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Life and Death: RESURRECTION and LIFE

APRIL 2020

Dear Confreres,

As we prepare ourselves to enter into the Holy Week and eventually to celebrate Easter, I thought it would be good to reflect on Life and Death from a theological perspective while we are all still living the consequences of this pandemic situation. I sincerely thank Fr. Richard Amalanathan, who has graciously consented to present us with a reflection on this theme as presented below:

‘To be or not to be’ was not just a question for Hamlet alone; it is for every man and woman, indeed, for every living creature, always and everywhere. The basic instinct is the ‘instinct for life’: **to be alive and not to die.**

Is that possible?

Corona virus is presenting us with a bigger stage to experience this, where our ‘basic instinct for life’ is put to test/show: all the world has become a stage now and all of us are actors and at the same time spectators of others and our own inner drama! We see people around the world desperately trying to preserve themselves and their own households at the cost of depriving others of the essential things by over-buying/storing. Their panicking to save themselves at all cost is surely costing others who will have to go without. Some others try to make a big fortune out of this crisis by selling essential commodities and services at exaggerated prices taking advantage of the desperation and fear of people. Is that the way to be alive? Yet on the same stage we see others like doctors, nurses, police, soldiers, other public servants who are obliged to serve the suffering and endangered society; and a long list of many volunteers, including clueless daily wage earning mothers and fathers around us, braving this invisible Tsunami by risking their own lives to help others stay alive. Hence the real question is not: ‘to be or not to be’ but rather “**How to be and How not to be?**”

Crown of LIFE: ‘Life or Death’?

As I ask this question a hymn that we used sing as aspirants comes to my mind: born to live, born to die... born to reach the sky. Yes, the fact that we are born we will have to die. It can be anytime, anywhere and anyhow. We are born to die. Death comes along with the gift of life and it is part and parcel of it: a total package... an irrefutable and all underlying fact of life! Truly great/wise men and women of all times entered this tremendous and all-encompassing mystery ‘thinking outside the box’. While the majority would think life as the crown of life, this minority understood **death as the crown of life and the best gift they could leave behind for the others to live.** Though they embraced death willingly unlike the majority, they were the ones who truly lived. The word ‘martyr’ frightens us. But who are real martyrs? They were not just poor victims of religious and societal situations who died an untimely and unfortunate death. In truth they were real ‘witnesses of LIFE’ which never dies. True to the meaning of the word ‘martyr’, which comes from Greek meaning ‘witness’, they live on in our hearts witnessing: How to be and how not to be!

Death?

They were not afraid of death but ***a certain way of living and seeing life*** which, with all the glitter and glamour it can feign, is a real homicide and thus in the process leading one to a slow poisoning of one's own life caught up in a rat-race to save oneself by hook or by crook resulting in suicide/self-murder. Hence, they chose to live an illumined life i.e. learning to die every day, 'to die to myself'. Thus, they learnt the art of living: "to die a million deaths so that I can truly die/live when I have to die". Their real fear of death in this way was not about their bodily death, which they understood will have no power over them if they spiritually stayed alive by dying to their 'false self/Ego' every day. Yes, they had mastered the 'art of dying' while they were alive to be able to make others live and die meaningfully. For **they woke up to their 'breathing in' as a gift and thus made their 'breathing out' as their best gift for the world.**

A list of such martyrs of LIFE, surely each one of us can make according to our own knowledge and preference. Fortunately, though not often brought to light, the number of such persons are more than what one speaks of or hears about. Just because we do not know them, or know or speak of them badly or partially, or the annals of human history have not recorded them or omitted them, they don't cease to be true or are lost forever. On the other hand, they are very much alive and present 'before' the and 'in' the great "**I AM**" of the poor, the orphans, the widows and strangers. Their full list is only in His Heart: in the Bosom of Our Father!

Here I am reminded of my much-cherished poem by Thomas Gray who sums up well such unseen and unknown yet true martyrs of life:

"... Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air..." (From Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard)

I would invite you all to read the whole poem and especially the Epitaph to see how such true lives are crowned and how their fragrance is not wasted in the desert air after all! Death and Life when understood this way, of course one will naturally cry out like St. Paul: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:15)

Born to live, yes. Born to die, yes. But between these two sides of the same coin, slowly but surely, they had learned to see: what it is to 'reach the sky'? Through 'life and death' they entered the sure portals of **LIFE: the BOSOM OF OUR FATHER!** And when? Already in the Here and Now of everyday life and not waiting for their bodily death. For those of us not so familiar with Thomas Gray some biblical passages can come alive that highlight the same point and stand behind as inspirations for such literature: the rejected, forgotten, thought of as cursed by God and men, with an untimely and inhuman death (cf. Wisdom 3:1-9 and Is 53). But all of them have their source, meaning and consummation in the only one in whom everything was made and have life: The Beloved Son who was in the Bosom of the Father (cf. Jn 1).

