. Each year, the observance highlights that poverty is not merely a lack of income, but a denial of dignity and opportunity. The 2025 theme — “Ending social and institutional maltreatment by ensuring respect and effective support for families” — calls on societies to listen to the poor and build systems rooted in justice and compassion. Approximately 56% of Indians are unable to afford a decent standard of living, lacking access to essential services such as food, housing, healthcare, and education (McKinsey Global Institute, 2022). I personally remember gazing through the window of the top floor of Xavier Institute of Engineering, Mahim, and witnessing this stark contrast in Mumbai City firsthand: sprawling slums on one side, towering skyscrapers on the other. Traveling by train only amplifies this disparity—people packed tightly in local and outstation trains, while luxury trains often run nearly empty. On the streets, children beg, transgenders struggle to earn a living, and countless others are deprived of basic human facilities, while luxury vehicles—BMWs, Mercedes, and more—glide past. Yet the biggest shock of wealth disparity was perhaps witnessed during the Ambani wedding, celebrated with extravagance that reportedly cost over ₹5,000 crore, highlighting the extreme gap and deprivation in the same society. The juxtaposition is impossible to ignore: while some, live in unimaginable luxury, millions still lack the most basic means to lead a dignified life.



The Scriptures speak repeatedly of God’s concern for the poor and marginalized. In the Gospel of Matthew (19:24), Jesus warns, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God,” reminding us of the moral peril of attachment to wealth. In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus proclaims His mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to set the oppressed free.” The prophet Amos (2:6–7) strongly condemns those who exploit the poor, saying, “They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.” Jesus’ teachings, along with the prophetic voice of Amos, consistently denounce the exploitation of the vulnerable and the hoarding of wealth at the expense of others. The parables—such as the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31)—highlight the consequences of ignoring the suffering around us. Together, these passages call us to justice, compassion, and solidarity, using wealth and resources to serve others, uplift the deprived, and challenge systems of oppression.

The Catholic Church has consistently upheld the dignity of the poor and marginalized, emphasizing that true Christian faith cannot be separated from the plight of the impoverished. Pope Francis, in his message for the Eighth World Day of the Poor in 2024, reminded us that “the prayer of the poor rises up to God”; and called for a faith that inspires action, urging Christians to practice justice and solidarity. In his recent apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi Te* (“I Have Loved You”), Pope Leo XIV echoed the enduring concern of the Church for the poor and placed them once again at the heart of Christian discipleship. He warned against the dangers of ultraliberal capitalism, which often dehumanizes the worker, commodifies creation, and turns society into a marketplace where only the strong survive. It treats human beings as commodities and places profit above people — contradicting the Gospel message and the Church’s vision of the common good. At the same time, he cautioned against a privatized and passive spirituality—a faith that seeks personal comfort in prayer while remaining blind to the cries of the suffering. He criticized both ultraliberal capitalism and a privatized, passive spirituality, calling for a Church that actively engages in social justice and defends the most vulnerable in society.



Finally, as we observe the World Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we are invited to introspect and ask ourselves why such a vast divide still exists between the rich and the poor. How is it that in the same nation, some live, in unimaginable luxury while others struggle daily for food, shelter, and dignity? Every person is entitled to a life of dignity, and every human being deserves access to the basic necessities of life — food, clothing, shelter, education, and healthcare — without discrimination or delay.

During my time as a regent at a school in Uplat, Talasari, I taught in a Marathi-medium setting and encountered many students whose brilliance and curiosity shone through despite their limited resources. I often thought that if these children had been given the same opportunities available in elite schools, they would have excelled beyond measure. This experience reaffirmed for me that the eradication of poverty is not merely about charity, but about empowerment — creating pathways through education, livelihood, and entrepreneurship that enable individuals and communities to build a better and more dignified life.

To bridge this growing gap, each of us must play a role — not only by sharing our wealth but by sharing our time, knowledge, and opportunities. In doing so, we participate in God's own mission of justice and compassion, helping to build a world where every person can live not just with survival, but with hope, dignity, and purpose.

Fr Wesley D'Costa SJ

## GUARDIAN ANGELS

There are players for the market  
That loudly advertise  
But Guardian Angels are a kind  
Who don't seem worldly wise

They never star in public  
Competing hard for power  
Could they be just absconding  
From tensions of the hour

But wrestling with dread moments  
In doubt if we'll survive  
Some presence stalls our weariness  
And stirs us to revive



That stirring may be Angels  
Assigned to guard our race  
To see us through the testing times  
Beholding Heaven's Face

The need for Guardian Angels  
Is obvious in our age  
With life so much in peril  
The good must also rage

## St. Francis of Assisi and Ecology

Its repeated unto boredom  
we must save our planet earth  
Many remedies are touted  
Of advice we have no dearth

But if we step the way of Francis  
We first need to shed this cloak  
Wealth and power - luxured living  
Harmonize with poorer folk



Then Creations endless wonders  
Rise more splendid in our sight  
Warming sunlight, winds and forests  
Bright stars twinkling in the night

We with less will find contentment  
Strive that all may have their share  
Save Creation from our wasting  
Francis teaches us to dare

## THE ROSARY

To the Rosary we owe the simplest of prayer  
With power to comfort with power to dare  
And win for the world new healing and grace  
That protects and upbuilds the whole human race

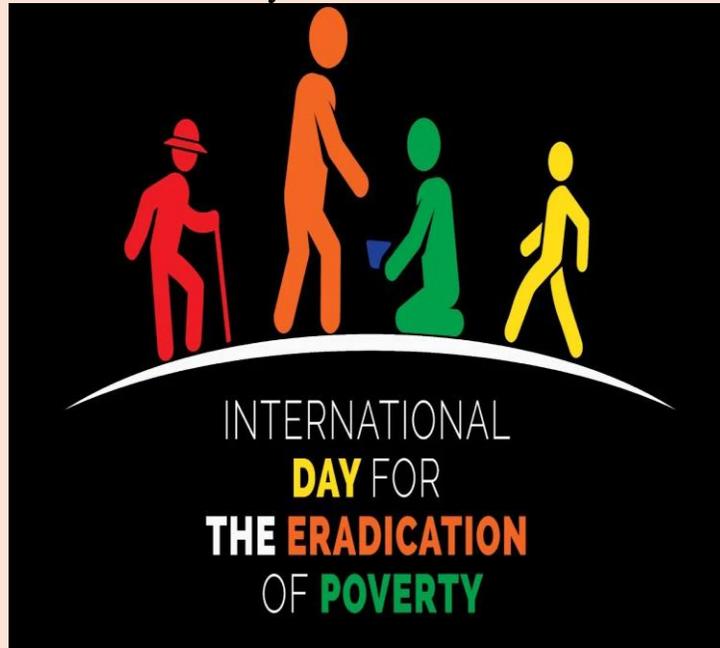


Through Jesus' Life, his Death and his Rising  
The Rosary can make us far more enterprising  
To look for the needs of both persons and nations  
Mary accompanying in all situations

# INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

We celebrate this precious dream  
That poverty must end  
But such events repeat each year  
And the poor still left to fend

As long as wealth and might infect  
We only bloat with greed  
We cannot free ourselves to search  
For ways that serve all need



But when we sense, and when we feel  
With hearts so moved to care  
We will discover truer creeds  
That spur us on to share

And reining in our spurious wants  
So, everyone will gain  
The scourge of poverty will cease  
And peace on earth will reign

## THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Gospel of Luke is generally regarded as the third of the four canonical Gospels. Almost all scholars agree that the author of Luke is also the author of the Acts of the Apostles.

The Gospel is known by many names. Some see it along with Acts as narrating the history of salvation, which is divided into three parts. This first is the time before Jesus where everything is old. This is possibly why Luke has changed Mark 8,28 which has “one of the prophets” as one of the answers of the people regarding Jesus’ identity to “one of the old prophets” (9,19). The second is the time of Jesus who inaugurates the kingdom (4,16-30) and the third is the time of the Church (The Acts of the Apostles), which continues the work of Jesus.

Others see it as a Gospel of Prayer because when compared with Matthew and Mark, the Lucan Jesus prays oftener. There are seven accounts of Jesus praying that are exclusive to Luke. (3,21; 5,16; 6,12; 9,18; 9,29; 11,1; 22,32).

