

THE SECULAR CITIZEN

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A NATIONAL FAMILY WEEKLY

India cannot have a Sophie... We just can't allow that to Happen

by Don Aguiar.

Sophie Scholl was a 21 year old social activist in what was then called as Nazi-Germany. On 18th Feb 1943, Sophie was arrested by the Gestapo for distributing pamphlets in the University of Munich.

These pamphlets contained information and instructions urging the people of Germany to resist the Nazi ideology. The said pamphlets gave procedures on how to passively and non-violently dissent against the Govt.

So basically these pamphlets were the "ToolKit" of 1940s.

The Gestapo found these pamphlets as a conspiracy against the Govt. Sophie was tried in the courts on charges of Treason.

"Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don't dare express themselves as we did" ---- this was the only statement made by Sophie in her defense. Sophie was beheaded by a guillotine on 22nd Feb 1943.

Sophie was beheaded not because she was wrong, but because she dared to raise her voice against the wrong.

Sophie Scholl's last words before she was beheaded for treason against the Nazi Govt. ~ "Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go... What does my death matter, if through us, thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?"

Today in India, we have a Sadaf Jafar, a Nodeep Kaur, a Disha Ravi..... Many Sophie's of India who are raising their voice against what's wrong.

They are being arrested on frivolous charges, held in custody without going to trial, abused, beaten, man handled, allegedly sexually assaulted in custody. **Not because they are wrong.... But because they dare.... Because somebody has to dare....**

Our salute and respect to all of them who have been brave enough to raise their voices against a tyrannical establishment while having full knowledge of the compromised institutions that it holds....

Hope the rest of India doesn't stand as passive bystanders, ignoring what's happening in the front of their eyes with the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi and agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar defended the three controversial farm laws in parliament has left little room for any further dialogue with agitating farmers. According to farmer organisations, the agriculture minister has taken a far more strident position in parliament than during talks with them. **Therefore, any offer of talks from the government now sounds hollow to them.**

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Pandemic Woes Anew!

So the ghost of the lockdown in the form of new stringent measures seems to be still lurking around, eh? Penalty for not wearing a mask, not more than 50 individuals in church, and the like... Bad decisions resulting from faulty analysis to say the least! **Not done Mister Chief Minister – NOT DONE!**

Penalizing those moving about in public without a 'mask' is all very well, thank you, perhaps even necessary if a sense of discipline is to be inculcated in the masses for the benefit of all. But entering private offices for a check and penalizing those not wearing masks there is the height of idiocy to say the least. It is obvious that the authorities concerned are trying to cover up their own failure to censure those not wearing masks in public by penalizing individuals who obviously do not need to wear masks in private. Good excuse for making illicit money the licit way eh? Again, not done Shriyut Mukhyamantri – NOT DONE!

The real culprits

The Ganesh and Navratri festivals were sordid examples of crowds exceeding 50 participants having a gala time in public to the accompaniment of band-baja and fireworks galore and, with police protection in place, encountering no hassle for their failure to wear a mask! But the government and the municipality feel it expedient to impose restrictions on church participation. The most recent example of the double standards in evidence was the Shivaji Jayanti celebrations that had threesomes sans masks zipping unhindered around on two-wheelers, waving saffron flags all over the place, right through the so called *naka-bandis*, beneath the holy noses of cops whose conscientiousness was limited to stopping private cars instead to check God knows what!

Victimization of Christians

The Church in Bombay, as also across

the country, has scrupulously observed all pandemic-lockdown rules and restrictions in letter and spirit, ensuring social distancing and the wearing of masks apart from sanitization of hands. All this has apparently gone unnoticed by the authorities concerned who seem to be hell-bent on looking for lapses where they don't exist. It may be pointed out here that the allegation of widespread neglect of the wearing of masks that can obviously cause a rise in the virus cases is debatable. Traveling by public transport six days a week, it has been gratifying to observe every



by Ladislaus
Louis D'Souza

commuter wearing a mask. In fact, just as no one is allowed entry into our churches without a mask, so too, no commuter is allowed entry into BEST buses without a mask. Those found without masks happen to be policemen and TCs at railway stations. **It is out on the streets and pavements in crowded areas (particularly outside railway stations) that one comes across hawkers and vendors, shoppers and drivers merrily throwing all caution to the winds with no masks and social distancing in evidence! What are the government and the municipality doing about it?** Would they have the general populace believe that such indiscipline has nothing to do with the spread of the virus, be it in Amravati or Mumbai, in Mulund or Malad, in Chembur, Chakala or wherever and that it is rather the disciplined assembly at Mass in church, masks and social distancing in place, and those working in private offices without masks that are responsible for the uptrend of the infection?

Issues identifiable

There are two sore points that tend to complicate matters. Firstly, there is a section of Catholics that makes no bones about its belief that the precincts of the church where the profoundest sacrifice in human history is repeated ad nauseam in memory of its victim and High Priest is a breeding ground for the virus as against the supposed safety of the market just across the road. Sec-

only, a certain language community whose numbers are steadily swelling in certain parishes, blatantly gives a damn for COVID restrictions, their sheer numbers in attendance at Sunday Mass and at weddings and funerals being cause for worry.

It would certainly not be too farfetched to say that it is strange that even our lay Catholic organizations, ostensibly representing the Catholic community with prominent figures at the helm of affairs and generally quick to trumpet their achievements, are mum on the issue and obviously seem to prefer the silence of the lambs so to say!

Whither our 'Right to Worship'?

As of now, there's no knowing which way the virus is headed, nor what is likely to be decided by the government in terms of public travel and the like, particularly train commute. But one thing is certain: In all this brouhaha, the Church is the loser. It's time therefore that the Church woke up from its pandemically induced lockdown-slumber and, having contributed much towards the battle against the pandemic, boldly started confronting the acute lacuna on the part of the powers-that-be and demanding due redressal. **By making such demands and questioning the government's skewed logic we stand to lose nothing, having already virtually lost our right to worship anyway.** If not, it'd be better for all dioceses across the country to seriously consider not keeping our churches PERMANENTLY CLOSED in a bid to please the government but summarily selling them off, the money thus earned being adequate for the live-streaming of Masses from some small pokey enclosure just about anywhere for at least a few decades rather than from a huge church having a 100 pews that are allowed to be occupied by not more than 50 participants. We won't even require more priests as such either, if one may hazard a guess! So, online training sufficing, why keep our huge seminaries [Goregaon, Poona, Rachol....], too!

'New normal' here to stay

Once the disposal of churches and

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The government had grossly underestimated the resolve and determination of farmers to sustain the agitation for a prolonged period and convert it into a mass movement. However, farmers across the country are favourably responding to the demand for minimum support price or minimum assured income that has been denied to them by every successive government. **That is why more and more farmers are volunteering to be part of this historic resistance movement.** The loss of over 150 lives has not in any way dampened their spirit.

The agitation has already spread to new areas in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Cutting across caste, religion and political lines, farmers are enthusiastically congregating at "maha panchayats" in these states. They ensured that the "chakka jam" on February 6 remained largely successful. Besides, the main protest sites at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur have been strengthened to resist violence by vigilante groups with the backing of police.

