

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 19/2019

8 June 2019

FUNERAL ORATION

Fr. Jose Thiruthanathy (TO), SDB (1949-2019)

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4)

Your Grace, Most Rev. John Moolachira, Your Grace, Most Rev. Dominic Jala, Rev. Fr. Paul Olphindro, Provincial of Shillong Province, Major Superiors of various Congregations, my dear family members of Fr. TO Jose, Former Provincials and companions of Fr TO Jose, and my dear Rev. Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Yesterday, 7th June 2019, was truly a shocking and heartbreaking day for me as the Provincial of the Salesian Province of Guwahati and all the confreres and Salesian family members and the Church in the North east India as we received the tragic news of the sudden passing away of Rev. Fr. Jose Thiruthanathy (TO). At the time, when I received the call yesterday, I was not able to believe or understand if the news were true. He passed away in the morning hours of yesterday in the Church premises. Fr. Joseph Teron, Vice Provincial, and Fr. Benny Basil, Economist, had just finished their visit to Dotma for the handing over of the school accounts and had gone to Rongjeng. They had to rush back due to this sad news. In the meantime Fr. CT Lukose, the Vice Rector of Dotma, and the Director of



Pre-novices, took the responsibility to inform the authorities immediately. Fr. Damian Basumatary, Provincial Councillor, and Fr. PA Peter, Rector of Kokrajhar, rushed to Dotma immediately to help the confreres.

Just two weeks back, on 24th May, Fr. TO Jose had completed 50 years of his religious life, and the Province level celebrations was being scheduled for a later date this year. We however will be missing him with much regret, during that celebration. We will be missing his dynamic presence in the mission frontiers of the Province. At the outset itself, dear friends, I wish to thank you for your fraternal support and earnest prayers for him and the Province at this greatest moment of sadness.

A sudden, tragic, pre-mature death. Perhaps that is what we can say right now. The circumstances surrounding his death are bizarre and still unclear. The postmortem report, we are told, will take another two days. Whatever the speculation be, we have lost a dear and admirable confrere in the most unexpected and unimaginable circumstances. Our sadness is out of proportion, and a thick cloud of darkness seems to envelope his death. However mysterious and dark his death be, the unfailing light and love of our Lord is our only consolation. “Love is stronger than death” and “The light of the Lord shines even in darkness.”

Today, we are deeply shaken by the incident. Even an oration at this moment would seem out of place. Yet we know Our Lord is in control of this situation, of every situation. Fr. TO Jose had the grace and fortune of passing away on the First Friday of the month and that too in the month of June, both commemorating the Merciful and Sacred Heart of Jesus. We know God is merciful, His name is “Mercy” itself. We commend the soul of Fr. TO Jose to the loving and merciful embrace of our Saviour.

Only with the hope of the resurrection, as we are about to conclude the Easter Season with the celebration of the Pentecost this evening and tomorrow, we will be able to say along with St. Paul: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” Even as we fervently pray for the soul of Fr. Jose, let us not lose this vision and strength that come from Jesus Christ himself. He is our resurrection, our life and our hope.



Thiruthanathy Jose was born to Mr. Joseph and Mrs. Mary Thiruthanathy on 8th December, the Feast Day of Immaculate Conception, in the year 1949 at Manjapra, in the diocese of Ernakulam, Kerala. He has two brothers and a sister. His elder sister is a CMC nun, belonging to the Province of Angamaly.

I acknowledge the presence of the family members of Fr. TO Jose here today. I thank them for making time to come and attend this last farewell for Fr. Jose. They are heartbroken and shocked beyond words. I offer them my heartfelt condolences and prayers at this moment of shock and sadness. The family members accepted the sad news with great faith, patience and magnanimity, despite their initial shock.



After joining the Salesians in North East India, Fr. Jose made his novitiate at Sunnyside, Shillong and made his first profession there on 24th May 1969. He did his philosophical studies at Sonada, and his theology at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore. He was ordained a priest on 16th December 1978 at his home parish of Manjapra, Kerala.

