

Enthronement as the Catholicos of the East Address

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, One True God, now and always forever and ever. Amen.

Dearly beloved in our Lord, may the mercies of God and heavenly blessings descend upon the most esteemed brother Metropolitan, the clergy, the deacons, and our dear spiritual children.

We pay our respect and homage before the blessed memory of our predecessor, the newly reposed, our father in Christ, His Holiness Moran Mor Baselios Marthoma Paulose II. May His Holiness' memory be eternal!

We greet you with paternal love and we bow our head in humility before the great mercy of the Holy and Glorious Trinity, who chose us, a weak and ordinary man to this glorious office of the Chief Shepherd of the Malankara Orthodox Church. We would like to express our profound gratitude to His Grace Kuriakose Mor Cleemis Metropolitan, and our respected brother Metropolitan who fulfilled their designated responsibilities through prayer and guided the Church during these decisive few months. As the office we assume is a continuation of the apostolic tradition of Saint Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we are cognizant of its significance and honor. As we assume the weighty responsibility of the *diakonia* of the Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan in your midst, we request your prayers. We are constantly encouraged by your positive disposition, your willingness to be of assistance, and your spirit of Christian charity and love. Beloved children, your continuous prayer is our strength.

Dearly Beloved,

First, we would like to bring to your attention the Life of the Church

The opening chapter of the Holy Bible invites us to reimagine human life. The first lessons reveal the meaning and significance of human life. In Genesis 1:26 we read, “*Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’...*” (RSV). This Scripture passage is one of the most fundamental and frequently mentioned aspects of Christian anthropology found in Orthodox theology. We humans are beings created in God’s image and likeness and thus always have a natural connection to our Creator. This basic anthropological insight rooted in the opening chapters of Genesis is central to the second century bishop of Lyons, Saint Irenaeus, who says, “*we, by nature, must grow and mature, ‘ripen,’ into the likeness of God – spirituality is a growth from Image to Likeness.*” Saint Athanasius the Great, who lived in the fourth century, in his most well-known work, *On the Incarnation*, wrote a sentence that illumines Saint Irenaeus’ words even more. Saint Athanasius wrote: “*God became man so that man might become god?*” (*On the Incarnation* 54:3). In the Syriac Tradition, the mystery of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed through the hymn sung on Wednesday,

*“That we might become like Him,
He became a son of man
In our image and likeness...”* (Shehimo – Qolo – Wednesday Sapro)

Through our life in the Church, the mystery of the Incarnation continues. Pursuing a spiritual life means to become more fully human: to live out our lives in love with others. Technology has

advanced into many areas of our lives, making information more accessible, improving communication, and make our lives easier, but with each benefit comes a potential cost. The cost being the devaluing of the worth of human life and the disinterest in the search for meaning. The general sensitivity towards religion has decreased and there is a steady decline in adherence to traditions and rituals, which may be seen as irrelevant and outdated. It is not logic, atheism, scientific research, or secular debates that burden us because they are minor arguments that center around a major misunderstanding of the traditional concept of God. However, we are burdened by religious masquerade – what Russian Orthodox Christian theologian, Paul Evdokimov said, *“proclaiming belief in God, yet not allowing the Gospel to influence any aspect of our personal life”* – hypocritical spiritual life.

It is such hypocritical spiritual life that hinders us from growing to be more Christ like. When the pretense comes to an end, we become “like Christ” through perfection in holiness, the continuous process of acquiring the Holy Spirit by grace through discipline and devotion. Just as Our Lord Jesus Christ taught, *“You are the salt of the earth,” “You are the light of the world,”* and *“city set on a hill,”* the Church is called to become radiant and illuminated by the light of Christ such that we become the light of the world, shining so brightly with good works that all will give glory to God. Father Alexander Schmemmann reminds us, *“Church is the moral conscience of the society.”* This is when the Church becomes the ‘inn’ we read about in the Parable of the Good Samaritan as expounded by Saint John Chrysostom. The Church must become God’s voice, and support the vulnerable, the downtrodden, and meek, the afflicted, the needy, and the marginalized in our society. Thereby the Church becomes a place of refuge and safety. It is through such beautiful witness, that the Church is illumined. We urge our youth to take a lead in social action and stand beside the Church, so that she can set out on a new path.

Therefore Dear Children,

It is our prayer that our homes, our families, our institutions, our parishes, and our individual lives become bedrocks of prayer and mercy.

Second, we would like to bring to your attention the Malankara Church

The Malankara Church trace our founding to the apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Thomas who brought Christianity to India and founded the Church in the first century. We take pride in this inheritance and the apostolic tradition handed down to us till today. As we commemorate all the spiritual fathers who have shepherded and governed the Church from the chiefs of the people, the Archdeacons and the Marthoman Metropolitans, the Malankara Metropolitans, and the Catholicoi of the East, on this day of our Enthronement, we are compelled to remind one and all of certain aspects of church history. During the series of foreign intrusion, the Malankara Church has always held strong to the true faith, set forth an intense desire for freedom, and safeguarded the Church’s glorious history with national pride. We must never forget the valiant fathers and fearless laity who, without praise or reward, served freedom for the Church even unto death. Let us remind ourselves as to why we must never forget such events in the history of our Church. The Holy Scriptures teach us the same.

