

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,
Greetings of Peace!

Visit to Rome: A Time of Learning and Reflection

I was in Rome, the heart of our Catholic faith, for the formative course organized for the new bishops from 15 to 22 September 2024. The course enabled me to gain some insights for the episcopal ministry and the connection to the universal Church. The course provided us, the new bishops, plenty of impulses for the mission and role of bishops in today's world. We engaged in discussions on topics such as synodality, evangelization, and pastoral care. The course also highlighted the importance of collaboration with priests, religious, and lay people in building a vibrant, faithful community rooted in the Gospel. On 21st September 2024, we had a special meeting with the Holy Father, Pope Francis. The Pope listened to many of us individually. There were 114 Bishops in the meeting. I conveyed your prayers to the Holy Father. In return, he sends you all his paternal Blessings.

During my stay in Rome, I had the privilege of visiting the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul and the Basilica of Mary Major. This was a deeply moving experience, renewing my resolve to follow their example of unwavering faith and dedication to Christ's mission. I recommended you all in these holy places and prayed for you.

October: A Month Dedicated to the Holy Rosary

The month of October is dedicated to the Holy Rosary, one of the best known of all Catholic devotions. October includes the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary (October 7). The Rosary is not just a personal devotion; it is a spiritual tool that directly touches our priestly life and ministry, aligning us more closely with the mission of Christ.

The Rosary: A School of Holiness

The Rosary invites us to journey through the life of Christ with His Blessed Mother, who knew and loved Him like no other. In meditating on the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous mysteries, we reflect on the pivotal moments in salvation history. Each mystery of the Rosary draws us deeper into the mystery of Christ's life and mission, which we, as priests, are called to live and proclaim. St. John Paul II once said, "*The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A marvellous prayer! Marvelous in its simplicity and in its depth*" (Rosarium Virginis Mariae, 2). It is through this simple yet profound prayer that we come to understand our calling more deeply. We are invited to live out the mysteries we meditate upon: the humility of the Annunciation, the redemptive suffering of Calvary, the triumph of the Resurrection, and the luminous proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

The Rosary: A Model for Priestly Life

In our priestly vocation, we are often called to live the very mysteries of the Rosary in our daily lives:

1. **The Joyful Mysteries** remind us of the joy and simplicity of our ministry. Just as Mary received the Word with humility at the Annunciation (Lk 1:38), we are called to receive the Word of God and bring it to others with joy and obedience. The Visitation

(Luke 1:39-45) challenges us to bring Christ to others, particularly to the marginalized and those in need of our pastoral care. Every moment of our ministry should reflect the joy of encountering Christ, much like the joy Mary experienced in bearing the Son of God.

2. **The Sorrowful Mysteries** compel us to unite our sufferings with Christ's Passion. As priests, we often bear the weight of others' sorrows, brokenness, and pain. The agony in Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-46) reflects the inner struggles we face, but it also reminds us to submit to the Father's will with trust. The carrying of the cross (Lk 23:26-32) speaks directly to the burdens we carry in ministry, reminding us that every sacrifice we make is redemptive when united with Christ's suffering.
3. **The Glorious Mysteries** remind us of the ultimate hope of our priesthood—the resurrection and the promise of eternal life. We are called to be messengers of hope, proclaiming the Good News of the Resurrection (Lk 24:1-12) to all. The Ascension (Acts 1:6-11) encourages us to continue Christ's mission with the same zeal, knowing that He is always with us. The descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4) is a reminder that every act of ministry we undertake must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, guiding and sanctifying our priestly lives.
4. **The Luminous Mysteries** are a call to live out our ministry with clarity and purpose, as we meditate on Christ's public ministry. The institution of the Eucharist (Lk 22:19-20) at the Last Supper is the heart of our priesthood. Each time we celebrate Mass, we participate in the mystery of Christ's self-giving love, and through the Eucharist, we are united with Him in the most profound way. These mysteries call us to proclaim the Kingdom of God and lead our communities towards the light of Christ.

In praying the Rosary, we are not only drawing closer to Christ, but we are also learning from Mary, the mother of the Good Shepherd, how to care for our flock with tenderness and compassion.

Diocesan Pilgrimage: A Time of Grace and Spiritual Renewal

I am very glad that we, as a Diocese make our annual diocesan pilgrimage to the historic **St. John de Britto Shrine Minor Basilica, Oriyur** in this year after a long gap. The pilgrimage is scheduled for **Sunday, 6th October 2024**, as it is our tradition to make the pilgrimage on the first Sunday of October every year. This is our second visit to Oriyur this year. Our pilgrimage this year is especially graced with the opportunity to receive **Plenary Indulgence**, a precious gift of mercy and grace from the Church.

I encourage each of you to approach this pilgrimage with a spirit of deep devotion and faith, allowing it to be a moment of personal and communal transformation. Let us carry with us the many intentions of our diocese, our parishes, and our communities, offering them at the feet of St. John de Britto, who so courageously bore witness to the Gospel in our land.

As priests and religious, you play a pivotal role in shepherding and guiding our Faithful. I earnestly request all clergy and religious to **organize and encourage** the participation of the Faithful in big numbers in this pilgrimage. Please make every effort to lead your parishioners and communities to take part in this grace-filled journey. This pilgrimage is not just a diocesan event, but a moment for all of us to come together in faith, prayer, and solidarity. Let us encourage our faithful to join this pilgrimage in large numbers, making it a profound expression of our diocesan unity and faith.

The Retreat: A Sacred Obligation and Opportunity for Renewal

As we approach the sacred time of our **Annual Clergy Retreat**, I remind each of you of the profound importance this retreat holds in our life and ministry. This year's retreat will be held from **Sunday evening, 13th October, to Friday, 18th October 2024**, at **Pillar, Nagamalai Pudukottai**, and will be led by the **renowned preacher, Fr. Stephen Thachil CMI**, from Sogathur. Fr. Stephen, known for his charismatic preaching and deep spirituality. He will guide us through these days in reflection, prayer, and renewal. The annual retreat is not just a time set aside for rest, but it is an essential part of our spiritual and priestly journey. It is a time to withdraw from the busyness of daily pastoral duties and spend intentional time with the Lord, listening to His voice and allowing the Holy Spirit to renew our hearts and minds.

I cannot emphasize enough the **serious obligation** we have as priests to attend this retreat. Canon Law reminds us of our duty to make a retreat annually (Can. 276 §2, 4°), and as your bishop, I expect **full attendance** from all priests. This retreat is an opportunity for each one of us to seek personal spiritual renewal, reorient our focus on our vocation, and return to our parishes with fresh energy and commitment to our pastoral ministry. I urge you to make the most of this time, and I ask that you **prioritize this retreat**, setting aside any other commitments that may hinder your participation. The fruits of these days will deeply impact our life and mission as priests.

To accompany us during this retreat, I have asked the **Carmelite Sisters** and our lay evangelizers to make **non-stop intercessory prayers** for the full duration of these six days. Their prayers will serve as a powerful support for each of us, calling down the graces we need to be transformed during this sacred time.

Let us approach this retreat with open hearts, seeking to deepen our relationship with Christ, so that we may continue to serve Him with greater zeal and love.

+ Lourdu Anandam
Bishop of Sivagangai.