

# THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC



One day Jesus went up the hill. He called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. **“And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim and to have authority to cast out demons”** (Mk. 3:13-17). Jesus built his Church on the foundation of the apostles and this is the reason why we call the Church as Apostolic. St. Paul says: “...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner stone, in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph. 2:20-22). **The apostles who were called to be the eye-witnesses of the Christ event and preachers of the salvific mission became his witnesses through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It was the witnessing and the proclamation of the apostles that formed the Church.**

## **The Faith Experience of the Apostles**

The faith experience of the apostles is the basis of the Church. When Jesus asked, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus was pleased with this answer and he said: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!.. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church..." (Mt. 16:15-18). Representing all the apostles Peter made this proclamation of faith in the divinity of Jesus. Remember St. Thomas, the Father of our faith, also proclaimed his faith in the Lord Jesus saying "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28). The apostles believed in Jesus as the Lord and God and proclaimed this faith with boldness to others. And those who listened to the proclamation accepted this faith. Thus the faith-experience of the apostles became the basis of the Church, the community of believers.

## **The Missions of the Apostles**

God wanted to liberate Israel from the slavery in Egypt and lead them to the land of Canaan. He made plans to make them his own holy people. God realized this plan by choosing some individuals and entrusting them with certain missions. They were the prophets, the Priests and the Kings. The prophets spoke to the people in the name of God and corrected them when they went wrong. The priests offered sacrifices to God for the sanctification of the people. And the Kings gave leadership and defended Israel against the enemies. This triple mission which provided a kind of salvation – experience to Israel was fully realized in Jesus who was to come. Jesus became a prophet, priest and King at the one and the same time. Jesus, by anointing the apostles with the Holy Spirit, handed over this triple mission to them. The apostles fulfilled their salvific mission, entrusted to them, through teaching the people, the prophetic mission; through sanctifying, the priestly mission; and through shepherding, the kingly mission. The Bishops, who derived their authority from the apostles, share in the same mission.

## **The Teachings of the Apostles**

The apostles who were filled with the Holy Spirit preached the Good News of salvation to all the people. They affirmed that Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews crucified and killed, God raised from the dead and to which they were witnesses (Acts 3:15). Besides, they declared that Jesus, who, in the eyes of the Jews, had a very humiliating death on a cross, was the expected saviour and God gave him a name above every other name, making him Lord. The apostles made it clear that those who believe in Jesus and confess his name will be saved. Even when they had to suffer persecution on account of this teaching, they continued to proclaim him boldly. And those who received the faith from the apostles also bore witness to him even in adverse circumstances.

## **The Apostles and the Communities of Believers**

The apostles who received the Holy Spirit went to various places proclaiming the Gospel. Wherever they preached the Gospel, communities of faith, sprang up. St. Thomas preached the Gospel in places like Persia and India. So the Churches in these places consider St. Thomas as the Father of their faith.

## **The Apostolic Heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church**

Our fore-fathers had the privilege of receiving the faith directly from St. Thomas, the Apostle. We, the members of the Syro-Malabar Church inherit this faith tradition. References like 'Mar Thomma Nazranikal' 'Mar Thomma Christians' are indicatives of our apostolic tradition and heritage. It was St. Thomas who confessed Jesus as Lord and God and expressed his readiness to go and die with him. The faith experience that we have received through the apostle St. Thomas is the apostolic foundation of the Syro-Malabar Church.

## **The Bishops**

The Bishops in the Church are the successors of the apostles. They, through the power of the Holy Spirit given to them, are the authentic teachers of faith, the high priests and shepherds. They are the shepherds of the Lord's sheep entrusted to their care (The Bishops, No. 2, 3). The Bishop is the head of the local Church, namely the diocese. In union with the Pope, a Bishop teaches, leads and sanctifies the people entrusted to his care in a diocese.