After his ordination, Fr. TO Jose was appointed in Tangla as Assistant Parish Priest. Here began his almost lifelong missionary life. He would serve as a frontline missionary in many mission stations and parishes of the Province. He worked with great commitment and dedication in the parishes of Doomni, Tangla, Bengtol, Dimakuchi, Kumarikatta, Panbazar – Guwahati, and finally at Dotma, in various capacities as Rector, Parish Priest or Assistant Parish Priest. It is no exaggeration to say that he was a valiant, frontline missionary in the Salesian Province of Guwahati.

Besides his service in the parishes, he also served as Prefect of Studies in St. Paul's Seminary, Shillong and Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong, and as Vicar General to the Bishop of Bongaigaon for four years from 2000 to 2004. He was also Provincial Council member from 1990 to 1993. For a short time, one year, he was the Rector of Salesian Training Centre, Shillong.

Fr. TO Jose was always lively and outspoken, dynamic and full of life. Contrary to all indications with regard to his death, he valued life. He upheld the dignity and preciousness of human life. Those who were close to him certainly know how cheerful and talkative he was. He loved to converse, and he could converse on any topic almost non-stop because he was knowledgeable and kept abreast on various topics by his reading habit. His liveliness and vivacity make everyone long to be in his company.

He never held back his views or feelings. He was very expressive, and communicated his ideas and opinions clearly to others—whether superiors or others. He was an orator par excellence. All his letters written to the superiors express his outspokenness. He was very frank in his words and his deeds. He had the courage to call a spade a spade but he always did it keeping in mind the dignity and decorum of himself and respecting the other.

His dynamism was also seen in the fact that he would move from place to place tirelessly. Recently, when the pre-novitiate was started under the parish community of Dotma, we could see him as Rector, he would not miss his conferences or celebration of the Eucharist for the pre-novices. He had so much life and energy within himself.



He was a priest and religious who was committed in preaching the Word of God and celebrating and administering the Sacraments for the people of God. And for all these, he learned the language of the people well.

Fr. TO Jose was always known for his generosity. In one of his letters, he wrote to one of his superiors, “Someone told me that you are planning a few journeys to Garo Hills. If you are in need of a vehicle I can offer you Doomni Jeep for the month of August. We have very few village programmes during this month.” Fr. Jose shared his time, talents

and resources with the Province and with the people whom he served. His last good-night talk day before yesterday to the boarders was on the importance of sharing our things with others, especially the least privileged ones.

His preferential option and love for the poor and the marginalised knew no bounds. Whatever he did he did with his whole heart and spirit. He is remembered for his special love for the poor. He dedicated his life serving the poorest and marginalised communities of our Province. He prided himself to be a missionary among the people of rural areas, especially in the Assam Plains and Bodoland. Though he passed away in a tragic way suddenly, he will live forever in the hearts of many people.



Besides his missionary endeavours in Assam Plains and in Bodoland, his missionary enthusiasm and energy was put into the evangelization of the people of Bhutan. He could narrate many stories about the royal family of Bhutan and the various Salesian works in Bhutan itself. He felt we could have done better in Bhutan, and continued our service for their people from within the borders. He thought it was unfortunate that we had to leave the country because of some problems there in Bhutan.

I thank you, dear friends, for all the messages that you sent, and for all the prayers that you have said for the departed soul of Fr. TO Jose. Glancing through the messages sent on WhatsApp itself gives us a good idea of his personality.

Fr. VM Thomas, our former Provincial and companion of Fr. TO Jose, writes, “I am shocked and deeply saddened by the tragic, sudden and premature death of a valiant veteran missionary who dedicated almost all of his life serving the poorest and marginalised communities of our Province. May his soul rest in peace and may he be abundantly rewarded by the merciful LORD! I have lost a companion and friend. My heartfelt condolences to Fr. Provincial and all the confreres with assurance of prayers.”

Fr. Emmanuel Margnar makes his message very personal and truly meaningful saying, “You are a chosen race. Sing the praise of the one who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet 2:9) There has been darkness but I believe it’s God who has called you into his wonderful light”.