The LIFE that Chose to Die

How can Life die? Is it not a contradiction in terms? Yet, He came/died that we may have life and life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10). He was in the beginning; He was with God and He who was everything chose to become nothing so that we may not go to nothing but reign with Him whether we are alive or dead! That was His plan for our abundant life, hidden in God for us even before the foundation of the world, but revealed to us as son of a carpenter, a good for nothing from Nazareth (cf. Jn 1:46), a man of Galilee, figure of contradictions and whose most trusted apostle was ashamed even to

recognize him before a simple servant woman. From the womb of the virgin till His burial in a tomb, that did not belong to Him, His life was nothing but a constant dying to His equality with God and a total embracing of the weak, helpless and defenseless nature of a 'son of man'. He did not make use of his human life as a chance to showcase His Power and Glory but gave them up willingly to lose himself in the pain, agony, anxiety, insecurity, tears and poverty of the common human family of Mary and Joseph: from Nazareth to Bethlehem to Egypt, back to Nazareth: 30 years of hidden life!

His public life hardly lasted a few years during which He shied away from any greatness, name, fame, glory and sternly admonished people whom he healed from making Him public. Instead He chose to hide Himself in deserted places preferring His intimacy with God His Father to the passing praise and crown from the crowds. He could command no power over the religious and civil authorities of His time for whom He was a menace for public and religious life and to their own double standards. Hence someone to be done away with as soon as possible. Yet the sick, lame, blind, lepers, public sinners and condemned of the society found in Him an authority that did not crush them but healed them and made them blossom (cf. Is 42:2-4). Such was His gentleness 'a man' who was well acquainted with human frailty and grief, who willingly chose to lose His good name to be counted among sinners so that He could give them their real name: 'beloved sons and daughters'.

In short He the LIFE had no place when He was born; had to face the plight of a refugee in Egypt even as a child; thrown out of His own hometown-synagogue and led to be killed at the very inaugural address of his public ministry; He was constantly set traps by those who thought that they were the sole proprietors and guardians of the Sacred Scriptures and places of worship; finally they managed to corner Him down with the help of His own disciple who betrayed Him with a false act of love and affection; religious authorities and civil authorities connived to hand Him a death sentence meant only for the worst of the blasphemers and criminals; and when He died crowned with thorns, stripped of his garments and human dignity, totally abandoned by his intimate circle of Apostles, he was buried by two men who had not openly followed Him as disciples. Such was the depth, height, length and breadth of His dying to Himself.

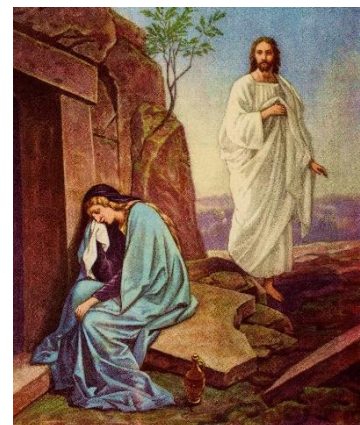
A Show of Masochism and Sadism Par excellence?

If LIFE itself chose to die, then was it 'the spectacle of perfect masochism'? And His Father, whom He said was always with Him and never left Him alone even when everyone else abandoned Him, was He then a 'Perfect Sadist' who turned a deaf ear to His Beloved Son's cry: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*? If that is true (for many of us though we do not say it out loud, but think, live and preach a certain type of Christian faith and life in similar lines), then we are not followers of the GOSPEL/GOOD NEWS but of a meaningless, very sad and unattractive LIE.

What then is the Crown of LIFE?

Why did LIFE choose to die in such a way? Why such a leap into the abyss of human misery and nothingness? Why does an ever-loving and unconditionally merciful Father want such a bloody sacrifice and the terrible death of His Beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased, to save us the irreparably lost? If He Himself refused blood sacrifices and human sacrifices and wanted only "Mercy and Knowledge of God" (cf. Hos 6:6; Is 1:1-20 and Ps 51:7-23), then why would He eat His own Word? Why such a drama of Salvation which seems insensible and totally 'foolish and scandalous' for every religion and every wise man of the world? (cf. 1 Cor 1:23)

Here we come to the Heart of the matter/the Heart of our Faith in Christ: **LOVE**. St. Paul understood this and articulated it so beautifully once and for all in 1 Cor 13.



Yes, the mystery of Creation and Redemption is all about Love and not about a corrupt creation and a lost world. For then God will be the biggest FAILURE! In creating He saw that everything was GOOD (cf. Gen 1) and in redeeming He saw everything He created was worthy of His infinite Love that He gave Himself/His only Son (cf. Jn 3:15-17). If this is the God of Jesus, the Beloved Our Father, from whose Bosom He came to reveal His true Face, for no one has ever seen God but the only Son ... (cf. Jn 1:17-18), then we as His followers and preachers have still a very big Homework to do: the way we present and live this FACE OF GOD! Then it will dawn on us the truth about the Death of Life! For it is not about the 'cold crib' of Bethlehem, or the 'cruel cross' of Calvary, or the 'sealed silent tomb'. But in and through all this is the deep and unending revelation that: **The Father is with me and I am not alone! Son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours!**

