



# CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

## CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.  
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA  
1805 - 1871

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI  
Prior General

REF: PG/417/2023  
Circular No. 18

02 July 2023

### Circular on *Dukhrana* of St Thomas

Dear and loving CMI *Koodapirappukale!*

On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July we commemorate and celebrate the life and legacy of St Thomas the Apostle known as the feast of *Dukhrana*. I wish each one of you the greetings of the day. The name Thomas renders the Aramaic word *Taoma* which means "Twin", the implication being he is Jesus' twin. He is the father of Faith of the Syro Malabar Christians and the patron saint of India who played a vital role in spreading the light of faith among the people in the different parts of India, especially in the southern parts of India like Kerala and Tamil Nadu. His deep faith, missionary zeal and commitment to embrace the truth are still influencing and challenging the people through generations.

#### 1. St Thomas, the Biblical Figure

In the Synoptic gospels Thomas' name is mentioned only in the list of the apostles, but in the fourth gospel (Jn 11:16; 14:5; 20:24-29) he appears in three places and plays a significant role in motivating the fellow apostles and revealing hidden truth about Jesus Christ. For the first time Thomas appears in chapter 11 of John in the context of the death of Lazarus while Jesus is preparing himself to move to Bethany. Other disciples were trying to prevent him saying: "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Then Thomas said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn 11:16). Here we see the courage, loyalty and boldness of Apostle Thomas who gives us an example to embrace danger with faith, show loyalty to the Master and put trust in divine providence. He had a deep love towards Jesus and was prepared to sacrifice his life for him. He was courageous to face persecutions and hardships in life and challenges us to be daring in the face of difficulties.

In the second instance Thomas appears in chapter 14 of John when Jesus is speaking about the way to the Father. Then Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6). Thus, Thomas becomes instrumental in Jesus' declaration of his identity and mission. Here Jesus is emphatically stating that he is the exclusive Way to the Father, the embodiment of absolute Truth and the giver of abundant Life. This knowledge made Thomas to come to a land riddled with various belief systems and paths to spirituality and challenge its inhabitants to become "followers of the Way."

Thirdly, Thomas appears in chapter 20 of John where we witness his ardent desire to seek and find the truth. Here Thomas teaches us that faith is a journey that requires encounter, surrender and confession. When the risen Lord appears to the apostles Thomas was not with them and he did not believe. When Jesus appears after eight days, he invites Thomas to see his wounds, touch them and believe in him (Jn 20:27). Thomas confesses his faith in the Lord saying: "My Lord and my God!"



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This is one of the great confessions of faith in the NT where we see his profound transformation and steadfast dedication. This deep love and unwavering commitment made him an ardent believer and an advocate for spreading the gospel.

### **2. St Thomas and Communitarian Witness**

Communitarian witness beyond borders is the theme of this year as we prepare ourselves for the bicentennial of our congregation. Right from the time of his call Thomas embraced an idea of community life that made him to join the group of apostles. He could find within the Twelve support, belongingness, shared sense of purpose and an experience of togetherness. The same community sense made him to travel to Bethany with the confident Jesus and the fearful apostles to sacrifice his life for the Master. In this transformative journey he could witness the resuscitation of Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary and grasp that Jesus is resurrection and life. Besides, the apostles could share a sense of unity and brotherhood among themselves; their prayer life deepened their communion and fellowship and strengthened their faith in the Lord. Their journeying together, learning the teachings of Jesus, witnessing his miracles, sharing the meals, encountering challenges invites us to strengthen the bonds of communitarian life.

St Thomas' life serves as a powerful example of the importance of communitarian life beyond borders. His doubt was not an obstacle to his relation with Jesus but a stepping stone towards a deeper understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. Having experienced the risen Lord and received the Holy spirit at Pentecost he travelled to India with a mission of spreading the Gospel. His community experience helped him to establish Christian communities in Kerala, build bridges between diverse cultures, proclaim the gospel in a land of unknown language and religion. His mission exemplifies his inclusive attitude, importance of reaching out to others, communitarian witness beyond borders, need for establishing communities and fostering connections beyond cultural, linguistic and geographical boundaries. In his missionary journey in the southern part of India, he united people from different backgrounds through the common bond of faith, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and fostering harmony amidst diversity.

### **3. A Synodal Way of Journeying**

"Let us also go and die with him", expresses Thomas' desire to travel with Jesus in a synodal way. Synodality refers to the journey the apostles and disciples made together with Jesus who presents himself as "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). St Thomas experienced Jesus as the way, his style as communicative, his mission as participatory, and his path as synodal and his goal as communion. He came to India to make the followers of Jesus "the disciples of the Way" (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The experience of the kenotic love of Jesus taking the form of a servant, his vision of authority as service (*diakonia*), his washing of the feet of the apostles with humility, his universalistic approach to all made Thomas to present Jesus as the absolute Truth.

St Thomas' encounter with the risen Lord reveals his doubt which later paves way for his deeper commitment and profound faith. He could dispel the doubts through shared experiences and





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interaction with Jesus and the other apostles. He experienced a sense of unity, compassion and inclusiveness at the resurrection appearance of Jesus. Though he doubted when the other apostles told him that they had seen the Lord, Jesus in his next appearance does not condemn him for his lack of faith. Rather he gives the doubting Thomas an occasion to see him, touch his wounds and witness the reality of resurrection. Here we see the inclusive attitude of Jesus that embraces all those who doubt him, deny him and even betray him. Jesus not only reconstitutes the scattered community but also nurtures the faith of each individual, welcomes their questions and trains them to become fishers of men.

#### **4. Manipur Riot**

As we know the Manipur riot that erupted as an ethnic clash on 03 May 2023 is now becoming a communal violence resulting in the persecution of the Christians and the minorities. A good number of innocent people lost their life, many churches and houses were burned and destroyed, and thousands of people have been displaced from their homes. Christianity arrived in Manipur during the British era and at present there are different denominations and groups. The growing presence of Christians stirred apprehensions among other religious groups sparking tensions and conflicts.

The present fight between *Meiteis* and *kukis*, in the state of Manipur has led to widespread violence, death and displacement. What is deplorable is that the authorities are silent in this matter and have not taken any attempt to condemn the riots and reestablish peace and harmony. The freedom of religion guaranteed in the Constitution of India stands as a testament to the country's commitment to pluralism, diversity and individual liberties. It recognizes and protects the right of every citizen to practice, profess and propagate the religion of his choice without fear. But there is a growing trend to undermine the principles of equality, diversity and individual liberty that form the backbone of a democratic country like India. Let us hope and pray for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence, unity and understanding amid diversity. Let the opposing groups be ready to embrace dialogue with respect and empathy.

As we celebrate the feast of St Thomas the Apostle let us pray for his intercession that we may grow in our missionary zeal, deep faith and strong courage. Let his life and legacy continue to motivate and influence us. I remember all those who bear the name Thomas and pray for them. May God bless us and St Thomas our patron saint intercedes for us.

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