

## **"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD" (Jn 8: 12) - Fr. Sebastian Kizhakkeyil**

### **1. Introduction**

*Asato ma satgamaya* (Lead me from untruth to truth)

*Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya* (Lead me from darkness to light)

*Mrutyor ma amritam gamaya* (Lead me from death to immortality).

This sincere prayer (*Brihadaraka Upanishad* I, 3.28) arose from the hearts of Indian sages probably centuries before the birth of Christianity. The Indian minds were looking for truth, light and immortality. Exactly those things sought after by Indian minds are offered by Jesus, i.e. truth, light and immortality. To hearts throbbing for truth, to minds searching for light and to souls looking for immortality there is only one answer: Jesus, Yeshua, Isa, Eeso.

"*Ani ha-wor ha-aratz*" – "I am the light of the world", Jesus proclaimed this in his local tongue. The fourth evangelist converted it into Greek, the literary language of culture and civilization of that time, and conveyed it to us of future generations as *Ego eimi to phos tou kosmou*. We now repeat in our common tongues these words of Jesus: "Mem sansar ki jyoti hoom"; "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8: 12: 9: 5),

Today we are gathered here for the First Indian Mission Congress from every nook and corner of our great nation India to proclaim Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and as the light to our country as well as to all the countries of the world. Since yesterday afternoon we have been experiencing a deep sense of our Christian fraternity and koinonia in this Yesu Mahotsav. It is like a new Pentecost similar to the first Christian Pentecost in Jerusalem. Jewish pilgrims from various countries of the world who spoke different languages gathered together in front of the Cenacle, the Upper Room, to hear Peter's message of salvation in Christ Jesus which he announced by the grace and strength given to him by the Holy Spirit. All of them with different mother tongues comprehended the salvific message proclaimed by Peter because on that historical day God reversed the event of the Tower of Babel described in Genesis 11. There humanity was scattered for its sins of pride and arrogance failing to comprehend each other. On the first Christian Pentecost pilgrims of diverse language origins understood Peter's words. Let us pray and hope for a new Pentecostal experience here during these five days. Our brothers and sisters from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat are present here and we form one people of faith who proclaim in the loudest possible way that Jesus is the Light of the world.

In the first Servant Song in Isaiah 42: 1-4 we see Yahweh declaring His choice of the servant in whom He delights, upon whom Yahweh has put His spirit, giving

the servant the mission of bringing justice to the nations. In the second Servant Song of Isaiah 49: 1-6 Yahweh declares that He will give the anointed servant of Yahweh as light to the nations so that His salvation may reach the ends of the earth. In this year of priests, when we celebrate the 150th death anniversary of St. John Maria Vianney, we should view every catholic priest as an anointed servant of God to bring divine justice and salvation to the ends of the earth and to become a light to the nations. As you know, Pope Benedict has declared “faithfulness of Christ, faithfulness of priests” as the motto of this priestly year.

I am one of those thousands of priests who have been chosen and anointed by Jesus, the Son of God and our Saviour, to bring Jesus’ light to the ends of the world. Like every other priest and every Christian, I am called to be a light to the world. I am a Catholic priest belonging to the Missionary Society of St. Thomas the Apostle since last 28 years. In my almost three decades of priestly life trying to reflect, radiate and spread Jesus’ light in the world, I worked as a missionary in central and north India for the first six years after my ordination. My second Christmas celebration as a missionary priest was in a place where there was no catholic presence. But I celebrated the Christmas liturgy with a crowd of hundreds of non-Christians. It was a great experience for the people who attended the service as well as for me. After six years of direct involvement in the work of evangelization I spent next three years as a parish priest in south India. The most memorable period of my life was the seven years that I lived in Jerusalem in the Holy Land, trying to know and experience Jesus more closely and deeply by living in the land made holy by Jesus’ physical presence. The Holy Eucharist that I celebrated at Calvary and at the Holy Sepulchre of Jesus in Jerusalem and at the nativity grotto in Bethlehem year after year was deeply touching. The long years of Bible study and research in the land of the Bible transformed me to radiate Jesus’ light in various parts of the world.

