

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

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RIP: Fr Paulus Guria SDB (1986-2021)

My Dear Confreres and Friends,

*“The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God and no torments shall ever touch them”
(Wis 3:1).*

It is with a heavy heart that I write this obituary of Rev. Fr Paulus Guria SDB, who succumbed to massive heart attack on 2nd May 2021, after having been infected with Covid-19. We cannot still believe that Fr Paulus is no more with us. It was really a shocking news to all of us that we are still in unbelief. He was not even 35 years old when he died. There is only one way to accept death, especially a sudden and shocking death, and that is, through Christian hope. Only through faith and hope, we can know that death is not the end. And for the Christian, death is nothing to be feared. Our Lord Jesus came to conquer death, hell, and the grave – and He has passed that victory on to us. If we believe in him, then death is merely a transition from this world to our true heavenly home. Fr Paulus believed and died in this faith; he died in Christ, albeit his death was too soon and too sudden. The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God; and we know that the soul of our dear Fr Paulus is in the hands of God.



THE LAST EARTHLY DAYS OF FR PAULUS GURIA SDB

Our dear Fr Paulus Guria passed away unexpectedly and prematurely on 2nd May 2021 at 8.25 pm at Tezpur Medical College and Hospital. He was on treatment for Covid-19 for several days, first at Borgang Catholic Hospital and then at Tezpur Medical College and Hospital till he breathed his last. At the time of his death, he was on oxygen support. When a team of doctors were working on him to facilitate a better supply of oxygen into his lungs, he had a massive heart attack and soon breathed his last. He was 34 years old and belonged to the community of Don Bosco, Dimakuchi (in the diocese of Tezpur).

A few hours before the end, about 3.00 pm, his father and mother had paid him a visit in the ICU. They spent a considerable time together and prayed before they returned home. Fr Philip Barla, the Parish Priest of Ambagaon and his maternal uncle, recounted that upto 4.30 pm, Fr Paulus was able to communicate with him through his mobile. But then his condition worsened, and passed away at 8.25 pm.

Soon after he passed away, the hospital authorities wrapped his body as per Covid norms and handed the mortal remains over to us. We then obtained the necessary permissions from the Deputy Commissioners of Tezpur and Kamrup Metro to bring his body to Guwahati and bury him in the Salesian cemetery at Uzan Bazar. As there was a night curfew, we too sought special permission from the police for movements which they readily granted. We are thankful to all the authorities.

The mortal remains of Fr Paulus were accompanied by Fr Philip Barla, his uncle, two of his own sisters and our confreres from Dimakuchi and Tezpur communities. In the meantime, the communities of Guwahati came together and prepared the place for burial much ahead of time. At about 1.20 am, the mortal remains of Fr Paulus arrived at the cemetery. 12 priests and 3 support staff of the Provincial House received the body on arrival. We then had a short funeral rite, blessed the body and the tomb and laid him to rest.

HIS ILLNESS

Fr Paulus went for a Covid test as soon as he felt unwell. The result of the test was positive and so immediately he isolated himself in the room. Fr Sebastian Edathumparambil, Rector of Don Bosco Dimakuchi, promptly informed me about his illness. Even though, initially there was a proposal to bring him to Guwahati, it was decided that he would remain in the room for a few days, as he felt that he was quite okay. Besides, the efforts to get a room for him in Excel Care Hospital, Guwahati or Guwahati Medical College Hospital were in vain.

On 29th April, he was admitted in the Catholic Hospital, Borgang for a better medical attention. Along with him, Fr Sebastian Ishorary and Fr KJ Francis were kept in the same room. Fr Sebastian and Fr Cletus closely monitored all the sick while they were in the hospital. As his oxygen level continued to drop, on 1st May, he was shifted to Tezpur

Medical College Hospital. Through the intervention of the Superintendent of the Hospital, he was given a bed in the ICU room and was treated.

I take this opportunity to thank all the doctors, nurses, and the medical staff for helping Fr Paulus during his last days on earth. I am deeply indebted to the communities of Dimakuchi and Tezpur, especially Fr Sebastian Edathumparambil and Fr Cletus Pattamkulam.

HIS FAMILY

Fr Paulus Guria was born on 12th June 1986 in the family of Mr Philip Guria and Mrs Jacintha Barla in Puranigerej village under Tetenbari parish of the Diocese of Tezpur. His parents are still alive and are very devout Catholics. Paulus was the second child of the family and had one elder brother and four younger sisters, of whom the youngest sister passed away some years ago. All his family members are working and are devout Catholics too. His maternal uncle, Fr Philip Barla is a priest in the Diocese of Tezpur and is presently the parish priest of Ambagaon.

