

Merdeka Day and Malaysia Day Message 2021 from Archbishop Simon Poh



Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

We are celebrating significant moments these few months for Sarawak and Malaysia.

- On 22 July, we celebrated Sarawak Independence Day.
- On 31 August, Malaysia will celebrate National Day.
- On 16 September next month, we will celebrate Malaysia Day when Sarawak, Sabah, Singapore as sovereign nations, joined Malaya to form Malaysia.

The name "Malaysia" was adopted in 1963 when the existing states of the Federation of Malaya, plus Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak formed a new federation. One theory on Malaysia being the name that was chosen is that "si" represented the inclusion of Singapore, North Borneo Sabah and Sarawak, to Malaya. In any case, on 16 September 1963, a new nation called Malaysia came into existence.

As Christians living in Malaysia after 58 years, one pertinent question is, "As citizens, what is the role as Christians and Church in Malaysia today?" During these few months celebrating our Nation Building, I would like to share my reflection on our duties to God and to our nation Malaysia.

1. Prayer for our Leaders and Nation

The first duty of any Christian for his country is prayer. The apostle Paul wrote, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way!" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). It is important to note that in the first century, the Emperor was persecuting Christians and yet Paul did not ask them to use violent means to fight back. Instead, he calls all believers to pray day by day asking God to change the situation with prayer and action that will eventually lead to peace and triumph of good over evil.

Christians are thus called to be "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14) by bringing values that transform society. All authentic human values are found at the very heart of the Gospel teaching.

In prayer, we are to come humbly before our God and intercede for our nation and leaders—both political and spiritual. God promises that "and if then my people who bear my name humble themselves and pray to me and seek my presence as they turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear them from heaven and forgive their sins and restore their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

2. Register as Voter and Vote

In a democratic government, the freedom to elect leaders through voting is the right of each citizen. To vote means to stand up and be counted. Hence, registration to be a voter is an inherent responsibility as a Christian citizen who has come of age to vote. God has entrusted this stewardship to us as his faithful servants to work for the common good of our Nation and the Church.

This does not mean that we simply cast our vote blindly or according to the popularity of a candidate. Every Christian should seek knowledge to become well informed about respective visions of political parties and the politicians. In Exodus 18:16-22, when Moses needed leaders to help him to govern the people, God asked Moses to select men with these qualities.

- Capability in leadership.
- Godliness and always seeking to be in a right relationship with God.
- Trustworthiness.
- Integrity so they cannot be bribed.
- Leaders who are just.

So, we look for the above qualities in our leaders. Each citizen is to vote according to one's conscience before God. And thus, we seek to elect Godly leaders who will ensure the common good of people of all races, religious and social standings.

While it is important that we demand such qualities from our political or spiritual leaders, let us also remind ourselves of this double edged sword. Each Christian is called to strive for these qualities as part of our stewardship and leadership in our respective families, workplaces and positions of leadership, in which we have been entrusted. When we sincerely, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (right relationship with God and people), then all other things we need will be given to us as well.” (Mt 6:33)

“GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT IS DUE TO CAESAR, AND TO GOD WHAT IS DUE TO GOD,” (MT 22:15–22)

Jesus teaches us that as citizens living in a nation, we give our government what is its due. At the same time, as the beloved people of God, we are to give God what is his due—our worship, our time, talent, treasures and good works. As good stewards, we are becoming God’s partner in seeking to create a world of love, peace, justice and abundance for all.

- Pay our taxes due to our elected government. (Rom 13:7)
- Be accountable and transparent in our dealings. (Lk 3:13–14)
- Be responsible for the ecology that God has created. God has entrusted us to be his stewards on this earth. Concretely, we seek to reduce carbon dioxide footprints. We consume local products to stimulate our local economy. We reduce the consumption of meat and use of plastic products.
- Donate to alleviate suffering especially during this pandemic. Give to Catholic Welfare Services (CWS), Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) or recognised charitable bodies to alleviate poverty.
- Donate blood to save lives of fellow citizens.
- Pray for our nation and the world.

As Christians celebrating Sarawak Day, National Day and Malaysia Day, may our prayers, sacrifices, commitment and actions in collaborating for the common good of all people and ecology build solidarity, harmony, mutual acceptance and respect in our *tanahair*. “Let your light shine so that it can be seen by others; this will enable them to observe your good works and give praise to your Father in heaven.” (Mt 5:16)

With my blessing and prayers.

+ Archbishop Simon Poh

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