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RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE

Sermon preached by the Revd. Daniel S. Thiagarajah

AT THE DIOCESAN FESTIVAL

on September 25, 1993 at Vaddukodai

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps"

(1 Peter 2:22, NRSV.)

"For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you"

(John 13 : 15, NRSV.)

Introduction

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, we are gathered here with thanks giving on this 46th year celebrations of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India to praise our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for the wonderful ways in which God has guided us through these years. This is the first Diocesan festival for the Rt. Revd. Dr. Jebanesan after he has taken up the bishopric of JDCSI. So, it is our task to discern the message of our Lord as we enter into another year of history.

According to Peter, "Christ has left us an example" - a paradigm, that we should follow in His steps." Three lessons taken for today's meditation, namely Isaiah 52 : 13 - 53 : 12; Philippians 2 : 5 - 11; and John 13 : 12 - 17, have one basic thought in common. These portions speak to us about servant and servanthood. We see how Christ identified Himself with the Messianic role of God's servant. By both example and precept, Jesus sought to instill into his disciples the principles of servanthood. These principles call essentially for humility, self-giving and a caring love which puts others above self.

If we look at the Philippian passage, we see a clear connection with the suffering servant songs of Deutero-Isaiah. When Jesus began his ministry in the Synagogue at Nazareth, he read a portion from Isaiah Chapter 61 and said, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus found in the servant songs the pattern for his own life. St. Augustine in his 'Confessions'

said, "In the books of Platonists, I read, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...' But that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us', I read not there. For I traced in these books, said differently and in many ways, that 'the Son was in the form of the Father, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God', because naturally he was of the same Substance.

But that 'he emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'... those books do not contain."

Incarnation and self-emptying are the two great virtues Jesus left behind for us as models. The servant Lord calls for a servant church. In Philippians 3:17, Paul says, "Brothers and Sisters, join in imitating me and observe those who live according to the example you have in us." Paul is not pointing to himself alone, but also to Timothy (2 : 20), Epaphroditus (2 : 29 f) and others as exemplars. Paul emphasizes that nothing should be done from selfish ambition or conceit, but rather by looking to the interests of others. So, he brings in the 'Christ model', 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Phil 2 : 5) When Paul speaks about Epaphroditus, he says that he came close to death for the work of Christ. It is quite obvious from this wider context that the imitation Paul is calling for in 3:17 is rooted in the profound commitment to the Point of letting go of

or dying to the self-seeking self and coming alive to a Christ-like life.

If we recall the life of Albert Schweitzer, he was a highly educated man who held doctorates in three fields; theology, philosophy and music. He became well-known in the theological circles for his scholarly book, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus." But, in spite of his intellectual achievements he had within himself a burning desire to serve the lowliest of the low and the neediest of the needy. He was burdened with the thought of the great suffering that the white man had brought to Africa through the slave trade. He wanted to repay that debt insofar as humanly possible and that he laboured as a servant to the black man for fifty two years. Even the 33,000.00 dollars he received as the recipient of the Nobel Prize 1952, he donated for the improvements of the hospital he founded and to start a colony for lepers. It is quite telling what someone has said, "The greatest contribution was not in what he did himself, but in what others have done because of him. His life furnishes a shining example of one who founded his life by losing it."

This is the model given to the Church, our Church's mission must have christological rootedness. We must make room for other to live. We should empty ourselves for others to fill in. Small scale charity and sacrifices are not enough. J. S. Whale has said, "God does not need our sacrifices but he has, nevertheless, appointed a representative to receive them, namely, our neighbour. The neighbour always represents the invisible Christ." So, it is our major task and think of the need for an ecclesiology of new humanity.

