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St. Thomas Parish Goregaon East Newsletter

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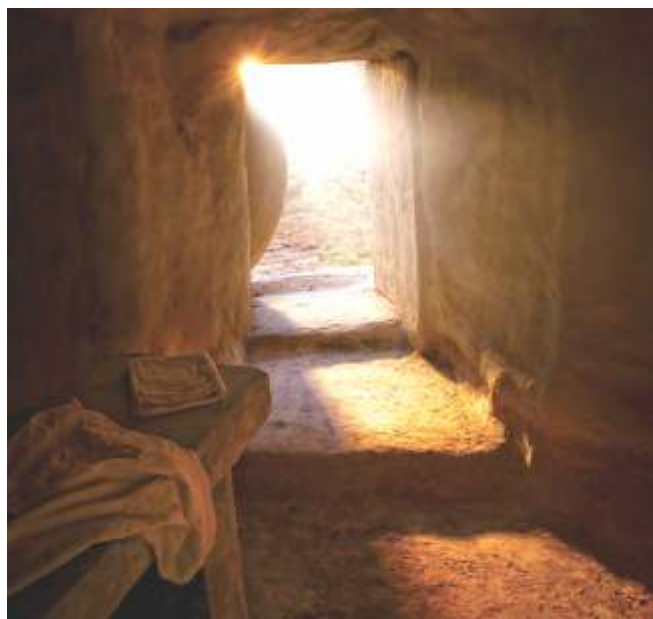
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Christ is Risen!

I am the Resurrection and the Life'. This is not a mere statement but the truth and the foundation of Christian faith, who believes that, 'Jesus is Risen'. This statement was put before Martha and is also put before us: Do we believe that 'Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life'? Jesus has promised to "raise up" on the last day those who believe in him

and consume his Eucharistic flesh and blood. He is the "life" because through baptism he gives a new spiritual life - the living water of the Holy Spirit - to those who believe in him. This new life is a participation in the divine communion, and it is enjoyed by all who believe it 'now' at this present moment. 'Jesus is Risen' again I say 'Jesus is Risen'. Today's competitive world may force us to prove ourselves to be 'The Best'. But in this race of proving we are 'The Best', have we fallen short and lost our focus from 'The Risen Christ'? We make our confession and our belief strong on Easter and every Sunday (the mini Easter) when we recite the creed by saying, 'I believe in the Resurrection of the Body'. This confirms our belief that 'Jesus is Risen' and we too shall rise like him. Our belief in the risen Jesus makes us aware of the 'Peace' he gave to his disciples, when he appeared after his resurrection and said to them, "Peace be with you". This 'Peace' becomes more alive in the midst of 'No Peace' in our lives, among our families and in this world. The Risen



Christ brings peace to all in the midst of this turmoil. It is our decision to believe and have faith in him who brings peace. This world makes us see war between countries, caste, families and each other, but the resurrection calls us to be children of God and when we are God's children, we are peacemakers and do not bring forth war. We all are called to wake up from our safe and comfort zones to spread our Lord Jesus Christ's Resurrection in the act of Peace. Jesus Christ has gained victory over sin, fear and death, and he encourages us not to surrender to evil and violence. Peace is possible and we need to share and experience it with the Peace of Christ. Happy Easter. God Bless you all.

- Br. Cajetan

WHAT'S INSIDE

Vishweshwar Nagar	2
Station Road	2
Concert: The Last Words	3
Walking Pilgrimage	4
First Holy Communion	5
The Agony & Ecstasy	6-7
Introze Celebration	8
Society of Vincent de Paul	8
Piramal Nagar	9
Shreyas Colony	9
Govind Nagar & Kailashpuri	10
Peru Baug	10
Mahindra Nagar	11
Kailashpuri	11
Sunder Nagar	12
Bus Pilgrimage	12

VISHWESHWAR NAGAR

St. Blaise unit, as a community, decided to strengthen the faith of the two children receiving their First Holy Communion and one child who was receiving the sacrament of Confirmation by having a prayer service for them.