Still others see it as a Gospel of Women since Luke gives special importance to women in his Gospel. In Luke’s Infancy narrative, Mary rather than Joseph is an important figure. Only in Luke do we find the miracles of the raising of the widow’s son (7,11-15) and the healing of the woman with a spirit of infirmity (13,10-17). Luke alone tells us that Jesus had women disciples who provided for him out of their means (8,1-3).

Some also see Luke as the Gospel of Great Mercy or Pardon. This is because the Parables of the Good Samaritan (10,30-35) and the Prodigal Son (15,11-32) are found only in Luke. While hanging on the Cross, it is in Luke’s Gospel alone that Jesus forgives those who crucified him (23,34).



The Gospel of Luke begins with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah followed by the announcement of the birth of Jesus to Mary. Immediately after

this announcement Mary goes to meet Elizabeth who will be the mother of John the Baptist in order to share the good news with her. Luke alone of all the Evangelists narrates an incident in the early life of Jesus after his birth where he is found in the Temple. Jesus begins his public ministry immediately after his Baptism and in the Synagogue at Nazareth where he reads from Isaiah what may term as his own manifesto and plan of action. He chooses disciples to help in his mission, which he continues in Galilee.

A large part of the Gospel (9,51-19,27) has been termed as the Journey to Jerusalem during which Jesus both preaches and heals. After his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, he cleanses the Temple but continues to teach in it even after this incident. During this time, he is questioned about his authority and other matters of the law and most of the questions are with a view to trap Jesus. It is one of the Twelve, Judas who betrays Jesus to the Jewish leaders. He is tried, and condemned to death on a cross where he dies forgiving those responsible for crucifying him.

The last part of the Gospel begins with an episode of the empty tomb in which the women who go to the tomb are asked why they look for the living among the dead. Jesus then appears to two disciples when they are on their way to Emmaus and chides them for their lack of faith. Finally, Jesus appears to the eleven, gives them a commission and then is taken up to heaven. The disciples return to the Temple in Jerusalem with great joy.

Some of the characteristics unique to Luke's Gospel are as under:

1. The Gospel of Luke is the only Gospel, which narrates the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist, and his birth. The birth of Jesus is announced to Mary (not Joseph as in Matthew). Luke alone narrates the ascension of Jesus into heaven.
2. Only Luke narrates the incident of Jesus being found in the temple (2,41-52). This is the only incident from Jesus' childhood that any evangelist narrates.
3. Luke's genealogy of Jesus goes back to Adam the first human being (3,38) unlike Matthew's, which begins with Abraham. Luke alone gives us the age of Jesus when he began his ministry (3,23).
4. In Luke alone, we find the parables of the Good Samaritan, the Publican and the Pharisee who went to the Temple to pray, the rich man and Lazarus, the lost coin, the prodigal son, the unjust steward, the rich fool who would tear down his barns and build greater barns in order that he might store his goods, and the story of Zacchaeus, who climbed a tree in order that he might see Jesus. Each of these parables and stories illustrates what Luke regards as an essential characteristic of Jesus' work.
5. Compared to the other canonical gospels, Luke devotes significantly more attention to women. The Gospel of Luke features more female characters, features a female prophet (2,36), and details the experience of pregnancy (1,41-42). Prominent discussion is given to the lives of [Elizabeth](#) and of [Mary, the mother of Jesus](#) (Ch. 2).
6. Luke portrays Jesus as extremely concerned about the poor and those who were considered social outcasts. Already in the Sermon on the Plain, the Lucan Jesus

pronounces a blessing on “the poor” (6,20) unlike the Matthean Jesus whose blessing is pronounced on the “poor in spirit” (Mt 5,3). Three parables in Chapter 15 (the Lost sheep, the Lost coin and the Lost Son) are told one after another because the Pharisees and scribes complained about Jesus’ table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners.

7. Luke mentions the Holy Spirit more than the other two synoptic gospels, Matthew and Mark. John the Baptist is filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born (1,15); next, John's mother Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41); before long, John's dumbstruck father Zechariah is also filled with the Holy Spirit (1,67). Jesus is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (1,35). The Holy Spirit reveals to the aged Simeon that he will see the Messiah (Christ) before he dies (2,26-27). John the Baptist announces that the powerful one coming after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (3,16). When Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends on Him in bodily form as a dove (3,22), as God the Father confirms from heaven that Jesus is "My Son, whom I love". At this point Jesus is "full of the Holy Spirit" (4,1), and is "led out by the Spirit into the wilderness" (4:1), where the Devil tempted Him for forty days. Having successfully resisted the Devil as a man (4,4.8.12), Jesus returns to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (4,14). Luke uses all these references as a build-up to Jesus reading the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me" (4,18-19). 'The Anointed One' is 'the Messiah' in Hebrew, 'the Christ' in Greek. The total involvement of the Holy anointing Spirit at every step of the way (conception, babyhood, childhood, extended family, baptism, temptation and inauguration to ministry) proves that He, Jesus, is the Anointed One, the Messiah, and the Christ.

**The structure of Luke's Gospel** begins with the Introductory setting (1:1-4), followed by the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (1:3-2:52). Luke then covers John's ministry and the preparation of Jesus' ministry (3:1-4:13). He then gives account of Jesus' Galilean ministry (4:14-9:50), and his journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27). Jesus' time in Jerusalem (19:28-24:53) can be divided up into his ministry (19:28-21:38), the passion (22:1-23:56), and his resurrection and ascension (24:1-53).

## St Luke and his Gospel

When looking for stories of Jesus' time  
We have many legends both lofty and grime  
But believers then settled for writings more sure  
Of the way Jesus lived that his life would allure

So, Luke and his team put this story so clear  
Of Jesus' birth in events that are dear  
Luke wrote of Christ's sermon he preached from the start  
Concerned for the poorest he called for new heart



Luke's Christ shows such care for the sick and the weak  
Respecting all women, a new age to seek  
Luke tells of Christ's death and his rising to life  
And that he'll be with us in calm and in strife

There's much more to read from the book of St. Luke  
To discover Christ Jesus not just by some fluke  
And then you will speak of Christ Jesus yourself  
Not only from Luke or some crusty book-shelf

## **ST. ALPHONSUS RODRIGUEZ (1533-1617)**

Alphonsus Rodriguez was born in Segovia, Spain in 1533. His father died when he was fourteen years old and he left school to help his mother to run the family business. He married at twenty-three and had a son, but his wife died in child birth. Within a few years his mother and son also died. Alphonsus interpreted these incidents as a message from God and prayed about what these events might mean.

He realized that he was being called to join the Society of Jesus and serve God and people through the Society. Though he was initially refused admission because he was not educated, he returned to Latin School and began his studies. He was admitted to the Society of Jesus in 1571 when he was thirty-eight years old. After his first and perpetual vows, he was sent to Montesione College in Majorca, where he served as doorkeeper for forty-five years.

Whenever a visitor rang the bell of the College, Alphonsus would go to admit the visitor with the words, "Yes, Lord I am coming". Legend has it that on one occasion Jesus and his mother Mary did actually appear to him.

His post allowed him to minister to many visitors. And he became spiritual adviser to many students. He exerted wide-reaching influence, most notably in guiding St. Peter Claver into his mission to the slaves.

In his old age, Alphonsus experienced no relief from his trials. The more he mortified himself, the more he seemed to be subject to spiritual dryness, vigorous temptations, and even diabolical assaults. In 1617 his body was ravaged with disease and he died at midnight, October 30.

The Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) summarized the life of Alphonsus in these words:

Yet God (that hews mountain and continent,  
Earth, all, out; who, with trickling increment,  
Veins violets and tall trees makes more and more)  
Could crowd career with conquest while there went  
Those years and years by without event  
That in Majorca Alfonso watched the door.

The Gospel text chosen for the feast is from the Gospel of Luke and is set in the context of a meal. It contains instructions on behaviour to guests who were invited. Meals were important social ceremonies, and very little was left to chance. In his instructions, Jesus advocates what may be termed as practical humility, with words from Proverbs 25:6-7. It

must be noticed that when the host asks the guest to move down from the place of honour, no term of address, respect or affection is used, whereas when the host invites the guest to move up, the guest is addressed as “friend”. The future tense that is used in 14:11 (“will be humbled”, “will be exalted”) points beyond the immediate situation to the reversal of values that is characteristic of the economy of God’s kingdom.