There we go! We have everything here why Jesus did what He did and with Him all His true precursors and followers of all ages: The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want... I shall not fear though I walk in the valley of Death (cf. Ps 23); If God is with us then who can be against us? (cf. Rom. 8:31-32); what can separate us from the Love of Christ... tribulation, famine?... neither life nor death... (cf. Rom. 8:35-39). Only such intimate discovery and experience as to the true identity of who we are/I am, can help us follow suit of the LIFE that Chose to Die, to die a million deaths on our turn to pass on this Crown of Life: the Loving and Merciful Heart of the God of Jesus! Thus, even the dreaded virus Corona can do nothing to us and instead will become an opportunity to experience, live, and share the loving presence of Our Father in Jesus, come what may. In this way true to its Latin name 'corona' which means crown, it can Crown us if we know how to live and face it.

The hymn born to die, born to live and born to reach the sky, then will not seem anymore, three distinct and well distanced moments of our birth, life and death but a daily spiral structure of dying a million deaths every day, to be reborn truly a million times every day, which is true birth, true life, Resurrection and LIFE ETERNAL!

This is our true Lent which is not just forty days; this is our Holy Week not confined to just seven days in a year; this is our true Pass-over i.e. to pass from a certain way of living and clamoring for our



survival and fear of our death; to pass from the old securities of considering our life as only food, drink and clothing. This is our **True Easter** (from the word East where the sun appears to rise): i.e. in seeing the Face of Our Father like Jesus, going beyond what it seems to be true to our naked eyes. For even if the sun to our human experience and eyes seems to rise and set, we know that it does not. In the same way to know, even when we do not see it yet, that the SUN OF GOD'S LOVING MERCY IN JESUS FOR US NEVER SETS and it is always there shining brightly right behind the PITCH DARKNESS that seems to envelop us / the whole world.

This is the Good News! And our 'true conversion' is nothing but believing, tasting and seeing How Good the Lord is, and who for us to live left behind His Best Gift: His Death. But could Death contain such a death? Can we not already hear the grateful and ecstatic Mary Magdalene shouting not only to the frightened Eleven but also to us who are often closed up in our Fear: **I SAW DEATH DYING!!!**

Spirit and Growth of the Province (Part 2)

Brief notes on the early history of certain Houses

In the last Circular, we saw how the Salesian Province of South India (Madras) was born and the initial stages of its growth. Thanks to Bro. Joseph Das and Fr. K.J. Louis who have compiled this information from the archives and given us in a synthesized form. In the early decades of the history of the Province, we cannot but notice how from the very beginning, the Province has nurtured and preserved certain values, practices and traditions which together constitute what may be called the “characteristic spirit of the Province”. They may be summed up as follows:

1. **Missionary spirit**: The missionary spirit has always been in evidence in the province. Right from the beginning, both in Tanjore and more especially in North Arcot, mission work progressed in true Salesian style, with the missionaries in the field fully backed by a network of institutions - orphanages, academic and trade schools, and even institutions of higher education – all aimed at the care and education of children and young people. The mission of Tanjore in 1925, for instance, had 24 village schools and one trade school. It was a holistic approach to evangelization that took into account the faith, the education, and the livelihood of the people, an approach that played a vital role in the transformation of the entire district.
2. **Family spirit**: “The Salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good” (C16). This is the spirit that the early Salesians took great care to inculcate in the province. Great Salesians like Mgr. Mathias and Fr. Carreno were greatly instrumental in creating that simple, serene, open family atmosphere which continues to characterize our province. Mgr. Mathias, in his autobiography *Quarant’anni in India* speaks of “family spirit” as the reason for the prodigious expansion of the Salesian mission in India.
3. **Vocation work**: Following Don Bosco’s example, our pioneers set about encouraging, cultivating and helping indigenous vocations. It is worth noting that within one year after their arrival, the pioneers started recruiting indigenous candidates for Salesian life. The priority given to the formation of candidates in the province reflects the importance given to this sector. Besides nurturing, encouraging and forming candidates to Salesian life, the Province was involved in the formation of the diocesan clergy for over sixty years, a work so dear to Don Bosco, the Holy See and the heart of God.
4. **Priority for the Young and the Poor**: Our history teaches us that right from the beginning, the missionaries set their eyes on the young and the poor. Be it at Tanjore, Vellore, Tirupattur or Chennai, the choice of the pioneers was always for works that directly benefit the poor and the young. Even in the early days of Tanjore, they not only set up institutions like orphanages, boarding houses, academic and technical schools, but also dared to take to the streets to fight for the rights of the poorest of the poor, in order to liberate them from tyranny and exploitation by the rich and the powerful.

