



The Stream

A monthly publication of the Diocese of South-West America

January 2013

Vol. 2 Issue 1

Metropolitan Joins For Indian Republic Day Reception at Indian Consulate

Indians across the world celebrate January 26th as Republic Day. This year happens to be the 64th year since India was declared a Republic and this occasion is always celebrated by Indian Consulates all over the world. In conjunction with the celebrations the Consul General of India in Houston



The Honorable Harish Parvathaneni invited dignitaries and leaders from the Houston area to an official reception to celebrate on Monday, January 28, 2013. Mr. Parvathaneni, having previously visited our Diocesan Center in Houston, knows our Thirumeni well and extended an invitation to him. Representing our community and being one of the few religious leaders invited to this event, thirumeni was able to meet other dignitaries at this gathering including Congressman Pete Olson, the U.S. Representative for Texas's 22nd congressional district.

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Words of Faith - A Reflection

Rev. Fr. Mathew T. Mathew (Shaun)

Associate Editor

In the prayers that we recite every day, whether in English or Malayalam or other liturgical languages, different versions of phrases in the same prayers abound. There are many (including myself) who quickly defend their particular version, backing it up with statements such as, "I remember when [insert name of any famous Bishop, the older the better] told me that [insert their version of a particular phrasing of a prayer] is the correct version". Of course, it is likely that that may have indeed been what the particular Bishop opined, but whether anyone does any further research into it is another thing altogether. As a result, we recite many prayers without really thinking about what our choices of phrases actually mean.

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"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"

St. Matthew 5: 23-24



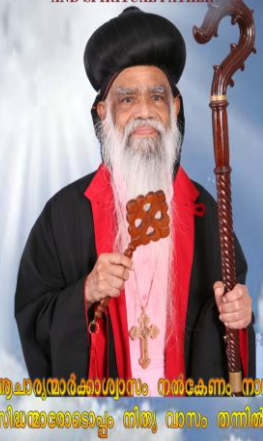
GREAT LENT BEGINS

FEBRUARY 11



30th and 40th Day Memorial Celebrations held across the Diocese

REMEMBER OUR SHEPHERD AND SPIRITUAL FATHER



മുഹമ്മദാലി ഹുസൈൻ, മലയാളം, സിറിയയിൽ നിന്ന്, വാഗ്ദാനം നൽകി

SEE INSIDE FOR MORE!!

Ecumenical Corner



Malankara Orthodox Church Participates in Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

H.G. Gabriel Mar Gregorios and H.G. Yuhanon Mar Demetrius represented the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church at the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity hosted by Pope Benedict XVI in Rome. Pope Benedict had a special meeting with the delegates representing all Oriental Orthodox Churches, and His Holiness acknowledged the worsening situation in the Middle East, especially for the Christian community, and assured them of his support and prayers.



During the meeting, the Pope cited the communion and communication between all Christian Churches in the first five centuries as a model for the International Joint Commission, which began their work 10 years ago, to achieve further unity.

Seasonal Potpourri



The Coonan Cross Oath (Koonan Kurishu Satyam), taken on January 3, 1653, was a public vow taken by members of the Saint Thomas Christian community of Kerala, India that they would not submit to Portuguese dominance in ecclesiastical and secular life.

Sooboro
Wednesday Prayer

Let us unite to pray for others!

Tele-Prayer Meeting in Malayalam
 From 10:20am to 11:30am (CST) every Wednesday.
 Bible reading, hymns, devotional message,
 intercessory prayer for the needy & the sick.
 Please send prayer requests to: sooboro@ds-wa.org
 Phone #: (218) 632-0187
 Access code: 3703#

Metropolitan's Column

The Great Lent is once again upon us. It is a great opportunity to engage in a life-changing spiritual retreat of repentance, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Fasting is the conscious act of simplifying our worldly life to make room for God. Jesus Christ tells us, "When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites ..." (St. Matthew 6:16). Through fasting we can quiet our souls and listen to the voice of God.

During Great Lent, it is important to practice almsgiving and see it as an opportunity to reach out to others in the love of Christ. It is our chance to live out our faith in a concrete, substantial way. During this Lenten Season, the saints of our Church direct us to use the money we have not spent on the rich foods from which we are abstaining to help feed the poor and hungry.