When one realises that God accepts one unconditionally, the result is practical humility. This is what Alphonsus realised already in his life and now in his afterlife. Alphonsus was a man for whom humility was as natural as anything.

“What does it matter, my God, that I should endure for your love these small hardships? For you, Lord, endured so many great hardships for me.”

Errol Fernandes SJ

## St Alphonsus Rodriguez

Alphonsus lived a Jesuit Brother  
Wasn't an exalted priest  
Yet we think of him now yearly  
Celebrating Heaven's Feast



He saw Christ in every person  
Who came knocking on his door  
Welcomed all with true respecting  
No visitor could ask for more

So, Christ is hosting St. Alphonsus  
In the joy of Heaven's Feast  
Never making any difference  
Between the greatest and the least

रोझरी महात्म्य!! वेन्सी डिमेलो.

ऑक्टोबर उजाडला. शारदीय चांदणे फुलले. शेतात नव पीक बहरले. की घराघरात गावागावात. आपण जपमाळेसाठी दररोज एकत्र जमतो. रोझरीचा एक एक मणी सरकवत मोठ्या भक्तीने पवित्र मरियेच्या आनंदी, दुःखी, गौरवी, आणि प्रकाशमय जीवन रहस्यावर चिंतन करतो. आणि तिच्यासारखे जीवन जगता यावे. संघर्षमय जीवनाला सामोरे जाता यावे म्हणून देवाकडे कृपा मागतो.

जपमाळा ही प्रार्थना पद्धत देवाचा सतत नामजप करण्यातून उदयाला आली आहे. सतत देवाचा ध्यास केल्यामुळे कुठला अविचार मनात डोकावत नाही. आणि मन सात्विक, सुंदर, शुध्द, पवित्र, निर्मळ बनते. दिवसभर ताजे तवाने रहाते. तनमनाचे आजार दूर होतात. कुटुंबात शांती, आरोग्य धनसंपदा लाभते.

नामस्मरण, नामजप, जपमाळ  
करणे हा एक दिव्य अनुभव आहे.  
त्याची ज्याला प्रचिती आली तो

मनुष्य देहाच्या कुठल्याही अवस्थेत "देव माझ्या सोबत आहे" हा अनुभव घेत राहतो. कुठल्याही क्षणी, प्रसंगात देवाची इच्छा खरी हा अनुभव घेतो. अशी निष्ठा असल्याने. मन अगदी शांत रहाते. बरे वाईट ह्यातील फरक जाणून पारख करता येते. योग्य निर्णय घेता येतो.

अंतकाळ समोर दिसत असला की बाकी सगळ्यांचा विसर पडून केवळ नामाचे तेवढे स्मरण ताजे रहाते. बंदुकीची गोळी आरपार गेली असताही. "हे राम." हे नामस्मरण बापूजीच्या मुखात होते. ही शक्ती लाभते कोठून? साहजिकच रोझरी, नामस्मरण, नामजप आदि प्रार्थना साधनेतून.

मला स्वताला माझ्या पदयात्रा अनुभवात जपमाळ करीत प्रभूचे नामस्मरण करीत असता माझ्या हृदयाच्या आंतर हृदयाला हा प्रभूचा अनुभव आला आहे. आणि पुढे काय करावे? ह्याचे मार्गदर्शन दिशादर्शन करून माझ्या निर्णय प्रक्रीयेसाठी त्याने तशी पारखही करून देण्यात मदत झाली आहे. आणि तू एकटा नाहीस मी सोबतीला आहे ह्याची अनुभूती आली आहे. अनेक विविध घटनांतून योग्य वेळी देव योग्य ते बोलला ते जपमाळ नि नामस्मरणातून....

एक घटना एक अनुभव असा. पदयात्रेत रस्त्याने चालताना आम्ही दोघे साथी जपमाळ नामस्मरण करीत असू.... पदयात्रेतील एके दिवशी दुपारी जपमाळ करीत आम्ही एका नदीपात्रापाशी पोहचलो. अंगावरचे कपडे धुवावेत. ते सुकत टाकावेत. दरम्यान स्वचैल न्हावे. असा बेत होता. कपडे काठावर काढून ठेवले नि आम्ही नदीत उतरलो. डुंबू लागलो. इतक्यात एक छोटी मुलगी आली आणि आमचे कपडे घेऊन गेली... तेवढेच तर होते कपडे...काय करावे? आम्ही हात जोडून देवाचे नामस्मरण केले. आणि काय आश्चर्य ती मुलगी आमचे कपडे धुवू लागली. धुवून तिने ते नेल्या जागी आणून परत वाळतही घातले.

धास्तावलेला आमचा जीव भांड्यात पडला. संयम राखण्यासाठी नामस्मरणातून दिलेल्या जाणिवेबद्दल आम्ही देवाला धन्यवादही दिले.

स्नान आटोपून आम्ही कपडे केले.

आणि परत वाटेला लागणार तोवर आम्ही त्या मुलीला भेटलो. ती कपडे धूत होती. सुलताना असे तिने तिचे नाव सांगितले. गावातीलच एका घरी ती भाडी कुंडी कपडे धुण्याचे काम करित होती ते कळाले. देण्यासाठी आमच्याकडे काहीच नव्हते. देवावर पूर्ण भरवसा, हवाला ठेऊन आम्ही निघालो होतो. ती म्हणाली... "मला काही नको. भाऊ तुम्ही दमलेभागले दिसले म्हणून मी तुम्हाला कपडे धुवायला मदत केली. एवढेच."

पाणावले नेत्र आमचे

भावनेने ओथंबले...

तिचा पत्ता विचारून निरोप घेत आम्ही पुढे निघालो.

पंधरा एक दिवसांनी आम्ही त्याच वाटेने चालत परतत होतो....

तिने दिलेला पत्ता शोधत आम्ही

दोन दिवस तिचा शोध घेत फिरत होतो. ती सुलताना आम्हास काही भेटली नाही.

कोण असावी? कुठले रूप असावे. पवित्र मरियेची जपमाळ नामस्मरण करित होतो. तिचे तर दर्शन नसेल? आमच्यातील श्रद्धा

बोलली. तार्किक डोके तर्क लढवू लागले. रहस्य कुतुहलाने मन भरले होते...

एक संदेश मात्र पवित्र मरियेच्या

दीर्घकालीन नामस्मरणातून आम्हाला पवित्र मरियेकडून मिळाला तो असा...

"मी स्वतः समोर येऊन तुम्हाला दर्शन कधी देणार नाही. "जा अशा अनाथ मुली शोधा. ज्यांना तुमची गरज आहे. माझे दर्शन त्यांच्यात घ्या. अशांना सांभाळा. आधार द्या. शिक्षण द्या. जीवन घडवा."

ही अशी उदात्त आणि 'निर्गुण' भक्तीची सेवामयी समज माणसास नामस्मरण नामजप व जपमाळा ह्यातून येते.

त्या जपमाळा साधनेचा हा मेचा महिना आहे.

रोझरीला विविध धर्मात वेगवेगळ्या नावाने संबोधले जाते. हिंदूसाठी "नामस्मरण नामजप"

ख्रिस्तींसाठी "जपमाळ किंवा रोझरी"

मुस्लिमांसाठी

"मिसबाह (Misbah)" किंवा "तासबीह (Tasbih)" अशी नावे आहेत..

सात्विक कुमारिका!!  
...मीना बनसोडे.

" पावन पावन नाम प्रभुचे  
केले मजला धन्य किती.  
मन माझे आनंदे भरले  
गाते प्रभुरायाची स्तुती."  
पवित्र शास्त्रातील सर्वात  
सुंदर आणि महान  
मरीयेच्या स्तोत्रात खुद्द  
पवित्र मरियाने देवाचे  
गुणगान गायले आहे.  
त्या स्तोत्राची रचिती  
म्हणजेच "पवित्र मरिया"  
ही आमची आई आहे.

लहानपणापासून निरागस  
सात्विक सुंदर सुगंधी  
बालपण,  
परमेश्वरावरील नितांत श्रद्धा,  
सर्वगुण संपन्न असलेली  
कुमारिका.  
विधात्याने लाडके फूल.  
परमेश्वराला योग्य वाटणारी  
कुमारिका जी देव पुत्राला  
जन्म देऊ शकते.  
म्हणूनच दूताद्वारे संदेश  
देऊन आपल्या पुत्राची  
आई होण्यास देवाने तिला  
निवडले.

