

# **YEAR OF THE CHURCH**

## **PASTORAL LETTER**

**To all the Catholics of the  
Apostolic Vicariate  
of Northern Arabia**

**from**

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Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia**

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## 1. Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters,

God loves you!

As I announced in my message of 20 November 2013, we opened on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2013 the year of celebrations for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sacred Heart Church in Bahrain, the first Catholic church built in our Vicariate (1939).

After we meditated for one year on Faith (2012-2013: Year of Faith, proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI), I saw that the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church in Bahrain is an occasion to study, meditate and contemplate the mystery of the Church.

You may notice immediately that I wrote “church” (with “c” small letter) when I referred to the building of the church (the place where we gather to celebrate together) and “Church” (with “C” capital letter) when I mentioned the Church as such, founded by Jesus Christ. I invite you to read in all the meetings in all the parishes the texts that I shall propose. Not just to read, but to meditate on these texts, to share with the others what you understood from them and what they teach you and us all. If we are faithful to this meditation and sharing we shall know much more about the Church, because the Holy Spirit will accompany and inspire us with his loving and merciful grace.

The Year of the Church started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2013, First Sunday of Advent, and will end on 23<sup>rd</sup> of

November 2014, the last Sunday of the Ordinary Time, solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the Universe. We shall offer him again our lives, thanking him for the salvation that he gave us through his death and resurrection and realized in us through the Church.

## **2. The Catholic Church, my mother!**

The term “Church” comes from the Greek *ekklesia*. But its origin is from the Old Testament and means the assembly of the people of Israel, summoned by God. Now, this term means the new community of the believers in Christ, who form the new assembly of God. We have our natural mother who delivered us through our birth and she is our mother forever. She gave us natural life.

Besides this natural life, every one of us received also a spiritual life and it is in the new assembly of God, the Church, that we received it. None deserves this new life, it is a free gift from God who communicated himself to us through the Church. Baptized in the Catholic Church, it is in this assembly of God that we knew God *“the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible”*; we knew Jesus Christ *“who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man; for our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered death and was buried and rose again on the third day”*; we knew the Holy Spirit *“the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the*

*Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified". Since our Baptism we are the temple of God, his house, members of his family. We are not alone anymore; God is with us and in us: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (Jn 14:23).*

In his Encyclical Letter *Light of Faith*, Pope Francis wrote: *"The transmission of the faith not only brings light to men and women in every place; it travels through time, passing from one generation to another. Because faith is born of an encounter which takes place in history and lights up our journey through time, it must be passed on in every age. It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus. But how is this possible? How can we be certain, after all these centuries, that we have encountered the "real Jesus"? ... Faith's past, that act of Jesus' love which brought new life to the world, comes down to us through the memory of others — witnesses — and is kept alive in that one remembering subject which is the Church. The Church is a Mother who teaches us to speak the language of faith" (N. 38).* It is the Church, this great multitude which no one can count (Cf Rev 7:9), who gave us the precious gift of faith.

Yes, I love the Catholic Church, my mother, who generated me to a new life and gave me hope and certainty of a life forever, the eternal life. I know that my mother, the Catholic Church, has limitations, wrinkles and even sins, exactly as our natural mother

has, but I know also that she is always there to forgive me, to welcome me, to embrace me, to ensure me of her eternal love. She reminds me of the unbreakable love of God: *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine... You are precious in my eyes and honoured, and I love you... with great tenderness I will take you back”* (Is 43:1-4; 54:7). How not to love such a mother!? How and why to abandon her?!

I feel very bad when I meet people who were beloved sons and daughters of this extraordinary loving mother, my brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church, and they left her, abandoned her, to join other denominations. I feel the same pain that was suffered by the merciful father when he saw his younger son setting off to a distant country! (Cf Lk 15:13). I feel very bad when they tell me that they found a better salary, a better social position, better friends! How could they abandon their mother for these material reasons, how could they sell their mother for a better salary! It is very sad! I know that my mother, the Catholic Church, never will hate those who abandoned her, but she will continue to love them, even though her heart is broken. It is this heroic maternal love of my mother, the Catholic Church, that pushes me to love her ever more. My beloved brothers and sisters, you were of ours and you are still of ours because our mother still loves you tenderly. So, come back to her, she is always waiting for you. Do you remember the merciful father in Lk 15:11? *“He run to*

*his son, embraced him and kissed him*". This is our mother, the Catholic Church!