This Lent is the perfect time to cleanse our souls of all that has accumulated over the past months and to say with the prodigal son, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee." Sins not confessed remain ours, polluting and destroying our souls. May the Holy Spirit make us aware of our sins so that we may experience true repentance during this Lent.

May the Lord our God be pleased with our fasting, prayers, charity and repentance and have mercy upon us through all the days of our lives.

*Your Shepherd in Christ,
Alexios Mar Eusebius
Metropolitan*

As an example, let us look at some of the important words or phrases of our faith that we declare when we recite the "Nicene Creed". The "Nicene Creed" or "Vishwasa Pramaanam" (Malayalam) is a prominent prayer among Orthodox Christians that is particularly contentious when it comes to choosing the right words to be used when reciting or meditating on it. This Creed (more accurately the "Niceno-Constantinopolitan" Creed) has many phrases that have variations in English for example:

1. "I believe in one, true, God..." (Greek Orthodox) vs. "We believe in one, true, God..." (others)
2. "...true God of true God" vs. "...very God of very God"
3. "...incarnate of...the Virgin Mary and became man" (Byzantine) vs. "...incarnate of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God...and became man" (Malankara), etc.

Variations are present in the Malayalam version as well:

1. "Saaramshathil pithavinodu samathwam ullavanum" vs. "Saaramshathil pithavinodu onnayirikkunnavanum"
2. "Thirumanasaaya prakaaram swargathil ninnirangi" vs. "Thiru-ishta prakaaram swargathil ninnirangi"
3. "Paapa mochanathinu mamodisa onnu maathrame ollu" vs. "Paapa mochanathinu mamodisa orikkal maathrame ollu", etc.

Addressing each one of the above variations or other variations not mentioned is beyond the scope of this article so I shall focus my attention on two phrases: "saaramshathil pithavinodu samathwam ullavanum" and its variant phrasing "saaramshathil pithavinodu onnayirikkunnavanum" as well as "...Deiva mathavaya vishudha kanyaka Mariyamil ninnu..." which does not have a variant phrasing in Malayalam. Before getting to the thoughts I'd like to share, let me state that this article is not intended to be scholarly or authoritative since there are numerous clergy and laity infinitely more qualified than me to comment on the "Nicene Creed". Instead, this article intends to add to the many existing opinions on improving what we mean when we say/meditate upon phrases especially related to the words of the declaration of our faith that constitute the Creed.

The original Syriac word from which we get "Samathwam ullavanum" is "ashwe". This is the *Aphel* form of the root word "shwo" which can be translated as "equal" or "alike". It is quite interesting as to why the Syriac word "shwo" was chosen by the Syriac fathers rather than the word "haad" (meaning "one") to elaborate on the relationship between the Father and the Son. Perhaps the Syriac fathers chose a word that was intended to deliberately distinguish between the Father and the Son while at the same time preserve the fact that Jesus Christ is just as much "God" as the Father is, which is why we are able to say "God the Father" and "God the Son".

In that sense, the Syriac word "ashwo" draws a perfect balance between 1) the equality of divinity of Jesus Christ with the Father, and 2) the distinct identity of Jesus Christ as the second person of the Holy Trinity, as distinguished from the first person of the Holy Trinity, God the Father.

Regarding the Malayalam translation of the Syriac word "ashwo", if the above reasoning is accurate, then the Malayalam word/phrase "samathwam ullavanum" is possibly a more accurate translation, from an etymological and liturgical-theological perspective, than the Malayalam word "onnaayirikkunnavanum".

----- continued on p. 8

From Around the Diocese

MGOCSM South Florida Winter 'Soul'stice Retreat

South Florida held its first-ever winter retreat from December 28-30, 2012. Close to forty youth from the three South Florida parishes of St. Thomas Malankara Orthodox Church of India, St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church of South Florida, and St. Gregorios Orthodox Church of India joined together and reflected on the theme taken from Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the son of God." Rev. Dn. Abey George of NY served as the main speaker for the retreat and spoke to the youth on recognizing what barriers hold them from leading a life in Christ, the importance of meditation and prayer and the meanings of traditions behind our Orthodox Church. The retreat was a most blessed event for all who attended and will be conducted again January 18-20, 2013 in North Florida for the Tampa, Orlando and Jacksonville MGOCSM youth.