An Encouraging Incident narrated by Mgr. Mederlet

When Archbishop Mederlet made his last journey to Europe in 1934 he passed through Konnersreuth, in Germany, in order to pay a visit to Teresa Neumann, a German Catholic lay woman who was known to be a mystic and a stigmatist. The zealous Archbishop wanted to put some questions to her so as to have guidance for the direction of his Archdiocese. But in order to make sure that the seer had really lights from on high, he first asked her where Arani was and what had happened there on 21st December 1933. To the astonishment of the Archbishop, she gave a description of the profanation of the Tabernacle and the Sacred Hosts that had indeed taken place in Arani on that day! Then the Archbishop made bold to ask her whether the Sacred Heart of Jesus was pleased with the work done by the Salesians in Madras. To his relief the answer was “Yes”, to which

she added that the Sacred Heart would always be pleased as long as the Salesians worked for the poor.

The Second Salesian Archbishop of Madras

An event that gave a mighty push to the development of the Province was the appointment of Mgr. Louis Mathias as the Archbishop of Madras in 1935. It was his foresight, his leadership, his prestige and his experience that gave a great encouragement to the Salesian activities. He steered the way in every enterprise of the Province and was always the best adviser and moral support in every achievement.

Consecration of the Province to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Another title of glory for the Province was its Solemn Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus so that, being completely dedicated to Him, He might deign to protect it, guide it, help it and also preserve it in unity. The consecration took place in the evening of 2nd July 1943, at the end of a day of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the newly built church of the Sacred Heart in Tirupattur. All the priests of the province, except three, and a number of diocesan priests, and representatives from the houses and parishes of the province were present in large numbers. All the Salesians knelt in the sanctuary before the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus and recited aloud the words of that solemn consecration composed by Fr. Carreño. It said, **“We solemnly and officially consecrate entirely and forever to Thy Most Sacred Heart our Salesian Province of St. Thomas the Apostle in South India. We consecrate to Thee our persons... We consecrate to thee our Houses and Institutions which we want to be schools of Thy love and doctrine... We consecrate to thee our mission stations... We consecrate to Thee our aspirants, future apostles of Thy Kingdom... and we lay in the shelter of Thy Heart the future of our Province....”** Fr. Carreño always attributed the prodigious growth of the province to this consecration. Even years later, a number of Salesians in the province were convinced that the extraordinary growth of the Southern Province during the years that followed was due to this consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The House of Vellore: First cell of the Province

The House of Vellore was the first cell of the Province of South India. In 1928, when the Salesians left Tanjore and Mylapore, they were directed to take charge of North Arcot mission, which until then belonged to the archdiocese of Pondicherry. When Fr. Mederlet, along with four other Salesians, arrived in Vellore on 31st May 1928, their heart sank on seeing the contrast between the flourishing mission in Tanjore that they had left behind and the desolate new field of their labour. However, they installed themselves in the parish house of the church, and their first effort was to look after the poor youth in genuine Salesian tradition. A Lower Elementary school that was there with just 80 pupils was soon upgraded to a Higher Elementary School and a boarding house for poor boys was opened. A shed was hurriedly built to start a carpentry workshop, and the institution was very soon filled with children and buzzing with activities.

When the new Province was born in 1934, the House of Vellore became the Provincial House and remained so till 1937. This house, which was by all means the most ill-equipped for accommodating people, was also the one which gave hospitality in the most generous manner. Its walls seemed to be expandable ‘ad infinitum’. It was always crowded with an endless stream of visitors - missionaries coming to see the Provincial, parish priests arriving for their purchases in the town, patients seeking admission in the hospital, missionaries coming to fight some odd battle on behalf of their Christians in the Collector’s office etc. The house offered to all of them some room, some comfort and a bright smile! Its premises were always peopled with a crowd of cheerful noisy youngsters, practically all destitute. Its carpentry eventually turned out many artisans who were able to earn an honest livelihood.

In 1938, the carpentry was given a new building, built in steel and asbestos. The new carpentry was blessed by Archbishop Louis Mathias in the presence of three ministers of the newly formed Government of Madras. In 1943 a plot of land with an existing bungalow, by the side of the main road, was bought. This building was modified to house the newly recognized High School which in due course gained an honourable rank amongst the high schools of North Arcot under the able guidance of Fr. Joseph Sandanam. The Don Bosco Band and Choir would execute at times pieces that had not been heard anywhere except in famous concert halls! It was not an unusual sight after night prayers to see the boys with their bed rolled under their arms streaming in different directions towards the verandahs, classrooms and carpentry shop because there was not a proper dormitory capable of holding those three hundred youngsters!

St. Joseph's Home Katpadi

In 1945 Fr. H. Tuena, one of the first novices of the 1933 batch, was appointed Rector of Don Bosco, Vellore. Fortunately, at that time a project called the 'Katpadi Scheme' was started for developing what was called 'Greater Vellore'. Mgr. Mathias immediately hurried to acquire some land close to the railway station in Katpadi, which was eventually made over to the Salesian Province and by the year 1953 a strong concrete building was built there through the untiring effort of Fr. Tuena to house what we know today as St. Joseph's Home, Katpadi.

Salesian House, Tirupattur

In 1931, during a pastoral visit to Kovilur, Mgr. Mederlet came to know that an 18-acre plot of land in Tirupattur, known as "Collector's Bungalow", was available for Rs. 9,000. A local gentleman volunteered to advance the money and the sale was executed and duly registered on 18 March 1931. Mgr. Mederlet bought it with the intention of giving it to the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo to start a convent and a school, but since that project did not materialize, the archbishop thought of using it for the Salesian Novitiate.

