

# ABOUT SIN, FORGIVENESS and RECONCILIATION

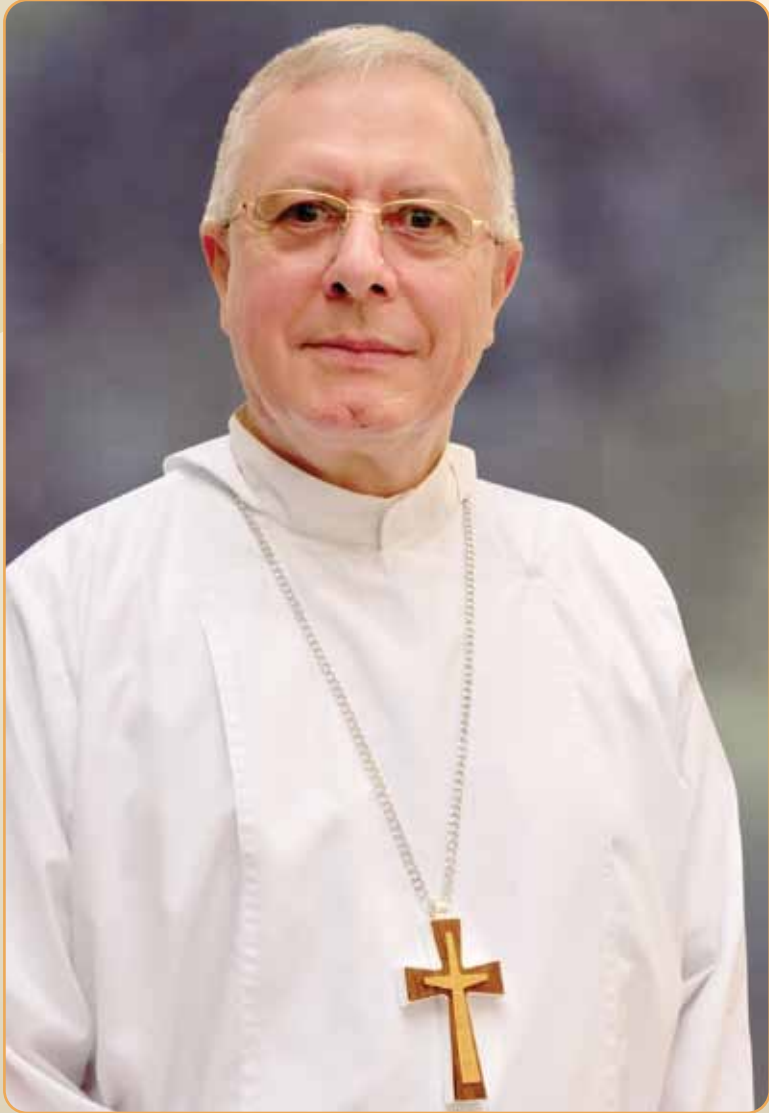
“Bless the LORD, my soul; and do not forget all his gifts,  
Who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills”  
(Psalm 103:2-3)

## A Pastoral Letter

From

Bishop Paul Hinder, OFM Cap.  
Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia

Lent 2012



**Bishop Paul Hinder**

# **Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia - Pastoral Letter 2012**

## **About Sin, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation**

*“Bless the LORD, my soul; and do not forget all his gifts,  
Who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills”  
(Psalm 103:2-3)*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may the Lord grant you peace and joy in the Holy Spirit!

1. Who of us has never experienced moments of embarrassment and shame when we realized that we committed an offence? Our first reaction is usually that we try to hide like Adam and Eve after having eaten the fruits from the forbidden tree: *“When they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden“* (Genesis 3:8). Basically we still react in the same way, we hide from God and from the others, because we do not like to be seen as we really are. We are afraid to admit that we are not perfect. This is the reason why since the expulsion from Eden we human beings have the tendency to deny our responsibility and to put the fault on the shoulders of the others: Adam on Eve, Eve on the Serpent.

### **We need the divine physician**

2. However, God will sooner or later call and ask everyone: *“Where are you?”* (Genesis 3:9) The first step to get out of the mess is to admit before the Lord and even before the others that we are sinners. The humble confession of our faults is the first step to discover God as the merciful physician. Unfortunately many react to God similar to a friend of mine whom I once asked to undergo a medical check. He replied: *“I am afraid, because the physician could find an illness I do not know yet!”* He was not able to see that the diagnosis of an illness was the first necessary step for healing. We are all wounded and sick people, but too often we are like my friend, we do not like to meet the divine physician because we are afraid of the divine diagnosis and the consequent treatment. Denying our spiritual sicknesses and wounds is one of the obstacles which hinder us to meet the divine physician.