Dallas Area Churches Remember Late Metropolitan

The thirty day commemoration of H.G Mathews Mar Barnabas was celebrated by all of the Orthodox churches in Dallas at St. Marys Orthodox Valyapalli Farmers Branch with Morning Prayer and the Holy Qurbana. H.G Kuriakose Mar Clemis, Metropolitan of Thumpamon diocese, was the chief celebrant that was assisted by all other priests at the event. All six Orthodox churches were participated at this event. The public meeting presided over by H.G Kuriakose Mar Clemis Metropolitan. Rev. Fr. John Kunnathusseril gave the welcome speech and His Grace gave a message about the life of H.G Mathews Mar Barnabas. Rev. Fr. Rege Mathew gave the condolence message for the Dallas clergy association and Rev. Fr. Matt Alexander gave the condolence message for the Dallas youth organizations. Mr. Thomas Rajan (Sabha managing committee member), and Mr. Elson Samuel (diocesan council member) gave condolence messages as well. Rev. Fr. Raju M. Daniel gave a vote of thanks and H.G. Kuriakose Mar Clemis concluded the meeting with benediction. Nercha and Adiyantharam Sadhya was served to all those who attended. A slide show presentation of Barnabas Thirumeni was shown at the auditorium.



From Around the Diocese



Diocese celebrates 40th Day Memorial of HG Mar Barnabas

The passing of the Late Lamented His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas, former Metropolitan of the American Diocese, on December 09, 2012, was greeted by the Malankara Orthodox faithful and others all over the world with shock and grief. The late Catholicose and Malankara Metropolitan, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews II, had described Thirumeni as a “shining example of how one lives in love and righteousness”. Indeed, the Christian Church had lost a shining star filled with humility, love and a life of simplicity.



Memorial Holy Qurbana celebrations and public meetings in honor of our beloved Valiya Thirumeni Mar Barnabas were held region-wise (due to the large geographical spread of the diocese) in various parishes across the Diocese of South-West America. The Diocesan-wide 40th day memorial celebrations of the passing of the late Barnabas Thirumeni, ex-Metropolitan of the unified American Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, which included parishes in the greater Houston region, were held at St. Thomas Orthodox Cathedral in Houston on Saturday, January 19, 2013.

The memorial Holy Qurbana was led by His Grace Kuriakose Mar Clemis, Metropolitan of Thumpamon Diocese, with the assistance of His Grace Alexios Mar Eusebius, Metropolitan of the Diocese of South-West America. More than 600 clergy, Diocesan Council members and other faithful from the Houston, San Antonio and Austin regions were present. At the Public Meeting, there were speeches by both Metropolitans, eminent personalities and representatives of spiritual organizations. The Sunday School was represented by Mr. Manoj Thomas, the youth by Mr. Philipose Philip, MMVS by Mrs. Suja Rajan and seniors by Mr. Philip Mathew. The Condolence Message was delivered by Rev. Fr. Mathews George (Sajeev Achen). The contributions and sacrifices of this visionary, spiritual and humble servant of God, who served the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in America for nearly 20 years, were highlighted by the various speakers.

May Thirumeni's life and message of love toward one another be a role model for everyone and may his intercessions to God on our behalf be heard by Jesus and result in God having mercy upon us and finding us worthy of spending life in eternity in His presence.

Chicago Area Churches Join Together to Celebrate 40th Day Memorial Of Mar Barnabas



On Saturday January 19, 2013 the Malankara Orthodox Churches of the Chicago area joined together for Holy Qurbana and Memorial Prayers for our recently departed Spiritual Father, Mar Barnabas of Blessed Memory. The Holy Qurbana was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Abi Chacko, along with the clergy and faithful of the Chicago Area. Following the Holy Qurbana a small Public Meeting was held highlighting the life of Thirumeni, and representatives from the clergy and faithful shared their personal thoughts and reflections. In addition a group of Sunday School Children representing all the parishes of the area joined together to sing

one Thirumeni's favorite songs, 'Yahen Idayan.' Rev. Fr. Paul P. Issac, Rev. Fr. Daniel George, Rev. Ham Joseph, Rev. Fr. Abi Chacko, Rev. Fr. Christopher Mathew and Rev. Fr. Gheevarghese John (representing NE Diocese) prayerfully led the gathering. The faithful were encouraged to always remember Thirumeni and to continue to be beacons of his message of love, fasting, and prayer in as much as he emulated Christ. May his memory be eternal.

