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CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Jesus Christ and Family

The prophets of the Old Testament were vociferous in speaking about the advent of the Messiah (Zech 9: 9). Prophet Isaiah is one among the prophets who gave a lot of coverage for messianic prophecies (Is 7: 14; 61: 1). That is why practically every day of the advent season; we have the readings from the prophet Isaiah. According to the inspiration received from God, prophets prepared the people to receive the Messiah. They called for a real conversion of heart (Joel 2: 12-13) to experience the Messiah who would restore whatever the 'people of God' had lost – family, kingdom, etc (Is 61: 4ff). Finally the long awaited expectation of the coming of the Messiah has been realized at the birth of Christ (Lk 2: 6-7). In the fullness of time God has fulfilled His promise by sending down His only begotten son to this world (Jn 3: 16). Though God Himself, Jesus Christ humbled Himself and took the human nature (Phil 2: 6-8) and preferred to live in a family. The Son of God, the Word made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14) in the womb of the Virgin Mother, lived and grew up in the family of Nazareth (Mt 2: 23). He was obedient to His parents (Lk 2: 51). He grew in wisdom and the favour of God was upon Him (Lk 2: 40, 52). He voluntarily accepted the profession of His foster father (Mt 13: 55) and showed us the dignity of work. He loved family and promoted the vocation to family life. And participated at the wedding at Cana, where He added importance to the festivities with the first of His "signs" (cf. Jn 2:1-11). In joy, He welcomed His reception in the families of His disciples

(cf. Mk 1:29-31; 2:13-17) and consoled the bereaved family of His friends in Bethany (cf. Lk 10:38- 42; Jn 11:1-44). He visited the families to grant salvation (Lk 19: 9).

Jesus Christ restored the beauty of matrimony, proposing once again the one plan of God which was abandoned because of the hardness of the human heart, even within the tradition of the people of Israel (cf. Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mk 10:1-12; Lk 16:18). Returning to the beginning, Jesus taught the unity and faithfulness of the husband and wife, refuting the practice of repudiation and adultery. Precisely, through the extraordinary beauty of human love — already celebrated in a heightened manner inspired by the Song of Songs, and the bond of marriage called for and defended by the prophets like Hosea (cf. Hosea 1:2, 3.3) and Malachi (cf. Mal 2:13-16) — , Jesus affirmed the original dignity of the married love of man and woman.

Even in the early Christian community the family appeared as the "domestic church" (cf. CCC, 1655): In the so-called "family canons" of the Apostolic letters of the New Testament, the great family of the ancient world is identified as the place of a profound solidarity between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between the wealthy and the poor (cf. Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Tim 2:8-15; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pt 2:13-3:7; cf. also the Letter to Philemon). In particular, the Letter to the Ephesians recognized the nuptial love between man and woman as "the great mystery", making present in the world, the love of

Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:31-32).

Over the centuries, especially in modern times to the present, the Church has not failed to continually teach and develop her doctrine on the family and marriage which had founded her. One of its highest expressions has been proposed by the Second Vatican Council in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, which, in treating certain pressing problems, dedicated an entire chapter to the promotion of the dignity of marriage and the family, as seen in the description of their value for the constitution of society.

However, concerns which were unheard of until a few years ago have arisen today as a result of different situations, from the widespread practice of cohabitation, which does not lead to marriage, and sometimes even excludes the idea of it, to same-sex unions between persons, who are, not infrequently, permitted to adopt children. The many new situations requiring the Church's attention and pastoral care include: mixed or inter-religious marriages; the single-parent family; polygamy; marriages with the consequent problem of a dowry, sometimes understood as the purchase-price of the woman; the caste system; a culture of non-commitment and a presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary; forms of feminism hostile to the Church; migration and the reformulation of the very concept of the family; relativist pluralism in the conception of marriage; the influence of the media on popular culture in its understanding of marriage and family

life; underlying trends of thought in legislative proposals which devalue the idea of permanence and faithfulness in the marriage covenant; an increase in the practice of surrogate motherhood; and new interpretations of what is considered a human right. Within the Church, faith in the sacramentality of marriage shows signs of weakness or total abandonment.

Conscious of the serious problems affecting the Christian families, on October 8, 2013, Pope Francis announced that in October 2014 there would be an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on topics related to the family

and evangelization. Subsequent communications made clear that the Extraordinary General Assembly would be followed by an Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, on the same topics. It will examine the "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization".

In the seventeenth century, the situations of the families were more or less same as of today. Poverty, continuous wars, defective government etc., affected the family life. St. Vincent de Paul being conscious of the situations tried to remedy the situation. He did everything to restore

family life. One of the strategies worth mentioning was that of 'Popular Mission' which aimed at family renewal.

As we are celebrating the great feast of Christmas, while wishing you all my sincere festal wishes, invite all the members of the Vincentian Family to follow the footsteps of Jesus in promoting the dignity of family life; imitate St. Vincent de Paul to work for the family renewal; and above all respond to the call of Pope Francis.

**Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil, CM
National Coordinator, VFI**

NEWS – NATION

National Commission for Systemic Change

A special meeting of the Systemic Change Commission was held on 7th December 2014 at Vincentian Nilayam, Enekapadu, Vijayawada. During the meeting the Time Table for the Workshops to be conducted in Chandapura, Bangalore on 25th, 26th and 27th January 2015 and in Edapally, Ernakulam on 29th, 30th and 31st were finalized. The materials to be presented in the workshops were scrutinized and finalized after the suggestions of the members of the Commission. Fr. Sebastian Anthikat of the Vincentian Nilayam made excellent arrangements for transport, board and lodging of the members. Bro. Joseph Pandian thanked Fr. Sebastian for his hospitality and all the

members joined him in expressing their gratitude to Fr. Sebastian.

Visit of the General Coordinator of Vincentian Family

In the 1990s, based on several experiences in different countries, the major superiors of some branches of the Vincentian Family met and a persistent proposal of Vincentian collaboration emerged from that. In 1991, the then Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Very Rev. Robert P. Maloney, responded to the proposal by calling for the meeting of the major superiors/heads of the various communities of the Vincentian Family. This gathering of the leaders of each branch continued once a year to promote

the ties of unity and launch common actions on an international level. The general coordination of the Vincentian Family rests on the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

Very Rev. Fr. Gregory G. Gay, the present Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity is visiting India from 2 to 28 February 2015. He will be present for the General Body meeting of the VFI which is scheduled to be held from 21 to 22 February 2015. He will be addressing the participants of the General Body on February 21, 2015.

NEWS – VARIOUS BRANCHES

Sisters of Charity of Nazareth

Former President of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Passes away

"Sister Shalini D'Souza (76), former Provincial and President of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth died of cancer on November 6th at Kurji Holy Family Hospital, Patna. The funeral was at 10:30 am Sunday, November 9, in Mokama.

Sister Shalini was a member of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth for 52 years. Her Initial Formation and First Profession were at Nazareth, Kentucky and the Final Commitment was at Mokama. Sister Shalini served in schools in both the United States and India before becoming the Director of Novices and later the Provincial of India. In 1998, She was

elected Vice-President, and in 2003, President of the SCN Congregation at Nazareth, Kentucky.

Sister Shalini was a pioneer champion for the cause of women. She shared her gifts with the Church, other religious Congregations and NGOs. She initiated a ministry to improve the condition of domestic workers and trafficked women at Catherine Spalding Centre, Ranchi. She was instrumental in collaborating with JAAN Foundation to begin 'Premasharay', a mid-way home for trafficked girls, at Nazareth Convent, Ranchi.

House Blessing at Lupungutu, Chaibasa



Nazareth Niwas - a new home for the SCNs at Lupungutu, Chaibasa was inaugurated on November 22, 2014 in the presence of many well-wishers, students, teachers, religious, and priests of the Chaibasa deanery. Rt. Rev. Felix Toppo, SJ, the Bishop of Jamshedpur blessed the house and Sister Basanti Lakra, SCN, Provincial cut the ribbon and Philomena Kottoor, SCN, Vice Provincial broke a coconut in the Indian tradition before entering the house for blessing.

Bishop Felix presided over the Eucharist with eight priests. In his homily, the Bishop said, "Like that of the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles, with one heart and mind the Sisters lived in simplicity. Personally they own nothing but hold everything in common. Many young people were inspired to join religious life seeing the way the Sisters lived, prayed and worked together. From the very beginning, the SCN Sisters were among the people working for the welfare of all. He further said that the Christian faith should be firm like the person who built the house on a rock in the gospel. He prayed that the Sisters who live in the new house be a light to the people." The students, teachers and staff gave their full cooperation in preparing the place for the blessing.

Lupungutu is located in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. The SCN Sisters have been working among the Ho people from 1971. Two of the Sisters teach and administer the school which primarily caters to Ho Tribals. Another one is

engaged in taking care of the hostel for high school and Plus Two girls run by the Jesuit priests and teach in their school. The Sister engaged in social action work is working towards systemic change. She takes up cases of people affected by witch craft, creates awareness to prevent it. She mobilizes women to take up issues that are close to their hearts.

Health Ministry Meeting

Called to be a new way of being and ministering, SCNs in health ministry moves into primary health care. Twenty-five Sisters were present for the meeting at Nazareth Convent, Mokama, on October 12, 2014.

Sister Philomena Kottoor addressed the group to bring about systemic change, to work for justice in solidarity with the oppressed people and to be innovative in ministry.

Each health unit presented their annual report which showed a gradual decline in the number of patients treated at the health centres.

Sisters Kitamai Catherine Sinku and Lilly Luka presented project design and documentation. Sister Anjana Kunnath presented, 'A New Way of being in Health Mission'. "Primary health care is an essential health care, based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in the

community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self reliance and self-determination. Primary health care must be quality oriented and sensitive to the needs of the community.

The members looked at how Jesus approached health care. For Jesus the healings were not isolated acts but part of his proclamation of the reign of God. This was his way of telling everyone the good news: God is arriving, and even the most unfortunate can experience his merciful love here and now. These amazing healings were simple but real signs of a new world: the world that God wants for everyone.