On Sunday, January 29, 2023, the core group members and the families of the candidates gathered at a member's residence to pray individually for each candidate and give a special blessing to each one. In doing so we tried to make these sacraments extra special for them, to help in improving their spirituality.



We also celebrated the feast of our patron St. Blaise, popularly known as the Saint of Throats, as always on February 3.

This year too, around 70 members from our

community were present for an event filled with fun and excitement. The evening started with a thanksgiving prayer followed by the core group's report listing the unit's participation in various activities conducted at the Parish level and new initiatives undertaken. The members applauded the core group for their efforts.



As the evening progressed, various spot prizes and games ensured active participation by all. There were a few group activities which helped in bonding, sharing of ideas and working together as a team. The atmosphere then only got livelier as everyone, young and old, could not resist singing and dancing to the groovy beats.

After spending time together and mingling with each other as a community, we felt a sense of belongingness and gratitude, surely a lesson we all learnt after the pandemic.

- Gia Pereira

STATION ROAD

Every year during the season of Lent our community comes together to pray the stations of the cross at the Cross in the community, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic this wasn't possible for the past 3 years. This year the way of the cross was prayed in every member's house as well as the community cross. It was great to see the participation of the family members in praying the way of the cross together in three different languages - English, Marathi and Konkani.

- Quinton Pereira



THE LAST WORDS - CONCERT BY OPEN SECRET.

Lent is described as a time of preparation and an opportunity to go further into with God. On February 25, 2023, we did just that with a first ever Lenten concert in our parish. Open Secret, a Christian Rock and Worship Band, performed 'The Last Words', the first in the band's series of Lenten concerts.

The event began at around 7.30pm, with an introduction of the band and its members. Without further ado, the quintet began creating magic on the school grounds through harmony and music. Through melodic lines, the lead vocalist, Macklin Lacerda, steered us into worship and prayer. Meditating on Jesus' Seven Last Words, not only through music but also through the tidbits shared, provided us with an understanding of how Jesus felt when he died for our sins.

The concert was a perfect blend of reverence, introspection, quiet reflection and meditation on God's Word, with intelligent humour thrown in at just the right moments. Our hearts were raised into God's joyful presence and peace, and we became a channel for God's power to operate in one's circumstances.

At the end of the concert Fr. Nelson Saldanha beautifully emphasised the power of praise and worship, further elaborating on Jesus' promise of reclamation, revival and redemption stating that the concert is not a show, not a performance...but a feeling, an experience, 'ekAnubhav' that touches your life deep within.

At around 10pm this spiritual experience that added to the season's solemnity came to an end. It was a great beginning to a spiritual and blessed Lenten season.

- Annabelle D'cruz.





LEGION OF MARY: RUBY JUBILEE OF THE WALKING PILGRIMAGE

It was indeed a momentous occasion as we celebrated the 40th Annual Walking Pilgrimage organised by the Legion of Mary from our Parish to the Mount Mary Basilica Bandra, on 25th March 2023 after a pandemic break of three years. The pilgrimage was flagged off by our Parish Priest, Fr. Nelson Saldanha in the presence of Fr. Anthony Fernandes (Parish Priest of St John the Evangelist Church (Marol) and the Spiritual Director of the Legion of Mary, Mumbai Senatus) and Fr. Joseph Gonsalves (Spiritual Director of the Legion of Mary of our Parish).

After a brief prayer service, Fr. Nelson unveiled the Ruby Jubilee banner. This was followed by the felicitation of the legionaries who pioneered the walking pilgrimage in our parish 40 years ago, including Fr. Bento Cardoza (currently at St. Michael's Church, Mahim) who was our parish priest at that time.

A beautifully bedecked float with the statue of Mother Mary led by a strong band of pilgrims from various parishes of Mumbai, wended their prayerful way to the Mount pausing to recite the Stations of the Cross at St. Blaise Church (Amboli), O. L. of Vailankanni Church (Irla), Sacred Heart Church (Santacruz), St. Theresa's Church (Khar) and St. Andrew's Church (Bandra). It was heartening to see many of our brethren from other faiths pause to venerate Mother Mary along the way. The prayerful atmosphere created by the pilgrims lent an air of solemnity to the occasion.