दुताकरवी परमेश्वराचा  
हा पवित्र पैगाम ऐकताच  
कुमारिका गोंधळली  
घाबरली बावरली.  
"हे कसे शक्य आहे?"  
देवदूत म्हणाला.

"घाबरू नको, पवित्र आत्मा  
तूजवर छाया करील."  
"मी प्रभूची दासी आहे".  
असे म्हणून तिने  
देव इच्छेचा स्वीकार केला.  
आदर केला.

जीवनाच्या प्रवाहात जगत  
असता हे सर्व अवघड होते.  
पण जोसेफ आणि मारीया  
दोघेही नीतिमान आणि  
धार्मिक वृत्तीचे असल्यामुळे  
हे सर्व शक्य झाले.

नाव नोदणीसाठी निघालेली  
पवित्र मारिया  
आपल्या गर्भावस्थेत  
असतानाचा  
हा लांब दूरवरचा प्रवास  
किती कठीण होता.  
हा नुसता विचार जरी  
मनात आला तरी आपल्या  
अंगावर काटे उभे राहतात.

धन्य ती माता.  
आणि धन्य ते तिच्या  
उदराचे ते फळ येशू.  
" मारीये आमचे माते  
तू सर्व स्त्रियांमध्ये  
धन्य आहेस."  
युगा युगाचे नाते आपले.  
जडले येथल्या मातीशी  
त्या मातीचे मार्दव सांगे  
आज  
येथल्या पात्यांची लवलव.

नवभक्ती द्वारे या  
ओढ लाविती

आस  
ही तुला भेटायची  
असे वाटते होईल  
दर्शन केव्हा  
मन मग दाटून येते.  
होताच दर्शन तुझे  
सुखद लोचनात  
भरते प्रतीमा ती  
सात्विक तुझी  
मन सुखावते  
आनंदे ते भरते.  
आई म्हणुनी हाक  
मारी वाटते  
घेई मज वेंगेत  
कुणी.  
बहरून गेले मी  
तुझ्या त्या सात्विक  
सर्वस्पर्शी स्पर्शात.

बाई व्हायचंय मला!!

"आई मला बाई व्हायचय."

"अरे तू तर बाप्या."

"होय बाई होऊन लढायचं  
आहे."

"अरे बाप्या होऊनही लढता  
येते."

"नको. बाई होऊनच लढून  
दाखवायचंय."

"खरं आहे बाळा, त्यासाठी  
पुरुषच कशाला?"

"होय, आई मला बाई  
व्हायचय.

दोन हात करायला मला  
दोन हात आहेत.

गुंड तुडवायला दोन पाय  
आहेत.

मनगटात ताकद आहे.  
छातीत स्फुरण भरलंय.  
कुस्तीत जिंकते तर मग  
जीवनाच्या आखाड्यात  
का नाही?"

आई मला बाई व्हायचंय"

"राखी ह्या पुढे बांधणार  
नाही.

माझे रक्षण मीच करेन"  
साथ सोबत हवीय

कशाला?

माझेच आकाश माझीच  
धरती.

अशीच एकटी लढत

राहीन

आकाश पेलत

खांद्यावरती."

११ऑक्टोबर आंतरराष्ट्रीय कन्यादिना निमित्ताने माझी साक्ष  
मीना बनसोडे.

एका पारंपरिक खेड्यातील एका निरक्षर कुटुंबात माझा जन्म झाला. खेड्यात शहरात मुलगी जन्मली म्हणजे नाके मुरडली जातात. माझ्या कुटुंबाने मात्र माझ्या जन्मावेळी उत्सव साजरा केला होता. दुर्दैवाने माझ्या जन्मावेळी वडील ऐन तारुण्यात देवाघरी गेले. आईने दुसरे लग्न केले नाही. माझा सांभाळ केला. माझ्यासाठी तिने तिचे पुरे तारुण्य अर्पण केले. तिला मिशनरी सिस्टरांकडे काम लागले. तेथील सिस्टर मला खूप जीव लावत. माझी आई अक्षरशः पुरे आयुष्य सिस्टरांचे व्रतस्त जीवनच जगले. पूर्ण आयुष्य येशू चरणी वाहिले. आम्ही मायलेकी पवित्र वातावरणात जीवन कंठत होतो. तेथील वसतीगृहामध्ये दूरवरून मुली येत. सिस्टर आम्हा साऱ्या बालिकांना मायेनं वागवीत. सर्वांगिण घडवीत. दूरवरच्या मुलींना घरची आठवण येऊ नये म्हणून काळजी घेत.

बारावीच्या परीक्षेनंतर मी श्रीरापूरातील संत लूक हॉस्पिटलात GNM नर्सिंग पूर्ण केले. परदेशी नोकरीची संधी चालून आली होती. पण मी कन्या घडवणाऱ्या व्रतस्त जोगिणींचे जीवन जवळून पाहिले होते. माझे पाचारण कन्या घडविण्याकडे होते.

माझे नाव मी नाशिकमधील एम्प्लॉयमेंट ऑफीसमध्ये नोंदविले. २००१ मध्ये आदिवासी विभागाकडून मला लेखी परीक्षेचा कॉल आला. त्यामध्ये अनेक पदांची भरती होती. आमची लेखी परीक्षा नाशिक येथे झाली. लेखी परीक्षेत मी पास झाले.

नंतर ओरल इंटरव्यूचा कॉल आला. ती आमची इंटरव्यू नाशकातील अंधशाळेत होती. साहेबांनी तेथे आमची मुलाखत घेतली. साहेबांनी आम्हाला दुर्गम डोंगराळ भागातील आश्रम शाळेची परिस्थिती समजून सांगितली. जेथे वीज नाही. पाण्याच्या नळाची योग्य व्यवस्था नाही. पाणी दूरवरून आणावे लागते. पाणी विहिरीतून शेंदावे लागते. अशा अति दुर्गम भागात तुम्ही काम करणार का? अशी विचारणा केली. पुढील परिस्थितीची कुठलीही कल्पना नव्हती. तरीही मी हो म्हटले.

साहेब मला समजावत होते. "तुम्ही खेड्यातील शासनाच्या शाळेत मुलींची काळजी घ्या. त्यांना शिकवा. घडवा. सुधरावा. खेड्यातील हा समाज तेथील कन्या जन्माकडे अपशकून म्हणून पहातो. अंधश्रद्धेने अनेक कलिका जन्मताच कुस्करून टाकल्या जातात. अशा निर्घृण समाजाचे प्रबोधन तुम्हाला करावे लागेल. वैगरे...."

मी आव्हान स्वीकारले. साहेब पुढे म्हणाले, " मी तुमच्यात पहात असलेल्या अध्यात्मामुळे तुम्ही नक्कीच त्यांच्यावर चांगले संस्कार करणार. हा माझा भरवसा आहे. तुमच्यावर पक्का विश्वास आहे."

मी साहेबांना म्हटले मी नर्सिंग केलेले आहे. परिचारिकेची पदवीधर आहे. आणि तुम्ही मला मुलींची अधिक्षिका म्हणून नेमता हे कसे? मला परिचारिका म्हणून काम करायचे आहे. मला जाऊ द्या.

नकार ऐकून साहेबांच्या डोळ्यांच्या कडा पाणावल्या. साहेबांनी माझी समजूत काढली आणि मला बोलले... "तुम्ही एकदा शाळेवर जाऊन या. शाळा बघून घ्या. त्यांनी तेथे सकाळी कोणती बस जाते ते पण सांगितले. मग मी बोलले ठीक आहे. अनुभव घेऊन पहाते.

तो रंगपंचमीचा दिवस होता १०/४ / २००४. या दिवशी मी सकाळी सात वाजता नाशिकहून मेळाबस स्थानकातून बापनविहीर या बसने शाळेकडे जायला निघाले. माझे डोळे अश्रुने डबडबले होते. नाशिक गिरणारे सोडल्यानंतर देवरगाव येथे अजून एक आमची शाळा होती. पुढे भयानक वाघेरा घाट पाहिल्यावर मी मनाशी म्हटले मी कुठे इकडे या भागात चालले? मला काही कळत नव्हतं . हरसुल गाव आल्यावर लोकांचा पोशाख रीतीभाती आणि भाषा बदलली होती. हा अनोखा प्रदेश पाहून मला अजूनच रडायला आलं.