### **Someone who opens our eyes**

3. Most of the time we need someone who opens our eyes. Look at King David who had committed adultery with Bathsheba and later had her husband

killed. He was not really aware of his sinful crime until the prophet Nathan challenged him with the following parable: “Tell me how you judge this case: *In a certain town there were two men, one rich, the other poor. The rich man had flocks and herds in great numbers. But the poor man had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He nourished her, and she grew up with him and his children. Of what little he had she ate; from his own cup she drank; in his bosom she slept; she was like a daughter to him. Now, a visitor came to the rich man, but he spared his own flocks and herds to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him: he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the one who had come to him.*” David grew very angry with that man and said to Nathan: “*As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves death! He shall make four-fold restitution for the lamb because he has done this and was unsparing.*” Then Nathan said to David: “*You are the man!*” (2 Samuel 12:1-7)

4. Each one of us needs a Nathan who tells us in a given situation of guilt: “You are the man!” “You are the woman!” Actually, we find this principle in the early Church based on the words of Jesus on how to treat the sinful brother or sister: “*If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (Matthew 18:15-18).

### **God is our Friend not our enemy, but we can become God’s enemies**

5. It is never an easy thing to be confronted by someone who can lay bare all that we try to hide. It may be one of the reasons why many people see in God a kind of enemy whom we have to flee from. However, this means to put the reality upside down. God is not our enemy. The opposite is true: we have become God’s enemies. Nonetheless, he is not treating us as his foes, but as his children. He has revealed it throughout the history of salvation and in a final and definitive way in his Son Jesus Christ: “*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned*” (John 3:16-18). Yes, God has made me his child: “*See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him*” (1 John 3:1).

6. Although adopted as children of God in baptism, sometimes we become again his enemies. That is why we need to regularly undergo in confidence, patience and humility a process of reconciliation: *“Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

### **How does God deal with the sinner?**

7. How does God deal with the sinner who is turning to him in confidence? We see it in the stories Jesus told and in the way he acted towards the sinners. I only remind you about some of them. You may take the Bible and meditate the full texts for yourselves or in groups: The parable of the prodigal son where Jesus reveals God as the merciful father accepting the child who had gone astray back into the communion of the family (Luke 15:11-32). You may add the parables of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7) and of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). Each time Jesus speaks about the joy in heaven that results from the sinner who repents. We can also bring light into our own sinful condition with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37): Jesus is the Good Samaritan who takes care of me. It is me who has been robbed and wounded by the devil. Jesus lifts me up on his own shoulders as the good shepherd and brings me to the inn, the Church, where he gives orders to the inn-keeper to take care of me. He, Jesus, is the one who pays the bill on the cross (cf. Colossians 2:14).

### **Jesus is not afraid to be in touch with sinners**

8. Jesus is not afraid to be in touch with sinners and to take the meal with them as he shows wonderfully in the meeting with Zacchaeus (cf. Luke 19:1-10). He will do the same with us. What is needed from our side is only the hunger and thirst to see Jesus like Zacchaeus did. The Lord will do the rest: pay attention to us; calling us down from our hiding place; coming with us into our house; sharing with us the meal in the company of others who need healing. There may be people grumbling that Jesus enters the house of a sinner, however, the result speaks for itself on the love and mercy of the Lord: Zacchaeus changes his life; repairs the wrong he has done; and he shares his riches with the poor. The comment of Jesus: *“Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost”* (Luke 19:9-10).

## **Learning through temptations and failures as the disciples did**

9. The disciples Jesus chose were not free from sin. They had to learn through temptations and failures what it truly meant to follow Jesus. Despite his enthusiasm and his threefold promises to the Lord, Simon Peter failed three times by denying that he knew Jesus: *“Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” He went out and began to weep bitterly”* (Luke 22:60-62). Each time I deny or betray Jesus in my own way, he turns and looks at me as he did with Peter. It is a moment of shame that leads to repentance and a new beginning. Am I moved to weep like Peter and to turn back to Jesus?