The therapy that Jesus applied was his own person: his passionate love of life, his wholehearted acceptance of every sick person, his power to renew a person from the bottom up, and the contagion of his faith in human beings. His power to awaken unrecognized energies in people created the conditions that made the recovery of health possible."

The question which the members reflected upon was, 'are we in medical ministry or health ministry, or what else?'

Sr. Malini Manjoly, SCN



OUR VINCENTIAN SAINTS & BLESSEDS

BLESSED GIUSEPPINA NICOLI. D.C (1863 – 1924)

Sister Nicoli entered the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Turin, Italy at the age of 20. She disembarked at Cagliari on January 1st 1885 at the age of 21. Several months earlier she had decided to leave her family and join the Daughters of Charity: Christ had irresistibly captured her heart. She was sent to Sardinia, Italy, where she spent most of her consecrated life.

She was born on November 18th 1863 in the village of Casatisma in the region of Pavia, Italy. Her father was a judge and her mother was the daughter of a lawyer. The fifth of six children, Giuseppina was loved by everyone. Her gentleness was a natural gift. She gained a teaching certificate with the secret desire of dedicating herself to the education of poor children for whom she felt a natural attraction. Sister Nicoli joined the Company of the Daughters of Charity in 1888. She started her new mission at Cagliari in Sardinia with great enthusiasm. She had been assigned to the "Providence Institute" to teach young girls and her activities were not confined to teaching only, but also care for the poor, orphans and the infirm, and she concerned herself with their evangelization. Although her health was not very robust, she did not spare herself – at the age of 30 she contracted pulmonary tuberculosis, a disease which would slowly take its toll till the time of her death.

In 1899, she became the Sister Servant (Superior) of the Orphanage of Sassari. Here, she brought new life to the Association of the Children of Mary, gathered together the Ladies of charity and guided them in the service of poor people. She encouraged the development of catechism classes that brought together large numbers of boys and girls each Sunday. Of special note was her involvement in rebounding the "School of Religion" for young people in secondary schools and universities in order to prepare them to become qualified teachers imbued with faith.

In 1910, Sister Nicoli was named Provincial Treasurer and left Sassari for Turin. Eighteen months later, she became the Seminary Directress of the Daughters of Charity. On

August 7th 1914, Divine Providence led her back to Sardinia to the "Marina Nursery School" in Cagliari. This district was the centre of a very large urban development plan, but also a place where many poor families lived. These families, who lived in squalor, lived by their wits and resorted to practices that were not always honest.

Since the children were poor, they were refused the right to education. This lack of schooling led them to engage in deviant behavior. When the First World War was declared the situation became even more complicated.

In addition to this material poverty and destitution, Sister Nicoli also discovered the even more hidden scourges of moral and spiritual poverty. She continued to promote the need for formation of young people through the School of Religion and in classes at the "Marina Institute" that enabled her to bring young people together. She also took care of the large number of youngsters in the city working in the tobacco factories and brought them together for spiritual retreats. She was also concerned about the young girls who had come into the city from the outlying areas to seek employment in the homes of wealthy families. As well as providing them with happy time of relaxation together, Sister Nicoli taught them catechism and gave them the opportunity to learn to read and write.

More than anything else, however Sr.Nicoli's fame is connected with the "basket boys" who were well known throughout the city because of the special tools of their trade: their baskets. These boys became her most constant concern. Hordes of these barefoot adolescents, poorly clothed and malnourished, would crowd around the market area in the city adjoining the Marina Nursery School. They earned a living by carrying luggage for people coming into the city via the station or the port, or by carrying in their baskets the good that ladies bought at the market. The young boys would often knock on the school door to ask for food to ease their hunger. Accompanied by the Sisters in her community, Sister Nicoli approached

these young people with the gentleness of a loving mother. She won them over; for she responded to a profound and inexpressible need they had for attention and affection. Through her trust and friendship, she guided them to find the Lord. She renamed them "Mary's boys" confiding them to Mary's protection. She gave them lessons, prepared them to take up a profession, and talked to them about God, giving them a sense of their own dignity.

During the last year of her life, in 1924, she and her sisters in the Marina were publicly maligned. Sister Nicoli accepted this calumny in silence, until the President of the administration admitted his error. On her deathbed, Sister Nicoli forgave him with a broad smile. She died on December 31st 1924 at the age of 61.

The kaleidoscope of apostolic works which brought so much spiritual and material benefit to many is an example of the great things God can do in those who are entirely dedicated to him.

Sr.Giuseppina Nicoli was beatified on February 3rd 2008 in Cagliari, the city where her charity spread far and wide. Numerous graces have been attributed to her intercession. The miracle that led to her beatification concerned a young military man in Milan who was suddenly cured of cancer of the vertebrae with lumbar swelling.

Charity was the rule of her whole life. In her journey of humility, she daily lived out the words of our Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul: "you serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor, O my daughters, how delighted Our Lord is to behold you".

The church celebrates her feast day on 3rd February. As we go through the beautiful life of this blessed let us implore through her intercession to imprint in us too that same spirit of love and service that filled her to give herself to the service of the most poor and abandoned brothers and sisters whom we encounter daily in our lives.

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