हरसुल सोडल्यानंतर दाट जंगलच जंगल झाडीच झाडी वळणाचा रस्ता मी मनात म्हणायचे मी इकडे कुठे येऊन पडले? अनेक प्रश्न माझ्या समोर होते. रडवेला चेहरा पाहून बिच्चारा कंडक्टर माझी समजूत काढायचा, "मॅडम रडू नका." अखेर शेवटी आमच्या शाळेचा स्टॉप आला. आम्ही उतरलो. माझ्यासोबत माझे मिस्टर व माझे सासरे देखील होते.

सर्वात प्रथम मी तेथील मॅडमना भेटले. तेव्हा दहावीच्या परीक्षा चालू होत्या. इतर मुलं होळीच्या सुट्टीला घरी गेलेली होती . मॅडम बोलल्या शाळेचे मुख्याध्यापक दहावीच्या मुलांसोबत परीक्षा केंद्रावर गेलेले आहेत. पाच वाजेपर्यंत येतील. शाळा लांबलचक चाळी सारखी होती. अनेक खोल्या होत्या. शिक्षक व इतर कर्मचारी तेथे निवासी राहत होते. मुख्याध्यापक आणि दोन-तीन शिक्षक तर माझ्या गावचे नगरचेच होते. त्यामुळे मला थोडासा दिलासा नि आधार आला. सर्व शिक्षक आपल्या कुटुंबासोबत तेथे राहत होते. त्यांनी माझे स्वागत केले. आम्हाला चहा दिला. वाचमनच्या घरी आम्ही जेवण केले. शाळेचा वाचमन नेपाळी होता. थापा त्याचे नाव.

तेथील सरांनी मला सांगितले "मॅडम हजर होऊन घ्या. काही काळजी नाही. आम्ही सहकुटुंब आहोतच. संध्याकाळी ५:३० वाजता सर आले. त्यांनी मला हजर करून घेतले. मी चार-पाच दिवसाची सुट्टी टाकून सामान आणण्यासाठी घरी आले.

परतल्यावर सरांनी आम्हाला राहायला खोली दिली. खोली मोठी लांबलचक होती. बाजूला भोजन हॉलमध्ये मुली राहत होत्या. दोन-तीन दिवसात होळीच्या सुट्टीवरून मुली शाळेत परत आल्या. कीलबिलाट सुरू झाला.

मुलींना पाहून मला खूप आनंद झाला.

माझे बालपण आठवले. माझे नुकतेच लग्न झाले होते. मी सलावार कमीज घालत होती. मुली शाळेत आल्यावर त्यांना समजले शाळेवर नवीन मॅडम आलेल्या आहेत. नववीतून दहावीत गेलेल्या दोन मुली सखू आणि सुमन या दोघी लगेच माझ्याकडे आल्या. मी त्यांची विचारपूस केली. पण त्यांची भाषा मला काही कळत नव्हती. सखू बोलण्यामध्ये पटाईत होती. तशी अभ्यासात पण हुशार होती. हॉस्टेलची

पटसंख्या २०० मुलींची होती. हे पाहून माझे हातपाय गळाले. बापरे एवढ्या दोनशे मुली कशा संभाळणार मी एकटी?

मी सखू आणि सुमनशी दोस्ती केली. एकदम मैत्रिणी प्रमाणे त्यांच्याशी संबंध ठेवले. हळूहळू त्यांची भाषा मला समजायला लागली. अवगत होऊ लागली. त्यांना पण मी काय बोलते ते कळायला लागलं. नववी दहावीच्या मुलींना मी इंग्रजी आणि गणित शिकू लागले. त्यांना पण माझ्याबद्दल एक जिढ्याळा निर्माण झाला. ही माझी दहावीची पहिली बॅच. सखू सुमन ही जोडगोळी मला नेहमी धीर द्यायची. "मॅडम तुम्ही आमच्या भागात नवीन आहात तुम्हाला आमच्या काही चालीरीती माहिती नाही. तुमच्यावर कुणी \*आवरून आलं तर आम्ही तुमच्या पाठीशी आहोत. मॅडम तुम्ही घाबरू नका." मी त्यांना विचारायचे आवरून येणे म्हणजे काय? . पालक मारायला, धमकावायला येतात अशा त्या मला म्हणाल्या. मी विचारायले कशासाठी? मुलींना मारलं तर पालक आवरून येतात. मी त्यांना बोलले मी तुम्हाला भांडणार पण नाही आणि मारणार पण नाही. तुम्ही सर्व माझ्या मैत्रिणी आहात. या वाक्याने त्यांचा पण माझ्याबद्दलचा आत्मविश्वास अधिकच वाढला.

त्या मुलींचा पोशाख पोलके आणि परकर असा होता. तर मी मुलींना बोलले आता पंजाबी ड्रेसची फॅशन आली आहे ना. शाळेत मुली सलवार कमीज घालून येतात. तर तुम्ही हे परकर पोलकं न शिवता दोन-दोन पंजाबी ड्रेस शिवाल का? मुलींना पण ते योग्य वाटलं. "हो मॅडम, आम्ही शिवणार." त्या म्हणाल्या.

जून मध्ये येताना सर्व मुलींनी पंजाबी ड्रेस शिवून आणले. आणि मी त्यांना दिलेला हा सुझाव आवडला. मुली म्हणायच्या... आमच्या आई निरक्षर त्यांना काय एवढी माहिती नाही. तुम्ही आम्हाला जे काही सांगणार ते आम्ही ऐकणार. तुम्ही चांगल्या मॅडम आहात. आमचे हिताचेच करणार. आम्हाला चांगले मार्गदर्शन करा.

दहावीच्या परीक्षेमध्ये सखूचा वर्गात पहिला क्रमांक आला . सखू आणि सुमन दोघीही मला पेढ्याचा बॉक्स घेऊन आल्या. पहिला पेढा आमच्या मॅडमला असे म्हणून त्यांनी पहिला पेढा मला भरवला. मी पण त्यांना आशीर्वाद दिला. आजही त्या माझी आठवण काढतात.

अक्का, पार्वता, शीला या एका गावच्या तीन मुली माझ्या दोन्ही मुलांवर त्यांचे जीवापाड प्रेम. मंगल, अनुसया, रंजना, संगीता, यांनी पण माझ्या पूर्ण कुटुंबाला खूप जीव लावला होता.

मी या सर्व मुलींना बोलायचे तुम्ही सर्व माझ्या बागेतली फुले आहात. सु मने आहात. नेहमीच प्रसन्न, हसरी नाचरी सात्विक, सुंदर, सुगंधी रहा. काही मुली चांगल्या शिकल्या. कोणी शिक्षिका आहेत तर कोणी शिक्षकांच्या बायका आहेत. कोणी फार्मसी करतात. कोणी इंजिनिअर झाल्यात. एक दोघी तर डॉक्टरांच्या बायका आहेत.

संगीता ही डॉक्टरांची बायको आहे. तिचे मिस्टर हरसुलचे प्रसिद्ध डॉक्टर आहेत. एकदा ती मला नाशिकला भेटली. तिने मला मिठीच मारली. मॅडम कशा आहात तुम्ही? तुमच्या आशीर्वादाने माझे

चांगले झाले. या ना माझ्या घरी. आताच चला माझ्याबरोबर. मला आग्रह करत होती. मी बोलले येईल. पण नंतर येणार. दुसरी राजवंती तिचे पण मिस्टर डॉक्टर आहेत मी मुंडेगावला असताना तिची मुलगी आणि मुलगा मुंडे गावात इंग्रजी शाळेत शिकत होते. दोघेही स्वताच्या फोरविलर गाडीतून मुलांना भेटायला येत. असे हे बघून मला खूप आनंद होत असे. ती पण म्हटली मॅडम तुमच्यामुळे आज केवळ मी घडले. तुमचे आशीर्वाद सतत माझ्या पाठीशी होते राजवती ही फार शांत स्वभावाची मुलगी होती. हुशार होती. माझ्या नेहमी घर कामात मला मदत करत असे. तिची ही दोन मुलं पाहून मला पण खूप आनंद वाटला. ती मला बोलली मॅडम आज माझ्याकडे सर्व काही आहे ते केवळ तुमच्यामुळे.