As a major seminary professor and formator in India, I have imparted Jesus’ light to hundreds of seminarians who have now been ordained priests of Christ. Thirty three books that I have published so far were my other efforts to spread Jesus’ light in the world. I can feel the work of the Holy Spirit within me. It is the Holy Spirit that moves me to proclaim the word of God vocally and in written form. While spending hours and hours with the word of God I feel no fatigue or boredom. On the other hand, I am all the more inspired and empowered to proclaim to the entire world that Jesus is its light of salvation.

During the next half an hour I shall make a Scriptural presentation of Jesus as the Light of the world and then we shall reflect how we can bear witness to Jesus as the light of the world today. Jesus is not a philosophical or theological concept remaining on the abstract level. He is a concrete reality that all of us have experienced in our lives. He has touched our hearts and our lives. He illumines and

guides us every day and he is the centre of our lives. We want that Jesus should illumine the lives of all our brothers and sisters of this country as well as of all the countries of the world.

Jesus says “I am” forty five times in the fourth Gospel alone. In all the NT books the expression “I am” occurs a total of eighty six times. In the fourth Gospel we see the following most direct “I am” sayings of Jesus:

“I am the bread of life” (Jn 6: 35, 41, 48, 51).

“I am the light of the world” (Jn 8: 12; 9: 5).

“I am from above” (Jn 8: 23).

“I am the door of the sheep” (Jn 10: 7, 9).

“I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10: 11, 14).

“I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11: 25).

“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14: 6).

“I am the true vine” (Jn 15: 1, 5).

Among these direct “I am” sayings of Jesus, our focus this whole day is on Jesus’ saying: “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8: 12; 9: 5).

## **2. Jesus as the light and life of the world**

The best exposition of Jesus as light may be the Johannine prologue (Jn 1: 1-18): “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; nothing was made without him. In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, and darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1: 1-5).

### **2.1. John the Baptist’s testimony**

I have just quoted the initial verses of John’s gospel. After these introductory verses, the evangelist presents John the Baptist as the witness to the light: “There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (Jn 1: 6-9).

This light of Jesus was for all without discrimination. It is the source of everything for us; yet, we believe at times that we can do without it! If we don’t think about (Him), it will go away. This works for a while, but then ... darkness is cold, lonely, purposeless and corrosive.

### **2.2. Three disciples witnessing Jesus as light**

Three of Jesus’ apostles were fortunate to have a glimpse of Jesus as the light when they witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration revealing his heavenly glory (Mt 17: 1-2). Yes, Jesus was and is the true light. Some of his disciples had the rare

opportunity to have a glance of Jesus as the light shining like the sun.

### **2.3. Fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 9: 1-7)**

In the eighth century BC Isaiah prophesied that those people of Galilee living in darkness will see a great light. On those living in the land of deep darkness a light will dawn (Is 9: 2). Evangelist Matthew sees the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Jesus when Jesus left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum (Mt 4: 12-16). The evangelist here emphasizes Jesus as the light of the world just as Isaiah had prophesied.

### **2.4. Paul's witness**

Saul was fortunate to witness Jesus as light when the risen Lord appeared to him on his way to Damascus (Acts 9: 3-5). It was this encounter in which Jesus' light that descended on Paul that removed his darkness whereby he became the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 26: 15-18).

St. Paul bore witness to Jesus whom he experienced firsthand in his encounter with the risen Lord. He wrote to the Corinthian Christians: "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor 8: 6; cf. Col 1: 15-17).

Yes, my fellow believers, Jesus is the Lord through whom we live and for whom we live. Let us proclaim this truth to the whole world and let us bear witness to our deep faith and trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Like St. Paul who went about proclaiming Jesus as the light of the world, are we ready to bear witness to Jesus and to spread his light far and wide? Let us say together, yes we are.

### **2.5. The Son is the radiance of God's glory**

The Epistle to Hebrews begins by highlighting the unique role of Jesus in God's plan of salvation: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through him he made all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory" (Heb 1: 1-3a).

My fellow-believers, we know that the true light has already come into the world. It is our duty, yours and mine, to radiate that light of Jesus in the entire world so that all peoples would be illumined by his divine light.

It is opportune now to recall the words of Pope John XXIII: "It would be scarcely

necessary to expand doctrine if our lives were radiant enough. If we behaved like true Christians, there would be no pagans.”

