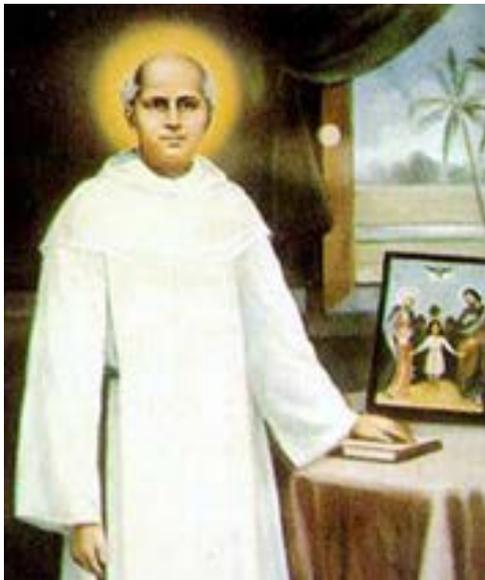

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 375

a saint from my own village!



What a blessing to hail from the same village as a saint! On the first anniversary of the canonisation of **St Kuriakose Elias Chavara**, here is a glimpse of the multi-faceted personality of this iconic saint.

On 10 Feb. 1805 the day dawned as usual in sleepy Kainakary village in the Kuttanad region of Kerala. But not for the Chavara Kuriakose-Mariam couple. It marked the birth of their sixth child, whom they named Kuriakose, little realising at the time that their cute little son was destined to be a special emissary of God and they would become known worldwide because of him!

By the time Fr Kuriakose Kathanaar was called back by his creator to his eternal reward, on 03 Jan 1871, this diminutive man had accomplished his mission on earth to perfection. In a fitting recognition of his great witnessing of Jesus, Pope Francis canonized him on 23 Nov 2014, becoming the second saint in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in Kerala, along with **St Euphrasia**.

a missionary and a visionary

Kuriakose was a man of many parts. He was a true missionary with a futuristic vision and a creative thinker with a divine mission, a man far ahead of his times. His multifarious activities made him a torch-bearer and defender of faith, a great social reformer, agriculturist, scholar, and educationalist, but above all a man of God and an extraordinary human being of immense charity.

a social activist

He was a social revolutionary with a strong conviction for social justice and the equality of everyone before God. A man of deeds, he felt the need to make effective intervention in society to remedy the prevailing inequalities, deprivation and poverty. He belonged to a privileged upper caste Syrian family, but at the same time recognised the sufferings of people at the lower strata of society. He did not want to be a moot spectator. Instead his sense of social equality prompted him to address those evils through well considered intervention strategies. His vision was not of short-term solutions, but of medium and long-term goals which would last the test of time. He emphasised the duty of the privileged minority towards the disadvantaged and deprived majority – his way of sharing the goodness of God with his fellow humans.

Education was at the core of his strategies. He used his official powers to start new educational institutions in the State which were open to all children, irrespective of religious or socio-economic background. This bold gesture greatly helped the people of lower rank but met with resistance from the powerful. Fr Kuriakose defended women's empowerment through education so that they could make a lasting impact. Many educational institutes were started for girls.

As the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar church, in 1864 he ordered every church under his jurisdiction to start a school. These schools, attached to Palli (churches), were known as Pallikudams – which has now become synonymous with basic educational institutions. This historic step led to an educational revolution in the State. Providing quality education to all members of society free of charge was the seed which would help Kerala make great strides in the educational field in times to come.

To attract children from poor families into school, he introduced the noon-day meals scheme. This innovative idea was later adopted by the rulers of Travancore and, in time, by the government of India itself!

Fr Kuriakose felt a need to make an impact in the wider social spectrum, to change people's views on prevailing social anomalies. Social media intervention by way of a daily newspaper was his solution. He started the St Joseph's Printing Press in 1846 at Mannanam, the third of its kind in Kerala and a first for the Catholic church. The first Malayalam daily - *Nasrani Deepika* – grew out of this press. This was the forerunner of the present day *Deepika*, published now from Kottayam. The role this newspaper played in shaping the destiny of the people Kerala is now part of history. In the same year he also started a school in Mannanam which was open to all children from the lower castes.

As a fitting tribute to this literary genius of the 19th century, the government of Kerala honoured him in 2006, placing his portrait in the Sahithya Academy, Thrissur. The government of India issued a postal stamp in his name in 1987.



a religious zealot

Fr Kuriakose founded the *Congregation of the Mother of Carmel* and was co-founder and first Prior General of the *Congregation of Mary Immaculate*. The main purpose of their creation was to sustain and promote christian formation, education and development for the less-privileged. Their combined efforts in education, health care, social welfare, and in the economic and spiritual fields, are visible throughout the world.