Fr. Saimy Ezhanikkatt from Rome writes, “I have fond memories of him - a wonderful and a great Salesian missionary”.

Fr. Jose worked hard to contact his benefactors in order to find funds for the various projects of his mission. He kept constant touch with them, especially with his benefactors and friends in the United States. His initiatives and endeavours for the various missions will always be remembered. He was committed in developing the various mission centres that were entrusted to his care.



He kept contact not only with his own confreres, but also with many priests of the various dioceses and other religious, especially those who worked in the North East. This showed his vast network of friends and well-wishers, and he maintained his friendship with them.

He was a person who was always available to others. His spirit of obedience is clearly reflected in the following words of his letter, “If there is an urgent need or an emergency situation of any nature and you want me to move from here I am not averse to it. I am ready to go wherever you want me. I can assure you of my full support and cooperation. In a spirit of obedience and faith I am ready and willing to take whatever comes from the hands of the Lord and Our Blessed Lady.”

Fr. TO Jose was found to be responsible and dedicated in whatever work he was entrusted with. He was chosen to be the Vicar General of Bongaigaon diocese, and earlier he also had been the Provincial Councillor in our Province. In these capacities, he endeared himself through his friendly and warm approach to people.

Conclusion

I conclude. “Alive or dead, we belong to the Lord. Christ both died and came to life ... so that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”

It is hard to accept the fact that he is no more, and that we need to bid him farewell from this world. 69 years of life, 50 years of religious life, and 40 years of priestly life. We need faith to accept the death of Fr. Jose. We need faith to reconcile our minds and our hearts with whatever is happening right now, right here. God’s goodness is not something abstract. It can be experienced concretely, but only if we are able to put God into this picture. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28) The death of Fr. TO Jose will have its meaning, it will achieve its purpose, or rather God will give meaning and sense to his death. God is good, His doings are all good. This is our firm faith and hope. We will never be deceived if we put our trust in the Lord.

I thank the confreres who have been taking care of the various arrangements and formalities. I thank the community of Dotma (especially the Pre-Novices) for their care of Fr. TO Jose when he was alive, and especially at his death when they had to act quickly and promptly. In a special way I thank Fr. CT Lukose, the Vice Rector of the community of Dotma, for his prompt communications and actions. I also would like to thank Fr. Benny Basil, our Economer, Fr. Joseph Teron, Vice Provincial, and Fr. Damian Basumatary who took care of the other necessary formalities to bring the mortal remains to Guwahati. I am grateful to the family members, friends and others who have supported us during this time of tragedy. I am thankful to His Grace John Moolachira, Archbishop of Guwahati, for having presided over the Eucharist today and prayed for the repose of the departed soul. I thank His Grace Dominic Jala, the companion of Fr. TO Jose, for coming over here, celebrating the final farewell of his companion, and giving his condolence message. I thank our Sisters and other friends and staff who have taken care of the liturgy and the arrangements in the chapel and the church here. I wish to also thank the Parish Priest Fr. Vincent Xalxo and his team for taking care of the arrangements in the church and in the cemetery. I thank Mr. Carlton for having kept the night vigil, and prayed continuously for the repose of the departed soul of Fr. TO Jose. I thank all of you especially thos who have come from far (from other Provinces) to pay your respects and to pray for Fr. TO Jose.



I acknowledge the support and help given by the Government authorities, and for their prompt interventions when we needed their help.

Dear Fr. TO, we are going to miss you and your enthusiasm that you brought to the Province. But the Lord had better plans for you. We respect this. Though we feel you have gone too soon, we pray that you may receive the well-deserved rest and reward for which you always longed. We accept God's will for you, and that your religious and priestly life and sacrifices may bring in many more vocations to the Church. Do intercede for us who have been deeply saddened by your sudden departure. May God grant you eternal bliss and light!

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him! May he rest in peace!

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

Fr. Januarius S. Sangma SDB
Provincial