दुसरी मुलगी चंदना ही मला नाशिक मध्ये भेटली. शालीमारच्या सिग्नलला. तिच्यासोबत तिची दोन मुलं आणि मिस्टर हे सांगलीला निघाले होते. तिचे मिस्टर सांगलीला शाळा मास्टर होते. तिला पण मला पाहून आनंद वाटला. मॅडम चला आपण चहा घेऊ. जेवण करू. मी म्हणाले. पुढे कधीतरी. आता तुम्ही प्रवासात आहात. आपण आता रस्त्यात भेटतोय. तिने फोन नंबर दिला. म्हणाली, मॅडम कधी पण या माझ्या घरी.

अशा अनेक मुली बोरीपाड्याच्या आश्रम शाळेत शिकलेल्या, माझ्या ओळखीचं कोणी तेथे गेले का त्यांच्याजवळ माझी आठवण काढतात. माझी खुशाली विचारतात. गावची लोकंही माझी विचारपूस करतात.

एकदा एक पालक रात्री बारा वाजता दारू पिऊन रस्त्यावर ओरडत होता. कोण बॉम्बेच्या नवीन मॅडम आल्यात आमच्या पोरींना शिस्त लावायला कि बिघडायला?" मोठमोठ्याने ओरडून मला शिव्या देत होता. सर्व मुली जाग्या झाल्या. मधुशाळेतील जणू मोहळच उठले. "मॅडम घाबरू नका. आम्ही तुमच्या पाठीशी आहोत. अशी ही सुबक कन्यारत्न घडवताना असे अनेक चांगले आणि वाईट प्रसंग आलेले आहेत.

त्यानंतर 2015 ला माझी बदली मुंडेगाव येथे झाली शासकीय निवासी इंग्रजी माध्यमिक आश्रम शाळा मुंडेगाव या शाळेची मी पहिली इंग्रजी अध्यक्षा होते. माझ्याकडे आमची इंग्रजी माध्यम, पिंपरी सदरोद्दीन एकलव्य आणि मवेशी एकलव्य अशा तीन शाळेच्या मिळून एकूण सहाशे मुलींना सांभाळायची जबाबदारी माझ्यावर होती.

आज या मुली सुद्धा चांगल्या पदावर आहेत. कोणी फार्मसी केली. कोणी इंजीनियरिंग केली. कोणी अजूनही पुढे त्यांचे ग्रॅज्युएशन पूर्ण करतात. कोणी नर्सिंग केली. कोणी लग्न करून त्यांचे पण चांगले संसार थाटले आहेत. या मुलींना मी नाशिकमध्ये भेटले की त्यांना बरं वाटतं. आपुलकीने त्या माझ्याजवळ येतात... ख्यालीखुशाली विचारतात. काही मुली आपल्या नातेवाईकांसोबत पुढील शिक्षणासाठी शहरात राहतात.

शिक्षण घेणाऱ्या मुली भेटल्या तर मी पण त्यांना आपुलकीने चला आपण चहा घेऊ चला आपण नाश्ता करू विचारते. त्यांची चौकशी करते. कुठे राहता. काय करता? त्यांना पण बरे वाटते.

त्या म्हणतात "खरंच आमच्या बनसोडे मॅडम आमची खूप काळजी करतात. 2021 मध्ये माझी बदली शासकीय माध्यमिक निवासी आश्रमशाळा सालभोये सुरगाणा येथे झाली आहे.

इथल्या पण मुलींना मी माझ्याकडून होईल तेवढे संस्कार आणि मार्गदर्शन करते. काही दहावीतून कॉलेजला जाणाऱ्या पोरी मला मार्गात बसमध्ये भेटतात. मी त्यांची चौकशी करते. काही मुली पोलीस भरतीमध्ये गेल्या आहेत. मला अभिमान वाटतो.

त्या भेटल्या तर मला सांगतात "मॅडम तुम्ही आमच्यावर चांगले संस्कार केलेले आहेत . तुम्ही आम्हाला चांगले मार्गदर्शन केलेले आहे. तुमची आठवण तुमची बोध वाक्ये आम्ही हृदयात कायम जपून आहोत.

आता मला ह्या सेवेमध्ये एकवीस वर्षे झाली आहेत. मी आतापर्यंत चांगले आणि वाईट दोन्ही अनुभवातून गेलेली आहे. शेवटी कन्यारत्ने घडविण्यासाठी परिस्थितीशी सामना आणि तडजोड ही करावी लागतेच. सारेच सुरळीत नसते. आपल्याला प्रवाहाबरोबर तर कधी प्रवाहा विरुद्धही चालावे लागते.

कन्या घडवण्याचे सात्विक सुंदर सुगंधी पाचारण देवाने मला दिल्याबद्दल मी देवाला धन्यवाद देते.  
\*समाजाला नकोशी झालेली कन्या आज जग घडवत आहे. मुलगी म्हणून नापसंत केलेली शिला समाजाची आज कोनशिला बनत आहेत.

\

सियोनेचा सिंह गर्जतो!!  
...वेन्सी डिमेलो.

आमोस ह्या संदेष्ट्यांला बायबलमध्ये \*सियोनेचा सिंह म्हणतात. तो त्याच्या अन्याया विरुद्ध छळाविरुद्ध गर्जनाच्या वाणीसाठी. बायबलमधील अनेक संदेष्ट्यांनी रयतेला त्या त्या काळी देवाची सत्वचने सांगितली आहेत. प्रजेला त्यांनी देवभीरू, पापभीरू बनवले. सन्मार्गाकडे वळावे म्हणून प्रसंगी प्राणांची आहुतीही दिली....

मात्र आमोस हा प्रवक्ता अन्यायी न्यायव्यवस्थेविरुद्ध सतत समाजात गर्जत राहिला. लढत राहिला. गरीबांना छळणाऱ्या राजांना जाब विचारत राहिला. गोरगरीबांची बाजू घेत राहिला.

एके ठिकाणी तो म्हणतो.

सियोनात सुखवस्तू असणारे निश्चिंत असणाऱ्यांचा धिक्कार असो. असे सर्वसमर्थ परमेश्वर म्हणतो.  
आमोस ६:१

तुम्ही हस्तीदंती पलंगावर निजता. आणि मंचकावर ताणून देता कळपातील लुसलुशीत कोकरे आणि गोठ्यातील वासरे खाता तुम्ही वीणेच्या सुरावर काहीतरी गात असता. दाविला प्रमाणे अनेक तंतु वाद्ये बनवता. तुम्ही घागरीच्या घागरी द्राक्षरस पिता. उत्तम सुगंधी तेलाने आपणास माखता मालीश करता. \*आता असा ऐषाराम, ख्यालीखुशाली करणाऱ्यांचा गोंगाट नाहीसा होईल. (आमोस ६: ४-७)

आणि हा इस्त्रायली लोकांना दिलेला इशारा वजा शाप बॅबिलाँनच्या हद्दपारी पर्यंत देवाने सातत्याने चालू ठेवला. आणि ऐश्वर्यात माजलेल्या धनिकांची देवाने दाणादाण केली.

अशाच परिस्थितीला अनुरूप संत पौल

तिमथ्याला लिहितो..."हे देवभक्ता, तू अशा अनीती लोकांपासून पळ. आणि नीतीमत्व, सुभक्ती, विश्वास, प्रीती, धीर आणि सौम्यता ह्यांच्या पाठीस लाग. विश्वासाचं ते सुयुद्ध ते कर. त्यासाठीच तुला पाचारण झाले आहे..."

"ज्या येशूने अन्यायी पिलाताच्या समक्ष\*स्वतः विषयी निर्भयपणे सत्याची साक्ष दिली त्यांच्यासमोर मी तुला सांगतो..."

(१ तिमथी ६: ११-१६) \*

संदेष्टा आमोस आणि संत पौल ह्यांची उदाहरणे देऊन ख्रिस्तसभा आज आपणास येशूने सांगितलेली गरीब श्रीमंताचा न्याय करणाऱ्या आब्राहामाची \*गरीब लाजरस आणि श्रीमंत माणूस ही गोष्ट सांगतो....

कारण २८ सप्टेंबर. हा दिवस आज जागतिक विस्थापित गरीबांसाठीचा दिन चर्च साजरा करतो. आणि समाजातील अनीतीने वागणाऱ्या आणि गरिबांना छळणाऱ्या धनिकांना सावध करतो... नीतीने वागण्यासाठी आमंत्रित करतो. आज देशात जगात अमीर गरीब दरी वाढत आहे. धनवान अधिक

बलवान होत आहेत. अन्नाचा तुटवडा निर्माण करून चढ्या भावात\*अन्न विकत आहेत. श्रमणाच्या शेतकऱ्यांना\*योग्य मोबदला देत नाहीत. गरीब अधिक केविलवाणे दारिद्वरेषेखालील जीवन जगत आहेत.