I stressed on the "Catholic Church". What about the other Churches? Let us read the document of the Holy See, ratified by Pope John Paul II on 16 June 2000:

*"Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him. The Churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, are true particular Churches. Therefore, the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches, even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church.*

*On the other hand, the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church. Baptism in fact tends per se toward the full development of life in Christ, through the integral profession of faith, the*

*Eucharist, and full communion in the Church”(Dominus Jesus, N. 17).*

### **3. I believe in the Church**

We saw that the Church is a mother. I believe in this. But, how can we know more deeply who the Church is? She is not fruit of a human initiative. Her founder is not Saint Paul, nor even the twelve Apostles, nor any human assembly. Her founder is only Jesus Christ. Also, Jesus Christ did not found the Church from nothing; he continued the community that God in the Old Testament called as his Spouse: *“For as a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you”* (Is 62:5). Jesus Christ invited the people of God of the Old Testament to believe in him as the Son of God sent to the world to announce that God is love (Cf 1 Jn 4:16). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit are at the origin of the new community whose members called themselves *“Christians”* (*“It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians”* Acts 11:26). The twelve Apostles became the continuation and the representatives of the twelve tribes which formed the people of God in the Old Testament; the Christian community became the new people of God, the new Israel now open to all. Pagans entered into this new community and all together, Jews and Pagans, formed the Church. We may notice that the Church has her origin in God. All the Trinity founded

the Church. To believe in the Church means to believe that she is a free gift from God. We can only ask God to give us this grace, to be members of the Church. In one word, to recognize him as Father, to become his children, to profess that we form a body whose head is Jesus Christ, to believe and to experience that the Holy Spirit is the *giver of life* to this body. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, one God, are the founders of the Church.

We notice that our churches, especially on Fridays and on the various holidays, are packed full of people. Crowds of brothers and sisters come to our churches at any moment. Meetings, prayers, discussions, teachings etc. take all the time during those days. The biggest problem is to find a place for all who want to remain in the compound of the church for their various meetings. The conflicts between the many communities are always caused by the lack of space.

On one hand, the church is happy to give the people the possibility to gather, to know each other better, etc. But, let us not forget that the purpose of any meeting in the church is to implement the human and spiritual formation. Our baptism was only the beginning of a long journey in which we are called to adjust our life, mentality and behavior, to the life of Jesus Christ, as Saint Paul wrote: *"We should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ"* (Eph 4:15). This means that we are continuously called to conversion; there is always something in our life that has to be changed. We have *"to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be*

*fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). This constant re-orientation towards God is not fruit of our human efforts but a grace from God: “He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). Therefore, the mission of the Church is not to organize human and social activities, nor to run schools, even though she does all this, but to make of us the true image of Jesus Christ. Coming from God, the Church wants to take us to God. The more our heart is near the heart of God, the more we change the world around us: injustice, violence, hatred, divisions and any human conflict are changed into love. Through the personal conversion, the Church offers the best collaboration for a new world, where “Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss” (Ps 85:11); her mission is to change the kingdom of the world into the kingdom of God. This is what we call also *evangelization*, to announce, through our life, the *Good News (= Euangelion)* of Jesus Christ, the only one who can free ourselves and the world with all its structures from the power of darkness and establish “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace” (*Preface of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe*). This is the mission of the Church! Sacraments (especially Eucharist and Confession), prayer and Faith formation are the main ways through which the Church realizes her mission.*

#### 4. Western and Eastern Churches

In all our churches we have the so called Latin Rite and Oriental Rites. What is the origin of this distinction? It is in a geographical-political division which, with time, became also an ecclesiastical one.

The Roman emperor Diocletian (AD 284-305) divided the Roman Empire into two parts: West and East. This division became permanent with the death of the emperor Theodosius I (+395), who divided the empire between his two sons – Honorius and Arcadius – who later became emperors respectively of the Western and Eastern parts. The Eastern Empire took the name “Byzantine” from Byzantium which was the ancient name of the capital. Byzantium was called Constantinople or “New Rome” after AD 330 when it was made the metropolis (= mother city) of the Roman Empire. We can say that the demarcation between the two parts is given broadly by a line that starts from the present Albania, straight to the South, reaching the present borders between Egypt and Libya. The Churches located in the Western part (from Libya towards the West) are called “Western Churches”, those existing in the Eastern part (from Egypt included towards the East) are called “Eastern Churches”. They are called also Occidental (*Occidens* = West) and Oriental (*Oriens* = East) Churches. The Western Churches centered mainly around Rome, the Eastern Churches around Constantinople. Another broad division was based on the language in use. One of the predominant languages

in the West was Latin and Greek in the East. Hence we come across the expressions “Latin Church” for the Western Church and “Greek Churches” for the Eastern Churches. However, “Greek Churches” don’t include all the Eastern Churches, because there was also the tradition of the “Syriac Churches”, of Semitic origin. Finally, there were Oriental Churches also outside the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, like the Armenian Church and the Chaldean Church. According to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, the Oriental Churches arise from the Alexandrian, Antiochian, Armenian, Chaldean and Constantinopolitan traditions (CCEO 28.2).