The pilgrimage culminated with the celebration of the Solemn Eucharist by His Lordship, Bishop Barthol Barretto at Mount Mary's Basilica, Bandra at 5.30 am followed by the cutting of the Ruby Jubilee cake graced by His Lordship Bishop John Rodrigues.

These past 40 years have been grace filled. The organisers are grateful to all who made this 40th-anniversary pilgrimage a truly memorable journey of penance and reconciliation during this Lenten season.

SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY EUCHARISTIC

The First Holy Eucharist is a very important sacrament in the life of a child as he/she receives Jesus for the very first time. It is during this sacrament, that the child comes in union with Jesus by accepting the bread and wine, which is symbolic of Jesus' body and blood. Fr Leslie Almeida, Spiritual Director of the Sunday School, along with Fr. Nelson Saldanha and Fr. Joseph Gonsalves celebrated the First Holy Eucharist on February 5, 2023 at 10am. The homily was insightful with a message to keep the hunger and longing for Jesus alive within us. The 17 communicants looked proud as they participated actively in the liturgy and received Jesus for the first time, a moment to treasure! We express our gratitude to all the priests, catechism teachers, altar servers, choir and everyone who contributed to make the liturgy so special and prayerful. It was indeed a heart-filled experience to watch our little ones take this step in their journey of Christian faith.

This journey began in June 2022. The classes were very well planned with an extensive syllabus including various activities, action songs and interactive sessions. The catechists, Mrs. Godeleva and Sr. Theresya, ensured that the children are not only enriched in their knowledge of Jesus and the Bible, but also learn to strengthen and express their faith in Him.

The children were explained the meaning of sacraments, significance of the consecrated bread and wine, why it symbolises Jesus' body and blood, and how each time, by partaking in the Eucharistic celebration, we commemorate Jesus' sacrifice for us.

During the intensive week, Fr Leslie also conducted a special session for the communicants and their parents, to explain the significance of the sacrament of reconciliation – the examination of one's conscience – which was followed by confession. The parents were also invited to engage and be a part in the spiritual growth of our children.



The Agony And the Ecstasy

There may not be a more apt phrase to describe the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Easter is the culmination of Jesus' victory over death. The Agony of the Cross was transformed into the Ecstasy of the Resurrection. Easter also reminds us that there is a crown of glory awaiting us if we can endure the crown of thorns in our lives. Every failure can ultimately lead to success only if we learn from our failures and seek to rise above our weakness and find strength in adversity. Jesus' death on the cross demonstrated to us that there is hope amidst abject despair, light leading us out of darkness, life eternal at the end of death and redemption despite our sinfulness.

The lives of Saints down the centuries is a heroic testimony to their faith and courage that led them to face suffering and death stoically. The sterling example of their lives is a beacon of hope for us as we strive to emulate our Divine Master and learn to bear our trials and sufferings with patience and fortitude. Let's reflect on a few such authentic lives that today shine in the firmament of heaven.

1. St. Charles Borromeo



In 1576, the plague broke out in Milan, where he was serving as bishop. In an unprecedented manner, St. Charles did not seek to isolate himself from the plague, rather he ran toward it. St. Charles sought to minister to those who were suffering the most in hospitals, visiting them and offering them the sacraments. It is said that St. Charles strove to feed thousands of people every day by going into severe debt to pay for the food. St. Charles lived for eight

years after the plague, dying at a young age of forty-six from illness and a life completely spent for the people he served.

2. St. Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes



She contracted cholera in the epidemic of 1854 and suffered from asthma and other ailments throughout her life. The illnesses of her childhood would catch up with Bernadette at the monastery. She contracted tuberculosis and eventually died from it on April 16, 1879. She was only 35.