In 1933 the first novices to the South arrived from Europe in order to inaugurate the Novitiate of the Province of South India. During the years of World War II, this house served as the Novitiate, Studentate of Philosophy and also for some time as Studentate of Theology.

As the number of missionaries from abroad started dwindling due to World War II, Fr. Carreno came up with the idea of enlisting local vocations in a systematic and organized manner by starting a house of aspirants in Tirupattur. It was formally inaugurated during a Holy Hour at 11 a.m. on 2nd July 1943, feast of the Sacred Heart, with a group of about 15 aspirants. Before that date there were local vocations, but they were few and far between. In fact, as of 2nd July 1943, there were altogether only nine native Salesian priests in the Province of South India: Fathers Ignatius Muthu, Paul Mariaselvam, David Marianayagam, Joseph Sandanam, Joseph Arokiasamy, Antonysamy Amaladoss, Eleutherius Fernandes, Edward Rego, and Bagavanta Raju. The last three were ordained only the day before and belonged to the first batch of Fr. Carrneo's novices from Tirupattur.

In 1946, it was decided to start a school for the aspirants in Tirupattur. As government recognition was taking a lot of time, the aspirants had to appear for the matriculation exam as private candidates. On 17th June 1946, the Sacred Heart Matriculation High School began its first scholastic year. The first group of 18 boys sat for the matriculation exam in March-April 1949 as private candidates. The next two batches too had to appear as private candidates. Finally, on 15th March 1951 a commission of seven professors from the University of Madras came for the inspection of the proposed Matriculation School and College. A month later recognition for the school and affiliation for the college were granted in a single letter from the Registrar of the University of Madras, dated 27th April 1951. It read:

- a) Resolved that the Sacred Heart High School, Tirupattur, be recognized for the purpose of preparing and presenting candidates for the Matriculation Examination of this University, from the Examination of March 1952.”
- b) Resolved that provisional affiliation for a period of two years be granted to the Sacred Heart College in the Intermediate Course.... Permanent affiliation will be considered after two years, if all the conditions are fulfilled.”

It is good to remember that the visionaries very aptly got a new branch approved by the University, namely, Mechanical Engineering and chose as the motto of the college “*Ad omne opus bonuminstructi*” (“Ready for every good work”) - from St. Paul’s exhortation to Titus (Tit 3:1)

Dominic Savio, Tirupattur

As the Salesians saw the poverty-stricken youngsters flocking to the oratories at Tirupattur – boys from Anandapatty, Koviloor and neighbouring villages - they felt the need to offer them food and shelter and also to equip them with skills necessary to earn a living. They also felt compassion for the numerous widows of these villages who were reduced to that state because of the early demise of their husbands who were working in the Kolar Gold Field as labourers, and contracting severe lung deceases as a consequence. The Salesians started employing them as labourers in the Salesian House. A little carpentry, a tailoring department and a weaving section were started together with the Higher Elementary school approved by the Government. In the year 1952 the orphanage became a separate entity together with the school and was named ‘Dominic Savio Orphanage’ and ‘Dominic Savio Higher Elementary School’.

St. Joseph’s Technical Institute, Basin Bridge, Madras

In the year 1928, when Mgr. Mathias came for the consecration of Mgr. Mederlet, both went around Madras to find a suitable place for an industrial school. They set their eyes on an extensive plot of land near Basin Bridge called the ‘Harness and Saddle Factory’. Mgr. Mathias advised the Salesians of Madras to try to secure that land for a future industrial school. Apparently, nothing much was done about it. In 1935 when Mgr. Mathias was appointed to the Archdiocese of Madras, the negotiations to get the land were begun. Then came World War II and that land was turned into an ordnance factory. In 1947-48, Mgr. Mathias went abroad to raise funds and to purchase the machinery for the new technical school. In February 1948, Mgr. Mathias wrote to Fr. Carreno from abroad that he hoped to send the machinery as soon as he received the import licence. At the meeting of the Provincial Council that met on 5-6 May 1948, it was decided to buy a piece of land in Shenoy Nagar, measuring 7 acres and 8 grounds for the future technical school. It was bought at the rate of Rs. 400 per ground and a wall was put up around it to protect it from encroachment. But the Corporation of Madras wanted it for its “town planning scheme”. In July 1949 Fr. Carreno asked the Corporation to give him in exchange for the Shenoy Nagar land an equivalent extent of land at the Saddle Factory. The Corporation agreed and the transfer of the property in Basin Bridge was done on 31st January 1950. Archbishop Mathias signed the papers for the South India Salesian Society. The buildings on the campus were suitably adapted to house a carpentry shop, a mechanical work shop and an art and printing section. A compound wall was erected and the Provincial Office was installed there. The Coadjutor Aspirants who had been for two years in Tirupattur came over to Basin Bridge with their staff.