There are at present six liturgical Families of which one is Western (Rome) and five are Eastern. They are:

- 1) Alexandrian Family (Coptic Church and Ethiopian Church).
- 2) Antiochian Family (West Syrian Church, Maronite Church, Syro-Malankara Church)
- 3) East Syrian Family (Chaldean Church, Syro-Malabar Church).
- 4) Armenian Family (only Armenian Church).
- 5) Byzantine Family (13 Churches).

Total: 1 Western Church (Rome) and 22 Eastern Churches. Except the Maronite Church and the Syro-Malabar Church, all the other Eastern Churches have Orthodox counterparts.

In our Vicariate we have faithful from almost all these Churches, with a great majority (around 90%) of the Latin Church. This is our richness, we celebrate in 5 Rites

and in 13 languages. God should watch with pleasure to our priests and faithful who celebrate the Sacraments in so many various ways. But this is at the same time a source of some problems. Everyone would like to have his own practice of Faith as he had in his country of origin, but the huge number of faithful, the multiplicity of Rites and languages and the lack of space oblige us to another way of pastoral care of our people. Our biggest challenge is to form of these many Churches ONE Catholic Church, yet with respect, as much as possible, for the particular Liturgies and traditions.

Saint Paul speaks about singular Churches (*“The Church of the Thessalonians”*, *“The Church of the Laodiceans”* – Col 4:16, *“The Church of God that is in Corinth”*, *“The Churches of Galatia”*), but never did he look at these Churches separately; he has always in mind that they form THE Church of God. He confesses: *“I persecuted the Church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it”* (Gal 1:13). In our Vicariate it is not easy to preserve always the unity of the Church; sometimes there is also a negative influence from countries outside the Gulf. It is in order to help us in this difficult mission of unity that the blessed Pope John II stated in 2003, and Pope Benedict confirmed in 2006, after long discussions with all the concerned parts, that: *“The jurisdiction over all Catholics, of whatever Rite or nationality, present in the territories of the Apostolic Vicariates of Arabia and of Kuwait, entrusted to “Propaganda Fide”, belongs exclusively to the two local Ordinaries. A “double jurisdiction”, therefore, cannot be allowed”*.

The two Apostolic Vicariates of Arabia and Kuwait became on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011: “Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia” and “Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia”.

## 5. Program

I invite every Movement, community and group of any kind to start their weekly meeting always with 20 minutes of special formation on the Church. The main sources are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), the *Compendium*, the *Youcat*, and the Constitutions of Vatican Council II *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*. I invite priests and people to be faithful to the following program.

- 1) JAN 2014: The Church in God’s plan. See CCC 748-750, *Compendium* 147, *Youcat* 121.
- 2) FEB 2014: Names and images of the Church. See CCC 751-758, *Compendium* 148.
- 3) MAR 2014: The Church’s Origin, Foundation and Mission. See CCC 758-769. *Compendium* 149-150, *Youcat* 122-123.
- 4) APR 2014: The Mystery of the Church. See CCC 770-776, *Compendium* 151-152, *Youcat* 124, *Lumen gentium* chapter 1. *Gaudium et spes* Chapter 4.
- 5) MAY 2014: The Church - people of God. See CCC 781-786, *Compendium* 153-155, *Youcat* 125, *Lumen gentium* chapter 2.

- 6) JUN 2014: The Church – Body of Christ. See CCC 787-798, *Compendium* 156-158, *Youcat* 126-127.
- 7) JUL 2014: The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. See CCC 797-801, *Compendium* 159-160, *Youcat* 128.
- 8) AUG 2014: The Church is One-The Church is Holy. See CCC 811-829, *Compendium* 161-165, *Youcat* 129-132, *Lumen gentium* chapter 5.
- 9) SEP 2014: The Church is Catholic. See CCC 830-856, *Compendium* 166-173, *Youcat* 133-136.
- 10) OCT 2014: The Church is Apostolic. See CCC 857-865, *Compendium* 174-176, *Youcat* 137.
- 11) NOV 2014: The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church – The Lay Faithful. See CCC 871-913, *Compendium* 177-191, *Youcat* 138-144, *Lumen gentium* chapters 3 and 4.