From Around the Diocese

Centenary Celebrations at St. Thomas, Dallas

Centenary celebrations on the establishment of Catholicate in India was held at Dallas St Thomas Orthodox Church, on Sunday November 18, 2012. The meeting was presided over by vicar, Rev. Fr. Rajesh John. H.G Zachariah Mar Nicholovos (Metropolitan, Northeast American Diocese) inaugurated the meeting. Rev. Fr. Mat Alexander (Dallas area Youth Minister), Mr. Thomas Rajan (Sabha Managing Committee Member), Mr. Elson Samuel (Diocesan Council Member), and Mr. Abraham Padanilam (Association Member) gave felicitation speeches. Diana Shinoy sang the centenary song; Sanu John gave presentation on growth of the church and its importance and Christina Varghese gave presentation on her dream about the future of the church. Mr. Ponnechen Koshy took class on church history. Trustee Mr. Nebu Cherian gave the welcome speech and Secretary Mr. Mathew Koshy gave vote of thanks.



ഫിനിക്സിൽ ബർണബാസ് തിരുമേനിയുടെ 40-ാം ചരമദിനം ആചരിക്കുന്നു

ഫിനിക്സ് അരിസോണ: മലങ്കര ഓർത്തഡോക്സ് സഭയുടെ അമേരിക്കൻ ഭദ്രാസനത്തിന്റെ മുൻ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തയായിരുന്ന കാലം ചെയ്ത അഭിവന്ദ്യ മാതൃസ് മാർ ബർണബാസ് തിരുമേനിയുടെ 40-ാം ചരമദിനം ഭക്തി നിർഭരമായ ചടങ്ങുകളോടെ ജനുവരി 27നു ഫിനിക്സ് സെന്റ് തോമസ് ഓർത്തഡോക്സ് പള്ളിയിൽ ആചരിക്കുവാൻ തീരുമാനിച്ചു. ജനുവരി 27നു രാവിലെ 8:30നു വിശുദ്ധ കുർബാനയും, പ്രത്യേക ചരമ പ്രാർത്ഥനകളും, അനുസ്മരണ സമ്മേളനവും നടക്കും. ഇടവക വികാരി സ്റ്റോമോ ഐസക് ജോർജ്ജ് ചടങ്ങുകൾക്ക് നേതൃത്വം വഹിക്കും.

MGOC SM DEVOTIONALS

MGOC SM North America presents weekly devotionals based on weekly Gospel readings for each week. These devotionals will be written by the leaders of the Church - both clergy and lay leaders.

This will be a great way to revamp your week with self-reflection and in the word.

Please subscribe and spread the word in your areas as well!

www.mgocsmamerica.com/devotionals

Florida Youth Give Back To Community

Twenty youth from St. Thomas Malankara Orthodox Church of India in Oakland Park, FL and St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church of South Florida in Hollywood, FL joined together to serve Thanksgiving lunch to local firefighters who had to work the holiday. The youth gathered early that Thursday morning of Thanksgiving to practice praise & worship songs to sing to the firefighters and share in fellowship before leaving for the fire station. The firefighters were overjoyed at the gesture and mentioned that no one had ever visited their station to do this before. The South Florida MGOC SM youth look forward to making their first annual Thanksgiving service project an annual project to continue on for years to come.



From Around the Diocese

Chicago Youth Ministry Rejuvenated During Winter Break Gatherings

During this year's winter break the Chicago area has been blessed to have multiple events to spiritually strengthen the needs of the youth and young adults.

On December 27, 2012, the MGOCSM of Chicago hosted its annual College One day conference. Over 40 college students from the area came and attended. Rev. Fr. Christopher Mathew, Youth Minister – Chicago, was the main speaker. The topic was 'Chosen Generation', and Achen used the lives of the saints of the Bible on how to live as chosen generation.



On December 29, 2012, MGOCSM Chicago hosted a one day Women's Conference. The young women from the area helped lead and teach the younger girls who are studying in High School and College the qualities of living as a strong Christian woman. The conference was attend by over 30 young women, and the conference focused on 3 women saints, St. Dorothy in Caesarea, St. Juliana of Lazarevo, St. Sophia, Mother of Orphans. The conference was a great time of fellowship for the young women of our church to share and grow in their faith.