The three sites have become a symbol of resistance for the farmers and

challenge for the government. The government has withdrawn water, power and sanitary facilities to thousands who are camping there, disregarding the presence of the old, and of women who need access to sanitation. Concrete and metal barricades have been erected and access spiked with sharpened iron rods and concert in a wire. **The protest sites at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur give a look of a war zone.**

Having failed to browbeat reporters and freelancers on social media, the government is now at war with Twitter and Facebook to block hundreds of accounts which bring out the farmer's plight and truthfully report the ground situation. **Any support from international personalities for the farmers is dubbed as subversive and brushed aside as interference in the internal affairs of the country. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has slammed those voices and the ever ready Delhi police has not only registered a case to uncover an 'international conspiracy' and "Tool-Kit" but has begun making arrests. India cannot have a Sophie..... We just can't allow that to happen.**

On the other hand, no one in the government raised an eyebrow when Gita

Gopinath (a US national) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) supported the three controversial farm laws. **Why should she be allowed to comment on the domestic policies of India but not we the affected citizens who are critical? Is it only because she is employed by the IMF, which is dictating our policies?**

In the US, farmers are under a loan burden of US\$ 416 billion (about 30 lakh crores). According to a 2019 article in TIME magazine evocatively headlined, 'They're trying to wipe us off the map'. Small American farmers are nearing extinction", the US lost 100,000 farms from 2011 to 2018. Farm bankruptcies are up by 12% and suicides in farm communities are happening with alarming frequency. **In fact, four million farms have disappeared from 1948 to 2015, taken over by big corporates. Many small farmers are compelled to sell their produce at lower prices than their input cost.**

Similarly, Philip H Howard and Mary Hendrickson have claimed that corporate consolidation of food production has resulted in rising food costs in the US. According to them, in 2019, over 35 million individuals were

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Lent In Our Post-Lockdown Church Ethos...

By Ladislaus Louis D'Souza

Time was when complaints regarding the church being turned into a studio with media personnel of every hue thronging the sanctuary and otherwise crisscrossing the length and breadth of the main body of the church came to be taken so seriously by parish administrations that guidelines for photography in terms of number of photographers and their positions as well as time slots for photographs came to be drawn up and observed in letter and spirit. And then, COVID-19 happened and the lockdown took over, sending all church activity into hibernation for nearly 10 months! Now with the lockdown over, our churches once again are abuzz with studio like activity afresh, all liturgical norms consigned to history!

Renewal of Liturgical niceties....

At a recent regular Sunday Mass, with the Celebrant singlehandedly blessing the Nuptials of three couples, there were over a dozen cameramen strutting their stuff, tripods, white umbrellas et al, distracting wedding couples and congregation alike sending the sanctity of sanctuary and sacrament spinning out of the window so to say, like there wouldn't be another tomorrow!

In the Church's scheme of things, as emphasized in the Liturgy courses for the laity being conducted in various dioceses (including the Archdiocese of Bombay) **the Celebrant at Mass is the PRESIDENT of the Assembly**, a norm so beautifully highlighted in the "Presidential Procession" that is appropriately accompanied by the sonorous singing of the Entrance Hymn. Isn't it time then that the celebrant at any given Mass at which there are Nuptials taking place must needs get his act together and firmly crack the whip? **To prevent the Mass from turning into a tamasha, the conscientious Celebrant cannot but consciously direct the proceedings in such a way as to ensure that both the congregation and the couples marrying benefit fully from the Mass in its entirety.**

Need for fresh guidelines

Vatican II clearly emphasizes that "in

order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain" (SC 11). This sentiment can be duly heightened by the Celebrant by making a pointed reference to the role of photography and videography in the celebration, either at the time of welcoming the couple at the Church entrance or at the 'introduction' to the Mass. Of course, in some parishes cameramen are not only positioned at fixed spots but are also allowed fixed slots during the entire celebration for camera use; but it is also common knowledge that such instructions are generally observed in the breach. The Celebrant would need to be very gentle yet firm and persuasive in asking all media personnel on duty to step out of the church at the time of the Homily so as to enable the couple concerned to benefit as much from the breaking of the Word without distraction as the rest of the congregation, and then immediately after the blessing of the Nuptials as there is nothing to be photographed as such, the cameras meaninglessly going flashy flash at filming the couple with utter disregard for the Offertory and Consecration in progress. **The Celebrant at a Final Profession Mass, a goodly no-nonsense bishop, tersely retorted, "I'm waiting for the photographer to move out of the middle of the congregation because there is nothing to be photographed during the homily."**

Distractions galore!

There are other distractions the Celebrant, as Presider of the Assembly, must needs pay attention to if the Mass per se is to be an unforgettable redeeming experience for all concerned. As Vatican II asserts: "In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims..." (SC 8). In a bid to give flesh to this assertion, the Priest in charge of Liturgy and the Parish Liturgy Team [PLT] in right earnest discussed such matters as referred to above, apart

from a church dress code be it for Sunday Mass or weddings, Christenings or whatever, and had the necessary guidelines put in place. Months later, issues cropping up at the monthly PLT meetings included among other things, cameramen going clickety-click standing in the sanctuary no less, with permission ostensibly having been obtained from the Parish Priest [PP], the choir allowed to sing songs instead of the designated hymns (again, permission courtesy Reverend PP!), and a short-haired short-veiled bride wearing a low-back gown – so low as to have portions of her inners on full display. When it was pointed out by members that the flouting of the dress code took place at a Mass presided over by the priest in charge of the PLT himself, he blurted out in exasperation: "Now how am I to know how low the back of the bride's gown was when I could only see her upfront!" To avoid such an eventuality in the future, it was decided to have special "capes" handy in the Sacristy with the Sister in charge of arrangements for Wedding Masses and Baptisms being entrusted with the task of doing the check needed and taking due action. At a nuptial Mass the Celebrant was flabbergasted to find himself standing face to face with a bride and her maid-of-(dis)honour [MO(D)H] who to all appearances had forgotten to wear their tops. Pronto the capes were called for but, amazingly, were nowhere to be found! It was only when the bride had worn the groom's overcoat and the MO(D)H had covered herself with her maid's *dupatta* that the bridal party was finally lead inside the church by the Celebrant.

More bloopers..., needless spectacles! Take this drama that occurred at a Christening. In days of yore, parents would place their newly baptized infant at the foot of the altar as a sign of committing the child's future into the Lord's hands, with the Godparents retrieving the baby a few minutes later. But today's parents and godparents who, though desirous of the "placing" ritual, would want to have none of the bending involved! And so it was that at the end of a Baptismal ceremony a baby was

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Just one farm law is sufficient

I think 3 farm law are way too much. What is needed is just one farm law to change the lives of farmers: Tax the rich farmers and distribute the tax collected among the poor and marginal farmers. Farm laws do not increase the holdings of poor and marginalised farmers who account for more than 80% of all farmers in the country holding less than 2 acres each. These poor farmers derive very little benefit from MSP as they have very small holdings, consume most of their produce and have very little left over to sell. They cannot afford to purchase subsidized fertilisers. All subsidies benefit the rich farmers who get richer. Hence it is necessary to put money, (hard cash), in the hands of poor farmers so that they can purchase fertilizers and buy better seeds and then derive full benefits of the subsidies. Hence govt must enact just one farm law taxing the rich farmers in the country.

So why are the rich farmers not taxed, like all other people under the Income Tax laws? Simply because the people who matter are not interested in taxing the rich farmers. And they are not interested because many of them, (cutting across the entire political spectrum), are farmers or pseudo farmers who reap the benefits of income tax exemption available to farmers. Little wonder then you don't hear our political master agitating for taxing the rich farmers.