All of us are very appreciative of Mother Teresa's missionary work in Calcutta. She too was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace (Continued to page 4)

Pandatheruppu Church Welcomes New Bishop & Mrs. Jebanesan

It was a very happy occasion on 10th October 1993 when the parishioners of Pandatheruppu Church who are scattered all over the peninsula owing to army occupation around Pandatheruppu, gathered together after a lapse of some time, to welcome our new Bishop and Mrs. Jebanesan the head of the Women's Fellowship of the Diocese. The function took place at Harriet Winslow Girls' Home, presently housed within the Uduvil Girls' College premises. The Bishop and Mrs. Jebanesan, Principal of Uduvil Girls' College and the Rev. A. Jayakumaran and his family were met at the Principal's bungalow by Mr. & Rev. Mrs. A. R. Tampiyappa, Committee Members and senior members of the Church and conducted to the Paadatheruppu Girls' Home. They were garlanded by the Youth Fellowship and the Church committee members. The welcome function was chaired by Mrs. A. R. Tampiyappa, Worker in Charge of Pandatheruppu Church. In her welcome address she spoke of the attainments of our new Bishop in the intellectual field and Mrs. Jebanesan as a very qualified and efficient western music teacher. She said that she was very pleased to see almost all our parishioners that day, to welcome our new Bishop and Mrs. Jebanesan. 'She said that our Bishop was our Circuit Pastor and had attended all of our important functions at Pandatheruppu. He showed concern towards the welfare of our girls at Harriet Winslow Girls' Home. This was followed by a speech by a girl of Harriet Winslow Girls' Home, who thanked the Bishop and Mrs. Jebanesan for their love and concern towards them especially Mrs. Jebanesan for her visiting them and inquiring into their well being. This was followed by a welcome song in English. Speeches were made by Mr. Thanarajasingam, Mrs. Virasipillai and Mr. Manikam. All the speakers dealt in length of the educational and intellectual attainments of our Bishop, his services at Jaffna College both as teacher and as principal. They also mentioned about the musical talents of Mrs. Jebanesan. (Continued to page 4)

We Wish All Our Readers
MERRY CHRISTMAS AND
HAPPY NEW YEAR

✻ EDITORIAL ✻

CHRISTMAS

Christmas is round the corner! But can we celebrate Christmas sans christmas tree, light or cake? This will be the third year in succession where many in Jaffna will be celebrating Christmas without all these things. A considerable number will celebrate 'Natale' in refugee camps, the living conditions of which have become even worse because of torrential rains that Jaffna experienced very recently. A slice of bread sans butter will be the Christmas cake for many. Should we celebrate Christmas in this gloomy weather, when war clouds are looming over us? Some wonder how we can celebrate Christmas when our dear brethren-innocent civilians - were killed and buried beneath the rubble of the very same church where they took refuge to escape air attacks. But this is the very moment when we should celebrate Christmas, for now we know the real meaning of Christmas.

In the past, many from the pulpit tried to expound the word 'Christmas'. We rarely understood the meaning of Christmas; even those trying to expound would not have understood it. But now even babes in Jaffna can understand the 'real' meaning of Christmas. Yes the meaning of Christmas is Jesus - 'Yahwehshua' (YHWH - the Lord-is Saviour).

Jesus is Emmanuel - the God come to live with his people in order to save them. Jesus Christ though equal to God, emptied himself, came into this world and identified himself with his people - the suffering masses. When Jesus was born the Jews were ruled by the Romans who tried to maintain peace with dagger and shield. The soldiers were reaming all over the country side, arresting and killing every one whom they thought were against peace.

People were sifted under the pretext of taking census; many refugee camps (so called inns) were set up and some were granted not even this privilege. Joseph and Mary belonged to such a group. They had no place to go when Jesus was born. He had no cot to lie; only straw was used as his mattress. There were no nets to protect him from mosquito bite; no baby creams to apply on. He received neither cards nor flowers.

Baby Jesus had only rags to take the chill off his body. Only people like a bunch of shepherds came to see him and wished him well. (The magi though guided by the star searched for him in wrong places - the palaces.) There were no nurses to attend on him; perhaps the fairies were dancing around him and shooing the devil away as is imagined in our refugee camps.

When Jesus was asleep peacefully in his improvised cot, Herod and his ruling class with soldiers were out on streets searching for him, killing all the tiny tots they came across. This was how the first Christmas was celebrated. The wailing of bereaved mothers and the screams of the slain babes were the first 'Noel' to be sung. The same way we celebrate Christmas to-day.

This is how we understand Christmas. We recognise the birth of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world in the birth of every baby in the refugee camp. They cry for milk but their mothers are unable to feed them. They have no milk to feed on; they are exposed to the cruelty of nature; they have no protection against bombs and shells that may fall on them.