Here we are gathered in the first Indian mission congress to remind ourselves of our duty of spreading the light of Jesus in our home country first of all by behaving like true Christians. Are we ready to behave like true Christians? Are we willing to take up the task of spreading Jesus’ light in our country? Let us all together say, yes we are.

### **3. Jesus as light removing the darkness of sin**

Let us reflect for a while how Jesus as the light of the world removed the darkness that covered it. How did Jesus do that? The fourth Servant Song in Isaiah has prophetically explained how the chosen One would be light to the nations. We have already mentioned it once. Jesus removed the darkness of sin by becoming a lamb. Jesus became the scapegoat of Yom Kippur that carried away the sins of the people (Lev 16) as John the Baptist bore witness: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1: 29).

Yes, my brothers and sisters, Jesus also became the paschal lamb that was killed in the Passover night (Ex 12) so that we would be saved by his blood just as the Israelites were saved from death with the sign of the blood of the lamb on the door post in the night when all the Egyptian first-born were killed.

#### **3.1. Jesus removing the darkness of sin by becoming the slaughtered goat and the scapegoat of Yom Kippur**

Let us reflect a little deeper: How did Jesus become “the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world” (Jn 1: 29) as announced by John the Baptizer?

Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement is one of the seven main Jewish feasts. This annual feast is observed on the tenth day of the Jewish New Year. The Jewish New Year Day is celebrated as a feast known as Rosh HaShanah. On the fifteenth day of the New Year they celebrate the third feast known as Sukkoth or the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. Hanukka, Purim, Pesah and Shavuot are the remaining four of the seven annual Jewish feasts.

Yom Kippur has been a day of fasting and atonement and it has been the most important liturgical day of the Jewish year. This was the only day of the year when the Jewish High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies of the temple in Jerusalem with the blood of an animal killed for the expiation of the sins of the people. The high priest would first offer an expiatory sacrifice of a bull and a ram for his own sins and those of his family. He was to incense the sanctuary so that a smoke screen would be created saving him from gazing upon the Lord and then getting killed (c. Ex 33, 20). He should sprinkle blood from the bull toward the Mercy

Seat. Two male goats and a ram were to be provided by the community and the high priest would draw lots to see which of the two goats was to be the people's sin-offering to the Lord and which would be the scapegoat. Then he would slaughter the goat selected for the people's sin-offering and sprinkle its blood inside the veil. Thus he would make atonement for the sins of all the Israelites. Bringing forward the scapegoat he would place both his hands on its head, and confessing all the sins of Israelites he would transfer them on to the goat. Then the scapegoat would be led into a far away desert carrying with it the sins of the Israelites laid on it; it would be left in a place from where it would never return; the scapegoat would then die there for the sake of the expiation of the sins of the people.

According to the apocryphal Book of Jubilees, the Day of Atonement is the one day in the year when forgiveness is granted to all who repent fully (Jub 5: 17-18). It was established on the day when Jacob heard of Joseph's death and mourned for him (Gen 37: 34). Its interpretation prescribes the Day of Atonement as a sad day and says that atonement is made with a male goat as a reminder of the male goat which Joseph's brothers slaughtered and in whose blood they dipped his clothes (Gen 37: 31-33).

According to the ancient Jewish scholar Philo, Yom Kippur is a day of abstinence and devotion, a day for praying from morning until night. The purpose of the fast is to purify the hearts of the people who pray without being disturbed by corporal desires. The Jewish sages considered the Day of Atonement as the supreme festival and the greatest day of the year. In Temple times this was considered as the annual Day of Purgation of the Temple. The goats were thought to be making atonement for the impurity of the temple by shedding their blood which was sprinkled within the Holy of Holies.

Why do I speak to you now about the Jewish feast of Yom Kippur although the Jewish people all over the world have just celebrated this year's feast only a few days ago, i.e. on September 27th evening to 28th evening? Do you see the essential connection between Jesus' sacrificial death and the feast of Yom Kippur? John the Baptist qualified Jesus as "the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world" (Jn 1: 29). Jesus substituted himself for the two goats that were offered for the expiation of sins. Jesus became the goat slaughtered whose blood was sprinkled inside the veil of the Holy of Holies to remove the stains of the people's sins; he also became the scapegoat by taking away all the sins of the people upon himself and by dying on the cross.