—Prof Robert Castellino
Malad

Lent is a period of fasting for Christians

Lent, the period of prayer and fasting for Christians in preparation for Easter is 40 days long. But there are 46 days between Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent in the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar and Easter Sunday. How can that be? The answer takes us back to the earliest days of the Church. Jesus' original disciples, who were Jewish, grew up with the idea that the Sabbath – the day of worship and rest – was Saturday, the seventh day of the week, since the account of creation in the book of Genesis says that God rested on the seventh day. Jesus rose from the dead, however on Sunday, the first day of the week, and the early Christians starting with the apostles (those original disciples) saw Jesus' resurrection as a new creation and so they transferred the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

Since all Sundays – and not simply Easter Sunday – were days to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, Christians were forbidden to fast and do other forms of penance on those days. Therefore, when the Church expanded the period of fasting and prayer in preparation for Easter from a few days to 40 days (to mirror Jesus' fasting in the desert before He began His public ministry), Sundays could not be included in the count. Thus in order for Lent to include 40 days on which fasting could occur, it had to be expanded to six full weeks (with 6 days of fasting in each week), plus 4 extra days — Ash Wednesday and the Thursday, Friday and Saturday that follow it. Six times six is thirty-six, plus four equals forty. And that's how we arrive at the 40 days of Lent.

— Jubel D'Cruz,

Withdrawing Sunday mass dispensation

With reference to the letter 'It's time for a rollback of online church services' by Prof. Robert Castellino (Secular Citizen, Feb 22-28), I would like to comment as follows: 1) We are still in the midst of the pandemic with added fears of another mutated Strain of the virus, and the likelihood of another lockdown in Mumbai due to a spurt in the number of Covid cases. One would therefore hardly expect the church to even think of withdrawing the spl. dispensation of Sunday mass obligation at this stage for the faithful, and even to the youth and young adults, as suggested by the writer. 2) Church laws cannot be discriminatory in nature by having one law for the youth and another for the elders. Due to the new seating arrangement in churches, and social distancing norms in force, making room for the youth and young adults below 40 years of age by restricting entry to senior citizens for church services, is both heartless, insensitive and uncalled for. All are equal in the eyes of God and God's house is open to all, irrespective of caste creed or age. 3) Online masses have proved to be a boon to all when our churches were closed, and they still continue to connect us spiritually, if not physically. There is therefore no reason to discontinue or discourage online masses till the situation is back to normal. 4) Fears of the youth and young adults not returning to the church, are unfounded, given that our youth are still active in church activities and a great help in these trying times.

—A. F. Nazareth,
Alto Porvorim, Goa.



The Catholic Church is NOT Apolitical

a significant period in the history of the Church. In 1959, when St. Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council, he emphasised that he wanted it to be a Pastoral Council, not necessarily creating new definitions in doctrine but an *'aggiornamento'* which was essentially an updating of what the Church is all about, in order to communicate more effectively the values of the kingdom with the men and women of the modern world. The key question which was therefore raised at the Vatican Council was *"what does it mean to be the Church of God in the modern world?"* The path-breaking Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *'Gaudium et Spes'* was a fitting response to what St. Pope John XXIII wanted as the sum and substance of a historic intervention. Earlier, in his Encyclical *'Pacem in Terris'* he underlines the **inviolability of human rights** and the four non-negotiables of **Truth, Justice, Charity** and **Liberty** which are fundamental for sustainable peace; and with that profound statement *"There is a saying of St. Augustine which has particular relevance in this context: "Take away justice, and what are kingdoms but mighty bands of robbers"*

Given the renewal that was taking place everywhere, because of the Church 'opening its doors' post-Vatican II, St Pope Paul VI convoked the 1971 Synod. The Synod document's message can be summed up in one well-known sentence, *"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation"*. The promotion of justice therefore, is essential to the mission of the Church. There simply is no sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ if the commitment to justice is downplayed or eliminated. Since then, all the Popes have reiterated the Church's position for a more just society. Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical *'Caritas in Veritate'* puts it very

'Apolitical' is both a word and a concept; it is reflective of one's attitude and behaviour towards the realities that grip people anywhere. It essentially means having no interest in or association with politics. It is also defined as 'politically neutral; without political attitudes, content or bias'. In ordinary parlance, for the ones who cry hoarse about being 'apolitical' it just means not getting involved in politics; because politics is 'dirty'- and any involvement would mean repercussions on oneself or family or the institution one represents. The fact however, is that every single human apart from being a social being is also a political being; not being involved in politics is also a political statement. The pretence is that if one says one is 'apolitical' then the idea communicated is that one is 'not' taking sides. This is a bluff. One needs however, to differentiate between 'politics' (which is about people: their rights and duties; governance; fair and equitable distribution of resources, justice) and 'political parties' which (in a very basic understanding) is about particular groups/ideologies which seek/work for power in order to control the lives and resources of others.

In 1971, the Synod of Bishops released a landmark document entitled 'Justice in the World'. It was path-breaking in every sense of the word. The Synodal document in the section on 'The Gospel Message and the Mission of the Church', offered a new understanding of sin *"in the face of the present-day situation of the world,*

marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognize both our responsibility and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as he shows us new paths toward action in the cause of justice in the world." It further stated, *"while the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and the life style found within the Church herself."*



BY FR. CEDRIC PRAKASH SJ

Fifty years ago, the Bishops of world used an idiom and response which makes tremendous sense in the context of India today. In no uncertain terms, they stated that the Church is and can never be 'apolitical'. The Church has to take sides in exactly the same way that Jesus took sides with the poor and the marginalised, the exploited and the excluded, the outcasts and ostracised of his time. The Bishops declared, *"even though it is not for us to elaborate a very profound analysis of the situation of the world, we have nevertheless been able to perceive the serious injustices which are building around the world of men a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up of a more just and more fraternal world."*

That Synod was the logical outcome of

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strongly, “Love — **caritas** — is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace”.

Ever since he was elected in March 2013, Pope Francis has not lost any opportunity of insisting that political engagement to counter the rampant injustices in the world, is an essential part of Christian discipleship. He addressed this theme with his trademark directness and charm during a daily Mass homily in 2013. “*Politics, according to the Social Doctrine of the Church, is one of the highest forms of charity, because it serves the common good. I cannot wash my hands, eh? We all have to give something!*” he said. “*A good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of himself, so that those who govern can govern.*” In ‘*Evangelii Gaudium*’ Pope Francis says, “*An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.*” He adds, “*I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets... I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.*”

He goes on to say, “*Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure, which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their life-style, which others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the*

distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised.”

We are in the special ‘*Laudato Si*’ year; many do not realise that the greatest challenge of this Encyclical which Pope Francis gave to the world in 2015, is to look into the endemic issues which impact on the environment. Pope Francis is direct, “*In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world’s good... it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good.*”

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis speaks about the growing impoverishment of the poor, their cries, their rights. Pope Francis begins the part of the ‘*Social Dream*’ on the right note. He challenges one and all to have the courage to read and respond to the cries of the poor. Times have changed and we are called to make a paradigm-shift in our response. The traditional benefactor approach (which in the past was the hallmark of the response of the Church) is no longer accepted and will certainly not be an effective response for a change which is sustainable. We need to look into issues which are endemic (the root causes of poverty). This is all easier said than

done – because in doing so we will have to take on the powerful and other vested interests; these could be the Government, the corporate sector (the ones destroying the livelihood and lives of our farmers) and the mining mafia. Whether it is in the countries of the Amazon or in countries like India, confronting the powerful on behalf of the poor means that one has to pay a price. There are no short-cuts – we witness the downward spiral of how the poor become poorer and how the rich (at the cost of the poor) amass a scandalous amount of wealth. This is all far from the Gospel of Jesus and for that matter from Christian discipleship.