Salesian Presence at Kotagiri

There was in Bangalore a good Father Pinto who had gone on a pilgrimage to Rome and did a little touring in Europe. In Belgium he sought the hospitality of the Salesians and remained there a few days as in a family. The Prefect of the house, seeing the thin cassock he was wearing which was not suitable for the cold weather, gave him a thicker one. When he went to return the cassock to the Prefect, he was told that he could keep it as a souvenir. He was very much moved by this gesture of

that good Salesian. When he returned to India, he told Mgr. Mathias that he would like to leave all his savings to the Salesians. His Grace suggested that charity should better be done when alive than after one's death. Fr. Pinto agreed on condition that his name should not be revealed till after his death. The money was used to buy the property named "Glen Carse" in Kotagiri from a certain Mr. Salebhai Vaghon 20 November 1945. Since it was mostly a hillock, it had to be levelled. On top of the hillock was a huge eucalyptus tree. The diameter of its trunk at bottom measured 5.5 feet. In February 1946 an adjacent property known as "Craigley" was also bought. The newly acquired property was christened 'Mount Don Bosco' and the Novitiate was shifted there in May 1946 from Tirupattur. In February 1948 Fr. Pinto, who donated the money for buying the Kotagiri property, passed away. Only then did Mgr. Mathias reveal the name of this great benefactor. In May 1953, the novitiate was shifted from Kotagiri to Yercaud.

The Retreat, Yercaud

Even during the Tanjore years the Salesians used to ask the hospitality of Fr. Capelle of the Foreign Mission of Paris to spend their holidays in Yercaud during summer. When Mgr. Mathias was spending his summer days in a villa belonging to the diocese in Yercaud, a property known as 'The Retreat' came for sale. The Archbishop negotiated the price and bought it for the Province in July 1947. Fr. Ricaldone, the Prefect General of the congregation paid a visit to this property and seeing the beauty of its landscape and sweet climate had written in the visitor's book, "Yercaud will perhaps one day have a Salesian Novitiate." However, in June 1950, the Retreat became the studentate of theology for the South. In March 1952, the theologate in Yercaud was discontinued and the students of theology were sent to Mawlai, Shillong. In May 1953 the Novitiate was brought to Yercaud, with Fr. Egidius Sola as Novice Master. The novitiate remained in Yercaud for the next 25 years, till 1978, when it was again shifted to Kotagiri.

In June 1958, the studentate of philosophy was shifted from Kotagiri to Yercaud. Nearly a year before that, Fr. Codello was sent to Yercaud to see to the construction of the philosophate. In the span of ten months he completed the main building that stands even today. The philosophate was officially opened in May 1958, under the patronage of the Sacred heart, with Fr. Mauro Casarotti as its first Rector. In July, the old chapel was pulled down and the foundation stone for a new church was laid Fr. Bellido, a member of the general Council. In June 1960 the new chapel was blessed and the altar consecrated.

The Refuge, Broadway

When the double jurisdiction was brought to an end in 1928, several Parishes were downgraded into sub stations. One such Parish was that of Our Lady of Refuge, Broadway. In 1936 Mgr. Mathias decided that St. Gabriel's High School, till then occupying space in the crowded Cathedral Campus of St. Mary's, should be shifted to the spacious campus available at Our Lady of Refuge. Though the school was run by Salesians it was not formally handed over to the Congregation. This was done when it was shifted to the new premises. New buildings were put up and were inaugurated in the presence of Fr. Berruti and Fr. Candela, the extraordinary visitors of the Superior General to all our institutions in Asia. By its side the Don Bosco Oratory began to function and it had a splendid spiritual harvest through its catechism classes, its feasts, scouting activities, public performances, trips and sports activities. In 1951 a spacious building was put up to which the office of the Salesian Province was shifted

Dessert Blossoms - Sagayathottam

It was felt that the Salesian Province should buy some land and grow its own rice; but not in the way estates are run but in the traditional way of the Salesians, namely, working it ourselves and giving it the shape of a regular Agricultural Colony or Agricultural School. It was through the efforts of Fr. Amaladoss Antonisamy, the then Parish Priest of Uriyurkuppam, a large plot of deserted land was found. It is interesting to note that this deserted land had produced fine crops of 'Samba Paddy'

many, many years ago according to the elders of the village living at that time! This land was eventually named 'Sagayathottam'. Fr. Codello was sent there to do the pioneering work. Then under the able guidance of Fr. Zocchi and his team which included Brother Ludwig, Uriurkuppam, once a desert became the granary of the Province. It is interesting to note that when the University of Madras demanded that the Society running the Sacred Heart College should guarantee the financial stability of the college it was the lands of Sagayathottam that satisfied the University's demand!

As we read the history of the development of this 'Glorious Province,' are we not filled with deep gratitude to the missionaries and visionaries who were behind it, courageously facing every obstacle and adjusting to the challenges posed by weather, food, new languages, sickness and other hardships they met with in a land of their loving adoption for the greater glory of God and salvation of souls? May we have a similar love for the mission we have inherited from them and push ahead with a vision that is in tune with the signs of the times for the glory of God and the good of the people entrusted to our care.

