**THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD [May 20 & 21]**

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into Heaven. That is, he ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father as what our Apostles’ Creed is telling us. His ascension into heaven is a sign that His life here on earth has already ended; He ends also His teaching and suffering here on earth. That is why, the light of paschal candle ends also today to signify that Christ has already gone physically in the eyes of His disciples. Jesus entrusted to the disciples the mission of preaching the Good News and evangelizing the whole world by bearing witness to him through their words and lives.

What we celebrate today is Jesus’ exaltation and the end of his earthly existence, as a prelude to the gift of the Spirit.  The ascended Jesus is still with us because of his promise, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).  He is with us at all times and in all places, releasing a new energy upon the earth, the energy of the Holy Spirit Who enables us to preach the Good News of salvation and to bear witness to Jesus in keeping and living out his word. Today we are not waiting for the Holy Spirit: we are not in the days of fulfillment. The Holy Spirit is already present amidst us, and He is waiting for us to be received. Therefore, today, this mission is not only entrusted to few people but to all of us, the whole Church, which had the apostles as witnesses of JESUS. Let us keep up this responsibility witnessing Jesus in our day today life in generous deeds and actions faithfully to fulfill our mission.

I am Fr. Anand from the diocese of Kurnool, southern part of India. I am here today as missionary priests. I would like to thank Msgr. Callahan, Fr. Nord, and Fr. Westhoff and all of you for your welcome. Let me speak briefly about my diocese.

As a kind of introduction to the diocese I would say that the Mission Diocese of Kurnool was created in 1967. The diocese consists of 4 civil districts. As you are very well aware of the Catholic population of India. We are a minority in our country. So, our diocese has 100 thousand Catholics. We carry out the Mission of the Lord in the best way possible for us. Today I share the three essential apostolates that we are doing in the diocese. Our three main apostolates are first an Educational Apostolate, second, a Pastoral Apostolate, and third a Social Apostolate.

The aim of the **Educational Apostolate** is to give a bright future to the children who downtrodden and below the poverty line. There are many students who pass from our educational institutions and live better lives. We also facilitate accommodation to the very poor children in our boarding & orphanage homes. We are running 65 schools and 42 boarding & orphanage homes. Mostly they are reachable to the children who live in the villages far from the city. The parents send the children to boarding homes and migrate to other places for work purposes. They come back to their homes when the holidays are given to the children. We provide education, accommodation, food, clothing, medication and discipline in the boarding homes.

Besides their academic education we also give spiritual education like conducting catechism classes and moral education. They do have daily Holy Mass and Holy Rosary in the boarding homes. Many of the Students after completion of their studies opt to become priests and religious nuns. I am the product of the mission diocese of Kurnool, today I am an ordained priest, all because of the free education of my diocese.

After the completion of the schooling, the poor and bright students who wish to continue their higher studies in the colleges and universities are encouraged with scholarships. This is all because of the donors like you who are generous in heart. We are happy and thankful for your kindness to these poor children and students.

Our diocese is very active in our **Pastoral Apostolate** with spreading the gospel of Jesus and we have several teams organized to reach out the villages and towns to preach and witness Jesus through our deeds and actions and our presence.

The diocese has 108 diocesan priests and 68 religious priests and 430 religious nuns working in 70 parishes and different institutions. We do have 444 catechists and youth leaders to help in the mission stations of the diocese. We also have 23 seminarians undergoing the formation for the priesthood. The people are hungry for the word of God. We do have a spiritual retreat center in the Diocese. There are small Christian communities (SCC) in most of the parish in which people take active participation. We conduct faith formation programs to the children in the summer holidays and we conduct marriage preparation courses for the youth every year. The diocese also seeks the need of constructing the Churches, chapels wherever it is needed according to the number of faithful. We have number of mission stations; Let me share my pastoral experience and what I do as a pastor: I have 10 mission stations, so I celebrate 4 masses on Sunday: one is at the main parish and the other 3 are at mission stations according to the customs. This means that the mission stations only have mass twice a month.

Through our **Social Service Apostolate** theChurch of Kurnool is the church for the poor and of the poor. The diocese lifts the poor and illiterate. The diocese fights for the rights of the poor, marginalized. We work in the fields of women development, eradication of child labor, human (girls) trafficking. Service to HIV/ AIDS patients, emergency relief works (like natural catastrophes), matching grants with the unemployed youth, housing programs and drinking water supply. We reach out the neediest and deserved people at their needs whether medical, empowering and nursing homes, orphans

To pursue all our missionary activities our financial resources are not sufficient. Most of our faithful are DALIT (untouchables) and their contributions are very meager. I am here to appeal to you, please be generous in your offerings for the greater cause of supporting our mission. We are ever grateful to the Donors for their generous contributions. For more information, please see the brochures. May the good Lord bless you all abundantly!