Pope Francis is particularly strong and unequivocal in ‘*Fratelli Tutti*’ “*the Church, while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the contrary, “she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines” in the building of a better world, or fail to “reawaken the spiritual energy” that can contribute to the betterment of society. It is true that religious ministers must not engage in the party politics that are the proper domain of the laity, but neither can they renounce the political dimension of life itself, which involves a constant attention to the common good and a concern for integral human development. The Church “has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities”. She works for “the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity” She does not claim to compete with earthly powers, but to offer herself as “a family among families, this is the Church, open to bearing witness in today’s world, open to faith hope and love for the Lord and for those whom he loves with a preferential love. A home with open doors. The Church is a home with open doors, because she is a mother”. And in imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, “we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity... to build*

bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation”.

Even before Pope Francis assumed office, the Bishops of India were already using rather similar words and tone. In 2012, at the XXX CBCI Meet in Bangalore on the theme ‘The Church’s Role for a Better India’, their statement was addressed “to all people of goodwill”, saying, “We sensed in our hearts our country’s yearning for a Better India. Our country has been noted for its deep spirituality, its saints and sages, its rich diversity of cultures and religions. People yearn for the ideal enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India of a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic which will secure for its citizens **Justice**, social, economic and political; **Liberty** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; **Equality** of status and of opportunity; **Fraternity** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation. But this yearning has remained largely unfulfilled. Economic development has brought about increasing inequities, an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor with consequent tensions spilling over into violence. We see around us a betrayal of the poor and marginalized, the tribals, dalits and other backward classes, women and other groups who live in dehumanising and oppressive poverty. We witness rampant exploitation of children. There is disappointment with those in public life for whom ethical concerns matter little. The Church does not wish to rest on her laurels. **She recommits herself to being a prophetic Church, taking a decisive stand in favour of the poor and marginalized “We envision an India with more attributes of the Kingdom of God such as justice and equity with its consequent fruits of love, peace and joy.”**

In February 2014, just before the National General Elections, the CBCI Meet in Palai, Kerala on the theme, ‘Renewed Church for a Renewed Society – Responding to the Call of

Vatican II’, the Bishops statement was even more emphatic, “When we look at our country, we see corruption plaguing every sphere of society. In such a scenario, Church institutions must be an example of transparency and probity. Another phenomenon is that of internal migration which, while opening opportunities to people, has torn the cultural and religious moorings that sustained them. Globalization too has brought in its wake problems like prolonged working hours which have disrupted family life. We witness the trend to fundamentalism which seeks to dilute the secular character of our nation. Against this trend, we stand by the values upheld by the Indian Constitution and appeal to governments to respect these values” “The experience of God will lead us to involvement in and solidarity with the marginalized and the exploited, those suffering from disabilities, those living in the peripheries of economic, cultural and social spheres. We will speak out against all forms of injustice meted out to them and we will defend their rights. We listened to the call of Pope Francis urging us to “work to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor.” (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 188). We want the Church to be truly a Church of the Poor.”

Sadly, times have changed; today being ‘apolitical’ and ‘diplomatic’ are apparently the buzzwords in the Church of India. Actually, they are sinful forms of escapism into one’s comfort zone; a clear betrayal of the person and message of Jesus. Being on the right side of the powerful and vested interest means that our privileges and possessions are seemingly ‘secure’; the internal corruption and scandals are not ‘touched’ and brought to the fore and above all, the ‘witnessing’ dimension of Christianity is effectively negated. It is so obvious that Church teachings on the social realities of today have not been studied and reflected upon; promulgated and internalised by a fairly large section of the Church in India today. They rarely form part of our Catechesis, our homilies, talks and writings; most Church media are

mutated on matters of national importance clearly apathetic forgetting the opening words of ‘Gaudium et Spes’, the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. In his message for World Communications Day 2021, Pope Francis makes it clear that communicators must ‘hit the streets!’

The Catholic Church is clearly not apolitical! But where then are the official statements by the Church in India on the current protests of the farmers demanding the immediate revocation of the three anti-farmer laws? Or in keeping with the letter and spirit of ‘Rerum Novarum’ and ‘Centisimus Annus’ is there any challenge to the recent anti-worker Labour Codes? Or in keeping with the mandate of ‘Laudato Si’ what’s the official stand against the destruction of the Mollem reservation, and what is happening to the Aravalli Hills and the Western Ghats and the greater use of fossil fuels through the auctioning of coal blocks? When a climate change activist Disha Ravi is arrested for sedition – what should the Church’s stand be in keeping with ‘Laudato Si’? What about the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the sedition and other draconian laws and for those framed and incarcerated under them – are we visible and vocal demanding the repeal of such antiquated and anti-people laws and for the unconditional release of all those illegally jailed?

What about ‘love jihad’? The well-known human rights group the Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) has recently filed an application before the Supreme Court of India seeking to amend its original writ petition that challenged the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand anti-conversion laws. The group now also seeks to incorporate the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Ordinance, 2020 and the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2019 in its petition. In a statement CJP says, “The illusion of ‘Love Ji-

(Contd.. from p. 4)

matter-of-factly placed by the parents on the Altar, the **table of the Eucharistic Sacrifice**. The Sacristan, amazed at the audacity of the parents and recalling PP's instructions about condoning no such nonsense, coolly walked up to the parents and, in a distinctly clear voice, asked in the stunned hearing of all present as to what tools or implements he could fetch them for sacrificing the baby, like say choppers, live coals, pure ghee or what! The mother nearly fainted while the godmother promptly carried the baby off the altar and hurried outside the church!

Just how long are we going to tolerate such spectacles that actually water down the beauty of the Church's sacraments, even virtually stripping the Mass itself of its profound richness! Before the pandemic and the resultant lockdown turned our lives upside down, it was often said that most Catholics are no more seen in church after their Confirmation until their Wedding day and then until the Baptism of their baby and finally at the child's First Holy Communion. Now, post lockdown, with 'attending' or 'viewing' of the Mass ONLINE so deeply ingrained in the psyche of our youth, one shudders to think whether we'd need our churches anymore, what with today's young couples apparently favouring a hall-like atmosphere where free-for-all possibilities prevail. Not for

them the adherence to Church rules and liturgical norms!

The newness of the 'old normal'!

Essentially, if the multifaceted penitential practices of Lent, like the Stations, the 3-Hours and a lot else including prayer and almsgiving are meant to deepen the faith of every Christian thereby facilitating the *metanoia* the season's liturgy calls the faithful to, we would do well to give due attention to the increasingly widening grey area of liturgical non-observance in our parishes during the ongoing Season of Lent. After all, doesn't the Catechism of the Catholic Church teach that the Holy Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Mass, the "sum and summary of our faith" [CCC 1327], is the "source and summit of Christian life" (LG 11) and worship? Indeed, it further affirms that "the other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For **in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch**" (CCC 1325) from whom flow the Sacraments as "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us" (CCC 1131).

Ready for the change to the real 'new normal', post COVID-19 lockdown? Then let Lent 2021 be your springboard!

(Contd.. from p. 2)

seminaries is over and done with, no more will our priests have to bother about putting out forwards apologizing for being 'back to square one' or gloating about Satan thinking that he had succeeded in closing down our churches, overlooking the number of home-churches that have opened, and such innuendo – 'innuendo' because what is galling is the flip-flop on the part of our clergy on the issue of attending church vis-à-vis participating online: one day it is 'O we've missed seeing you all in church for such a long time and are happy to be celebrating Mass for you live!' The next day it is: 'We urge you to participate with your families, in the online Mass at home, where the atmosphere is much safer, with the same eager enthusiasm you have always shown, whenever you have visited the church!' 'Innuendo' because we've all seen for ourselves by now what sort of an atmosphere prevails at home during the live-streaming of the Mass; 'innuendo' because the training of lay folk for and their induction into the Church's various parish ministries is already set to become history even as the attitude of those in power in relation to the teeny-weeny, invisible corona virus jettisoning the practice of the Catholic Faith reigns supreme! **'Innuendo' because, to give the devil his due, even he knows that, forget 'eager enthusiasm', the fact is that online Mass is no Mass really!** Who the heck is fooling whom—the devil knows that, too! And how normal can such fooling be – dare to hazard a guess!?!'