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCE

CONCLUSION OF GC 28 & NEW GENERAL COUNCIL

Due to the Corona virus in north Italy, GC 28 was closed on 14th March 2020, earlier than previously planned. Before concluding the Chapter, the Chapter members elected the new General Council and the Regional Councillors. The following members were elected for the next six-year term (2020 – 2026). The Province of Chennai congratulates all of them and wishes them all the very best for their service of leadership and animation in the Congregation.

Rector Major	-	Fr. Angel Fernandez ARTIME
Vicar General	-	Fr. Stefano MARTOGLIO
Economer General	-	Br. Jeal Paul MULLER
Councillor for Formation	-	Fr. Ivo COELHO
Councillor for Youth Ministry	-	Fr. Miguel Angel GARCIA
Councillor for Missions	-	Fr. Alfred MARAVILLA
Councillor for Social Communications	-	Fr. Gildasio SANTOS



Regional Councillors

Africa – Madagascar	-	Fr Owoudou ALPHONSE (ATE)
America South-Cone	-	Fr. Hector Gabriel ROMERO (ARN)
East Asia Oceania	-	Fr. Joseph PHOUC

Europe Centre-North	-	Fr. Jachimowicz ROMAN (PLN)
Inter-America	-	Fr. Hugo Orozco SANCHEZ (MEG)
Mediterranean	-	Fr. Juan Carlos PEREZ (SSM)
South Asia	-	Fr. Biju Michael PULIANMACKAL (ING)

CONGRATULATIONS TO FR. BIJU MICHAEL PULIANMACKAL, OUR NEW REGIONAL

The General Chapter 28 of the Society of St. Francis de Sales has elected **Fr. Biju Michael Pulianmackal** of the Salesian Province of Guwahati [ING], as the Don Bosco South Asia Regional Councillor for 2020-2026. Congratulations and prayers for Fr. Biju Michael as he takes up the responsibility from Fr. Maria Arokiam Kanaga who was our Regional Councillor from 2008-2020.



Fr. Biju Michael was born on 20 May 1970 in Idukki, Kerala, India. He completed his novitiate in Shillong, making his first profession on 20 March 1988; his final profession also in Shillong, on 24 May 1996, and was ordained priest on 30 July 2000 in Moolamattam - Kerala. He has a Ph.D. in Moral Theology and a Licentiate in Bioethics, and was the Dean of the Salesian Theological Studentate 'Ratisbonne' in Jerusalem from 2011 to 2017. Recently he was one of the Provincial Councillors of the Salesian Province of Guwahati and Registrar at the Assam Don Bosco University. Congratulations and prayers for Fr. Biju Michael as



he takes over the responsibility from Fr. Maria Arokiam Kanaga who was our Regional Councillor for 12 years, from 2008-2020. As we welcome Fr. Biju Michael, we wholeheartedly thank Fr. Maria for his selfless service to the congregation as a regional councillor for 12 years. May the Lord continue to guide them both.

INM ANNUAL RETREATS 2020

With the increase of measures to arrest the spread of the corona virus, we are asked to remain in the house. As communicated by our Provincial, let us make our Annual Retreats in our respective communities during the Holy Week from 5th to 11th April 2020. Let the Rectors/Leaders of communities work out a programme that will enable all the confreres to make a good retreat while at the same time maintaining Social Distancing during the time of pandemic. May this retreat be a moment of grace for each one of us. Let us get more love energy from the Lord, willing to sacrifice ourselves for others as Christ did.

CORONA GUIDELINES

As the Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) is threatening the whole world and is fast spreading in India too, it is very important and urgent that we take the necessary precautionary measures as per the government guidelines. This will definitely help us to avoid the virus spreading and we can safeguard ourselves and our people. In this connection, please note the following:

- Follow all the advisory guidelines of the Government and the local church regarding this matter without fail.
- Avoid gathering large number of people and students for training, worship, seminars, games/ tournaments, camps, etc. It is advisable to send hostel and boarding students to their homes until 14th April 2020.
- Keep ready enough and more provisions, stationery, toilet articles, etc. for all the confreres and for our beneficiaries.
- These days, it is better to avoid all kinds of travelling using our private vehicles.
- Do not propagate fake news and information in this regard in any social media.

- Make sure that all the common places in all our institutions are kept clean.
- Unless it is necessary and unavoidable, do not allow visitors to our institutions during these days.

FOOD FOR THE FOODLESS – SALESIAN SUPPORT DURING SHUTDOWN

Attached with this Circular, you will find more details of our involvement in the neighbourhood during this Corona Pandemic. Fr. Alphonse, the SURABI Director is coordinating efforts together with our Salesian communities as well as with other religious congregations. I also thank Fr. Edwin Vasanthan and Fr. Francis Bosco for being in the vanguard of service for the migrants in Chennai. It is our duty to go out of our way to the neediest in these times and help alleviate their suffering and inconvenience caused due to the lockdown. So let every community do whatever is possible to assist those in need around us. Those communities that require financial assistance from the Province for this purpose can contact me as early as possible.