Seminaries for the education and formation of clergy, the introduction of annual retreats for priests and laity, houses for the destitute and dying, relentless efforts for the reunion of the faithful, were other significant contributions he made. His effective leadership helped protect the Syro-Malabar Church from potential threats of a schism, created by the intrusion of Thomas Rocco, in 1861.

His contributions to religious and secular literature are several. Canonical prayers for the clergy like *Dhyana Sallapangal*

(colloquies in medication), Tukkasa (liturgical rubrics) and family manuals for the common faithful ('Testament of a loving Father' etc.) are very widely used even today.

Fr Kuriakose was well-known for his devotion to the eucharist even in the midst of his busy religious and social commitments. It was he who introduced 40 hours Adoration and the Way of the Cross in the Kerala church, also the scapular and rosary to spread Marian devotion especially in the month of May. His devotion to St Joseph found expression in his establishing a charitable association in 1868 called *St Joseph for a Happy Death*, in order to help the poor and dying.

For the Syro-Malabar Church Fr Kuriakose was a great champion of faith and a mediator, a special gift of God. For the downtrodden of his time he was a redeemer. And for the universal church he is now a role model. For the people of India he was one of the finest social reformers who ever lived.

We must take to our hearts the exhortation of *St Kuriakose Chavara*: "Let there be no day in your life in which you did not do good" (for God).

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item 376

God bless the IC Province!

Nowadays knowledge of the English language is something almost assumed. Certainly it is not only an advantage but first and foremost a requirement. It is generally presumed that, beside a knowledge of their native language, people know English at least to some extent. Undoubtedly that makes life easier. English has become virtually a universal language that allows one to communicate with others, regardless of origin. Knowledge of English allows one to make friends internationally and, importantly for students, enables access to numerous and important scientific resources. Together with Italian it is an official language of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate. Not surprisingly, any young Pallottine really needs to learn English.

This requirement, for both communication and research, was at the back of my mind as I prepared myself to take up a foreign language course in the USA. Thanks to the efforts of the Rector General, Fr Jacob and thanks to the kindness and hospitality of the leader of the Immaculate Conception Province, Fr Frank Donio, I was granted a 3-month English language opportunity in America.



During my stay my home was the **Pallottine Seminary** [above] at Green Hill, West Hyattsville, where I was made very welcome. The Green Hill community is one that prays and lives the charism of St Vincent Pallotti. It is young and dynamic. Just being present in the community and participating in community life, in Pallottine prayers, daily Eucharist (always with a homily!), shared meals, meetings, recreation, was an invaluable time to become familiar with the use of English. Initially of course it was difficult, but with time communication and understanding it became easier. We also enjoyed trips together – to the cinema, to St Jude Shrine in Baltimore. And I also had the opportunity to visit confreres in New York.

Beside our Pallottine home, the first place of learning English was *Lado International Institute*. I completed 3 levels at this international language school. Classes were held from Monday to Friday, lasting 5 hours. It was an enriching time becoming familiar not just with the language, but also with the culture and traditions of America, as well as getting to know people from all over the world. The friendships made there, thanks to social media, continue to this day. It is worth mentioning too that the language school prepares many priests from around the world to take up missionary work.

For me, as a young Pallottine, living in this Society house was an extremely edifying experience. I was able to take a close look at the work of confreres from this American province, their daily life and their apostolic commitment. The seminary is associated with the Catholic University of America in Washington so that is where they study and work. In addition, Pallottines are involved in the life of the local church, serve it with enthusiasm and put in a lot of effort to make the charism of our Society known.

The Catholic Apostolate Center is worth noting. The seminary community, consisting mainly of young people studying at CUA, organises – in the Pallottine spirit – formative conventions, publishes books, promotes activities which revive faith [e.g. using Facebook], and regularly provides information about events in the life of the church. Their house is an open home – to the ecclesial communities, to young people and to lay people. During summer holidays the community hosts students from Rome, and also others from around the world. There were days when, at the altar during the morning Eucharist, there were priests from four different continents.

My time in the USA coincided with two important events for the Immaculate Conception Province. The first was the official start of the postulate by a candidate, Sean. The second was the start of the novitiate by our Pallottine postulant, Brandon. Thanks to these two ceremonies, I had the opportunity to meet confreres of the province and the families of our youngest confreres.

The three-months away was a good experience. It was a time to learn English, a time of building community, a time of visiting and exploring Washington DC, as well as a time of rest. My next step is the challenge to develop and build on the experience gained and to continue to deepen my language skills.

God bless the Immaculate Conception Province!



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sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented ...

on #196