आज हा जागतिक विस्थापित जागृतीचा दिन साजरा करीत असताना आपण ह्या गरीबांना गावातून विस्थापित का व्हावे लागते? त्यांना हद्दपार करतो कोण? कोणामुळे व कोणत्या कारणामुळे हे लोक गरीबीचे जीवन जगतात? हे चर्चने प्रवचनातून आणि चळवळीतून समजून सांगितले पाहिजे. जर पुरोहितांच्या उपदेशाला ते सांगत असलेल्या देवाच्या सुवार्तेला कृतीची जोड नसेल. छळ नि अन्यायाविषयी चीड नसेल. तर नुसते \*प्रभो प्रभोचा तो जयघोष होईल...

गरीब अबलांवर जुलूम होतच राहतील. गरीबांना दानधर्म करून त्यांचा आवाज दाबण्यापेक्षा समाजाची कुठली व्यवस्था त्यांना गरीब आणि निरक्षर बनवते ह्यांचे सामाजिक विश्लेषण होणे आवश्यक आहे. तरच शुभवर्तमान पूर्ण होईल. हे आमोस सारख्या अनेक संदेष्ट्यांनी बायबलमध्ये आपल्या जहाल नि तीव्र शिकवणूकीतून सांगितले आहे. हाच जहाल विचार पुढे प्रभू येशूने समाजापुढे अंतर्बाह्य परिवर्तनासाठी मांडला आहे.

येशूने गुड समॅरीटन ह्या गोष्टीतून शिष्यांना सामाजिक विश्लेषण करावयास शिकवले. जखमी गरीब वाटसरूला लुटारूंनी मारहाण केल्यावर त्याला नुसते इस्पितळात भरती करू नका. तर त्याला मारतात कोण? लुबाडणारे कण? त्या समाजातील लुटारूंचा बंदोबस्त करा. तरच तुमचा धर्म पूर्ण होईल अन्यथा तो चॅरिटी ओरिएंटेडच राहील.

ख्रिस्ती धर्म हा केवळ स्तुती आराधना उपासना विधी भक्ती प्रार्थनेपुरता मर्यादित नाही. ख्रिस्ती धर्म हा सामाजिक शैक्षणिक वैद्यकीय आर्थिक पर्यावरण आदी मानवी जीवनाच्या प्रत्येक क्षेत्रांचा पुरस्कार करणारा धर्म आहे. जीवनाच्या विविध पैलूंवर भाष्य करणारा हा धर्म आहे. अन्यथा संत पौल म्हणतात तसे "तो वाजणारी आणि झंजणारी थाळी ठरेल."

आजचा आपला आपल्या देशातील २% ख्रिस्ती समाज केवळ भक्ती पुरता आणि पूजाअर्चेत मग्न नाही. तर हा समाज आपल्या देशातील इतर बांधवांसाठी सामाजिक, शैक्षणिक, वैद्यकीय क्षेत्रात सर्वात आघाडीवर आहे. कारण ह्या धर्माला आमोस सारख्या प्रवक्त्यांच्या विचारांचे विवेकी अधिष्ठान आहे.

आजच्या गरीब व विस्थापितांना ऊसतोड विट भट्टी आदि रोजगारासाठी वणवण फिरावे लागणार नाही. त्यांची कुटुंबे लेकरं बाळ वृद्ध बुजूर्ग एका जागी एकत्र नांदतील. म्हणून स्थानिक ख्रिस्ती नेत्यांनी जागृत रहायला हवे. कारण देवाने ज्यांना चोंच दिली आहे त्यांना पुरेसा चाराही दिला आहे. पण हा चारा आज कोण लुबाडतो आहे. तोंडचा घास कोण पळवतो आहे. हे ख्रिस्ती ह्या नात्याने आपणा प्रत्येक नागरिकाचे ते कर्तृत्व आहे....

**APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION  
DILEXI TE  
OF THE HOLY FATHER LEO XIV  
TO ALL CHRISTIANS  
ON LOVE FOR THE POOR**

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1. “I HAVE LOVED YOU” (Rev 3:9). These words are addressed to the Church in Philadelphia which is the sixth of the seven Churches that are addressed. The powerless will be vindicated
2. The last Encyclical of Pope Francis was “He loved us [Rom 8:37} of October 24, 2024. In Rom 8:31-39, Paul is emphatic that nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God in Jesus. Jesus almost always identified himself with the poor and marginalized. As disciples of Jesus, we need to do likewise
3. We need to recognize Jesus in the poor and suffering

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **A FEW ESSENTIAL WORDS**

- 4 It was pure, unadulterated love of the woman which resulted in her anointing Jesus. It is also likely that she had insight into what was to happen to Jesus. Jesus points this out when he says that she has prepared his body for burial [Mt 26:12]
5. Contact with the poor is fundamental to our finding the Lord today  
*Saint Francis*
6. St. Francis of Assisi is an outstanding example of how to find God in the poor
7. We need to move from self-centeredness to other centeredness.  
*The cry of the poor*
8. Proactiveness is required. If we do not act for the poor, we might be counted as their oppressors
9. Material poverty, social marginalization, moral, spiritual, cultural poverty and those who have no rights, no space or freedom are other kinds of poverty. We need to see the face of Christ on the wounded faces of humanity
10. The United Nations celebrates October 17 as the Day for Eradication of Poverty. This year, theme urges three shifts: (1) *From control to care*: Design services that start with trust. Reduce punitive conditionalities, streamline documentation, and prioritize respectful, person-centred interactions. (2) *From surveillance to support*: Rebalance investments away from monitoring and removal toward family-strengthening services: income support, quality childcare, adequate housing, mental health care, parenting support, and access to justice. (3) *From top-down to co-created solutions*: Involve families living in poverty at every stage—assessment, design, budgeting, delivery, and evaluation—so policies reflect real needs and constraints.
11. Over 690 million people live in extreme income poverty (under Rs. 170 per day), and nearly half the world lives below Rs. 550 per day, leaving many just one shock away from hardship. The parable of the rich man and In Lk 16:19-31 is relevant even today
12. Poverty is spreading so that even in the “So called” wealthy countries of the world, the number of those families who cannot make it to the end of the month is growing. Women are particularly affected when they are excluded, mistreated and are victims of violence. In the condemnation of the religious leaders of his time, Jesus says that there is a dichotomy between their words and actions. “... therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practise what they teach.” [Mt 23:3]  
*Ideological prejudices*

13. We must distinguish between growth and integral human development. While wealth has certainly increased, inequality has increased at a higher rate. The consequence is that those who had a lot, have more now and those who had little have even littler now

14. We need to accept responsibility for the poor. We must avoid generalizations about the reasons for their condition. We must not write them off. We are the keepers of our brothers and sisters [Gen 4:9]

15. Charitable works are one way of responding to the poor and their situations

## **CHAPTER TWO GOD CHOOSES THE POOR**

### *The choice of the poor*

16. Phil 2:5-11, summarizes the initiative and action of God in sending Jesus. It encapsulates the Incarnation, Ministry and the death and resurrection of Jesus. In our “option for the poor” we do not exclude anyone. However, we clearly OPT for the poor

17. All through scripture, God is presented as caring for the poor in a special way

### *Jesus, the poor Messiah*

18. Jesus was not born as a king, rich or privileged. He chose to be born of simple, ordinary people. This was a deliberate choice, which we are called to make

19. Jesus was born poor, lived a life of poverty and died as an outcast. He is truly the Messiah of and for the poor

20. The trade of Jesus, the offerings of his parents at his presentation and his invitation to those who wished to follow him, all speak of his life of poverty

21. Jesus’ inaugural Discourse in the Synagogue at Nazareth summarises that his focus will be the poor. The good news that he brings is primarily for the poor [Lk 4:16-20]

22. Jesus makes it abundantly in many places in scripture, that poverty is not linked to personal sin

23. If we are truly disciples of Jesus, concern for the poor has to be an integral part of our profession of faith.

### *Mercy towards the poor in the Bible*

24. Jesus summarises the whole Decalogue in two commandments, which are actually one. Love of God is manifested in love of the other [Mk 12:31]. John explicates this when he states that if a person cannot love a brother or sister and professes to love God, that person is a liar [1 Jn 4:20]