DIACONATE ORDINATION

On the 18th March 2020, Nine Salesians (INM 5 and INT 4) received their Diaconate Ordination in **Sacred Heart Church, Gummidipoondi**, by **Most. Rev. Dr. Neethinathan D.D.**, Bishop of Chingleput. The ordination ceremony was organised very well by the Becchi community. I, on behalf of the Provincial, thank and appreciate the Rector and the community for preparing our brothers to this level. Let us continue to support these young ministers of the Lord with our prayers and witnessing life.

RENEWALS ADMISSION - REMINDER

The Rectors and leaders are reminded to send the application form of the clerics who wish to renew their vows this year. Along with the application, please do send the scrutiny report and the duly filled in admission report of the house council (F4 form).

ADIEU TO BISHOP SOUNDARARAJU SDB, BISHOP OF VELLORE

Bishop Soundararaju Periyannayagam SDB of Vellore is no more. Early morning on 21st March he suddenly collapsed due to a massive heart attack. Earlier, he was admitted in the German Hospital, Chetpet, as he was not feeling well. A requiem mass was celebrated and the body was taken to Kolapalur, his native village where another mass was celebrated for the repose of his soul. Then the body was taken to the Christian Medical Hospital, Vellore, to be kept in the mortuary till the Funeral Service, which took place on 24th March 2020 at 10 a.m. in Assumption Cathedral, Vellore.



Bishop Soundararaju Periyannayagam was born to Mr. D. Periyannayagam and Mrs. C. Bernath on 6th June, 1949 at Periya Kolapalur, Vellore District. He was the eldest of the eight children, five brothers and two sisters. After finishing his elementary school in his own village, he first joined Don Bosco High school, Gandhinagar, as a boarder and completed his VI and VII Stds. He did his VIII and IX Stds at Subramani Sastriar High School, Arani, staying at his uncle's house. He then continued his studies at Don Bosco High School, Pannur, and completed his X and XI stds. He joined the Salesian House, Tirupattur as an aspirant in 1967 and did his Pre-University studies at sacred Heart College, Tirupattur. He joined the Salesian Novitiate at The Retreat, Yercaud, in 1969 and made his first Profession on 24th May, 1970, at Yercaud. He made his Perpetual Profession on 10th June 1977 in Bangalore.

He did his Bachelor's Degree in Economics at Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur and his Master's Degree in the same subject at Loyola College, Madras. Later he did his Master's Degree in Theology at Ushaw College, United Kingdom. After becoming a priest, he completed his Doctoral studies in Economics at the Bharathidasan University, Trichy. He was ordained a priest on 25th June, 1983 at Manchester, United Kingdom by Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Hitchen, Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool.

He did his practical training at Sagayathottam from 1972 to 1974. He served as a Professor and Vice Principal of Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur, from 1983 to 1988 and again from 1991 to 1994. He became the Principal of the same college in 1994 and served that institution in that capacity till 2000. In 2000 he was appointed as the Moderator of the Provincial Chapter which was held in 2001. From 2001 to 2004 he served the province as the Rector and Parish Priest of Lourdes Shrine, Perambur, Chennai. In 2004 he was appointed as the Rector of Don Bosco, Gandhinagar.

On 11th July 2006 he was appointed Bishop of Vellore and received episcopal ordination on 24th August, 2006 at the Assumption Cathedral, Vellore from Most Rev. Dr. Lopez Quintana, Apostolic Nuncio, New Delhi assisted by Most Rev. Dr. A. M. Chinnappa, Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore and Most Rev. Dr. Antony Anandarayar, Archbishop of Pondy-Cuddalore as Co-Consecrators.

Bishop Soundararaju was known for his administrative skills. He always preferred team work in administration. Even as a Bishop he followed this principle. He was quite outspoken and would not mince words when he pointed out things that were going wrong. He was not easily intimidated by threatening circumstances but he had absolutely no animosity against anyone. He would easily forgive and even have compassion for those who misunderstood him or even misinterpreted him. He was known for his deep friendship and loyalty to his friends. It is no wonder that he had a very large group of friends. He helped many young people to come out of suicidal tendencies by listening to them and counselling them. He would go out of his way to help the needy especially the poor young. He was generous. He wanted the religious working in his Diocese to focus their ministry on behalf of the poor and the marginalized. We are sure that the Lord has welcomed him with open arms saying, "Whatever you did to the little ones, you did it to me." May he rest in peace!

REST IN PEACE

- **Bro Soosai Dennis (INH)**, aged 80, passed away on 14th March 2020 at Vijay Marie Hospital, Hyderabad.
- **Mr. A.M. Thomas**, aged 73, younger brother of Fr. A.M. Mathew, passed away on 04th March 2020 at Kottayam, Kerala.

CONCLUSION

I take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you a Joyful Easter! Even in this not so happy time, we can still feel the inner peace and joy of the Risen Lord in our hearts and homes. Let us continue to pray for our confreres in Italy that they may return safe and soon to the Province.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr. Xavier Packia SDB
INM Economer

Date: 01.04.2020
Place: Chennai – 10