When all the people of Israel were on the other side of the Jordan – in the Promised Land, each tribe was to send a representative to take a stone from the dry river bed where Israel had crossed over, so the stones could be set up as a memorial. The purpose of this memorial was so that the people of Israel could teach their children about the great things God had done, so that the work of

God would not be forgotten among the generations. Joshua says, “...that this may be a sign among you, when your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial for ever” (Joshua 4:6,7 RSV).

Dear Children, we must never forget the miraculous ways in which God guided our forefathers. Saint Thomas the Apostle, the East and West Syriac Fathers, Archdeacons, the nine Marthomas from First Marthoma to the Ninth Marthoma, Malankara Metropolitans, the saints of the Malankara, Geevarghese Mor Gregorios of Parumala, Yeldho Mor Baselios of Kothamangalam, Geevarghese Mor Dionysius of Vattasseril, and the Holy Catholicoi of the East in the Malankara are the exalted fathers who illumined us in the Orthodox Faith.

We say, “*A society without history is like a man without memory.*” It is when we lose our historical awareness and relevance that society becomes deranged. Such rage is what gives rise to chaos, disorder, and confusion.

Therefore Beloved,

Let us remind you in paternal love, as the Orthodox Church, our call and election is to be Christ’s ongoing presence in the world as the ‘One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church.’ In the struggle to remain faithful amidst the swirling winds of eclectic ideas and doctrine, the Creedal statement offers comfort, hope and clarity.

Third, we would like to bring to your attention the relationship of the Malankara Church to the sister churches.

As the Malankara Orthodox Church with its apostolic heritage and lineage from Saint Thomas, the Apostle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, takes on a paternal role in relation to the Christian Churches in India, it is our deepest desire to continue a cordial and amiable relationship with all our sister churches. We live in a land where the intonation is – “*Truth is One, Paths are Many*” and by realizing this, we can have better understanding, better living, and greater capabilities. Therefore as the native church of the land, the Malankara Church pledge to work for promotion of Christian unity between the Churches in India. However, let us be reminded that working in the ecumenical movement in no way must compromise the integrity of the Apostolic Faith. Unity does not mean any form of syncretism or equality of confessions.

Beloved Brethren,

The Malankara Church is one family. There are no parallel administrative systems or separate divisions within the family. There might be differences in opinion, but they are no reason for hatred, but can be resolved in the most just and righteous manner. In the presence of God we will find a resolution to our differences.

Beloved Children,

Finally, our faithful represent all walks of life – and they offer excellent and selfless contributions to various organizations in the field of science, human services, education, and politics. It is our responsibility to encourage and acknowledge their benevolence. We also have our faithful in the fields of business, state and government services, armed forces, officers, health care, and faithful

involved in various professions. We also recognize the contributions of our faithful in the field of art, literature, and media. We have a duty to diligently attend to the spiritual and earthly progress of the children of the Malankara Church. The children of the Malankara Church living outside India are vital to the overall global growth and visibility of the Church. We greatly value their selfless love and dedication to their Church.

Dear Children,

The mothers of the Malankara Nasrani community are the transmitters and the foundation of the faith tradition of the Holy Church. It is through the tears and fervent prayers of mothers that we are able to bring forth a generation of true believers and socially responsible citizens. A mother's tears: nothing so tender, so convicting, so touching and so powerful. For this very reason – it is impossible for Malankara Nasranis to forget our mothers.

Dear Children,

To the priests who add glory to the Church, to the deacons, to the monks, to the missionaries, to the spiritual workers, and to the beloved children of the Malankara Church who reside in different parts of the world – we appeal to each and every one of you to uphold us in your everyday prayers and that you would pray to the Lord to bless us. That we be a shepherd who unceasingly intercedes and prays for his flock before God's throne of grace. May we remind you in paternal love – dear children, your prayer is our strength.

Beloved,

At this historic moment we express our deepest gratitude to the civil authorities of this great land, especially to the honorable President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, to the honorable Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, to the honorable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, to the respected governor of Kerala, Shri Arif Mohammad Khan, and respected Kerala Chief Minister Shri Pinarayi Vijayan. We are grateful to all the leaders in the political, social, religious, and cultural realms of society. We also express our brotherly love and indebtedness to all the leaders of the sister churches.

Let us conclude our words. Our plea to all of you is to strive for the further cultivation and growth of our Orthodox faith and for the preservation of our precious heritage, to extend the range of our love for our fellow human beings, and earnestly to maintain our God-given unity in the body of Christ, which is the Church.

We have a Prayer...

Our prayer is that we be transformed to be a people filled with a deep love of Christ, that surpasses all knowledge.

We have an Exhortation...

Our exhortation is that we be a people who on our pilgrimage towards Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, we walk steadfast in the path of our forefathers – the path of Saint Thomas.

We have an Expectation...

Our expectation is that we be a people who stand firm in our faith till the very end against our eternal struggle against injustice.

We have a Responsibility...

Our responsibility is that we be a people who have a renewed commitment to creation, respect for the environment and respect for people—especially the poor, the needy, and the marginalized.

We have a Hope...

Our hope is that the Lord God Almighty will guide and equip the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church to face the challenges in the world and make them opportunities to renew the world.

Let us march forward together in this dynamic faith, unlimited love, and unbreakable unity, and chant hymns of praise and adoration to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Whose grace has saved us and blessed us so richly. Blessing and glory and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever.

May the mercies and blessings of God Almighty be showered upon you always. Through the prayers and intercession of the All-Holy and Ever-Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, of Saint Thomas the Patron Saint of India, and of all the saints, may God have mercy on us and save us.