On January 11-12, 2013, MGOCSM Chicago hosted the annual MGOCSM Winter 2 day conference. Rev. Dn. Daniel (Dennis) Mathai, MGOCSM North America General Secretary, was the main speaker. The main theme "Chosen Generation" and Semassen highlighted how Christians are called to be his Royal Priesthood and God's Special Possession. Over 70 high school and college students attended the 2 days.

On January 18, 2013, FOCUS Chicago, hosted its first meeting of the year, and started a new teaching ministry called 'The Way.' Rev. Fr. Geevarghese John, assistant vicar St. Thomas Orthodox Church Philadelphia, was the speaker for the evening. Achen spoke about Authentic Christianity and how we have to make sure that we are living the faith that has been handed down to us. Over 70 young adults came attending the meeting, which was filled with fellowship, music, teaching, and learning. Baby-sitting was provided by the MGOCSM at the church so that the parents could attend the meeting.

Christmas Day Service Project Spreads Holiday Cheer

Having enjoyed their Thanksgiving service project so much, thirty youth from St. Thomas Malankara Orthodox Church of India in Oakland Park, FL and St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church of South Florida in Hollywood, FL joined together on Christmas day to sing carols to a local nursing care facility. Bringing along sugar-free desserts, the youth sang and spent time with the residents, many of whom had no relatives to share the holiday with. The youth were accompanied by Rev. Fr. Dr. Joy Pyngolil, vicar of St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church of South Florida who closed the event in prayer.



Slootho

Tuesday Prayer

Let us come together for
fellowship and intercession!

Tele-Prayer Meeting in English

From 9:05 pm to 9:35 pm (CST) every Tuesday.

Soothoro prayer, Devotional message,

Intercessory prayer for the needy & the sick.

Please send prayer requests to: slootho@ds-wa.org

Phone # (218) 632-0187

Access code: 3703#

From Around the Diocese

FOCUS Service Project- Helping The Houston Community.

The FOCUS members of the St. Gregorios Orthodox held a food-service project for the needy of the Houston society on Jan 27th 2013. More than 300 packages of meal packages were distributed in and around the Houston city for the needy and homeless people in the society. More than 35 FOCUS members had joined in planning and executing this project successfully. This was made possible for the FOCUS members by working in partnership with the 'Life centre of Homeless organization' based in Houston. This service was initiated by Rev. Dn. Daniel Dennis Mathai who stressed that faith should be put in practice which states the need of serving the needy in the community.

This being conducted after the three-day lent and the advent of the Great Lent only shouts out the need for the same. Above all, this was an opportunity to show the little ones of the Sunday-School and the teens of MGOCSM on the importance of living according to the Gospel which accentuates the need of serving the poor. Needless to state this service acted as a great platform for fellowship within the FOCUS members. The packing of the meal packages took place after the Holy Qurbana on Sunday Jan 27th which lasted 3 hours. This was later distributed to the Life centre for the Homeless organization located in greater Houston area which distributed the meal bags to the needy. At the same time the FOCUS members would like to thank the Vicar Rev. Fr. P.M. Cheriyan and the Church committee for support given to conduct the service project.



Words of our Faith: A Reflection -cont'd from p 3

Perhaps an even more interesting Malayalam wording in the very same "Nicene Creed" is "...Deiva mathavaya vishudha kanyaka Mariyamil ninnu..." When we say the phrase "Deiva mathavu" – that phrase comes from the Syriac "yoldath Aloho". This Syriac phrase is more accurately translated as "deivathe vahichaval", i.e. "bearer of God" rather than "mother of God".