### **3.2. Jesus removing darkness by becoming the paschal lamb**

Jesus was the paschal lamb as well. During the Temple times a paschal lamb was offered as a sacrifice; it was then eaten in family groups after it had been roasted

(Ex 12: 1-28, 43-49; Deut 16: 1-8). The Jews consider the feast of Passover as a divinely ordained one, a permanent reminder of God's deliverance of his people from the Egyptian slavery. The special ceremony on the first night of Passover is known as Seder (order). It is based on Ex 13: 8 which asks the Jewish parents to inform their children of the Israelite deliverance from Egypt.

The Jewish Passover is viewed as the anticipation of the Christian Easter since the Lamb of God, Christ, was sacrificed (the crucifixion) and eaten (the Last Supper) within the framework of the Jewish Passover. The paschal lamb slain and eaten every year recalled the liberation of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. Its blood displayed on the doorposts commemorated their deliverance from the tenth plague when all Egyptian first-borns were killed. Jesus became the paschal lamb that was slain and eaten and whose blood saved humanity from the plague of sin and death. Everyday in the Eucharistic celebration we recall the slaughter of Jesus the Paschal Lamb and we eat his flesh. Each of our Eucharistic celebrations reminds us of our salvation that Jesus has achieved through his sacrificial death and resurrection.

Jesus became the light of the world through his example of life by offering himself as the slaughtered goat and the scapegoat of Yom Kippur as well as the paschal lamb of Passover. Mark Twain says, "Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example." According to Albert Schweitzer, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others – it is the only thing."

Are we ready to follow Jesus' example of dedicating our lives for others? Let us all together say, yes we are.

#### **4. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness" (Jn 8: 12; 9: 5)**

We find this great declaration of Jesus in Jn 8: 12 (cf. 9: 5). Here Jesus emphasizes the effect of being in his light: 'they will not walk in darkness.' Sometimes a momentary flashing light from a lightning bolt can be of great benefit to us. Such a light can show a danger on the road ahead to a man walking in darkness and thus save his life. If we follow Jesus, we shall always be walking in his light, discerning the dangers ahead in order to be saved from them.

##### **4.1. Jesus' light as source of energy**

Once Tennyson was walking in his beautiful garden where many flowers were blooming. A friend asked him, "Can you tell me what Christ, about whom you often speak, really means to you?" Then pointing to a flower, Tennyson said, "What the sun is to that flower is Jesus to me." Yes my brethren, Jesus is the indispensable source of all our energy just as the sun is for plants and flowers.

## **4.2. The painting by Holman Hunt**

Holman Hunt made a famous painting in 1854 which he named as “The Light of the World.” It portrays Christ, thorn-crowned and carrying a lantern, knocking at a closed door. One of his friends who saw the painting pointed out to the artist an omission by him. He said to Holman, “You have not put a handle on the door.” Then Holman replied, “The handle is on the inside of the door. We must open to the Light.” Yes, my fellow Christians, we must open the door of our lives from inside so that Jesus’ light will enter us.

Beloved brethren, let us never walk in darkness because Jesus has removed the darkness of our lives. With the Christian faith that we have received in our baptism we have decided to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. The various sacraments that we have received are the food that sustains us on our journey ahead. Let us invite our non-Christian brothers and sisters in our own neighbourhoods, in our villages and towns to walk with us behind Jesus illumined by his light. This is what this mission congress urges each one of us to do.

At a time when electricity was not discovered, John Ruskin watched a lamplighter lighting the street lights of his city. As Ruskin watched him going farther away with lighting each lamp post, the man’s figure became smaller and smaller, but he left behind him a light burning more and more brightly dispelling darkness. Then Ruskin said, “There, that is what I mean by a real Christian.” Every Christian must leave behind the light of Christ shining brightly as he walks ahead and finally disappears.

Are we ready to be real Christians by becoming lamp-lighters leaving behind Jesus’ light burning brightly? Let us all together say, yes we are.

## **5. Jesus’ mission command to all Christians**

The first book in the NT, i.e. the Gospel of Matthew, concludes his witness to Jesus by reporting Jesus’ mission command to the apostles and to every Christian: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything that I commanded you” (Mt 28: 19-20a). The other two Synoptic Gospels of Mark and Luke also repeat this mission command of Jesus in their Gospels (Mk 16: 15; Lk 24: 47). Before his ascension into heaven Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). The apostles executed Jesus’ command by preaching the good news of salvation in as many places as they could. Apostle James (Acts 12: 2) and almost all the other apostles were martyred on account of the Gospel that they preached.