Though we are a forgotten people, God remembers us. The world has alienated itself from us, but Jesus who was born as a refugee baby identifies himself with us, He is Emmanuel - the God among his own people. We are his people; He is in our midst to-day, sharing in our struggles and sufferings and in the mean time comforting and encouraging us in our struggle or existence, He is with us giving us power and strength and renewing us with new vigour day by day.

This is Why We Celebrate Christmas

OBITUARY

Miss Hannah Sobithamalar
Sinnathamby

The death of Miss Hannah Sobithamalar Sinnathamby. Retired Headmistress, Vembad Girls' High School occurred on

Sunday the 21st of November 1993. She was the daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs. S P. Sinnathamby of Third Cross Street, Jaffna.

The funeral service took place on Monday the 22nd at 3.30 pm at her residence. The service

Sermon preached...

(Continued from page one)
some years ago. Her life is well illustrated by the British Journalist Malcolm Muggeridge's book - "Something beautiful for God." He says in another book entitled "Christ and the Media", that once when he asked Mother Teresa the difference according to her between the welfare workers and her Missionaries of Charity, Mother responded "The welfare workers do for an idea, a social purpose, but what my sisters and I do is for a Person. Muggeridge further said that this kind of vision cannot be taught but it can only be caught.

Trying to be Christ's 'Servant Church' in contemporary setting carries no guarantee that we shall be free from frustrations and hardships. Experience of passion and sufferings is one of the major dimensions of the mind of the servant. Bishop Bromley Oxnam while preaching at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches said, "In deep humility I must confess that my faith has cost me nothing. I have never suffered for the Faith. I have never been hungry. I have not been in prison. I have never had a stone thrown at me. I have not been persecuted. My faith has cost me nothing". Let us remember the words of Christ, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35), "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all". For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many". (Mark 10:43-45). Let us be reminded of the fact that we are not called to be Christ's patrons, but as Christ's servants only. It is not the one who sits at the table, but the one who serves is greater. Let us, as we enter into a new year, stop and

was led by Rev. A. W. Jebanesan assisted by the Rev. S. S. Terrence, Rev. R. Thayaniythy Rev. S. S. Gnanaarajah of the Methodist church and Rev. S. P. Nesakumar of the St. John's Church Chundikul. Tributes were paid by Mrs P. S. Skandarajah Principal Vembadi Girls' High School and Miss G. T. Vadivelu Retired Headmistress Vembadi.

The deceased leaves behind two sisters Amirtha Sinnathamby Karunavathy Thomas and brothers Reggie Sinnathamby and Rev. S.S. Karunairaj of the Methodist Church.

think for a while of this servant ministry of the Church. Only in serving, sacrificing and giving of itself, the Church finds its true identity and its fulfillment.

Therefore, "for to this we have been called, because, Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we should follow in his steps.

Amen.

Pandateruppu Church...

(Continued from page one)
nesan. They wished Bishop and Mrs. Jebanesan all the best during their tenure in office, and pledged their fullest cooperation in the development of the Diocese.

In replying, our Bishop thanked every speaker for the nice words spoken about him and his wife. He said he was sad that we are one of the churches in exile. He also noted, under what difficulties and hardships our Home children and even our parishioners live after being displaced. Like the new Israel he hoped that very soon all our members who are displaced from their homes would be able to get back to their own houses. In proposing a vote of thanks, Mr. S. Ratnavel thanked Bishop and Mrs. Jebanesan for honouring our invitation and being present that day. He thanked the Principal, Uduvil Girls' College for giving our children accommodation in the College premises and also for all facilities given to the girls.

He thanked all members of the Church for being present in large numbers on this happy occasion. Giving him their fullest cooperation and support in making this function a success.

The proceedings came to a close with benediction pronounced by the Bishop. This was followed by lunch served to all who attended this function.

Jaffna College Carol Services

Jaffna College Primary School Carol Service was held on 21st November 1993 at 4.00 p.m. The Senior School choir had its carol services on the following Sunday at 4.00 p.m.

The Tamil choir of Jaffna College presented a 'Gretha Natgam' - song and dance Christmas programme at Ottley Hall, Jaffna College on 5th December 1993 at 4.00 p.m. All three services were well attended much enthusiasm was shown by all the participants in spite of gloomy weather overcast over us.