However, Dom. Bede Griffiths, when translating the Syriac *Sh'himo* into English, translated this very important Syriac phrase "yoldath Aloho" as "mother of God", which is both theologically and etymologically inaccurate. Somewhere along the line, this "poor" translation was taken one step further and now, in many "conventions", entire sermons are now devoted to this recent creation called "Mother" or "Mathavu" in all its guises where up until recently, only "mother" existed. In no way am I trying to decrease the importance of Holy Virgin St. Mary. If you notice our daily prayers, especially in the *Sh'himo* (book of daily prayers used in our Seminaries and by many youngsters here in America) there are numerous references to St. Mary in nearly every liturgical "hour" of prayer, which culminates with the Sunday Eucharist service which similarly has multiple references to the greatness and the importance of St. Mary. The power and efficacy of St. Mary's pleadings on our behalf are unparalleled and attested to by the earliest of Church Fathers, who give St. Mary extraordinary importance because of her chosen role in the Incarnation of the Son of God. In addition, everyone these days is quite aware of the fact that we Orthodox do not pray "to" St. Mary; rather, we pray "through" her, "to" God. However, the evidence points to the fact that the term "mother of God" was rarely used in the prayers of Syriac Christians and only in recent times has the focus on the word "mother" grown extraordinarily. Out of the large variety of texts that we Malankara Orthodox Syrians have at our disposal, the most basic and arguably the most important liturgical text (after the "Qurbana Thaksa") is the daily prayer book of the "hours" i.e. the *Sh'himo* (commonly known as the *sheema namaskaaram*). The theological approach of the prayers in the *Sh'himo* is followed very closely by all other liturgical texts used by our church today.

In the *Sh'himo*, the phrase "mother of God" i.e. "Emeh d'Aloho" is seen a grand total of three times, in the:

- 4th stanza of the *Qolo d'Bothar Pirmo* of *Yoldath Aloho* of Tuesday *Ramsho*
- 4th stanza of the *Enyono* of Wednesday *Lilyo*
- 2nd line of the *Sedro* of the 1st *Qaumo* of Saturday *Lilyo*

-----concluded on next page

Words of our Faith: A Reflection -Concluded from previous page

This begs the question as to why, in a text of nearly 500 pages (when counting only the Syriac pages in the SEERI version of the *Sh'himo* printed in 2006), out of the hundreds of references to St. Mary in those pages, only three of them refer to her as "Emeh d'Aloho" i.e. "mother of God"? Why did the Syriac fathers, who were so convinced about the importance and greatness of St. Mary, so severely restrict the use of "mother of God" and in its place used "bearer of God" nearly everywhere else?

The reason for this restricted use of the exact phrase "mother of God" is perhaps that the Church Fathers wanted to create an "upper limit" or "ceiling" to the veneration of St. Mary, just in case, at some point in the future, people decided to artificially "raise" the importance of St. Mary to such a level that she shone with a brilliance equivalent to that of Christ. Let me say that this opinion is my own and is not representative of the church's opinion on the matter. I feel that the worst fears of the Church Fathers were realized through the persistence of the Church of Rome in elevating the cult of St. Mary to heights that have gone well beyond that "upper limit" the Church Fathers may have envisioned. A practical example: I was with my Syro-Malabar relatives one evening, and their normal, daily evening prayer of 29 minutes in length consisted of a full 26 minutes of just intercessory prayer through St. Mary. In terms of increased importance given to St. Mary, our own Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (MOSC) is trying very hard to imitate the "success" of the Roman church in "marketing" St. Mary and to duplicate the success of Manarcad church in all its flavors. It is quite possible that in one hundred years or less, at the rate things are going, even the MOSC's typical evening prayer said at a normal home might be reduced to 26 out of 29 minutes of prayer being devoted to St. Mary.

Some of us might counter this by saying that we all know that Jesus is much more important than St. Mary and that we are all aware that St. Mary will never be as divine as Jesus Himself. If that is the case, if we are so aware of this "bifurcation" or difference between Jesus and St. Mary, why is it that we do not express this in practice? More and more, we take the veneration of St. Mary to never-before-seen heights. Every year, parishes of the MOSC compete with each other and with their Roman (i.e. Syro-Malabar and Latin) brethren to outdo the previous year's "Mathavinte Perunal" or worse, "Deiva Mathavinte Perunal", which is now synonymous not with the Feast from August 1-15 but the non-Orthodox and Roman one from September 1-8.

The wisdom of the silent agreement in playing copycat with the Roman church in this regard must be questioned. For example, we have some powerful MOSC parishes in India where it is now an "unchangeable tradition" to have a different Bishop celebrate Holy Qurbana each day from September 1-8. The fact that our Bishops are perfectly ok with this is alarming in itself. What is worse is that few parishes clamor to get a Bishop for the real Feast of St. Mary on August 15, which is sadly close to extinction in our church, due to the popularity of the pseudo-"perunal" on September 8. Are things going in the wrong direction in terms of the veneration of St. Mary in our church? Yes, quite possibly. Do we need corrective measures to address this? Most definitely.