### **5.1. Paul obeying Jesus’ mission command**

“Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22: 21), Jesus told Saul,



appointing him the ‘Apostle of the Gentiles.’ Again the Lord said to Paul: “I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes and turn them back from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26: 17b-18; cf. Col 1: 13-14). We know that Paul obeyed this command of Jesus literally and in its proper spirit by preaching Christ crucified and risen. Symbolically he reached the ends of the earth by preaching the good news of salvation in the capital city of the world empire of Rome while bound in chains and under house arrest (Acts 28: 16.20; Eph 6: 20).

## **5.2. Paul’s sufferings for the sake of the Gospel**

In spite of the perceived dangers, Jesus went to Bethany and raised his friend Lazarus back to life after sharing the grief of his sisters Mary and Martha by weeping with them (Jn 11: 1-44). Paul followed this example of Jesus. Dangers of persecutions did not slow him down in his ministry of evangelization.

Paul made himself a slave to all to win as many as possible for Christ (1 Cor 9: 19-23). He underwent persecution and suffering in his mission of preaching Jesus and his good news of salvation. Paul was made a public spectacle of ridicule like men condemned to death and was displayed as a fool; he was hungry, thirsty, clothed in rags, brutally treated, homeless, cursed, persecuted and slandered; he became the scum of the earth and the refuse of the world (1 Cor 4: 9-13). Hear again what Paul tells us about the challenges he faced: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body” (2 Cor 4: 8-10). Again the Apostle of the Gentiles informs us about his sufferings: ‘I have been in prison, flogged severely; I was exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one; three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; I spent a night and a day in the open sea’ (2 Cor 11: 23-28). St. Paul identifies with every Christian who is persecuted for the sake of Jesus and his Gospel.

In our persecutions we should remember the words of St. Paul: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword?” (Rom 8: 35-39). He then declared boldly his conviction that nothing in the world was able to separate him from the love of Christ. Are we bold enough to say the same?

Dear fellow Christians of our country, who are suffering, who are persecuted, you are not alone in your suffering. As St. Paul says, you carry in your bodies the death of Jesus in the form of persecutions so that Jesus’ life may be revealed in you. Beloved Christians of Kandamahal and other places in Orissa, of Mangalore

and other places in Karnataka, of the various villages and towns of Madhya Pradesh and other states, you are not the first ones to follow Jesus in his sufferings and persecutions. We have St. Paul and most other apostles as our models in sufferings and persecutions. They will strengthen us in our sufferings. Are we with our persecuted fellow Christians in their time of crisis and challenges? Let us all together say, yes we are.

## **6. Jesus' light as compassion and mercy**

So far we have seen how the Bible presents Jesus as the light of the world. Our next attempt is to see how Jesus becomes the light in our lives, how he touches each one of us in our particular life context and how we can radiate that light around us.

We are in the city of Slum Dog Millionaire where thousands of children are born and brought up in slums. Can Jesus relate to those children? Yes, he can, for Jesus himself was born in an animal shelter and his bed was the animal manger. He was surrounded by animals.

About a quarter of the population of our country lives in poverty. Millions of households work hard and parents struggle to feed their children. How can they relate themselves to Jesus? Jesus had hard-working parents. His foster father Joseph was a carpenter; since his boyhood Jesus helped Joseph in his work. Jesus himself worked as a carpenter until the beginning of his public ministry.

Jesus can relate himself closely to the marginalized people because he himself was a marginalized Jew. He has the experience of being homeless because he had no home even to be born on this earth. When Rubina Ali and some other child actors and actresses lost their homes in the Garib Nagar demolished by the Mumbai Municipal teams, the world press highlighted their fate of being homeless. How can homeless people experience Jesus as the light of the world in their struggle to survive in their state of being destitutes?

Can we present Jesus to such people as their light? Let us all together say, yes we can.

### **6.1. Blessed Mother Theresa**

Blessed Mother Theresa spread Jesus' light heroically through her apostolate. She often quoted Jesus' words in Mt 25: 31-46: 'I was naked, hungry, homeless, in prison and you cared for me. When you have shown mercy and compassion to the least of my brethren, you have done to me.' The apostolate of Blessed Mother Theresa was to radiate Jesus' light especially on the abandoned and the marginalized in the form of compassion and mercy.