## **It is never too late to turn to Jesus**

10. It is never too late to turn to Jesus as shown by the example of the two criminals who were crucified together with Jesus. When one insulted Jesus, the other rebuked his friend saying: *“Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:40-43). Let us ask the Lord that he may give each one of us the chance to turn to him in confidence when it comes to our own end.

## **The risen Lord entrusts the mission of reconciliation to his disciples**

11. After his resurrection the risen Lord entrusts the mission of reconciliation to his disciples saying: *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained”* (John 20:21-23). The disciples and their successors are therewith empowered for the ministry of reconciliation. They do it in the power of the Holy Spirit the Lord has breathed on them through the sacrament of ordination. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (= CCC) deals with the sacrament of reconciliation in the chapter of the “Sacraments of Healing” which comprise the sacrament of penance (or reconciliation) and the anointing of the sick. You may study in detail the sacrament of penance and reconciliation in the Catechism of the Catholic Church by reading the articles 1422 to 1498. Although this sacrament has undergone important changes in the way it has been practiced in the course of history, the essential has always been the same: to continue the ministry of reconciliation Jesus has entrusted to the apostles and their successors. Thus continues with the same effect what Jesus did when he said to a sinner: *“Your sins are forgiven”* (Luke 7:48).

## **Why do I need to confess?**

12. More and more people are asking questions like these: What is considered a sin? And if I have committed a sin, why should I tell it to somebody else even if he is a priest? Why can I not get forgiveness directly from God? Why do I need an intermediary? We all are under the subtle influence of a culture which tends to trivialise sin or even deny its existence. If that is not the case, many think that sin is a private matter between the individual person and God. There is also the tendency to give excuses and psychological explanations for all kinds of human deviations. Many people are no longer aware that we can truly act against God and his commandments. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines sin as “*an offence against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity*” (CCC 1849). We can also define sin as “*a revolt against God through the will to become ‘like gods,’ knowing and determining good and evil*” (CCC 1850). By committing sins we are taking the place of God and deciding ourselves about good and bad. God’s commandments are overruled by our own rules. This leads us step by step into an impasse. The problem is that too often our pride does not allow us to admit the error, to give up the wrong behaviour, and to turn humbly back to God who is waiting at every corner of our life.

## **The culture of self-expiation and trivialization**

13. This culture of self-expiation may explain why in the lives of so many Christians injustice, adultery, fornication and pornography, stealing, cheating and lying, or the idolatry of pleasure and money, have become common behaviour. However, do they not destroy in a sustained way the relationship with God and with others? Have we not become remarkably blind regarding the values God has put into his whole creation, especially into the human person whom he has “*created in his image*” (Genesis 1:27)? Have our consciences become so riddled that everything passes through unnoticed? To commit sins means precisely that we are destroying or disfiguring the image of God. We may do it “privately” and erroneously think that it does not matter as long as nobody is aware of it. However, we should not pretend that we can cheat God like we may be able to cheat the police. God sees into our heart, and he wants us for our own good and for the good of the others to live as his images.

## **We have to come to our senses**

14. It is true we need first to come to our senses, as it is said of the prodigal son (cf. Luke 15:17). However, we should not pretend that we can repair the damage ourselves. We need the service of somebody else who has the power to restore

us. It requires humility to allow Jesus to wash our feet in order to become clean again (cf. John 13:10). It was the tragedy of Judas that he could not believe in forgiveness and lacked the humility to turn back as Simon Peter and others did. It is essential to understand that forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God is not a result of our moral effort. It means first of all to give space to the gift of Jesus who “lives in me” and makes it possible that *“I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me (Galatians 2:20)*. Our efforts to conduct a morally responsible life are only a modest answer to the infinite grace of Christ that has already worked in me. A moral life according to the rules Christ has given us is, therefore, not our work but an expression of our gratitude for the fruit of the Spirit of God who dwells in us (cf. Romans 8:9).

### **Conversion is an on-going struggle**

15. We all are struggling day after day knowing that we have not yet reached our goal. With Saint Paul we experience that we are often doing what we do not want to do, but do it all the same (cf. Romans 7:14ff). In this situation it may be good to remember the wonderful words in Psalm 103: *“Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. He will not always accuse, and nurses no lasting anger; He has not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our wrongs deserve. For as the heavens tower over the earth, so his mercy towers over those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:8-14)*. Whoever surrenders himself or herself in confidence and with contrition to God, will be forgiven: when we pray honestly the “Our Father” asking “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”; when we are sorry about our sins at the beginning of the mass and humbly praying for pardon and peace; when we truly love one another *“because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8)*. The test of our conversion is the readiness to forgive those who have sinned against us.