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Self Compassion: The Key To Forgiveness

As disciples of Jesus, we all need to share in God's mission for the salvation of the world. *No one can be saved alone; we can only be saved together-* Fratelli Tutti (FT) # 32. Lent is a journey towards Easter. It is a time not just for fasting, penance and sacrifice, but a time to open wide our hearts, to the extent of breaking it, even piercing it open, in order to love unconditionally. For this to become a reality, we need the help of the Holy Spirit to renew our own faith, draw extensively from the 'living waters' of hope, and receive with an open heart the compassionate love of God, who birthed us all from star dust, as sisters and brothers of one family- *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Love in concern and compassion for all, is the highest expression of our faith and hope-* Pope Francis' Lenten Message (LM).



We inherited this relatedness with all God's creatures at our baptism through the working of the Holy Spirit. The potential for conversion by piercing our heart open to love unconditionally was shown to us by Jesus at the cross. The Paschal Mystery of the Passion-Death and Resurrection of Jesus provides enough inspiration for our thoughts, words, deeds, attitudes and decisions, particularly during this Holy Season of Lent.

Fasting, prayer and almsgiving will certainly help us along the way. However, in order to open our heart to the grandeur of God, who created all creatures big and small, we need to accept all God's creatures as part of one big family and love them all with zeal and compassion. This alone can lead all of us to the fullness of life. Fasting and sacrifice as forms of self denial are good, but not good enough. In our present Millennial-Narcissistic-Generation, where many are absorbed with clicking selfies, a consumer-oriented media and a job-driven educational system, which fosters individualism and self-promotion, this culture-of-death has resulted in drilling the desire to excel in this

highly competitive world, at all costs, by hook or by crook. The outcome of this dog-eat-dog mentality has given rise to soaring levels of stress and a sense of inadequacy, unable to meet the lofty standards of success. Depression, suicide and the constant need and urge to compare ourselves with others and succeed in the rat race, has almost become an epidemic, especially during the present pandemic.

Perhaps during this season of lent, we need to make the paradigm shift from self-esteem to self-compassion. We urgently need to be kind and non-judgmental to ourselves. We need to accept ourselves, exactly as we are- with all our strengths and limitations- imperfect human beings in a world of chaos and suffering. When we are able to accept ourselves gracefully and with tenderness, then we will also be able to connect more easily with other frail human beings who are also struggling on this planet. When this becomes a reality, it will help to engender a sense of solidarity. Genuine self-compassion will connect us with ourselves and will lead us to reach out to others in compassion and unconditional love.

When we are able to feel one with others, suffer with them, share solidarity with them, experience a sense of empathy and bonding with a desire to relieve their suffering, and even feel their pain in our flesh, then the 'other' becomes part of me, not separate from me. When this realization dawns, we understand the true meaning of compassion. Compassion knows no 'other'.

This illumination will make me realize that when I hurt another, I am hurting myself and when I love another I am in truth loving myself. This heightened consciousness will help me bridge the gap between the 'self' and the 'other'. It will make it easier for me to love and forgive my enemies. *It all starts from within,* as Muniba Mazari (a once broken woman) from Pakistan, says. *Having received forgiveness our-*



selves, we can offer it through our willingness to enter into attentive dialogue with others and give comfort to those experiencing sorrow and pain (LM).

When my circle of compassion widens it will slowly include all God's creatures. When all are loved and cared for with compassion and tenderness, a counter-culture of interdependence, equality, inclusivity and concern for the least and the lost will slowly emerge. This will hopefully result in a communitarian, egalitarian community where all feel refreshed and joyful, dancing and celebrating the gift of life. The wisdom of nature reveals that compassion, which is cosmic in scope, is vital for our wellbeing. Mother Earth has shown us the way. She has evolved over the ages through cooperation, coordination, patient groping and searching. All species including human beings are inter-related and inter-connected in a life and death fashion to one another. When this happens, life will perdure. *Nature Protects if She is Protected.* (COP-11 Logo, Hyderabad). When we keep destroying and hurting Mother Earth, we are hurting ourselves in the process as well, and the pandemic and COVID-19 will continue.

This lent let us be compassionate to ourselves, to all around and to our beloved Mother Earth. *'I exist because 'we' exist-* Bishop Allwyn's Lenten Reflection Calendar 2021 (Week 4). *Let us become witnesses of new times, in which God is making all things new (Rev. 21:1-6). Let us depend on God-the crucified Lord who has Risen. Let God unfold the mystery of life to us this lent.*



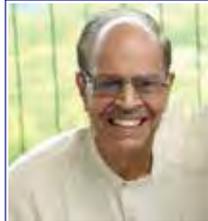
Let us become witnesses of new times, in which God is making all things new (Rev. 21:1-6). Let us depend on God-the crucified Lord who has Risen. Let God unfold the mystery of life to us this lent.



Dr (Sr) Mudita Menona Sodder RSCJ,
17th Feb 2021, Ash Wednesday.

Why We Need A Gym For Developing Our Body?

Passion is that emotion which gives you the strength to survive the tribulations of life and continue to aim for the ultimate goal you've set for yourself. A life without passion is a life wasted. Passion need not be necessarily big—it can be something as complicated as wanting to land on the moon to something as simple as reading. In this spectrum, my passion falls somewhere in the middle. I would like to open a chain of state-of-the art gymnasium all over the country.



C.K. Subramaniam

Why is it important to be healthy?

How often we see people who have a tough time trying to reach their toes. Every day, we notice at least one 'all-rounder' who huffs and puffs to climb that one floor to their home or that one flight of stairs to the platform. But, that is not seen as a sign of being unhealthy—the panting is attributed to stress, those few extra pounds are characterised as a 'sign of the wealthy'.

Let's look at the reasons we would normally cook up when explaining our inability or unwillingness to exercise. These include:

- Financial constraints—a gym is too expensive
- I just don't have the time
- I'm fit—I don't need to exercise
- Exercise is for the old to keep themselves fit
- I get enough exercise climbing the stairs at my work
- I get enough exercise running after my kids
- There's no good gymnasium around my place

This list can go on and on...But the truth is, human life



will not. Why is it that the average life expectancy in the US is 86 while it's somewhere around the 70s in India? The reason being, we are not

paying enough attention to fitness regimes. Heart diseases, diabetes, arthritis and so many other diseases strike those who are unfit and obese. Not just that, exercise boosts immunity and can keep many diseases at bay—including the recent and deadly H1N1. Besides, exercise releases endorphins—the hormone that makes one 'happy' and thus relieves stress and improves mental health.

Why is Gymnasium a necessity?

While some may argue that healthy living is possible even without hitting a gym, we need to dwell on the practicality of such arguments. Unlike the US, we do not have special cycling lanes; our offices are not equipped with lockers and shower-rooms that we can freshen up after walking or cycling our way to work. Also, the Indian weather does not permit exercise all year around—the summers are bad, the

winter season has its own woes, and the winter is practically nonexistent. Such scenarios don't leave much scope for exercise. This is where a gym can make a difference...by providing a conducive environment for fitness.

Conclusion:

I strongly believe that every individual has the right to healthy living. Healthy living is not a privilege, but a right. Sadly, however in our country, healthy living is more like a right of a pocket of people who are able and willing to pay for it. That is the reason I want to open a chain of health clubs—to make fitness the part of every Indian's lifestyle. To provide easy access to superior quality, affordable fitness regime that will be an integral part of every Indian's.