Are we ready like Blessed Mother Theresa to feed the hungry, clothe the naked,

shelter the homeless, visit prisoners, care for the abandoned and the dying?  
Let us all together say, yes we are.

## **6.2. Blessed Kunjachan**

Unlike Mother Theresa, Blessed Kunjachan was almost unknown while he was alive, while he was spending his entire life for the marginalized Christians. For a people struggling to survive with meager means of livelihood and in low social status, Blessed Kunjachan became the beacon of light. He kept Jesus' light shining brightly among them. How many of us are ready to follow his example today? We have several more beacons of light shining in our country: St. Alphonsa, Blessed Vaz, Chavara, and Eupresia stand out as shining stars spreading Jesus' light in our country.

## **6.3. WWJD (What would Jesus do?)**

On this thought, allow me to share the following experience with you. In my travels I happened to see a bumper sticker on the back of several cars on American roads. There were only four letters on the sticker and they were: WWJD. When I inquired as to its full form and meaning, I found that WWJD was an acronym for: What would Jesus do? The sticker was inviting Christians to ask themselves what would Jesus do in particular situations of their lives: What would Jesus do in this situation? Then act and respond as Jesus would have acted and responded. We can ask ourselves this question – WWJD, What would Jesus do? - more often in our lives if we want Jesus' light to spread in this world.

## **6.4. Jesus' light shining through acts of compassion**

We often shun criminals and convicts and exclude them from our society. WWJD. Just look at Calvary: Jesus is crucified between two robbers. To one of them Jesus says, "Today you shall be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23: 43). Jesus became instrumental in releasing the hard-core criminal Barabbas. Jesus is the light that opens the Kingdom of heaven to everyone; he excludes no one.

## **6.5. Seeking those lost and abandoned**

Jesus' mission was to call sinners to repentance and not to condemn them. He accepted their hospitality; he dined in the houses of the so-called public sinners, i.e. tax collectors, such as Levi and Zacchaeus. Jesus was ready to leave the 99 and go in search of the lost one. But today how many of us are doing the same? In the West, the Church caters mostly to those who frequent Sunday Mass and leaves out the vast majority who needs help and guidance. How does the Indian Church seek sinners, go after them and welcome them back just as the prodigal son was welcomed back by his father? WWJD. There is no point in saying that Jesus is the light of the world if we do not make Jesus present in today's world as the light that dispels darkness in the lives of millions of people.

For centuries lepers were outcasts in most parts of the world. It is a blessing that the Church tried to care for the lepers when the general public shunned them and expelled them from society. At present HIV/AIDS affected people are stigmatized in our society. Family members, friends, neighbours, hospitals and educational institutions refuse to extend help to the victims of HIV/AIDS. WWJD. We have the examples of Jesus curing the lepers and healing the woman with a hemorrhage that should impel us to present Jesus as light to those shunned by society.

### **6.6. Becoming light to the marginalized**

Centuries-old caste system that has existed in India has its evil effects even upon present day society. Some groups of people suffer social discrimination since justice and opportunities are denied to them. How does Jesus become light to people of the Dalit communities? WWJD. In Jesus' time the Samaritans were considered 'untouchables' by the Jews. That was why the Samaritan woman was surprised by Jesus' request to her for water to drink. Jesus took positive efforts to promote their cause. He presented a Samaritan as the ideal neighbour over a Jewish priest and a Levite who were close to the Jewish temple and the Torah. Out of the ten lepers cured by Jesus, only a Samaritan came back to thank Jesus!

Jesus understood human problems, hunger, diseases and death and he acted empathetically when he faced such situations. Seeing the hungry crowd, Jesus said to his disciples, "I have compassion for these people ... If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way" (Mk 8: 2-3). Jesus fed the hungry people.

Seeing the hapless paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus had compassion on him knowing that he had been there for a long time and Jesus healed him (Jn 5: 1-18). Luke writes in his gospel about the widow of Nain, "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.' Then he went and touched the coffin ... He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up.' The dead man sat up and began to talk" (Lk 7: 13-15).