### **My sins affect the body of the Church**

16. You may ask: If God is so merciful and so compassionate and sins are forgiven in many ways, why have we to confess our sins to a priest? First of all we have to remember that we are members of a body, the body of Christ. Therefore, my sins, even if known only to me, are not simply a private matter but affect negatively the whole body of Christ. It is similar to polluting the air or the water. I cannot say it affects only “my” air or my water. It influences the whole climate within the body of Christ. Therefore, it is somehow logical that my offences have to be pardoned within the social body of the Church. In the case of the sacrament of reconciliation, that pardon is imparted by the priest who has received the fac-



ulty from the bishop to do what Christ did. This is compulsory for what we call the “mortal sins” which affect in a deadly way the sinner, and also damage the body of Christ and the Christian community. That is why in the early Church the so called capital sins were submitted to the public reconciliation with sacramental reconciliation only after a time of penance. Not only apostasy, adultery and murder were considered capital sins, but also other grave offences against the Lord’s commandments that heavily damaged the Christian witness.

### **Confess your sins to one another**

17. How shall we deal with sinners within the community? We have already seen the gospel of Matthew (18:15-20) where Jesus has given the rules for the treatment of sinners. We know that the present Bible text reflects the penitential practice already established in the Church in and for which Matthew wrote the gospel. The letter of James explicitly states: “*Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed*” (James 5:16). And the Apostle John writes in his first letter: “*If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). The context of the writings of John suggests that this confession of sins was not a private act between the individual faithful and God, but happened within the community.

### **My first confession**

18. I made my first confession, as most of you, before the first Holy Communion. It happened to me more than 60 years ago. Though I was only a child, I did not find it easy at all to overcome the embarrassment and shame. I gratefully still remember how my mother helped me to prepare myself and to get rid of the bad feeling. However, more important than the embarrassment was the feeling of relief and joy after the confession. Since my childhood I never gave up the practice of regular confession. With gratitude I remember all the priests who helped me in difficult times with their patience and gentleness to experience the confession really as the sacrament of the love of Christ. To this day I hear Christ himself speaking to me through the words of absolution from the priest when he says: “*Your sins are forgiven ... go in peace*” (Luke 7:48.50).

### **Grateful to merciful pastors**

19. When I became a priest I pledged to myself to be a merciful pastor, remembering my good experiences with the priests who had guided me. Sometimes people think that being a confessor must be interesting because we would hear a lot of exciting things. They are wrong. Maybe a young priest during the first few months could have that feeling. However, soon he will discover that hearing con-

fessions can be boring and painful at once: boring because the same sins return again and again; painful because we see into the heart of people who struggle and suffer in their weakness. The only way to continue to do the sacramental ministry properly is to realize that we are doing the work of Jesus in his name and with the commission he gave to the disciples after his resurrection.

## **Have you given up the practice of regular confession?**

20. Many faithful have lost their practice of regular confession for reasons I do not know and I do not judge. I am only concerned that they are missing something that really helps to overcome our sinful habits. Looking back to the World Youth Day 2011 in Madrid, Pope Benedict XVI in his Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia mentioned particularly the growing importance of this sacrament: *“A further important element of the World Youth Days is the sacrament of Confession, which is increasingly coming to be seen as an integral part of the experience. Here we recognize that we need forgiveness over and over again, and that forgiveness brings responsibility. Openness to love is present in man, implanted in him by the Creator, together with the capacity to respond to God in faith. But also present, in consequence of man’s sinful history (Church teaching speaks of original sin) is the tendency that is opposed to love – the tendency towards selfishness, towards becoming closed in on oneself, in fact towards evil. Again and again my soul is tarnished by this downward gravitational pull that is present within me. Therefore we need the humility that constantly asks God for forgiveness, that seeks purification and awakens in us the counterforce, the positive force of the Creator, to draw us upwards.”*

## **What do we have to confess?**

21. Going to confession does not mean that we have to formulate scrupulously everything that smells of sin. In our confession we express in honesty and simplicity the real issues which were wrong in the eyes of God and harmed my being a child of God and being a brother or sister within the communion of the Church. Thus, we have to see the lack of faith and trust in God and the betrayal of the one true God in running after other gods in our life. We know the substantial rules of God’s commandments and spontaneously realize that injustice, cheating, stealing, lying, hatred, adultery, fornication (including the consumption of pornography), idolatry of money, pleasure, luxury, and things alike, are not harmless, but ruin the relationship with God as well as with others. Before confessing our sins we should recognize the seriousness of our wrongdoings by conducting a genuine interior act of contrition. At the same time we should have the courage to name our sins properly without concealing anything and to confess them honestly.

