

Shepherd's Voice

Pastoral Perseverance, Marian Hope and Responsible Freedom

Dear Reverend Fathers, Sisters, Brothers and Beloved Faithful

Greetings of peace and joy to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The month of September places before us several beautiful moments of grace: the **Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on 8 September**, the **Exaltation of the Holy Cross on 14 September**, the memory of **Our Lady of Sorrows on 15 September**, and **Bible Sunday, which we celebrate during the last week of September**. These celebrations invite us to receive the Word like Mary, remain faithful at the foot of the Cross, accompany those who suffer, and allow Sacred Scripture to shape our daily lives.

1. The Nativity of Mary: Every Birth Carries a Promise

On 8 September, we joyfully celebrate the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The birth of Mary announces the dawn of salvation, for through her, God prepared a dwelling place for His Son.

Every birth carries a promise. A newborn child cannot yet speak, work, achieve, or prove anything, yet within that child lies a future known fully only to God. Mary was born into an ordinary family and lived in an insignificant village. Yet God saw in her a willing heart through whom great things could be accomplished.

Her birth teaches us never to underestimate small beginnings or ordinary lives. It invites us especially to value every child and young person entrusted to us. No child should feel inferior because of poverty, caste, family background, disability, academic performance, or social condition.

Our families, schools, parishes, and institutions must become places where children are welcomed, protected, encouraged, educated, and helped to discover their God-given gifts. The future of the Church and society is already present in the children growing among us today.

2. The Exaltation of the Holy Cross: Love That Remains Faithful

On 14 September, we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The Cross stands at the centre of our Christian faith. We place it in our churches, homes, schools, hospitals, and institutions because it reminds us of the depth of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Cross is not a glorification of suffering. Jesus never taught us to create suffering or to remain indifferent to injustice. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, defended the weak, forgave sinners, and restored dignity to those who had been excluded.

Rather, the Cross tells us that when suffering enters human life, God does not abandon us. In Jesus crucified, God enters into our pain and transforms suffering through love.

Many crosses are carried silently among us: financial difficulties, illness, family conflicts, unemployment, loneliness, bereavement, uncertainty about the future, and many hidden struggles. As Christians, we should not increase the burdens of others. We are called to help carry them.

A truly Christian community asks not only, **"What cross must I carry?"** but also, **"Whose cross can I help carry?"**

Let our parishes be places where struggling families find support, the elderly find companionship, the sick are visited, young people receive guidance, and those who have fallen discover a hand willing to help them rise again.

3. Our Lady of Sorrows: The Grace of Remaining

On 15 September, immediately after the Feast of the Holy Cross, we commemorate Our Lady of Sorrows. The closeness of these celebrations is significant. On one day, we contemplate Jesus on the Cross; on the next, we contemplate Mary standing beside him.

There are moments when we cannot solve the problems of those we love. We may not have answers to their questions or solutions to their difficulties. Yet we can listen, pray, accompany, visit, console, and remain near them.

Our Lady of Sorrows speaks especially to those who silently carry pain: parents who have lost children, widows and widowers, families caring for the sick, victims of violence, people experiencing broken relationships, those living with loneliness, and those carrying wounds that others may never see.

The Church must stand beside them as Mary stood beneath the Cross. I encourage our parish communities to develop this ministry of compassionate presence.

4. Bible Sunday: Let the Word Enter Our Lives

During the **last week of September, we celebrate Bible Sunday**, a special occasion for our diocesan community to renew its love for the Word of God.

The Bible is one of the greatest treasures entrusted to the Church. Yet possessing a Bible is not enough. The important question is whether we read the Word of God in it, listen to it, pray with it, and allow it to influence the choices we make.

Sacred Scripture is not simply a record of events that happened centuries ago. It is the living Word through which God continues to address his people today.

When we read the Bible, we should therefore ask not only, "What happened in this passage?" but also: **"Where am I in this story? What is God saying to me today?"**

I encourage every Catholic family to give the Word of God a visible and practical place in the home. During this Bible Sunday week, let every family make an effort to read at least a short passage together each day. Let parents encourage children to read the Bible aloud. After reading, a family may simply ask: **"What is God saying to our family through this passage?"**

I invite our parishes to mark Bible Sunday meaningfully through Bible enthronement, Bible processions where appropriate, Scripture reading, Bible quizzes for children and youth, Bible exhibitions, Bible-sharing groups, and special reflections on the importance of the Word of God.

Above all, Bible Sunday should lead us beyond programmes and celebrations. The Bible must become part of our ordinary Christian life.

Our priests have a special responsibility in this regard. The homily must help people see the connection between the Word proclaimed at the altar and the realities they face in their homes, workplaces, villages, schools, and society. Our catechists, religious, teachers, parents, and youth leaders must also help cultivate a love for Scripture in the communities entrusted to them.

Let the Bible move **from the shelf to our hands, from our hands to our minds, from our minds to our hearts, and from our hearts into our lives.**

When Scripture enters the heart, it changes the way we speak, forgive, serve, spend, relate, and make decisions. The best way to honour the Bible is therefore not merely to read the Word but to **become doers of the Word** (cf. Jas 1:22).

Entrusting our diocese, our priests and religious, our families, children and young people, the sick and suffering, and all the faithful to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I invoke upon you the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

With mercy and hope,

+Ambrose Pitchaimuthu
Bishop of Vellore