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Sd/-

Lawrence Coelho

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Coronadose: An overdose of bad news from consuming too much media during a time of crisis. Can result in a "panicdemic".

I was having wine with my wife when she said 'I love you so much, you know. I don't know how I could ever live without you.' I said, 'Is that you or the wine talking?' She said, 'It's me talking to the wine.'

What's the secret to enjoying a good bottle of wine? Open the bottle to let it breathe. If it doesn't look like it's breathing, give it mouth-to-mouth.

It's funny how 8 glasses of water a day seems impossible but 8 glasses of wine is a sign of a good meal.

During a job interview at the 99 Cents store, my son was asked, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" My son's reply: "At the Dollar Store." He got the job.

My husband and I were daydreaming about what we would do if we won the lottery. I started: "I'd hire a cook so that I could just say, 'Hey, make me a sandwich!'" Thomas shook his head. "Not me. I already have one of those."

In the Birds Section

I was perusing the shelves at a bookstore when a customer asked an employee where the birding section was. After pointing it out, the employee asked, "Is there anything specific you're looking for?" "Yes," said the customer. "My husband."

Forgot About the Gift

My friend Garrick had the solution to forgetting his wife's birthday and their wedding anniversary: He opened an account with a local florist and provided it with both dates as well as instructions to send flowers and a card signed "Your loving husband, Garrick." For a few years, it worked. Then one day, Garrick came home on their wedding anniversary. He saw the flowers on the dining room table



and said, "What nice flowers. Where did you get them?"

Only Woman There

A local lumberyard was having an open house, and my mother really wanted to go. Dad, though, had no interest. After badgering him with no luck, she finally said, "If you don't go, I'll be the only woman there." Dad shrugged. "If I go, you'll still be the only woman there."

Keep the Name

Spotted in the legal notices section of the Maryland-based Daily Times: Michael Ray Dipirro petitioned the circuit court to change his name to Michael Ray Forbes. His reason for doing so? "Ex-wife wants to keep my surname. She can have that too!"

Takes Two to Get Married

I just read that 4,153,237 people got married last year. Not to cause any trouble, but shouldn't that be an even number?

Damage caused by Corona Lock-down put up in the witty English language

This lockdown has led to several local businesses going bankrupt.

- The Blouse manufacturer has gone 'Bust.'
- The specialist in Submersibles has gone *Down Under.'
- The manufacturer of Food Blenders has gone into 'Liquidation.'
- A Dog Kennel has had to call in the 'Retrievers.'
- The suppliers of paper for Origami enthusiasts has 'Folded.'
- The Heinz factory has been Canned as they couldn't *Ketchup* with expenses.
- The Tarmac laying company has

reached the 'end of the road.'

- The Bread company has run out of 'Dough.'
- The Clock manufacturer has had to Wind Down and the owner has gone 'Cuckoo.'
- The Chinese Food company has been 'Taken away.'
- The Shoe shop owner has had to put his foot down and given his 'Staff the Boot.'
- The Laundrette has been taken to the 'Cleaners.'
- The Bread Bakeries are all 'Toast'
- And yes, it's 'Curtains for Theatres'

Who Can't Hear

A man goes to the doctor, concerned about his wife's hearing. The doctor says, "Stand behind her and say something and tell me how close you are when she hears you." The man goes home, sees his wife in the kitchen, cutting carrots on the counter top. About 15 feet away he says, "Honey, what's for dinner?" Nothing. He gets halfway to her and repeats the same question. Nothing. Very concerned, he gets right behind her and asks again "What's for dinner?" She turns around and says "For the THIRD time, beef stew!"

Bald Baby

I dreamed I was rocking a baby to sleep. In the morning, my husband, who is bald, told me I patted his head for 30 minutes while repeating, "Go to sleep, baby."

Send a Sign

The graveside service had just ended when there was a frightening clap of thunder, followed by a tremendous bolt of lightning accompanied by even louder thunder. The little old man looked at the pastor and said calmly, "Well, she's there."

Tooth Pulled

A woman and her husband stop at a dentist's office. "I need a tooth pulled right away," she says. "Don't bother with the Novocain; we're in a hurry." "Which tooth do you want pulled?" asks the dentist. The woman shoves her husband toward the dentist. "Go ahead, dear. Show him your tooth."

(Contd.. from p. 8)

had' has led violence and intimidation by police and non-state actors. The 'Love Jihad' laws legitimise un-constitutional, anti-minority and misogynistic beliefs, and help further the hateful, communal agenda of extremists. CJP is challenging these laws as they impinge upon the privacy, freedoms and autonomy of consenting adults". Some High Courts have already declared it unconstitutional. On 14 February the Chief Minister of Gujarat announced that Gujarat would soon have a 'love jihad' law on the lines of UP and MP. That some Church hierarchy can support such a law (political or apolitical?) is downright immoral and certainly against the teachings of Jesus. An adult has a right to marry the person of one's choice and also to embrace the religion of one's choice. There are sufficient provisions in the CrPC to address any force or fraud.

What about the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)? or for that matter the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35 A, where Kashmir is concerned? Is there any statement on the stifling of freedom of speech and expression in the country, the consistent attack on freedom of religion or for that matter, on general the denial of most human rights? Migrants and refugees suffer very much (we have seen this during this pandemic) in keeping with the Church directives have we been only their benefactors or have we truly accompanied them in the protection of their rights? Already last week (Feb 7) following the military coup in Myanmar and in the wake of the massive protests Pope Francis expressed "solidarity with the people of Myanmar". He said, "I pray that those in power in the country will work... towards the common good," and he called for "social justice, national stability and harmonious democratic coexistence".

True there are several Catholics: laity, nuns and priests who have taken a stand on the above. Many are at the forefront and at great risk. That however is not enough! Pope Francis constantly reminds us that when rights

(Contd.. from p. 3)

food insecure as they did not have reliable access to affordable and nutritious food. The situation has only worsened post COVID-19.

Why then is the Indian government determined to play havoc with the lives of small and marginal farmers, who constitute more than 80% of all farmers? Where are they going to disappear? What will happen to our food chain? How will the poor and needy have access to food? Would the IMF provide us with any answers or tell us where in the world their farm policies have placed money in the hands of small farmers? Questions abound, but no answers from either the government or IMF.

But the farmers already know the answers. That is why they are on the streets against all the odds stacked against them. The government should remember that the more it humiliates the farmers, the greater will be anger pouring out on the streets.

The biggest gain from this agitation is that the well-rehearsed and well-tested divisive policies of the present government have only produced contrary results – uniting farmers irrespective of caste, religion and region. This is what happens to a government that is out of touch with the peoples' pain and lives in its own make-believe world.

and values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised. Jesus was deeply concerned about the deep-rooted injustices of his time and took a visible and vocal stand against them. The Catholic Church in India can no longer remain a silent spectator, stand on the sidelines and pretend that it is apolitical! Jesus was never apolitical! the Catholic Church is not apolitical!!

