

# PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati, Assam, India

JS – 17/2019

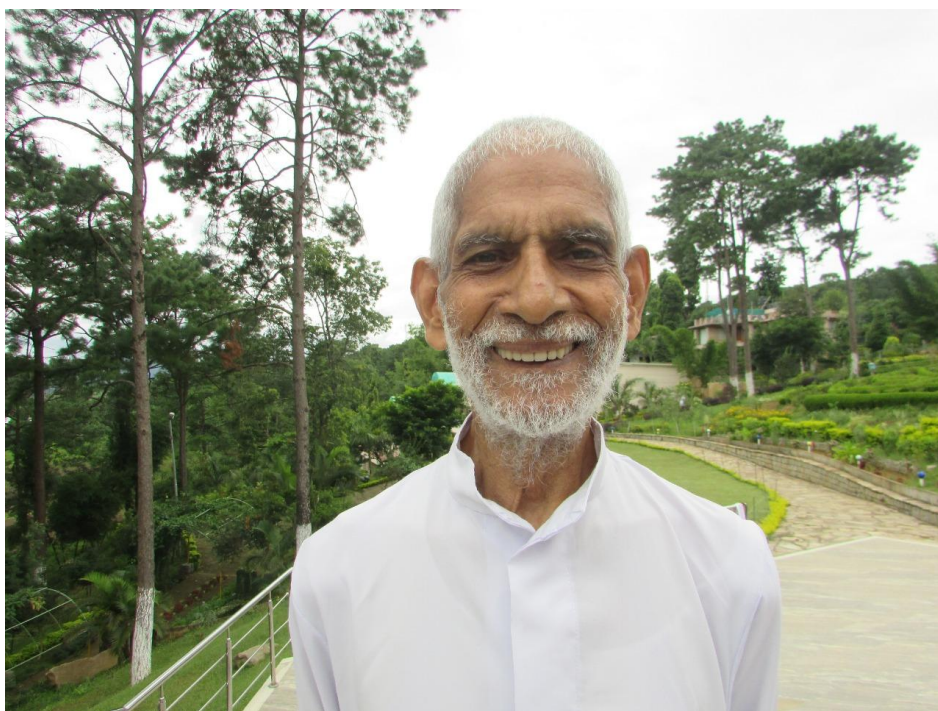
26 May, 2019

## FUNERAL ORATION

### **Fr. Thomas Kochupurackal (K.A.) SDB (1938-2019)**

*Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”*

Jesus Christ, our risen Lord took to himself Fr. Thomas Kochupurackal (KA), lovingly known by all as “Confrere,” at 6.00 am on 25th May 2019, at our Aspirantate House of Bosco Mount at Rongkhon, Tura. He would have completed 81 years of life on 5th July. As you might know, he was gradually declining in his health. Last year in the month of February (2018), we received the news that Fr. KA Thomas had a fall while visiting his nephew in North Kerala. Not that a fall was new for Fr. Thomas, but this was something very serious this time. When later he was admitted to Fr. Mueller’s Hospital at Mangalore, we learned that he had had a stroke and brain concussion. He was unconscious and admitted into the ICU, and the doctors recommended an immediate surgery to remove the brain clot. Though the surgery was successful, Fr. KA Thomas was never the same again. He could neither stand nor walk. He needed constant care, and was not able to continue his normal activities without help. After the immediate post-operative treatment at Fr. Mueller’s Hospital, he was kept at Mamma Margaret Home, Aluva (attached to the Salesian Philosophate of the Province of Bangalore). He was kept there for his recuperation and



further treatment for some time, but he constantly called me up to take him back to the North East. When he returned to the Province last year, we could see that he was weak and needed constant support. Gradually he grew fragile, and was admitted a few times in the hospital. His heart too had become very weak.

Yesterday (25th May) early in the morning, just a day after the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, the Lord willed to take Fr. Thomas to Himself, on a Saturday and in the month of May, the month of our Blessed Mother Mary—to whom Fr. Thomas was greatly devoted. Though he was sinking steadily, his death came sooner than expected.



The Salesian Province of Guwahati has lost another veteran missionary, a true “confrere,” a saintly religious and priest, and a charismatic figure for many people. We thank God for the religious and priestly life of Fr. Thomas, through whom God has inspired so many people.

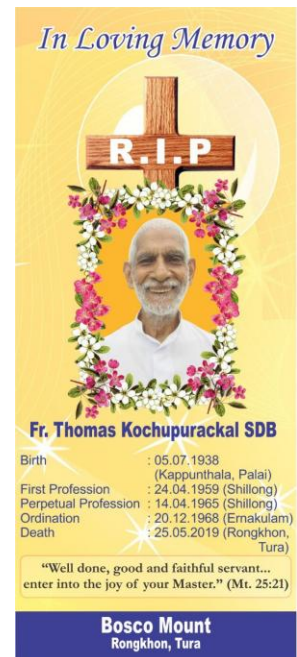
Fr. KA Thomas was born on 5th July 1938, to Mrs. Rose and Mr. Augustine Kochupurackal at Muttuchira, Kerala in the diocese of Palai. Not only was he born in a religious and pious family, but also he was born in a family that provided many religious vocations to the Church, especially in the Salesian Family. He was the 6th of eight children: one sister and seven brothers. Of the eight siblings, three of them became religious. Besides himself and his younger brother Fr. Cyriac, a Salesian, who passed away at Guwahati in 2006, his sister too became a religious in the Congregation of the Sisters of the Destitute. It is interesting to note that four of his nieces became MSMHC Sisters: Sr. Shirley Mary Abraham, Sr. Rose Mary, Sr. Mercy Augustine, and Sr. Mary Mathew.