## **The importance of the individual confession**

22. Regarding the necessity of individual confession we can read in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* of Blessed Pope John Paul II the following substantial passage: *“In the last years much has been done to highlight in the Church’s practice - in conformity with the most ancient tradition of the Church - the community aspect of penance and especially of the sacrament of Penance. We cannot however forget that conversion is a particularly profound inward act in which the individual cannot be replaced by others and cannot make the community be a substitute for him. Although the participation by the fraternal community of the faithful in the penitential celebration is a great help for the act of personal conversion, nevertheless, in the final analysis, it is necessary that in this act there should be a pronouncement by the individual himself with the whole depth of his conscience and with the whole of his sense of guilt and of trust in God, placing himself like the Psalmist before God to confess: “Against you... have I sinned”. In faithfully observing the centuries-old practice of the Sacrament of Penance - the practice of individual confession with a personal act of sorrow and the intention to amend and make satisfaction - the Church is therefore defending the human soul’s individual right: man’s right to a more personal encounter with the crucified forgiving Christ, with Christ saying, through the minister of the sacrament of Reconciliation: “Your sins are forgiven”; “Go, and do not sin again”. As is evident, this is also a right on Christ’s part with regard to every human being redeemed by him: his right to meet each one of us in that key moment in the soul’s life constituted by the moment of conversion and forgiveness. By guarding the sacrament of Penance, the Church expressly affirms her faith in the mystery of the Redemption as a living and life-giving reality that fits in with man’s inward truth, with human guilt and also with the desires of the human conscience. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”. The sacrament of Penance is the means to satisfy man with the righteousness that comes from the Redeemer himself“ (Redemptor Hominis 20).*

## **The need of satisfaction**

23. The sacrament of reconciliation puts away our sins. However, it requires also satisfaction as the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: *Many sins wrong our neighbour. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbour. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must “make satisfaction for” or “expiate” his sins. This satisfaction is also called “penance” (CCC 1459).*

## Reconciliation and Eucharist

24. In his first letter to the Corinthians Saint Paul shows his concern about those faithful who accede to Holy Communion without being clearly free from sin: *“A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup”* (1 Corinthians 11:28). In this text of the Apostle we can see a link between Eucharist and Penance. Blessed John Paul II develops this link in his Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* as follows: *“Indeed, if the first word of Christ’s teaching, the first phrase of the Gospel Good News, was “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (metanoete), the Sacrament of the Passion, Cross and Resurrection seems to strengthen and consolidate in an altogether special way this call in our souls. The Eucharist and Penance thus become in a sense two closely connected dimensions of authentic life in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, of truly Christian life. The Christ who calls to the Eucharistic banquet is always the same Christ who exhorts us to penance and repeats his “Repent”. Without this constant ever renewed endeavour for conversion, partaking of the Eucharist would lack its full redeeming effectiveness and there would be a loss or at least a weakening of the special readiness to offer God the spiritual sacrifice in which our sharing in the priesthood of Christ is expressed in an essential and universal manner. In Christ, priesthood is linked with his Sacrifice, his self-giving to the Father; and, precisely because it is without limit, that self-giving gives rise in us human beings subject to numerous limitations to the need to turn to God in an ever more mature way and with a constant, ever more profound, conversion”* (Redemptor Hominis 20).

## Christians not enjoying full communion

25. There are Christians among us who cannot enjoy full communion through the sacraments of the Church. I think of those who were validly married, then divorced, and finally engaged in a civil marriage. The discipline of the Catholic Church does not allow the regular administration of the sacrament of reconciliation and the Holy Communion to them unless the union with a new partner can be regularized after the death of the first partner, in rare cases by the declaration of nullity of the original marriage, or the abstinence from sexual intercourse with the new partner. Although the discipline of the Church appears hard, it respects the clear words of Jesus regarding the indissoluble bond of marriage. However, nobody has the right to judge people who for reasons we do not really know did not succeed in maintaining their marriage vows. They remain members of the Church and deserve our love and assistance although we may not be able to resolve the thorny problem. They cannot receive the sacramental reconciliation, but they may receive the prayers and blessing of the priest. I invite them, despite the impediment, not to give up their prayer life and participation in the mass. There is still the possibility of spiritual communion. The Lord knows about the suffering and thirst behind such situations and takes it into account when it comes to the final judgment.