The grandparents of Fr Paulus, Lt Philip Aind and Lt Mary Topno came from Torpa Parish, Ranchi and worked as the Head Catechists in Tetenbari, Tezpur. They were very devout Catholics and leaders in the Church and they catechised and evangelised the Catholic Adivasi community working in the tea gardens, most of whom had migrated from the present day Jharkhand. They toured from Tezpur upto North Lakhimpur to keep the faith of the people alive.



Paulus did his early schooling in his own village. His parish priest Fr Augustine used to encourage him to join the seminary to become a priest.

In 1999, he joined Don Bosco Technical School, Maligaon, Guwahati as an aspirant in Class VII. Fr Thadeus Kujur, who was his Br Assistant then, said: “Paulus was a prayerful and hardworking boy. He was friendly to all and was always cheerful.” Br Joby Mani in his condolence message to me, wrote, “Paulus was a good vocation from Maligaon. He studied here from class seven to class ten. From here he went to Bosco Mount. We are proud of him and we have a great intercessor in heaven. May he rest in peace!”

Paulus entered the Salesian novitiate at Sunnyside, Shillong on 27th May 2005 and made his first profession on 24th May, 2006.

In 2009, after a few months of practical training at Bosco Mount, he volunteered to go to Uganda – Africa as a missionary, where he worked in two communities of Kamuli and Namugongo as the Hostel Warden and Teacher.

He made his final vows at Sirajuli, Tezpur, Assam on 19th August 2013.

He studied his theology at Gerini, Rome and was ordained a deacon on 20th July 2014 in the Basilica of Sacred Heart (Sacro Cuore), Rome. He was ordained a priest at Tetenbari, his home parish on 24th January 2016.

After his ordination, he worked as the Youth Director and Director of the Hostel at Don Bosco Ngozi, Burundi. In 2018, he returned to the Province, initially for medical treatment. Later, in consultation with his Superiors and the Rector Major, he opted to remain back and get himself incardinated to his Province of origin (Province of Guwahati). After his return, he worked for three years as the Deputy Director, Hostel Warden and Administrator at Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati. On 24th May 2020, he was appointed as the Vice Rector, Assistant Parish Priest and in charge of the Small Christian Communities in the parish of Dimakuchi.

Fr Paulus was conversant with the languages, such as, Assamese, Munda, Sadri, English, Italian and French.

A RELIGIOUS AND GOD-CENTRED HUMAN BEING, LOVED AND ADMIRER

I share with you now, what the Archbishop of Guwahati, Msgr John Moolachira and our own confreres said about Fr Paulus Guria. They are edifying, poignant and true to reality.

His Grace Archbishop John Moolachira paid him a glowing tribute when he said that “I had come to know him as a good person. We will miss him.”

Fr Sebastian Edathumparambil, his Rector, opined that “Fr Paulus was a true missionary, and a spiritual person. He was a man with a heart of a father. He was a spiritual father among children, youth, adults and old people. He was friendly to everyone. He always made available to the spiritual needs of the faithful. His amicable character attracted everyone towards him. He became so popular in Dimakuchi within a short time which speaks volumes of him. He was community builder. He took care of everyone; he fulfilled his responsibility with full commitment. He made others feel at home, and welcomed whoever came to the community. He had great devotion to Eucharist and our Blessed Mother. He was very generous, he never complained of anything, and he respected everyone, including the children.”

Fr Lukose Cheruvalel, Director of the pre-novices, wrote about Fr Paulus from his personal experience of him on three occasions. “Fr Paulus Guria was a Salesian with a golden heart, a heart of flesh,” he wrote. “He maintained always a cheerful and welcoming

disposition. He came across constantly as a friend to everyone he met, especially the poor and the young. The way he showed great love and concern for the Prenovices when they enjoyed the hospitality of the confreres at DBI for the Diamond Jubilee Symposium was very impressive. The sympathy he showed at the death of the father of a Prenovice who was participating in the Formees Exposure programme at Ambagaon, accompanying him personally to his home demonstrated practically how sensitive he was to the pain and sorrow of others. The smile and bonhomie with which he was moving around easily among the perpetual-profession-course brothers during the lunch hosted by the Dimakuchi Community proved that he knew how to love tenderly. Of course he had his serious health issues and God planned his short sojourn on earth in His way, and cut him off in God's good time, though suddenly from life's loom, reminding us all that life is but a breath."