**(Fr Cedric Prakash (GUJ) is a human rights, reconciliation and peace activist/writer. Contact: cedricprakash@gmail.com)*



Ingredients:

- 300 gms fresh ground coconut
- 100 gms cashewnuts (ground)
- 350 gms granulated sugar
- 2 tbsp rosewater
- 130 ml water
- 2 drops of food colouring (pink or any other colour of your choice)
- 2 tbsp ghee



Method:

1. Butter a 9 x 9 square baking pan. Set aside.
2. Grind the coconut with the rosewater until it is smooth. Set aside.
3. In a large vessel, heat the sugar and water over medium heat. Cook until all the sugar has dissolved and you have a thick syrup consistency.
4. Now add the ground coconut and ground cashewnuts to the sugar syrup and continue to stir over medium-low heat.
5. Continue to cook until the mixture become thick and starts to leave the sides of the pan.
6. Now add the food colour and ghee. Stir well.
7. Pour the mixture into a buttered 9 x 9 square baking pan.
8. Spread the mixture evenly, then use the bottom of a flat bowl or glass to press it down.
9. Cut into desired shapes. Traditionally, coconut cordial is cut into squares or diamonds.



Sweta D'Cruz

Story After Marriage – With a drizzle of coconut oil and lots of pepper

To begin with, I want to dedicate this article to my dear husband – who reads only those articles in which he is mentioned. As for the others, he either chooses to ignore them or makes me read them aloud so that he can continue with his other “important” pursuits. Well, that pretty much sums up my life after getting married.

Since it is Valentine’s day and there is talk of love and red hearts everywhere, I thought this could be my best opportunity to write about this topic. Not often do I venture out to write love stories or anything even mildly related to romance.

Recently as a part of a campaign, my husband and I shot a video of baking a cake, uploaded photos of the cake with wine by the side and a beautiful ambience we had set-up at home. We received a lot of compliments and most of them were “How

Romantic!”. Well, the arrangement was indeed romantic but the clutter and the dishes to wash after the episode was more romantic! On a serious note, most of the married couples often complain that at the beginning of the marriage or during courtship period the spouse was so romantic but as the years pass, the romance fizzles out and the married life turns stale devoid of any spark.

I have also complained a lot and did personally feel, where has all the spark and butterflies in the stomach gone? Slowly I realized that it has completely disappeared. Just like my slim figure and my husband’s four (Six according to him!) packs.

Life after marriage is definitely different. To put it better, it has evolved. Long romantic messages slowly turn

into grocery lists. Tight jeans and cocktail dresses are replaced by pajamas. Shea butter cream is replaced by Vicks gel. Soft kisses become formal pecks. Yet we claim that we are in love. Or are we?

I remember one incident, during our courtship period I had slipped and had sprained my leg. My fiancé (now husband) had rushed to my aid and helped me sit. He massaged my leg, applied some ice and had enquired about my well-being a good number of times. Recently, history repeated – I slipped again and landed on the floor in our room. To my utter dismay, my husband was busy looking at the floor instead of me. When I enquired as to



by Sonal Lobo

what he was doing, he calmly replied that he was checking if the marbles on the floor were intact and they had not broken because of my fall! Well, priorities change! However, afterwards he did lift me and applied a good amount of pain-relieving gel.

Nevertheless, there was a huge difference in his reaction. This did make me realize that life after marriage had a lot of chillies but less spice!

Life was different before marriage or even a few months after marriage. We would look into each other’s eyes and smile all day. But now, we are better off looking at our smart phones than look at each other. Before marriage we would speak over the phone for hours and now calls are meant only for important conversations. Before marriage we were longing for privacy, just to steal a warm hug. But now, we prefer some “me” time over “us” time. In the early days of marriage, a kiss was mandatory before going to work and now kisses are restricted to Christmas and Easter wishing. Yet, we proudly claim we are so much in love. Or are we?

While I was planning to pen this article, a series of questions did cross my mind. How would people accept this article? Would they be offended? Am I propagating negative aspects about marriage? But the most crucial question I asked myself was are we still in love?

After pondering for quite some time, I realized, probably “love” is cliché and overrated. What I understood was that we were committed and attached to each other. That is what glued us together when we felt we had fallen out of love.

There are moments in each couple’s life when they feel there is no love between them. But is it true? For most of us in the present generation the definition of love is vastly different. It is romance, vacation, cuddling, intimacy and freedom. Probably we are forgetting the aspects of companionship, trust, transparency, security and dependency. Aren’t we?

I have heard many married couples say, “I don’t want to be dependent on anyone, I am independent”. Well, being independent is appreciated but a beautiful marriage does involve some level of dependency which adds a different flavor to the love. I am dependent on my husband in many ways. I am dependent on him to pick a dress, switching a job or pursuing an interest. I am dependent on him while selecting a piece of furniture and so many other things. These dependencies of the couple make them glued to each other, when each one seeks the other’s opinion there is a level of transparency and this makes way for great amount of trust and compatibility.

I have heard people say, “I want freedom!”. I have also said this many

(Contd.. on p. 15)

times. What is freedom? When a concerned wife frantically calls her husband to check on his safety, is it curtailing one's freedom? When a husband who struggles to manage finances, advises his spouse to spend less, is it curtailing one's freedom. Even today when I wish to buy something, I discuss it with my husband and so does he when he is planning to spend on something. Even today when we make plans to go out or catch up with friends, we inform each other and seek each other's opinion. It is not controlling; it is being involved.

People grow and change and so does a married couple. As years pass, we mature and so do our thoughts. While love remains intact it is expressed in different ways. Today when I leave for work my husband does not kiss me and say I miss you. But he helps me during the busy mornings and waves a gentle goodbye. Most of our outings today are not long drives. But a short stop over for a glass of wine and some peaceful time. It is not about passionate sex, but long hugs and the reassurance that there is someone sleeping by your side.

I have received tremendous support from my husband. When I planned to switch careers taking a huge risk, he whole heartedly supported me even though we were not financially secure. Whenever I wanted to dedicate time to pursue my interests, he never stopped me nor asked me why. Those evenings when I did not want to cook, he quietly had a bowl of Maggi or some leftover rice. Those times when I did not look pretty and cracked my voice, he smiled and held my hand. What could be more romantic than this? This was more than romance. This was commitment. This was fulfilling the promise we made before God to stand by not only in times of fun and frolic but also in tears and fights.

The greatest test of our marriage was the loss of our babies. When I went through two miscarriages, that is

when I witnessed what love was. My husband not only held me close and tight, but in every step, he helped me come out of the pain. His love and care would never permit him to pressurize me for a child till this day. Isn't this more beautiful than red roses and a bottle of wine?

Each of us have our own struggles in marriage, there are times we scream at each other and wonder why did we have to get into this? We hate to look at each other and wish time just flies. We want to run away far and hide but when it is all over is it not our spouse that we always want by our side?

Seven years of married life is not long but it is not short too. We face new challenges every day. There are arguments, fights, doubts and tears. But it is nothing when compared to the fact that you have been given the most precious gift by God. A friend he sent specially for you. Yes, it is not going to be same. There may not be surprises of expensive gifts. There may not always be a romantic getaway, and each other's habits may pull us astray.

But the love will always stay. It has stayed for me too. When he helps me in the kitchen, when he arranges the vessels, when he respects my folks, when he discusses his problems and

weaknesses, when he lays open his vulnerabilities and issues, when he fights with me to watch Netflix, when he applauds my success, when he cracks a PJ, when he cannot stand to see my tears, when he argues, when he lies to make me happy, when he works hard to secure my future, when he calls me when I'm far away and many such moments remind me every day that this is love.

Though marriage has many aspects, the fact that we are glued together, emits an aroma just like the coconut oil. No matter what ingredients you put in a dish, the coconut oil outshines, just like the love between a couple. As years pass by the spark might disappear but the shine remains. Yes, we will continue to sigh and wonder why. There will be fights and arguments just like pepper but though pepper is spice It is digested well by our body.

Every after-marriage story is not sparkly white but definitely it is tempered with a drizzle of coconut oil and some spice.

Thanksgiving

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be Praised Adored, Glorified and Loved today and everyday throughout the world, now and forever. Amen!!