3. St. Alphonsa



Our own Indian saint offered herself to Jesus as a victim of love. Her life was not one of roses, but that of sufferings – both physical and mental. A few months after her Vestition, she had an attack of haemorrhage for which she had to undergo an operation at Ernakulam. Though Sr. Alphonsa got cured of the serious sickness she continued to be tormented by various ailments and even had a serious mental breakdown for a year. The final phase of her agony persisted for almost a year before she finally was united with her Divine Groom in heaven. She was only 36.

4. St. Teresa of Ávila



The Spanish Carmelite reformer and Doctor of the Church also suffered through many debilitating illnesses and physical pain, nurturing a life of deep contemplative prayer. As a child, Teresa was captivated by the thought of eternity and the vision of God granted to the saints in heaven. She experienced many profound hardships, including the loss of her mother at age 14, which caused her to develop a devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Here's what she had to say about suffering:

Suffering can serve as an active form of prayer, if we allow it. Even out of evil, God can work for our good and the good of others. We act as instruments of Christ to bring aid and hope for those who suffer. Every trial has a purpose, even if we won't see it fulfilled on earth. If someone in your life causes you to suffer, all the more reason to take them to prayer. Suffering increases our humility if we allow it, thus drawing us closer to God.

5. St. Therese of Lisieux (The Little Flower)



St. Therese suffered in particular from tuberculosis. In fact, it was the very illness that claimed her life. She spent over a year in the gradual erosion of her bodily life. In the very process she was also assailed

by severe temptations to doubt her faith, especially the existence of heaven.

She says it so perfectly in her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*: "I understood that to become a saint one had to suffer much, seek out always the most perfect thing to do, and forget self." As a young woman who died at the age of 24, Therese was wise enough to understand that her earthly adversities had a divine purpose. More than anything, she desired to serve God well, through every minor inconvenience, to joyfully lying on her deathbed.

The lives of these Saints is a pointer to each one of us as we face various challenges in our daily struggle of life. The Easter message of redemption and salvation can be assimilated in our lives only if we root out sin in all forms from our lives. Like the saints, we need to surrender ourselves and obey God's perfect will for us, with the inevitable consequence of even death, rather than choose to do our own will.

The fact that Jesus overcame death itself was because He always denied His own will to do His Father's will, in a body like ours with the same desires and passions to live for our own pleasure and gain. With the power of God's Spirit He suffered these passions and desires to death and finally triumphed at Easter.

In a world assailed by war and turmoil, Pope Francis' *Urbi et Orbi* message of Peace for Easter 2022 is relevant even today:

"Dear brothers and sisters, every war brings in its wake consequences that affect the entire human family: from grief and mourning to the drama of refugees, and to the economic and food crisis, the signs of which we are already seeing. Faced with the continuing signs of war, as well as the many painful setbacks to life, Jesus Christ, the victor over sin, fear and death, exhorts us not to surrender to evil and violence. Brothers and sisters, may we be won over by the peace of Christ! Peace is possible; peace is a duty; peace is everyone's primary responsibility!"

- Thomas Lobo

INTROZE CELEBRATION 2023

A few days before the season of lent begins various communities celebrate Carnival and Introze. This festivity brings people together to continue age old traditions, like to Feast before they Fast. The Goregaon East Indian Association (GEIA) organised an Introze celebration on February 18, at Chincholi which started off with Maan at the Cross and a hymn to our dearest Mother Mary. Around 150 people from different communities came together in a spirit of brotherhood to celebrate and enjoy the foot-tapping music of the live band. It was a fun-filled evening of games, spot prizes, music, dance and delicious food. The GEIA thanks all who patronised and attended the Introze and made it a success. The GEIA wishes everyone a Blessed Easter. May the Peace of the Risen Lord be with you and your families.

- Martin Correa



SOCIETY OF VINCENT DE PAUL

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul celebrated women's day on March 5, 2023, with the women of the adopted families.

The programme began with an opening prayer by Fr. Joseph Gonsalves. This special gathering was celebrated with games and plenty of spot prizes. Fr. Nelson Saldanha and Dr. Salina Sampey encouraged the women to be self-sufficient, independent and to stand against atrocities. They were cautioned about putting their hard-earned money into 'get-rich-quick' schemes. They were also urged to be alert to any inappropriate behaviour from anyone. After this they were given a sumptuous lunch sponsored by a very generous parishioner, who also made provision for extra food to be taken home for the families.