25. The Old Testament teaches respect and love for the other even if that other is an enemy

26. Love for the other must be tangible. It must be shown in deeds.

27. Our love for the other which shows in action, must come from within

28. We must avoid excuses and do what we HAVE to do for the poor

29. In his letter “to the twelve tribes in dispersion” [which indicates the whole Christian community wherever they are], James is explicit that a faith which does not show itself in action is dead [Jas 2:26]

30. The question that we need to keep asking ourselves daily is “How have I reached out to my brother/sister in need?”

31. We must not dilute God’s message

32. The Acts of the Apostles provides practical examples [Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-6] of caring for the poor and life in common
33. When we give to the poor we help ourselves
34. Christianity is not a theoretical religion, but one which shows faith in loving action towards the poor

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **A CHURCH FOR THE POOR**

35. The Church must not only be a Church of the poor, but must also be SEEN to be a Church of the poor
36. Our faith is genuine when it shows in our actions to help the poor  
*The true riches of the Church*
37. The giving of 1% of our earnings is instructive here. This exhortation states, that the amount we give is not as important as our wanting to give from the heart and because we want to give
38. Can we like Lawrence say that the true treasurers of the Church are the poor and marginalised?  
*The Fathers of the Church and the Poor*
39. From the earliest of times, the Church saw herself and acted as a Church for and with the poor)
40. Faith, worship and social action are linked)  
*Saint John Chrysostom*
41. Our altars cannot contain vessels of gold and silver while Jesus is out on the streets cold, naked and hungry)
42. Charity and true worship go hand in hand)  
*Saint Augustine*
43. Lk 17:10 in which Jesus asks us to regard ourselves as servants makes us realise that we reach out to the poor not as a favour to them, but because they deserve it)
44. The Eucharistic Lord is present in the poor
45. We do not do the good we do because we expect the Lord to give us more in return. Rather we do what we do, BECAUSE the Lord has been gracious to us in so many ways)
46. Alms giving must flow from within
47. Christ lives in the poor
48. Doctrine which does not have mercy as an essential component is empty.  
*Care of the sick*
49. Challenges like Covid-19 and other challenges which keep coming our way, reveal whether we are men and women of action or mere words
50. Peter summarizes the ministry of the Lord, in one sentence when he says “He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. [Acts 10:38]. Can we imitate the Lord in this regard?
51. Many religious congregations of women have reached out tangibly to the poor.
52. Salvation is here and now and must be communicated through our loving actions  
*Care of the poor in monastic life*
53. We are called to be contemplatives in action. This action is concern for the poor

54. Our prayer leads to action which brings us back to prayer

55. Mt 26:40 “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

56. Voluntary poverty is a path to freedom. We become part of those whom we serve.

57. Monastic life also helped to change structures which perpetuate poverty

58. Compassion is not an option, but an integral part of the life of a disciple of Jesus

#### *Freeing prisoners*

59. The liberation of any and all who are oppressed is a sign of the Kingdom of God

60. Our God frees us from concrete oppression

61. When people are enslaved, the Church steps in to remove the shackles and become a paschal sign

62. Freedom is freedom from any kind of slavery

#### *Witnesses of evangelical poverty*

63. A simple and poor life style becomes a witness and a prophetic sign

64. It is in giving that we receive

65. Voluntary poverty is a prophetic sign

66. We live out the Gospel practically when we acknowledge dependence on God and not material things

67. We become small in order to welcome the small. When the Church strips herself of everything, she becomes the light of the world [Mt 5:14-15]

#### *The Church and the education of the poor*

68. We cannot teach without loving

69. When we are Educators, we need to regard each child as a unique gift from God. Teaching furthers the Kingdom of God)

70. As much as we can we need to make education available to all

71. We teach through our lives before teaching with words

72. We do not do a favour to the poor when we educate them. It is our duty

#### *Accompanying migrants*

73. God is present in migrants

74. The world is our place of mission

75. We need to be bridge-builders

#### *At the side of the least among us*

76. We need to reach out to those who lack material goods and a voice on their behalf

77. Prayer which leads to Christ fills us with strength to reach out to the poor

78. We need to respond to precariousness with creativity, obstacles with tenderness and need with unshakeable faith.

79. Serving the poor is not a gesture to be made “from above,” but an encounter between equals, where Christ is revealed and adored.

#### *Popular Movements*

80. Inclusion is the need of the hour

81. We need to focus on the structural causes of poverty

## **CHAPTER FOUR A HISTORY THAT CONTINUES**

*The century of the Church's Social Doctrine*

82. Constant dialogue is the need of the hour

83. The content of the Social teaching of the Church is rich. We need to keep referring to it

84. The mystery of Christ in the Church has always been and today is, in a particular way, the mystery of Christ in the poor.”

85. The poor are representatives of Christ)

86 We need to constantly ask “How much is enough?”

87. Our option must always be for the poor

88. We need to reform structures and create those which work for justice and equality

89. The Church must be moved by the masses of the poor suffering from unemployment, underemployment, unjust wages and sub-standard living conditions.

*Structures of sin that create poverty and extreme inequality*

90. The Church must stand at the side of the poor and work actively for their integral development

91. Charity has the power to change reality

92. Today is the day to act. We must not procrastinate

93. Sometimes sacrifices are demanded of the masses to serve the needs of the powerful

94. Inequality is the root of social ills

95. Are the less gifted not human beings? Do the weak not have the same dignity as ourselves? Are those born with fewer opportunities of lesser value as human beings? Should they limit themselves merely to surviving?

96. We need to be other-centered in everything we do

97. The Kingdom of God which we seek, is a kingdom of fraternity, justice, peace and dignity

98. The concern for the purity of the faith demands giving the answer of effective witness in the service of one's neighbour, the poor and the oppressed in particular, in an integral theological fashion.”

*The poor as subjects*

99. The table of life must be shared by all

100. The poor live out their faith in a unique and tangible manner and teach us how we must live our faith

101 Living with the poor is one of the highest forms of evangelical life

102. Only by relating our complaints to their sufferings and privations can we experience a reproof that can challenge us to simplify our lives.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**A CONSTANT CHALLENGE**

103. As the Body of Christ, the Church experiences the lives of the poor as her very “flesh,” for theirs is a privileged place within the pilgrim people of God.

104. We need to give the poor time and loving actions. We are to stand by them in difficult moments, striving to transform their situations

*The Good Samaritan, once again*

105. Are we like the Priest or Levite or like the Samaritan in our response to the one who fell among robbers?
106. Tangible action rather than condemnation or even platitudes, is the need of the hour
107. We get so caught up in our own small worlds that we become indifferent to what is happening around us
- An inescapable challenge for the Church today*
108. Do not store unused the good things you possess
109. Too much focus on the wealth we have may make us blind and deaf to the sufferings of our brothers and sisters
110. For Christians, the poor are not a sociological category, but the very “flesh” of Christ.
111. The Church is in solidarity with the poor by the very nature of her being
112. Christianity is a communitarian religion. It is a religion of me, my community, my God and our God
113. The Church community must have as its Mission helping the poor to live with dignity
114. Spiritual care of the poor is as important as material care
- Almsgiving today*
115. We must assist those we can to find a good job. When we cannot do that, almsgiving becomes a means of contact.
116. We share our bread with the poor through Almsgiving
117. Almsgiving is other centered
118. The Lord asks for mercy not sacrifice
119. Almsgiving helps us to reach out to others and must be done with diligence and social responsibility
120. Christian love like the love of Jesus is unconditional and sets no limits
121. We are the ones who must reach out to the poor
- Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 4 October, the Memorial of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the year 2025, the first of my Pontificate.*



The Jesuit Team at the  
**Shrine of the Infant Jesus, Nashik,**  
Invites you to the

# **11th RESIDENTIAL LAITY RETREAT**

**DATES:** November 14 (Arrival in the evening) to  
November 16, 2025 - (Departure after lunch)

## **THIS A SILENT RETREAT.**

Participants will be required to maintain silence during  
times of personal prayer and at all meals.

## **TOTAL DONATION:**

Rs. 1,200 per person

Concessions are available for those who need it.

**For more details, kindly contact:**

**FR. ERROL FERNANDES SJ**

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