## 6. The priests of our Vicariate

We spoke about the Church and we mentioned Sacraments and Faith formation. The main persons in charge of our spiritual formation are the priests. Who are the priests of our Vicariate? Where are they from? I shall list the countries and the priests in an alphabetical order.

### l) Bahrain

- |                    |         |         |
|--------------------|---------|---------|
| 01) Fr. Andrew S.  | ofm cap | (India) |
| 02) Fr. Anthony D. | ofm cap | (India) |
| 03) Fr. Freddy D.  | ofm cap | (India) |

04) Fr. Maroun B.	ofm cap	(Lebanon)
05) Fr. Rodolfo E.	Diocesan	(Philippines)
06) Fr. Saji Thomas	ofm cap	(India)
Replaces Fr. Joy	ofm cap	(India)
07) Fr. Uldarico C.	ofm cap	(Philippines)

## II) Kuwait

01) Fr. Adel Nasr	Diocesan	(Lebanon-Italy)
02) Fr. Albert S.	Carmelite	(India)
03) Fr. Alfredo M.	ofm cap	(Philippines)
04) Fr. Andrew F.	ofm cap	(India)
05) Fr. Angelos	Diocesan	(Egypt)
06) Fr. Anthony L.	ofm cap	(India)
07) Fr. Blany A.	sdb	(India)
08) Fr. Dominic	Incardinated	(India)
09) Fr. Francis K.	sdb	(India)
10) Fr. Franco P.	sdb	(India)
11) Fr. Gaspar F.	ofm cap	(India)
12) Fr. Ivan	Diocesan	(Sri-Lanka)
13) Fr. John P.	Diocesan	(India)
14) Fr. Jose X.	ofm cap	(India)
15) Fr. Lionel B.	sdb	(India)
16) Fr. Mathews K.	Carmelite	(India) <b>VG</b>
17) Fr. Noel V.	ofm cap	(India)
18) Fr. Prakash	ofm cap	(India)
19) Fr. Ramon	ofm cap	(Philippines)
20) Fr. Raymond Eid	Diocesan	(Lebanon)
21) Fr. Ruben B.	Incardinated	(Philippines)
22) Deacon Sylvester	Incardinated	(India)

### III) Qatar

01) Fr. Anand C.	ofm cap	(India)
02) Fr. Cherian	Diocesan	(India)
03) Fr. Elie Hachem	ofm cap	(Lebanon)
04) Fr. Jaison P.	ofm cap	(India)
05) Fr. Johnson A.	ofm cap	(India)
06) Fr. Joy William	ofm cap	(India)
07) Fr. Rally	ofm cap	(Philippines)
08) Fr. Selvaraj A.	ofm cap	(India)

### IV) Other priests (Blessed Land)

01) Fr. Aldo B.	Trinitarian	(France)
02) Fr. Anil	ofm cap	(India)
03) Fr. Arman	ofm cap	(Philippines)
04) Fr. Ben M.	ofm cap	(USA)
05) Fr. Joby	ofm cap	(India)
06) Fr. Joseph	Trinitarian	(India)
07) Fr. Jozef T.	ofm cap	(USA)
08) Fr. Martin M.	ofm cap	(India)
09) Fr. Paul K.	ofm cap	(USA)
10) Fr. Sebastian M.	ofm cap	(India)
11) Fr. Shaji	Diocesan	(India)
12) Fr. Vedam	ofm cap	(India)
13) Deacon John D.	Incardinated	(USA)

Total: 48 Priests and 2 Permanent Deacons.

We are happy to have in our Vicariate (in Kuwait) also the Apostolic Nuncio:

***His Grace Mgr. Petar Rajič***

and the secretary of the Nunciature:

*Mgr. Ionutz.*

## **7. Conclusion**

Dear Fathers and my dear people, let us entrust this Year of the Church to prayer. I ask you to say the Prayer for the Church (see cover page 4) in every Mass before the Prayer after Communion.

The Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Arabia, will lead us to Jesus. Her mission is to bring Jesus to the world and the world to Jesus. Let us remain under her protection.

Your Bishop,

+ Camillo Ballin, mccj

Bishop's House, Awali (Bahrain): 19 DEC 2013.