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My Father's House Is Not For Trading



Third SUNDAY IN LENT

Third Sunday in Lent

Beyond the cliché that God spoke to his prophets only in the Old Testament, lies a little known fact: he speaks to us even today. It comes as a surprise to most people to accept the seriousness of this statement. This is the third Sunday in Lent, preparing each one of us to listen to the voice of God. "I am the Lord your God." (Ex. 20:1)

The Lord speaks to us through his chosen prophets. In Psalm 19 (a reading for this week) our attention is drawn to the cardinal values of God's gracious Words: "The law of the Lord



BY MELVYN BROWN

is perfect, reviving the soul...the Ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever....." At one point we find humility in the Psalmist, "Let the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer". (Ps.19:14)

Mainstream Biblical scholars believe with equivocal statements that the voice of the Lord was always present and will always guide the Church and the faithful for all the time to come. His voice is heard in the minds of those he keeps for his ministry. His voice lives in the hearts of modern day prophets and seers; men and women in the backyards of our neighborhoods, or even before us and we do not wish to believe it, or see it. Church analysts know that God speaks to us in mysterious ways.

Jews demanded signs and Greeks sought wisdom, said St. Paul in his first letter to Corinthians. The voice of God was heard by Saul on the road to Damascus. It changed his life – and made him the instrument of the Lord, to propagate the Christian Faith. In our lifetime the Word of the Lord was heard in the works and prayers of Pa-

dre Pio, Cardinal John Neumann, Fr. Maximillion Kolbe and Blessed Mother Teresa among others.

Listen, the Lord God is speaking to us. Abba spoke to Moses and about how He was "showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex.20:6)

Find the time to be in prayer alone, and at peace. You will hear His voice. Jesus went to Jerusalem because of the Jewish Passover. He saw merchants, money changers and people buying doves to make sacrifice in the vicinity of the Temple. This was wrong and sinful. So Jesus drove them out of the temple grounds. He told them with a stern voice: "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." (Jn. 2:16)

To take responsibility in a world of tumultuous happenings is not a small task. It needs trust in the Lord, and a heart open to his voice. "Therefore as the Holy Spirit says; "Today, when you hear His voice do not harden your hearts..."

The quest begins with your faith, your belief in Jesus' words, and the unflinching truth of His promises. Believe and all things are possible. This Sunday takes us closer to Christ's passion. His words along the way are the gleam of divine light to help us to cross this vale of trials. His voice is precious when we listen.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

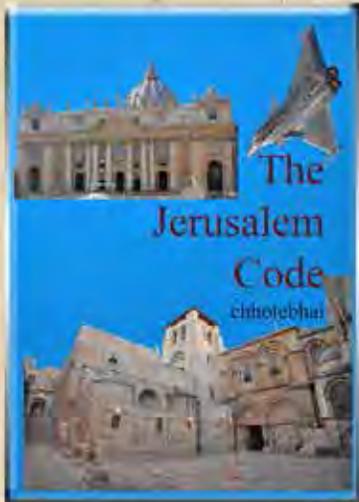
In faith, the formation of conscience succeeds if the believer recognizes that his happiness in life is to accept and trust God when he speaks.

Let us prepare for a true encounter with the suffering Christ, and the real encounter with the Risen Lord.

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The Jerusalem Code

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This book is an exciting journey into the Past, an analysis of the Present and a vision of the church of the Future. It is a scholarly work with over 600 references and hundreds of scripture quotes; but it is far from dry academics. It blends both fact and fiction. It expresses the anguish of the laity, and women in particular, about where the church is, and where it should be.

The book goes back to the origins of the universe and the human race, the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel, the birth of the Church at Pentecost, and the persecution of the early church; till it mutated into Christendom. It looks at what is called the Dark Ages, the Reformation, Revolution and Renaissance, colonialism and missionary outreach, leading up to Vatican II; and then goes beyond to Vatican III and Jerusalem II. It studies the claim of the apostles Thomas and Bartholomew coming to India and even if Jesus was buried in Kashmir! It also looks at the apocalyptic prophesies of Malachy and Nostradamus.

It explores delicate issues like a celibate clergy, women priests, family planning, abortion, divorce and re-marriage, pre-marital sex, papal infallibility and clericalism. It draws heavily on the Word of God and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. While expressing divergent opinions on the one hand, it shows utmost respect for church teachings on the other. This is an honest attempt at the reform, renewal, demise and resurrection of the Church; constantly asking, "What is the Spirit saying to the churches?" (Rev 3:22). It has a surprise ending!

In his Foreword senior Jesuit theologian Rev Dr T.K. John SJ of Vidyajyoti, Delhi, describes the author as one inspired by St Francis of Assisi, as a radar or antenna of the church. He brackets him with erudite lay writers G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc of the last century.

The author is the former National President of the All India Catholic Union, and former Director of the International Council of Catholic Men. Presently he is the Convenor of the Indian Catholic Forum. Over the last fifty years of public life he has written several hundred articles and four books – The Trinity & Me (1978), Cracks in the Ceiling (1985), Beyond 2000 – The Other Side (2000) and An Unfinished Symphony (2011).

Interestingly, in the interregnum between the writing and publishing of this book, two of its predictions have already come true! One may then safely assume that the author has his finger on the pulse of the Church. This book is a must for opinion makers, leaders and reformers in the Church, as also for libraries. It is a valuable resource material for groups like Catholic Associations, Small Christian Communities and Prayer Groups.

Published by: INDIAN CATHOLIC FORUM, Mega Mall 3rd Floor, Noronha Crossing, 63/2C The Mall, Kanpur -208001.

Campaigning for beggar-free cities

Recently there was a news item which says, the Mumbai city police have launched an initiative to rid the city of beggars (The Free Press Journal - 15 February 2021). Now, this is indeed a very good initiative.

There is no doubt, beggars have become an eyesore and a nuisance to the general public. One will find them everywhere, at railway booking counters, at bus stops, traffic signals, on footpaths, on the streets, just about anywhere, for that matter. Getting rid of them is indeed a challenging task. Well, what are we doing about it? We need to ask ourselves, can we do something? Many a times, we are moved with pity and compassion and what is the easiest thing we do? We dip our hands into our pocket and give them a few coins or a couple of notes. Very good gesture.



Melville X. D'Souza
- Orlem, Malad

And we feel good about it, we perhaps pat ourselves and comfort ourselves that we have done a good deed. What's wrong with that? There are other groups, charitable organisations & other religious institutions including the Church, giving them alms, food, blankets, bed-sheets, etc., some everyday, others on a weekly basis, some on special occasions. And so, one will find scores of beggars camped outside our churches & other religious institutions.

Do we think we are going to eradicate this menace of begging by such acts of charity, and compassion? Far from it, perhaps, we could be encouraging them to continue begging for the rest of their lives. It is our social responsibility that we should be doing acts of charity by donating to the poor and economically weaker sections of society, yes, but there is a difference be-

tween helping the poor and helping the beggars. Many of us may but be aware how begging has become a very profitable business venture. There is a message circulating on WhatsApp which says, that there are beggar mafias operating around us. It goes to explain how children are mutilated, their organs removed and they're being used in the begging business. Are we not a party to such activities by our acts of charity?

Can the police alone succeed in putting an end to begging? It's just not practical. So, where do we go from here? Life is difficult, making ends meet is a big challenge. COVID-19 may have contributed to the situation but only to a certain extent. We need go to the root of the matter. The authorities need to check the influx of people from the rural areas & from other states into the cities. Unless we do that, we would be fighting a losing battle and the war against begging would seem an unending war. The streets and other open spaces will become their dwelling place for ever.

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