Here are alternatives for the two phrases in the Creed discussed above:

1. "...saaramshathil pithavinodu samathwam ullavanum" (currently in use) and

Either:

2. "...swargathil ninnirangi, deivathe vahichavalaaya vishudha kanyaka Mariyamil ninnu..." (currently not in use)

Or simply:

3. "...swargathil ninnirangi, vishudha kanyaka Mariyamil ninnu..." (currently not in use).

The above opinions are not in any way official statements of our church but are intended only as thinking points as a result of which further discussions can take place regarding the wording of particular phrases in our liturgy. Once again, I'm not saying that we should not give any importance at all to St. Mary. Indeed, the intercession of St. Mary is powerful and a fortress for us beyond a shred of doubt. Our Lord Jesus assuredly hears the prayers and pleadings of the one who bore Him, as evidenced by the experiences of millions of Christians and non-Christians. The message I intend to convey can be approximately illustrated by this example: If a car capable of going 200mph has tires rated only to 155mph and we continue to blindly insist on increasing the speed of that car, ignoring the use of available brakes, we will have one day gone beyond the tires' limits. Yet, we would not realize that something is wrong because the run-flat tires continue to keep the car going, innocently ignoring the warning light on the dashboard. To some, that may be a risk worth taking, but to one who is risk-averse, it surely sets off alarm bells.

- Fr. Mathew T. Mathew

Know our Parish

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St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Oak Lawn, IL

(www.stmaryschicago.com)

St. Mary's Orthodox Church is a parish of the South-West American Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India. The Parish was established in 1982, in Chicago, Illinois and then later on moved to Park Ridge. The parish began as a small extension of the St. Thomas Orthodox Church Community founded by The Very Rev. Kuriakos Thottupuram, Cor-Episcopos, its first vicar. His nephew, Rev. Fr. Cherian Kunnel assisted him until he was appointed the vicar of a new congregation in Oklahoma City. Rev. Fr. Sunoj Malayil Oommen was appointed the Assistant Vicar from 2005 until 2010. Currently, Rev Fr. Abi Chacko has been serving as the Churches second Vicar since June 2010.

Over the history of the St. Mary's parish we have continued to see the faithfulness of our Lord and God. In 2001 the church moved to its present location in Oak Lawn, Illinois. The purchase of this building is a true testament to the hard work and prayers of the founding Vicar, and all the faithful of the St. Mary's Parish Community.

The Church complex consists of two buildings 2-story buildings; the Church Building and Sunday School building with an attached parsonage. The Church Sanctuary is adorned with beautiful Orthodox iconography signifying the foundations of the Church; The twelve icons of the Holy Apostles, the shrines of St. Mary, and St. Thomas with altars, St. Jude Thaddeus, St. Gregorios of Parumala (India), St. George, and Transfiguration of our Lord to name a few. The newest addition is a shrine in the back of the Church consisting of the large Icon of the Life of St. Mary with the Holy Archangels Sts. Michael and Gabriel on either side.



St. Mary's Church has a very vibrant, active and spiritual parish life. The Sunday School, ranging from nursery to senior class continues to mold and grow our children in the faith and traditions of the Holy Orthodox Church having regular exams, talents shows and competitions. The St. Mary's youth fellowship consisting of members 13 years old and above holds regular meetings with bible studies and social fellowships. In addition our families join together for monthly prayer meeting, outings such as three day Parish Retreat, Bulls Game, and family Night. As the Psalmist says "how lovely it is for brethren to dwell together in Unity. Extending beyond the parish, the St. Mary's family comes together to participate in the area, regional, and diocesan level programs such as OVBS, MGOCSM, MMVS, FOCUS, and Midwest Regional Family and Youth Conference. This allows for our parish to join in fellowship with sister parishes on an on-going basis. In addition to Church programs, the members of the St. Mary's Orthodox Church are prominent and active leaders and participants in ecumenical and cultural programs in the Chicago-land area.

The parish continues to grow as a place of worship that welcomes the community, and witnesses the love of Christ to all those who seek the intercession of St. Mary the Mother of God. Being the only Malankara Orthodox Church dedicated to St. Mary in the Chicago area we have worked hard to develop and maintain a welcoming atmosphere. We thank our Heavenly Father for his abundant blessings and faithfulness, May His Name be blessed.