26. Especially here in the Gulf, we have a good number of non-Catholic Christians coming to our masses, and some may even occasionally ask for the sacrament of reconciliation. As the administration of the sacraments normally requires full communion with the Catholic Church, these sacraments cannot be given ordinarily. However, there are exceptions for those non-Catholic Oriental Churches which have and recognize all the sacraments of the Church, but whose faithful do not have the possibility to approach a priest in their own Church. The same exception is true for all those in imminent danger of death who are baptized at their request. The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes this situation as follows: “*When, in the Ordinary’s judgment, a grave necessity arises, Catholic ministers may give the sacraments of Eucharist, Penance, and Anointing of the Sick to other Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church, who ask for them of their own will, provided they give evidence of holding the Catholic faith regarding these sacraments and possess the required dispositions*” (CCC 1401; cf. Code of Canon Law can. 847 § 4). Where the conditions for these exceptions are not given, it is still possible and even recommended to pray over the person and to ask the Lord for pardon and peace.

### **Christ is the incarnate mercy**

27. In his Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* John Paul II has a wonderful passage about Christ as the “incarnate mercy”: “*In Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in His mercy; that is to say, there is emphasized that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as “mercy.” Christ confers on the whole of the Old Testament tradition about God’s mercy a definitive meaning. Not only does He speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all He Himself makes it incarnate and personifies it. He Himself, in a certain sense, is mercy. To the person who sees it in Him - and finds it in Him - God becomes “visible” in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy (Dives in Misericordia 2). In the same letter the pope stresses the mission of the Church as a mission of mercy and forgiveness: “The Church rightly considers it her duty and the purpose of her mission to guard the authenticity of forgiveness, both in life and behaviour and in educational and pastoral work. She protects it simply by guarding its source, which is the mystery of the mercy of God Himself as revealed in Jesus Christ (Dives in Misericordia 14).*”

### **Conclusion**

28. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary we call her “Refuge of sinners”. And each time when we recite the “Hail Mary” we also say: “Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death”. As our loving Mother she will take care of us if we entrust ourselves to her intercession “now and in the hour of our death”.

29. I would like to conclude this pastoral letter with the consoling and encouraging words Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the Youth of Germany on 24 September 2011: *“Dear friends, Christ is not so much interested in how often in our lives we stumble and fall, as in how often with his help we pick ourselves up again. He does not demand glittering achievements, but he wants his light to shine in you. He does not call you because you are good and perfect, but because he is good and he wants to make you his friends. Yes, you are the light of the world because Jesus is your light. You are Christians – not because you do special and extraordinary things, but because he, Christ, is your life, our life. You are holy, we are holy, if we allow his grace to work in us.”* – It is my deep desire that everyone may again experience the merciful love of God in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Trust in God *“who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills, who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with mercy and compassion, who fills your days with good things, so your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”* (Psalm 103:3-5). May the Lord bless you and keep you.

+ Paul Hinder OFM Cap.  
Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia

## **REGULATIONS**

### **FAST, ABSTINENCE, HOLIDAYS OF OBLIGATION**

1. FAST & ABSTINENCE are prescribed for Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, after having completed 18 years of age, to 60 years.
2. ABSTINENCE is prescribed as a general rule for every Friday, applicable to those who have completed the 14th year. However, for the particular circumstances of the Vicariate of Southern Arabia, abstinence is to be observed on Wednesdays of Lent. Out of devotion, abstinence may be observed every Wednesday throughout the year.
3. EUCHARISTIC FAST: The faithful must abstain from solid food and liquids for one hour before receiving Holy Communion. This regulation is applied to Masses celebrated in the morning, afternoon or at midnight. Water does not break the fast. Those who are sick, even though not confined to bed, may take any liquid or food as medicine at any time before Holy Communion without asking permission.
4. EASTER OBLIGATION may be fulfilled any time between the First Sunday in Lent and Trinity Sunday.
5. HOLIDAYS OF OBLIGATION: Sundays or Fridays (where it has been decided) and Christmas.
6. FEAST DAYS TRANSFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING OR PRECEDING SUNDAY: Epiphany (January 6th); Corpus Christi; Ascension; SS Peter & Paul (June 29th); Assumption of our Lady (August 15).
7. SPECIAL CELEBRATION DAYS: Mary, Mother of God (January 1st); Our Lady of Arabia (Saturday after the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord); St. Joseph (March 19th); All Saints (November 1st); Immaculate Conception (December 8th).

