

ID # MCP 2020-027 – Diocese of Bhadravathi

Mission Appeal Homily, (18th Sunday – Matt. 14: 13-21)

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Jesus,

Most cordial greetings to all of you! I am happy to be with you through this recorded message as we come together to pray and listen to the Word of God on this Sunday! I am bishop Joseph from the Mission Diocese of Bhadravathi in the State of Karnataka in India. First of all, I would like to express my most sincere thanks to the Archdiocesan authorities and the Director and his team from the Mission Office for taking this unprecedented step of organizing this mission appeal online during this unprecedented time of a global pandemic. May the good Lord bless the Archdiocese of Chicago and each and every one of you abundantly!

My dear Sisters and Brothers, we are going through a very difficult time. The whole world is in the grip of a deadly pandemic, the so called Covid-19. The relentless spread of the Coronavirus all over the world is a source of worry, anxiety and fear for every one of us. Most of the people attend Holy Mass online from the security of their home, as they cannot come together in the parish church. Hence, I believe, while some of you may be listening to this message from the Eucharistic gathering in a parish church, others may be listening to it from within of their home. The fear and concern are very understandable in a pandemic situation, but they must not be allowed to lead to despair or a loss of hope. At this time of emergency all our efforts must be to strengthen our faith, sustain a sense of community and build hope. Above all, it is time to come out of our self-centeredness and to recognize ourselves as the Body of Christ, to support and encourage one another and to reflect God's concern and compassion for all people, especially the most vulnerable. This is also the message we get from today's Gospel passage.

Today's Gospel reading begins with Jesus hearing the news of the death of John the Baptist. John was brutally murdered by Herod. Hearing this news Jesus withdraws to a deserted place to be by Himself. Certainly, Jesus was grieving over the death of His cousin. However, Jesus would not be left alone for a long time, as the people sought Him out. He had compassion on them who were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus could not allow His grief to keep Him from caring for the people. He needs to feed them in word and in deed. He tells his disciples who try to send them away hungry, **"They need not go away. You give them something to eat"**. Of course, the disciples had only five loaves of bread and two fish with them.

Jesus took them, blessed and gave them to the people. Everyone had enough and more!

My dear Brothers and Sisters, **Jesus could not allow His grief to keep Him from caring for the people.** As Christians and as His disciples we are also challenged by the Gospel today to follow his example. All of us are going through the inconveniences, difficulties, fear and anxiety caused by the Covid-19 epidemic. However, that should not prevent us from reaching out to our less-fortunate brothers and sisters who are most severely affected by the pandemic and the situation created by it. **Jesus told his disciples, “don’t send them away, you give them something to eat”.** Today, speaking from our Indian context, I feel that Jesus is asking us to do the same thing in different ways. I can hear Him telling us: Don’t send them away, you do something to encourage them; you do something to heal them; you do something to feed them; you do something to cloth them; you do something to give them shelter etc. etc.

This is what we try to do in our own little ways in the young mission diocese Bhadravathi. The Catholic Diocese of Bhadravathi in the South Indian State of Karnataka was erected in the year 2007. The diocese spreads over an area of ca. 14,000 sq. miles with a population of over 3 million people, of which just 11,000 are Catholics. Our Catholic population consists of both migrant Christians and Christians of local origin. We have at present 24 parishes and 10 mission stations in the diocese. All our parishes and mission stations are in underdeveloped areas.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people here. All our faithful are either small scale farmers or agricultural laborers and almost always they find it difficult to make both ends meet. Our priests, religious sisters and lay ministers try to reach out and support them through our various village ministries. This year the life situation of our people is very grim due to the prolonged lockdown and other restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of Corona virus. Many are left without the basic necessities like food and medicine. And Jesus is asking us to do something to make his compassionate love present to this people. It is in this concrete situation that I am making this appeal to you.

My dear brothers and sisters, I know, the United States is perhaps the worst hit country from the Covid-19 pandemic. By the time this message reaches you, India may be the second worst hit country by the same pandemic. And our people, very many of them are suffering enormously. There are ways in which we can reach out

to them as individuals and as a church. Today I would like to share how you may participate in doing that by cooperating with this Mission Appeal.

As I have told you, our families, both of Christians and non-Christians, are suffering from lack of basic necessities. We reach out to them irrespective of caste and creed, bringing God's love by distributing food kits and kits containing sanitizers, face masks, hand wash etc. However, as a young mission diocese with meager resources we have our own limitations in doing this for a long time. Your cooperation can make a big difference here.

Our Christians, young in their faith, need to be supported to grow in their faith convictions. We help our families to grow in their faith and to share it with their children through our various faith formation programs. By participating in this Mission Appeal, you would be helping to form, and train lay ministers who go out to encounter others with the love of God.

As a young diocese we urgently need personnel, priests incardinated to the diocese. Currently we have 30 candidates for priesthood going through the different stages of formation. Meeting their formation expenses itself is a big challenge to our infant diocese. By your participation in this Mission Appeal you would be helping to form our future priests.

My dear friends, I invite each one of you to participate in our efforts to bring God's love and concern to our less fortunate brothers and sisters through your support of this year's Mission Appeal. Your contribution allows us to support our families, pastoral leaders, and seminarians who serve in so many ways. A gift of any size makes a huge difference. Please consider making your generous gift today. Your support allows us to continue bringing the compassionate and merciful love of Jesus to our needy brothers and sisters.

I take this occasion also to thank you all, especially the Archdiocesan authorities for giving us the opportunity to participate in this year's Missionary Cooperation Plan. Thank you so much! May the good Lord bless the Archdiocese of Chicago! May God bless each of you that you may live your faith fervently and bear witness to it joyfully! Amen

- Bishop Joseph Arumachadath