The SVP thank Fr. Nelson Saldanha, Fr. Leslie Almedia, our spiritual advisor, and Fr. Joseph Gonsalves for their continued support and the many donors and benefactors who assist the SVP in cash and kind.

SVP meets on Friday at 7.30pm in the conference room.

-Lourdes Pereira (Secretary)



SVP Women's Day Celebration

PIRAMAL NAGAR: WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

“The success of every woman should be the inspiration to another. We should raise each other up. - Serena Williams

Our community gathers together every year to celebrate International Women's Day, wherein the women and men get together for this special occasion. This year we celebrated the women of our community on February 19, 2023.

The programme started with an opening prayer, followed by snacks, soft drinks, entertaining games, bingo and spot prizes. Men, women and children participated in the games with enthusiasm. Prizes were distributed to the winners and spot prizes were announced.

The table was laid with aromatic and colourful dishes by Chris Caterers. Fr. Nelson said Grace and blessed the food. All enjoyed the sumptuous meal. Special thanks to Fr. Nelson for being in our midst, despite his busy schedule. This entertaining celebration made the day memorable.

-Maggie Fernandes



SHREYAS COLONY: VISIT TO THE OLD AGE HOME

Parents take utmost care to bring up their children in the best possible way. They give them the best of everything, most importantly education, which is what makes them successful in life. Sadly some children seem to forget the hardships their parents went through to bring them up, sacrificing so much. Some of the members of Shreyas colony visited the old age home on March 11, 2023. It was disheartening to see the inmates, that thirst in their eyes waiting for their loved ones to come and spend time with them. Most of our members who visited were teary eyed. We spent time with them enjoying lovely music which they were listening to on Caravan and did our best to uplift their spirits by enquiring about their health and talking to them. Grocery items were donated to the old age home as a token of our love to the wonderful people we met there.

- Lily Bhanushali

GOVIND NAGAR & KAILASHPURI UNITS

During this season of Lent, community members of Govind Nagar and Kailashpuri Units came together on March 12 as a community of Christ to perform an open area Stations of the Cross.



People from both communities came together as one family to witness the passion of the Christ

through prayers. Father Joseph came to be a part of this special day along with 50 members from both communities.

The stations of the cross started at 3pm from Chincholi Gate proceeding towards an upward area of Kailashpuri covering a few stops at the member's society/building.

Every member actively participated in the occasion. The stations of the cross was performed in five different languages: English, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, and Konkani.

Both units made arrangements for refreshments for everyone who attended the event. Even though it was a hot summer day, everyone made an effort to come and make this prayer day a success.

It was an overwhelming experience because after Covid restrictions this was the first few spiritual encounters that everyone was looking forward to.

- Mariya Menezes (Govind Nagar)

PERU BAUG: COMMUNITY GET-TOGETHER



Our annual get together is always an evening to celebrate and remember the past achievements and look forward to keeping this on-going journey happy and collaborative. The event was held on February 11, 2023, at the school basement. We began the evening with a beautiful prayer conducted by Sr. Sunita Machado. Fr. Leslie, our Spiritual Director, along with Fr. Nelson, Fr. Joseph and Br. Cajitan made the evening extra special with their presence. We appreciate Fr. Nelson's kind words as we

started the event. Dean Pereira, our host for the evening, stole many hearts drawing everyone into a fun ice-breaker session followed by many games, spot prizes with loads of music and dance. While the snacks were being served Fr. Leslie delivered a lovely speech about the community and how we must keep this lovely bond alive. He encouraged each one to work in unity as always

for the greater glory of God. The evening ended with a mouth-watering buffet, an exciting housie game and appreciation gifts for every family. We thank the youth for organising the whole programme and for ensuring all the young and old had a great time. We especially thank all the members who participated actively in this event making it a successful one