### **COLLECTIONS TO BE MADE IN ALL CHURCHES OF THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF SOUTHERN ARABIA**

1. Christmas Day & Easter Day for our mission
2. Good Friday for the Holy Land
3. SS Peter & Paul for Peter's Pence
4. Mission Sunday for the Propagation of the Faith
5. First week of every month for the Vicariate

# APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF SOUTHERN ARABIA – PARISHES UAE

## **Abu Dhabi - St Joseph Parish's**

P.O. Box 54, Tel: 02 446 1929, Fax: 02 446 1868  
abuparish@yahoo.com, [www.stjosephsabudhabi.org](http://www.stjosephsabudhabi.org)  
Fr. Savarimuthu, OFMCap.  
L: Al Mushrif, on 17th Street, between Old Airport Road and Karamah Street (near Al Khubeirat British School)

## **Al Ain - St. Mary's Church**

P.O. Box 15645, Tel: 03 721 4417, Fax: 03 721 7929  
[www.stmarysalain.com](http://www.stmarysalain.com)  
Fr. Antony Puthanpurackal Anikleth, OFMCap.  
L: near Etisalat, opposite Oasis Hospital;

## **Dubai - St. Mary's Church**

P.O. Box 51200, Tel: 04 337 0087 / 335 8504, Fax: 04 334 7594  
[stmarysdx@gmail.com](mailto:stmarysdx@gmail.com), [www.stmarysdubai.com](http://www.stmarysdubai.com)  
Fr. Tomasito Veneracion, OFMCap.  
L: Oudh Metha Road, close to Oudh Metha Metro Station

## **Jebel Ali - St. Francis Of Assisi Church**

P.O. Box 72715, Tel: 04 884 5251, Fax: 04 884 5216  
[info@stfrancisjebelali.ae](mailto:info@stfrancisjebelali.ae), [www.stfrancisjebelali.ae](http://www.stfrancisjebelali.ae)  
Fr. Eugene Mattioli, OFMCap, Tel: 04 884 5104  
L: Exit 25 of Sheikh Zayed Road (near Ibn Battuta Mall), in Jebel Ali Village, drive past the hospital and the school, then turn right and follow the gravel road to the end (buildings only on your right, desert on your left). The last entrance is St. Francis of Assisi Church.

## **Fujairah - Church Of Our Lady Of Perpetual Help**

P.O. Box 1168, Tel: 09 223 1377; Fax: 09 222 3238.  
[www.motherofperpetualhelpfujairah.com](http://www.motherofperpetualhelpfujairah.com)  
Fr. Patrick Joji, SDB  
L: Nearby landmarks: water tower, new Carrefour

## **Ras Al Khaimah - St. Anthony Of Padua**

Box 10946, RAK.; Tel: 07 222 2377; Fax 07 222 9618  
Fr. Thomas Ampattukuzhy, OFMCap.  
L: Nakheel area, near the Kerala Supermarket.

## **Sharjah - St. Michael's Church**

P.O. Box 1745, Sharjah; Tel: 06 566 2424 / 06 566 2049, Fax: 06 566 3324  
[stmichaelsch@emirates.net.ae](mailto:stmichaelsch@emirates.net.ae), [www.stmichaelssharjah.org](http://www.stmichaelssharjah.org)  
Fr. Ani Xavier Antony Muthu, OFMCap.  
L: Al Yarmook Area, close to Al Estiqlal Square, the Ministry of Labour and the Russian Orthodox Church with its many domes and golden crosses.

## **Bishop's House**

P.O. Box 54, Abu Dhabi, Tel: 02 446 1895; Fax 02 446 5177  
[info@ccsarabia.org](mailto:info@ccsarabia.org), [office@ccsarabia.org](mailto:office@ccsarabia.org), [www.ccsarabia.org](http://www.ccsarabia.org)  
L: in the compound of St. Joseph's Church