How can Jesus be light to those who live in abject poverty? How do hungry people relate to Jesus? How can Jesus be made known to those who have no proper roof over their heads? How can Jesus' light reach those who are ignorant with no access to education? How are our social programmes working? When we put up huge mansions for our various Christian institutions, why do we forget those homeless living just outside our gates or across the street? When we run schools where only the rich can afford to send their children, how can we spread Jesus' light to the poor and the marginalized whom Jesus loved the most? WWJD.

How can those people who cannot afford medical treatment look toward Jesus as their light? What about our Christian hospitals? Are they accessible to the poor? WWJD.

Today all of us Christians should act as Jesus did with empathy and compassion so that the hungry, the sick and the dying will experience Jesus as their light. In the present time Jesus' compassion and mercy must be manifested through our empathetic actions.

Are we ready for it? Let us all together say, yes we are.

### **6.7. Shedding Jesus' light on the ignorant and the indifferent**

We know that there is ignorance in this world. Indifference as a result of spiritual apathy is a mark of many people of our time. Some are under the impression that they are self-sufficient and are not dependent on anyone else. Atheists in the garb of secularists are also many in our modern society. These are people who are in need of Jesus' light so that they may come out of their ignorance, indifference, misconceived self-sufficiency and pseudo-secularism and live in Jesus' light.

Are we ready to help them? Let us all together say, yes we are.

## **7. Evil-doers are afraid of Jesus' light**

We know the famous saying in the fourth gospel: "God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3: 16). The evangelist immediately adds that the purpose of the mission of the Son of God is not condemnation but salvation of the world. But at the same time, all those who reject the divine Son and refuse to believe in him stand already condemned.

### **7.1. Warning against those who reject Jesus' light**

The fourth gospel goes on to explain the verdict against people who are obstinate and arrogant (Jn 3: 19-21). He declares that those who do evil hate the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. This explains why people oppose Jesus; they are afraid that Jesus' light will expose their evil ways of life and will be discredited. In the absence of Jesus' light they can continue their evil actions.

Only when people remove their fear of light by cleansing their lives, they can come to light. There are many people who live in darkness. They may not know how to come to the true light. Let us bring them into the presence of Jesus' light. Are we ready for it? Let us all together say, yes we are.

### **7.2. Against the greedy and the arrogant**

Although Jesus accepted invitations from the rich to dine in their houses, he was not shy to speak out against their greed and arrogance. Lk 11: 37-54 depicts an incident in which Jesus is the guest at a dinner in a Pharisee's house; there Jesus speaks out against the evil ways of the rich. Jesus' reprimand began with the host's surprise at Jesus not washing his hands before meals. Jesus continued his tirade against the hypocritical Pharisees calling them "unmarked graves," and

“whitewashed tombs.” How many of us deserve this designation and condemnation of Jesus? Anyone of us who acts unjustly, abandons truth and moral values will be qualified as ‘unmarked graves’ and ‘whitewashed tombs.’

### **7.3. Against the self-righteous**

When Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees, the scribes and teachers of the law took offence, saying that Jesus’ words were an insult to them also (Lk 11: 45). Then Jesus turned his ire on them, qualifying them as self-righteous and hypocritical (Lk 11: 46). Jesus’ reprimand may seem to be against some of us today for our self-righteousness and intransigence. We may ignore or block Jesus’ light so that we may be able to continue in our darkness.

Are we ready to listen to Jesus’ strong warning and change our lifestyle? Let us all together say, yes we are.

### **7.4. Against defrauders**

Who are those who hate light and love darkness? Can we find them among ourselves too? Yes, we can. Those financiers who defraud and cheat people, those merchants who adulterate food items for illicit and unjust gains, those black-marketers who hoard goods in order to sell them at higher prices, those farmers who use poisonous pesticides on crops to increase their yield and then sell them endangering lives, drastically increasing the number of cancer patients in our country, those industrialists who do not pay just wages, those officials who receive bribes to pervert justice, and many more people of similar sort are those who are afraid of coming into Jesus’ light. They prefer darkness to light; they want that Jesus’ light should never shine anywhere near them. They do not accept that Jesus is the light of the world. Are we also defrauders?

Are we ready to abandon our evil ways and allow Jesus’ light to come into our lives? Let us all together say, yes we are.