We acknowledge the presence of his nieces and a nephew who has come from Kerala to pay respects to him. We thank them, and pray for the family that Fr. Thomas may continue to be an inspiration to all the family members.

Fr. Thomas began his novitiate in April 1958 and professed on 24th April 1959 at Sunnyside, Shillong. Noteworthy among his formation days was his movement for his theological studies from Shillong to Kotagiri and then to Bangalore. He completed his theology in the year 1968 and was ordained a priest on 20th December 1968 in Ernakulam. He worked in various communities especially as Assistant Parish Priest in the states of Mizoram, Assam and Meghalaya, particularly in Garo Hills. His zeal for souls made him endearing to many people.

His Masses, homilies, prayer services and even confessions were very long. There was never a hurry in his life. Everything could be accommodated, everyone was welcome in his life. With his bass and his thunderous voice, he would go on and on with his conversations or with his sacramental celebrations. Order, timetable and structures were not his strong points, but that also showed how strong he was at the heart level. He could relate to any person or every person from his heart.

He was constantly on the move, a true missionary in all the senses. No one could hold him back, nothing could hinder him—not even his ill health. He would limp his way to the villages and remote corners of the various parishes to give them Christ, to instruct them in the faith and administer the sacraments. Thanks to his missionary spirit that Garobadha and Mallangkona were erected into full-fledged parishes in due time.



His care for the parishioners was so great, that he would not only take care of them spiritually but also made sure that their day to day living went on smoothly. He would visit their homes to teach them how to preserve food especially for lean seasons. He taught the people how to make chips out of tapioca. In fact he managed to make tapioca chips in a bigger scale. For some time, there were some packets going around marked with the words, “Tapioca chips, Made in Garobadha.” Similarly, banana chips, fried groundnuts all packed and sold. He gathered women in the parish and taught them how to do those businesses. He would even bring agricultural experts from Chennai and Kerala to do many types of plantation in the parish’s fields.

Fr. KA Thomas was a man of adventures and mishaps, accidents and falls. There are so many jokes and humorous anecdotes of Fr. Confrere that are going around in the Province, especially with his regard to numerous accidents. It is said that there is no bone in his body that has not broken twice.

Failures and accidents were never hindrances in his God-centred life. While at Garobadha, he had also dreamt of starting an association for less educated girls. He had gathered ten young women and instructed them about religious living and also about health care. But he was not able to dedicate sufficient time to guide and accompany them. When individual differences arose, the young women being inexperienced were not able to live together, and the idea of forming them into an association did not take off.

Here is one of the incidents narrated by Ms. Sobita Mary Mawlong, one of the ten women, who was closely associated with Fr. KA Thomas for a long time: “One evening in 1978, Fr. Thomas announced to all of us, “Tomorrow, I am going to Tura. When I return

day after tomorrow I will be bringing a new Jeep. Till then he was only using a motor bike. In fact, he was the only one who was riding a motorbike in Garobadha at that time. All of us clapped in joy. When the day arrived, we did not see him coming back. We were anxiously looking forward for him to come with the Jeep, but it was an officer who came with a car. He got down and said, "I have a bad news for you. Fr. KA Thomas met with an accident. His leg is broken and is now taken to Bishop's House, Tura. I do not know if he will live or die. He had dashed against a big tree on the main road at Araimile." Our joy turned into sorrow. All of us cried. We quietly took our supper, prayed the Rosary and went to bed without recreation. After two weeks, I took some children and went to see him in Jaktrakhona near Dalu, South Garo Hills, because Father had refused to go to Civil Hospital to be treated by a doctor. He preferred to be treated with country medicine. Then I asked him, "Father, you are not expert in driving a four-wheeler. Why did you drive at all?" Fr. Thomas answered, "I thought children will be very happy to see me driving the new Jeep. However, after driving for some time, I felt giddy and knew nothing more!" This was his reply. He remained there more than a month and then returned to the parish to continue his job."

This was the time, during the absence of Fr. Thomas that Bishop Orestes Marengo had gone to take care of Garobadha parish. Even when Fr. Thomas returned, Bishop Marengo continued to stay in the parish since Bishop George Mamalassery had been already appointed as the Bishop of Tura.

There are so many stories of his accidents, perhaps this may not be the time to recall them all. But one thing is sure. Fr. Thomas carried the marks and effects of every accident on his body, especially on his bones. He suffered his bad health silently, he even gladly welcomed inconveniences for the sake of saving souls. If suffering was a constant companion on his life journey, the crucified Christ was his model.