## The Major Archbishop

Patriarchal Churches are local Churches having the self-governing power which is exercised in union with the Pope. The head of a Patriarchal Church is called a Patriarch. Besides the Patriarchal Churches these are also Major Archiepiscopal Churches having the same rights and powers as the patriarchal Churches. The Head of a Major Archiepiscopal Church is called a Major Archbishop. The Syro-Malabar Church was raised to this status in 1992. Mar Antony Padiyara became the first Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church with its head quarters in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam – Angamaly. In 1997 Mar Varkey Vithayathil was appointed as the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. It was in 2011 Mar George Cardinal Alencherry was elected as the Major Archbishop by the Syro- Malabar Bishops Synod.



## The Primacy of the Pope

Jesus himself gave the first place to Simon Peter among all the apostles chosen by him. Peter was a witness to all the important events in Jesus life. Peter who enjoyed the privilege of special consideration and love of Jesus and who was also scolded by him on certain occasions, was given the first place by Jesus in founding the Church and in exercising the mission of the Church. We can see the Primacy of Peter in the Gospel of Mathew. Jesus promised that he would establish the Church on Peter, the rock, and give him the Keys of the Kingdom of God. (Mt. 16; 17-19). So we know that Jesus appointed Peter as the first among the twelve apostles. So we should say that the Pope is the first among the Bishops in the Church as he is the successor of Peter. The Pope is at the one and the same time the Bishop of Rome and the head of the Universal Church. He has the authority to lead, sanctify and teach the



Universal Church. The first Vatican Council declared the Primacy of the Pope as a fundamental truth. Through the encyclicals and apostolic instructions the Pope exercises his teaching authority over the entire Church.

## **The Collegiality of Bishops**

Just as St. Peter and the other eleven apostles had apostolic fellowship, the Bishops who are the successors of the apostles and the Pope who is taking the place of St. Peter, have an apostolic mission and fellowship which is exercised in the leadership of the Church. The Pope is the Head of the council of Bishops. When the Bishops of the Church exercise their apostolic authority in union with the Pope, we see the collegiality of Bishops. The ecumenical councils also reflect the collegiality of Bishops.

The Catholic Church is the Church that has received its faith from the apostles and is led by the Bishops, the successors of the apostles. Let us be proud of being part of this great Church and do our best to preserve, live and hand down this faith from generation to generation.

### **Word of God to Read and Meditate**

Eph : 2:17-22

### **Word of God to Remember**

“You are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone”

(Eph: 2:19-20).

### **Let us Pray**

Lord, just as Moses led the Chosen people of God to the Promised Land, bless the Shepherds of our Church so that they may effectively lead your people towards the heavenly Jerusalem.

### **My Resolution**

I shall pray for my Parish Priest and Bishop every day.

### **To Think with the Church**

Just as, in accordance with the Lord's decree, St Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a unique apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another. Indeed, the very ancient discipline whereby the bishops installed throughout the whole world lived in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity and peace (Vat. II, The Church No. 22).

### **To Know the Mother Church**

With a view to free the Mar Thomma Christians from the Latin jurisdiction, which lasted for about four centuries, and restore its individuality, Pope Leo XIII established a separate hierarchy for the Latin Catholics, in September 1886. Thereafter, the Mar Thomma Christians were brought directly under Roman rule on 20th May 1887. Thus, Kottayam and Trichur Vicariates were established. Later for better administration the Mar Thomma Christians were brought under three Vicariates - Trichur, Changanacherry and Ernakulam, on 28th July 1896. For the first time three sons of the soil were made Bishops by Rome: Mar Luis Pazheparambil in Ernakulam, Mar John Menacherry in Trichur, and Mar Mathew Makkil in Changanacherry. Further Changanacherry vicariate was divided in 1911 in order to create the diocese of Kottayam, which was meant specifically for the Knanaya Catholic Community.

### **Questions**

1. How does the faith experience of the apostles become the foundation of the Church?
2. What are the functions of the Bishops, the successors of the apostles?
3. Write a short note on the apostolicity of the Syro-Malabar Church.
4. When does the council of Bishops express itself in the Church?
5. What do you mean by the Primacy of the Pope?