

Homily preached by Mar Cyril Vasil, the Pontifical Delegate for the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, on Tuesday 15 August 2023 at Mount St Thomas, Ernakulam

Dear concelebrating priests, dear brothers and sisters here present, and dear faithful of the archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

I am very happy that I can celebrate the Holy Qurbana today in this church.

Today we are in the midst of multiple celebrations. Together with all the Christian Churches, we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Furthermore, it is a time of immense joy for us as we celebrate the Independence Day of this great nation. We recall with gratitude all those who contributed to achieving this freedom.

We can understand the significance of the Feast of the Assumption by considering the profound disposition and wholehearted obedience of the Blessed Virgin Mary towards God, as she fearlessly declared her commitment without any reservations during the Annunciation. In essence, her Assumption is a result of her complete self-surrender to God. This serves as a clear and deep lesson for us today, highlighting that our unwavering “yes” to God is necessarily oriented to yield fruit in the most elegant manner.

As someone deeply acquainted with the Syro-Malabar Church and the archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, I can affirm that both the Church and the archeparchy have frequently demonstrated their unwavering commitment to God through their mission, adopting a disposition of prayer, patience, perseverance, and generosity on numerous occasions. I assure you that God will abundantly bless you for that.

In my role as the Papal Delegate to the archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, I can see a special connection between this great feast and the mission for which I have been sent here.

The Holy Father has been following for some time the situation in this archeparchy with great concern. More than two years ago, on 9 June 2021, the supreme legislative body of your Church, the Synod of Bishops, which prepared the Raza Qurbana Taksa, obtained for this text, including, of course, all its rubrics, the recognition of the Apostolic See. The letter of recognition explicitly calls for the implementation of the uniform mode of celebration in the entire Syro-Malabar Church: "The celebrant shall face the faithful at the Bema during the Liturgy of the Word, turn towards the Altar - in the same direction that the faithful are facing - for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and once again face the faithful during the concluding rites after Holy Communion."

This decision has been made, approved and is therefore legitimate, and cannot be further subject to endless discussion.

In this context we shall remember that the Holy Father Francis was personally and in detail informed of the various objections and arguments that some people raised towards this decisive solution; he studied also the request for a special dispensation for a local liturgical variant for this archeparchy. Thus, he was fully aware of what was happening here, especially the opposition against the synodal decision and the request to continue in the archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly the way of celebrating the entire liturgy facing the congregation, as it had been introduced in this archeparchy more than 50 years ago.

Despite this, in his letter of 3 July 2021, writing to the entire Syro-Malabar Church, stressing that unity must prevail over conflict, he says: "I ...exhort all the clergy, religious and lay faithful to proceed to a prompt implementation of the uniform mode of celebrating the Holy Qurbana, for the greater good and unity of your Church."

In his subsequent letter of 25 March 2022, specially addressed "to the Priest, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly" renewing his request for prompt implementation he notes with sadness in his fatherly heart: "You have chosen instead to continue to follow your particular liturgical form, albeit after careful reflection, isolating yourselves from the rest of the Syro-Malabar Church. However, it is good that we, as believers in Christ, question our behaviour, how we express dissent, how we accept even difficulties and humiliation, how we take steps backwards. ... I realise that I am asking you to take a difficult and painful step, but I am certain that I will find in you examples of priests and lay faithful who are ready to listen to the voice of the Lord and to trust the Pope's advice and plea. ... Trusting in your fidelity and obedience, and recalling in particular the obligations assumed at priestly ordination, I invoke upon you all the Lord's blessing."

This paternal voice of the Holy Father was not heard, by many priests, and in many cases was even hidden from the laity.

Finally, the Holy Father decided to send to you, dear priests, dear labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, one of his personal delegates, with an explicit mandate "to bring back to obedience those priests and bishops who remain dissident" - as one can read in the decree of my appointment.

The Pope has chosen this personal mission in the hope that the living voice and the mutual looking into each other's eyes will finally achieve a result. So now, dear priests, I stand here before you and I would like to ask each of you a simple question that is part of my special mandate: Answer in your heart! Are you with the Holy Father, do you wish to remain priests and members of the Catholic Church and of your Syro-Malabar Church, or do you wish to give preference to the voice of troublemakers who lead you towards disobedience to the Holy Father, to the legitimate pastors of your Syro-Malabar Church and to the Catholic Church? Do you want to continue celebrating Holy

Qurbana in an illegal manner or are you willing to celebrate it according to the rules laid down by the Church? Do you prefer to listen to your Pope, or do you prefer to listen - in the name of false solidarity, or because you have been intimidated, - to some priests who are leading you towards a de facto separation from the Catholic Church? Do you allow yourselves to be intimidated by small groups of violent protesters who fulfil the plans of some dark forces and come to disturb or even prevent the celebration of Qurbana according to the synodal decision? Are you with the Pope or against him?

Therefore, I ask you again, in the hope that you will not close your ears to this voice of mine: "Do you wish to remain priests of the Catholic Church, of the Church led by the Divine Master Jesus Christ who entrusted to St Peter and his successors the right to untie and bind, to encourage the brethren in the faith, to teach and to govern, do you wish to follow Christ and His vicar on earth the Roman Pontiff, or do you wish to follow other teachers who are leading you away from the path of your priestly promise?"

And to you, lay faithful of the archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, I ask the same question. Are you ready to follow the Holy Father and the Catholic Church; or do you prefer to put your trust in some of your priests who want to cover their personal disobedience to the Holy Father under your name? They basically abuse you by inviting you to protests; they are trying to make you their own supporters with their long-standing teaching, and finally are using you as unwilling and often unwitting hostages in their sacrilegious rebellion.

I am sure that many priests and laity have perhaps made their protests in good faith. Many are led down this path of pride believing that they are only exercising their right to dialogue and discussion, believing that insistence will eventually bear fruit.

Chosen for a difficult mission, honestly, I am telling you: The only fruit of continued protest and rejection will be the great harm to the Church, great scandal before those who observe us, and the spiritual damage that is the fruit of disobedience to God's will. Do you really want to be responsible for the grave sin of such a disobedience?

There can never be God's blessing on disobedience to His will – no matter how much you try to cover it up with pious phrases and even prayers. There will never be God's blessing on illegal protests and rebellion.

Before our Lord, I beseech you on my knees, and personally ask forgiveness for anything on the part of anyone who may have given any reason for any real or supposed justification for this rebellion. Likewise, on my knees I also ask you to no longer participate in this sin against our Lord and the Catholic Church, namely, in refusing to celebrate Holy Qurbana in the only legitimate way, the way approved by the Holy Father.

May the Blessed Mother on the feast of her Assumption into heaven, the woman who obeyed the Lord's call, help you with her example, with her "Fiat" in promptly making the right decision. Amen.