Life with Fr. KA Thomas was never easy. Whoever lived with him could vouch to this personality trait of his. He was strict with himself. But he was also equally strict with those under his care. He was a man of conviction. Once he was convinced, he would strive to do it under any circumstances whatever the cost may be. He pushed himself to the extremes, and others too.

He always had a broad smile on his face, ever ready to say a word of encouragement or consolation. I wonder if anyone saw in him any overreaction or irritation. He was very kind and compassionate to people.

Fr. KA Thomas was an apostle of devotions. Though he kept changing the forms of devotions, they were all Christ-centred, and manifested his great filial love for our Blessed Mother. Later years he promoted the devotion of the Divine Mercy, by distributing many pictures or even selling them at subsidized prices.



He found benefactors wherever he went. He had a knack of roping in people for his mission, especially by way of asking them to contribute to his various works. I am not sure if he had spent any money for himself or his needs. The one pair of shoes that many of you might remember—it had its every part repaired, but he would not give up on it.

Fr. KA Thomas was not just a person who practised radical poverty, he was a man totally for the poor. His love for the poor and marginalized was clearly manifested in his decisions, and in his deeds. His generosity was unmatched. He would see that children got a good meal in the school. The staff and his close associated were provided lunch in the parish every day. According to his instructions, church leaders must have breakfast and lunch whenever they come to the parish even in his absence. Every Sunday, after their meetings, the catechists and church leaders were provided meals. When he went for touring and found people who were seriously sick, he would bring them home with him. He attended to them like a doctor, gave them good food, took them to the nearest hospital and would bring them back to the parish centre and made them stay there till they got better. On one occasion, he brought a very sick woman and made her sleep in the verandah. When the others grumbled and were indifferent, he said, “If you are unhappy, I will keep her in my bed room.”

Every place that he went, he made it a home. He made people feel at home wherever he went. He gave his heart to the ordinary persons, and was a consolation to them. The simple people accommodated him easily. His manner of dressing was even shabby at times, that showed he had no time for himself, he was a priest for others, who lived for others.

Fr. Paul Panachikkal, one who had been closely associated with Fr. Thomas, summarizes the life and mission of our dear “confrere” thus: “Fr. KA Thomas was friend of all. My close association with him started when I was in regency in Tura in 1973. He was a great and zealous missionary with a large heart for all. He was a great devotee of the Holy Eucharist and Mother Mary. He was charismatic and passionate in his belief but occasionally bordering strangeness, it seemed. For me he was an epitome of simplicity and courage. He had an incredible capacity for enduring pain and suffering. I took over from him the parishes of Garobadha and Damra in interesting circumstances but his tenacity and passion for the Lord in challenging circumstances was extraordinary. I am saddened by his demise but gladdened by the thought that we have one more Salesian intercessor in heaven. If his biography is compiled surely I shall contribute very personal and interesting anecdotes. Condolences to Fr. Provincial and the confreres of Guwahati Province. RIP.”

I take this opportunity to thank all the persons who took care of Fr. Thomas, during the last one year and half. I place on record the care taken by the community of Bosco Mount. I am grateful to Fr. Abhilash, the present Rector, and all the confreres of Bosco Mount past and present, for their sacrifices and for their time for Fr. Thomas. This was

the last community that he lived in, but it was here that he was most helpless. I thank the aspirants and all the other lay staff who were directly in charge of taking care of him. May God bless you all.

Thanks to Fr. Benny P. Basil, our Economer, for seeing to the various necessities during the last year in a special way. I thank all the other communities and confreres who supported Fr. KA Thomas in one way or another.

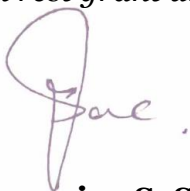
Though we are saddened at the passing away of our dear and beloved “confrere,” we hope in the promises of our Divine Saviour who said, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me! In my Father’s house there are many rooms. After I have gone and prepared a place for you, I shall come again and take you to me, so that where I am you also may be.”

We truly believe that the life of the faithful departed is changed, not ended. It is our firm hope that we too will be united with Fr. KA Thomas and all the faithful departed. Our death will be a gateway to new life; death will not be the end of us. We will live, but in a transformed state. Death and life will be united. Whatever Fr. KA did and lived for has not ended. His death is not really an end. It is perhaps a beginning, or rather a continuation of the best that he stood for. Resurrection is going to be the continuation of the best that we can ever think of, and even more! In death, nothing is lost, everything is transformed.

The numerous accidents and ailments in body could not kill him. He had escaped death every time. Even this time, he has escaped death. He was not born for death. He will live forever with Jesus his Saviour, and Mary his beloved Mother.

We entrust Fr. KA Thomas to the Divine Mercy, whose apostle he was while on this earth. In His great and unfailing mercy, may the Lord grant eternal bliss and peace, and also a well deserved rest to His untiring son! Indeed, a valiant son of Don Bosco who fought a good fight till the end and kept the faith. Certainly, the Lord will say to him, “Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Master”

*Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him!*



**Fr. Januarius S. Sangma SDB**  
Provincial