- Karen Gonsalves

MAHINDRA NAGAR

After a hectic and festive Christmas season comes the feast of our patron St. John Bosco on January 31, a time of bonding for the community. This year we held our annual community get together on January 26, 2023. The evening started spiritually, with a Thanksgiving mass celebrated by our Spiritual Director Fr. Leslie Almeida, followed by an evening full of fun, frolic and laughter. Our compere Christopher D'mello kept each and every member engaged with games, spot prizes and jokes. There was lip-smacking food by Chris caterers and foot-tapping music by Audio Solutions (Ryan Albuquerque). We were blessed by the presence of our parish clergy team Fr. Nelson, Fr. Leslie and Fr. Joseph, all members were happy to interact with them on a one-to-one basis.

As we moved into the season of lent, the core group

geared up to bring the members together in devotion. We began with fulfilling the spiritual requirements of the sick and homebound of our community as we prayed the Stations of the Cross with them and their families in their homes. Then for the able members the core group along with Fr. Leslie organised a bus pilgrimage on Saturday, March 18, to Dongri, Uttan. We were welcomed by Fr. Oscar Mendonca, Parish Priest of Our Lady of Bethlehem Church, Dongri, Uttan, who gave us a little history about the church and its parishioners and organised the meals for the day. We climbed and prayed the stations of the cross on our way to Irmitri (Chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima on the hillock) where Fr. Leslie celebrated the Eucharist for us. After lunch we visited the shrine and churches in Bhayander Deanery before returning home, enriched with a beautiful experience.



KAILASHPURI: COMMUNITY GET-TOGETHER

Our community had an evening together for our families on February 19, 2023, where we had around 55 plus people attend. We had an enjoyable evening with games for all categories, spot prizes and a dance session which ended with dinner.



SUNDER NAGAR: LENTEN ACTIVITIES

The season of Lent is of sacrifice and charity. We, the members of St. Anne's Community, Sunder Nagar (LMSC), put our best foot forward to do small deeds in our own little ways. On March 6, 2023, we visited Sneha Sagar Orphanage, Malwani. The immense joy on the angelic little faces of the kids was a sight to behold. The unforgettable moments that we spent with them are nothing in comparison to what we gave them. It was indeed an emotional moment when we bid them goodbye.

This wouldn't have been possible without the wholehearted support, cooperation and generous contribution of the community members. A host of items such as rice, wheat flour, pulses, fruit jam, hair care products, sweets, noodles, soap, ice-cream and cooking oil made up for a car load of useful items for the orphanage.

Our Lenten mission is incomplete without SVP. Once again, community members rose to the

occasion and generously contributed to the cause. On March 17, 2023, in the presence of Fr. Nelson and Fr. Leslie, we presented items like wheat flour, cooking oil, fruit jam, onion, talcum powder and pulses to help the poor and needy during these difficult days.

Once again, I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the donors. Thank you and God bless all of them.

- Jyoti Lobo



BUS PILGRIMAGE

On March 22, 86 pilgrims embarked on a spiritual bus pilgrimage to Uttan. Our Lenten journey began with a prayer and singing praises to God. The first two visits were at the beautiful historic churches of Our Lady of Nazareth, Bhayander, and Our Lady of Bethlehem, Dongri. Both the Parish Priests gave a short synopsis of the church and its parishioners. Our next visit was to the holy shrine of Our Lady of Velankanni, Uttan. A scenic location, it was a place to surrender to divine peace. Fr. Nelson Saldanha celebrated mass for us here followed by stations of the cross wherein each station was beautifully carved around the church and sea.

Every pilgrim devotionally participated in the passion of Christ reciting prayers and singing hymns to God. After a modest lunch, we prayed the Divine Mercy Rosary and then headed to our last destination, St. Andrews Chowk, a serene church overlooking the sea. The pilgrimage concluded with a vote of thanks by our VP of the PPC, Derick

Fernandes. After some refreshing snacks and tea, our spiritual journey came to an end. I thank the organisers for making my first lenten bus pilgrimage prayerful and memorable.

- Charmaine Coutinho David