Fr Pojit Marak, who lived with him for a few years at DBI Guwahati, writes, "Yes, dear confreres, friends, well-wishers and admirers of Fr Paulus, we can vouch for ourselves that he was indeed a faithful servant of God by being faithful to his priestly vocation of teaching and preaching the Good News by his authentic life of service, a life of Good shepherd who loves his sheep. He was a true Don Bosco amidst the young, and so loving and so caring like a mother. Everyone who came in contact with him found in him a joyful heart, a welcoming heart, a tender touch, a personal love and affection that sent out a fragrance of nicety and divine love all around. He used to call boys and girls and even our hostel staff '*beta/beti*' like a father. That was his *magic wand*, used to cast a spell of loving-kindness to everyone. He always had a second chance for so-called helpless cases of our naughty boys and girls. He frequently told me that love has the power to change. This was the philosophy of his life which was predominant in his mind and in his demeanour. This approach to life made his heart like that of God. Love, compassion and mercy, understanding and patience and magnanimity were the godly clothes he wore. Who has not been touched by his endearing ways and charming personality? None."

Fr John Parankimalil, who was his Rector at DBI Guwahati, writes: "He was an ever smiling, cheerful and committed priest who devoted his life to God and to the service of people. He had an attractive and magnetic personality that attracted everyone. He was able to transform the lives of so many young people in DBI and did everything possible to love them and care for them."

"Felt really sorry," writes Fr Emmanuel Marngar, Rector and Principal of Don Bosco Haflong, "that dear Fr Paulus died so young. As tenderly as the father treats his children so Yahweh treats those who fear him. Fr Paulus, besides being my friend, was a God-fearing Salesian. May Yahweh who is full of tenderness, pity, slow to anger and rich in faithful love, grant him eternal rest."

Fr Saju Kariyil, who knew Fr Paulus Guria for a long time, wrote, “Dearest Fr Paulus, you have been always my younger brother, you began to call me elder brother from Class IX and continued till I met you the last time. Whenever you met me, your closeness and your brotherly approach, I can never forget. Will miss you so much my brother.”

“A promising young priest gone so soon!” (Fr Abraham Kanattu)

“It’s so sad to learn that Fr Paulus is no more. He was such a lovely person, cheerful, calm and loved by youngsters too.” (Fr Robert Faustin)

Fr Paulus had great love and respect to his superiors and to everyone. He was very affectionate, loyal and prayerful. I always felt nice in his company to interact and dialogue with him. He was often cheerful and serene. His love for Fr Augustine, his parish priest when he was young and who passed away recently, was proverbial. The DP in his WhatsApp profile is still the photo of Fr Augustine who moulded and encouraged him early to think about priestly and religious life.

When I gave him the last apostolic assignment to be the Vice Rector, Assistant Parish Priest and Incharge of Small Christian Communities (SCC) in Dimakuchi, his oft repeated words were “Let God’s will be done”. I observed that he loved to visit the villages, teach people the Word of God, administer the Sacraments especially the Holy Mass and worked hard to uplift the poor in every field. He was extremely grateful to me for facilitating his incardination into the mother Province due to health issues.

He was truly a community builder. He participated in the community prayers and meetings actively. He promoted peace and family spirit in the community. Whenever he was free, he rendered his help in the school and the hostel. While at DBI, I knew that he had to handle many responsibilities, but he never complained about them and he carried out his duties with precision and cheerfulness. I had not seen him becoming impatient and upset any time, even in trying circumstances.

He was a good animator. Once every month, I used to go to DBI for Sunday Mass. Invariably every time I went there, he would prepare the boys and girls for the Holy Mass. He had a good, fatherly and soothing voice and his reflections were always profound, meaningful and motivating. He knew the Word of God, the Bible well. He was able to make the love of God real in his preaching and teaching. Most importantly, I am convinced that he was someone who walked the talk. He was certainly a man of faith.

He was someone who was very caring. His care for others was not superficial. It was genuine and it had continuity. There are many confreres and young clerics who expressed to me saying that they would miss his advice and counselling. It was because he followed them up and gave them a lot of encouragement.

In short, Fr Paulus left behind voluminous edifying memories, though he left so early. Indeed, he has gone out of sight but not out of mind.

CONCLUSION

“Love is stronger than death” (Song of Songs 8:6). Death is not a barrier for God’s love. The truth and never-changing beauty of God’s love that we experienced through Fr Paulus was a piece of heaven here on earth. Now that he has gone before us so suddenly and prematurely should not be a cause of worry. We have one more intercessor in heaven. The love and kindness of Fr Paulus Guria still shines among us. The beauty of God’s compassion and love makes us hope even in our sorrow. We know that Fr Paulus has gone before us to partake in that resurrection we all hope for. Resurrection is all about experiencing God’s love in its fullness. Let the life of Fr Paulus stand as a guarantee for each one of us. Let us have no fear. God’s life and His transforming love is given to us freely and abundantly. There are no terms and conditions for this. This is resurrection, this is eternal life.

May the goodness of Fr Paulus help us believe in Jesus, who is our resurrection and life: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even though he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” (Jn 11:25-26).

We pray that the Almighty may forgive all the shortcomings of Fr Paulus, and accept him into His heavenly abode!

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

Yours affectionately in the Lord,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