### **7.5. Against bribery and corruption**

St. Augustine says, “Light, even though it passes through pollution, is not polluted.” But what we see today in our society is Jesus’ light becoming polluted through bribery and corruption even of Christians. There are millions of people living below the poverty line in India. Even to get certified as BPL (‘Below Poverty Line’), poor people are forced to bribe the officials responsible for issuing it. We are living in a world of rampant corruption. Almost nothing is done today by officials in our country without a receiving bribe. Are Christian officials any better? I don’t think so. Even our Christian young men are trying their best to get a job in the customs, excise, or police, or any other departments where they can become rich faster through corrupt means. Where is our Christian faith? What is the value of our Christian formation? Have all our values been reduced to one thing: money by all means and money alone?

Dear fellow Christians who occupy offices of public service high or low, you have a great duty to fulfill. You are not to be the torch-bearers of the Satan and darkness through your corrupt practices. When you receive a bribe to do your duty or not to do your duty, you become agents of the devil and you spread Satanic darkness in this world.

Dear friends, shun all corrupt practices in your daily life. Stand by your Christian faith and radiate Jesus' light around you, in your office, in your work place, among those with whom you work or you come into contact.

### **7.6. Against attachment to riches and desire for luxuries**

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Lk 19: 25), declared Jesus when the rich young man refused Jesus' call to discipleship because he was not ready to part with his material possessions. Jesus had suggested to him to sell his riches first and distribute them to the poor if he wanted to follow Jesus in perfect discipleship (Lk 19: 22).

In a parable Jesus gave us the picture of a rich man who amassed an abundance of grain and other goods in his barn and felt comfortable and self-assured. He told himself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (Lk 12: 19). To him God said, “You fool, this very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Lk 12: 20). Living in Jesus' light saves us from becoming fools like the rich man of this parable. Those who are in the darkness of ambition, greed, avarice, and gluttony will miss Jesus' light that takes them on the path to the heavenly Father.

Are we ready to hear Jesus' voice and abandon our evil ambitions, greed and avarice? Let us all together say, yes we are.

### **8. Our duty to spread Jesus' light**

All Christians have the duty to carry out the mission command of Jesus. It is not limited to some Christians alone.

#### **8.1. Example of St. Paul**

“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel,” declared St. Paul (1 Cor 9: 16b). He was fully aware of his obligation to preach Jesus' good news of salvation. Today in this first Indian Mission Congress each one of us should repeat the words of St. Paul, the apostles of the Gentiles: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.’

Are we ready to repeat his words with total willingness to preach Jesus' Gospel? Let us all together say, yes we are.

St. Paul wrote to the Christians of Galatia: ‘I am in pains of childbirth until Christ

is formed in you” (Gal 4: 19). We should also be in the pain of childbirth so that many will be born in Christian faith.

St. Paul told the Christians of Philippi: “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1: 21). He found merit in his life as well as in his death. But he was sure that he would live only for Christ, to preach his gospel and build up Christian communities.

Are we ready to follow the example of St. Paul in spreading Jesus’ light of salvation? Let us all together say, yes we are.

### **8.2. Example of St. Thomas, the Apostle of India**

In the middle of the first century St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, dared to come to this distant land of our mother country. It was he who lit Jesus’ light in our country for the first time. He spent the rest of his life spreading Jesus’ light in this land of ancient sages and seekers of truth. He founded churches and established Christian communities. After twenty more centuries we have not succeeded to spread that light of Jesus to our entire country. Even today just around two percent of our countrymen have come to the light of the Christian faith. In this Mission Congress let us resolve to spread Jesus’ light to every nook and corner of our country. Let us share with each and every one of our fellow beings of our country Jesus’ light of salvation.

### **9. Conclusion**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, we are here today, this week, to acknowledge and proclaim once again that Jesus is the light of world, that Jesus is the light in the life of each one of us.

The world today needs Jesus’ light for its survival and sustenance. There are very many people in our world who need Jesus’ light to remove the darkness in their lives. Proclaiming Jesus to every human person is our duty and mission – to bring Jesus’ light to the whole world.

Let us proclaim in one voice: ‘Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world. We will be your torch-bearers and candlesticks. We will spread your light to every nook and corner of our country.’

Let us keep our minds and hearts open to the Holy Spirit so that the Spirit will channel Jesus’ light into our everyday lives. May God the Father, his beloved Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit bless us all