

Circular Letter

The Renouncement of Office by Pope Benedict XVI and the Election of the New Pope

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GEORGE ALENCHERRY, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Men and Women of Life Consecrated and Lay faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church, Praise be to Jesus Christ!

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus,

The renouncement of the Petrine office of Holy Father Benedict XVI has created a new situation in the Church. By now the faithful, although with some mental agony, has already accepted the momentous decision of the Holy Father. Pope Benedict XVI who began his ministry after the time of the epoch making Pontificate of John Paul II, was guiding the barque of the Church safely for the last eight years. Having given to the Church and to the world new vision and orientations, Benedict XVI has in this very short span of time proved himself to be an absolutely befitting successor to John Paul II.

Pope Benedict is a Church leader who integrated Christ and the Church in his person and mission. He wanted to teach the faithful the vision about Jesus the Lord and Saviour in its wholeness. It is this basic thought that prompted him to write, in the midst of his busy schedule of the office of the Pope, a three volume work "Jesus of Nazareth" utilizing his Biblical Scholarship and Theological Wisdom. He spared no effort to give exhortations on the mission of the Church which is the mystical body of Christ and the vision those who minister to this mission - the Bishops, priests, the consecrated persons, lay missionaries and the youth - should have in their life and ministry.

It was with sincerity and commitment that Pope Benedict faced the challenges of the times. For the renewal of the Church and the dialogue with the world, it was the documents of the Vatican Council II that shed light on his thought patterns. Having understood that the Council teachings are not to be reduced to a mere Christian humanism, he tirelessly worked these last years to bring out their intrinsic vision of Christian faith and to make them experiential in the day to day life of the faithful.

Through the last two Synods on the Eucharist and the Word of God Benedict XVI illustrated to the Christian faithful the complementary nature of the word and the mission of Christ intimately united with the Church. With great missionary zeal, innovative methods of pastoral care and new styles of presentation, he took special care to make the Gospel of Christ proclaimed throughout the world, especially in Europe. In order to strengthen the new insights in the field of faith formation, he even established a Pontifical Council for New Evangelization.

In spite of the difficulties of age, Pope Benedict XVI could give to the Church a really effective and strong leadership. Not only the members of the Church, but the whole

world, has recognized this fact. The Holy Father, who now intends to enter into a life of seclusion, will ever be with us in the mission of the Church through his prayer and sacrifices. We shall keep in our hearts our gratitude towards the Holy Father. We shall remember him in our prayers. I think that a day of prayer was observed in all our eparchies on February 22 to express our gratitude to God for the gift of Pope Benedict XVI, as instructed by Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the President of CBCI. I exhort those who could not observe this day of prayer on that day to observe it on another convenient day.

The renouncement of the Holy Father comes to effect on 28 February, at 8.00 p.m. Italian Time corresponding to Indian Time 00.30 a.m. on 1 March 2013. I bring to your notice that it has been made clear from the press note of the Vatican that from that time onwards we shall omit the part naming the Holy Father in the prayers of Holy *Qurbana* and other liturgical celebrations and pray only for the Major Archbishop and other Hierarchs.

The election of the next Pope is an event of great importance for the Church. Preparations are underway for this event. The most important preparation is to be done by prayer. It is a time to pray fervently for the College of Cardinals as they assemble in the Conclave so that they may obtain the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. A formula of prayer will be made available to the people of God in all our eparchies. This prayer is to be recited in all the Syro-Malabar eparchies in Kerala after the Holy *Qurbana* from 1 March onwards, until the election of the new Pope.

Let the days of the conclave be days of prayer in the whole church. Just as the apostles who awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit, we too shall spend these days in fervent prayers together with Mary our Mother.

I leave for Rome on 25 February to participate in the farewell services of the Holy Father and to join the Conclave to elect the new Pope. I hope to come back after the election of the Pope before the Holy Week.

As soon as the news about the election of the new Pope is made public, in all our Churches and institutions the church bells are to be rung for a short time, as a sign of joy. A thanksgiving solemn Holy *Qurbana* is to be offered in all our Churches/communities on the Sunday that follows the election of the new Pope.

We shall pray to God Almighty so that the College of Cardinals, guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is able to elect a person who is absolutely worthy to guide the Church, during this period of time ahead of us.

May this season of lent be a time of God's blessings for you!

Cordially in Christ Jesus,

+George Cardinal Alencherry
The Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St Thomas, Kakkanad on 22 February 2013.

N.B: This circular letter is to be read out during the Holy Qurbana, the latest on 7th March 2013 in all churches and chapels of the Syro-Malabar Church where there is Sunday Mass for the public.

Prayer for the Election of the Pope

Lord our God, who looks after us everyday, you give us shepherds most suited to your holy will, to lead your flock. Fill with your Holy Spirit all the Cardinals who assemble in Conclave to elect the new Pope, the successor of Peter. We implore you to prepare them so that they may elect the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, submitting themselves to your holy will. We pray you to give us an eminent pastor as Pope who is able to lead and protect the Universal Church, knowing fully well the challenges posed by the modern world. Lord of all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for ever. Amen.