



MEDITATION SHRINE DEDICATION

St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church

By

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His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos Metropolitan

(Northeast American Diocese)

On Sunday, December 23, 2012



The Significance of the Meditation Shrine

Fr. M. K. Kuriakose

The new Meditation Shrine of our parish is now ready to use, fulfilling one of my dreams. Not many people are aware of what the room was used for when we acquired the building. It was a memorial area of the Jewish community with engraved memorial plates. The Jewish community removed them at their exit. I thought it will be an ideal area for us to convert it into a small meditation room where our people can sit down and quietly meditate. One of the marks of Orthodox Spirituality is to meditate with the saints. Therefore we installed the saintly people's pictures including that of the Ascending Lord. In addition to the Lord, the pictures of St. Mary, St. Thomas, St. Gregorios, St. Dionysius, His Grace Kuriakose Mar Gregorios of Pamapadi are installed.

What is the Significance of Icons?

In the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox traditions icons have a significant place. Icons are not produced as a commercial product but as artistic expression of spirituality. They are made with prayer and fasting. The visual presentation of a reality with contextual significance is seen in presenting the pictures of our Lord and the saints. It has both artistic and spiritual component. Icons were normally hand-made but now more photographs are used in that place. In any case the icons give an experience of physical presence of the person or event that is portrayed. In the Orthodox tradition many miracles are attached to icons because people who are able to meditate in front of an icon have more realistic meditational experience. In meditation a visual aid is helpful to enhance the intimacy of one's devotion. It is not mandatory for spiritual growth but it will indeed be a harmless tool.

In the Protestant tradition such iconographic spirituality is absent. In the Roman Catholic tradition the statues of persons stand as a representation. In the Orthodox it is just the picture. In the Eastern (Byzantine) Orthodox Tradition the icons are not made like in popular art forms drawing people with their physical appearance but without sharp curves and body expressions. The icon stands as a symbol of the person depicted. In the Malankara Orthodox tradition mostly the popular form of art is used. This goes with the Indian artistic tradition of drawing a picture exactly like the way the person looks. In all these iconic expressions we can see a spiritual component that is nothing but an experience of being connected to a spiritual person. If we visit the room of a worldly-minded teenager we will see photographs of various celebrities in various kinds of expressions. Most of it will be sensual or emotional depictions with which they connect themselves to those people. One can easily figure out what kind of teenagers they are based on the kind of pictures they decorate their room with. Often sensuality and violence are attached to almost all those pictures. In the Christian iconic expressions it is different. The icons help us look into deep spiritual power that was already proven in real life. That is a positive power that benefits others. I am writing this as my own experience than an a theological state-

ment.

What is the Significance of the Communion of Saints?

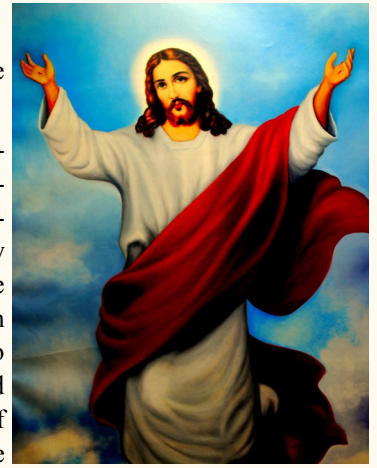
In the Orthodox spirituality, the saints are an important component as we believe that they continue to pray for us. Our life will be complete only by our communion with the unseen world of saints who became stalwarts of faith and people who took the suffering of Christ to themselves. Saints are the historic proofs of living presence of God in this world. They were successful in obeying the Lord to the best of their ability. They exemplified Christ in their life. They denied their self and took the cross of suffering to fulfill their duty as a true Christian. We all need the company of such saints whose success stories will inspire us to follow our Lord to best of our ability.

The communion of saints helps us grow in holiness day by day. The Lord expects us to grow to the goodness of the Father God as our Lord taught, "be ye perfect as your heavenly father is perfect." It is this holiness that ultimately makes our destiny. We know that this world is not the final resting place for us. We will have to leave all our possessions and material riches behind and join the Lord with the heavenly beings once we go beyond the earthly life. Our Lord showed the life beyond the curtain. In the event of the transfiguration, the Lord was able to show to the apostles how one would be once this life is over. However, the enemy is overpowering our faith not to believe such things. The enemy wants our destruction. Whereas God wants us to acquire eternal life and so the Lord taught us how to renounce the worldly pleasures and become like children to get into the Kingdom of God.

The communion of the saints is a positive power that can heal us and change our life in a positive manner. Our parish has witnessed several unexplained events including healing of the believers both physical and spiritual. Some time ago one of our members saw the image of St. Mary in our meditation room area and asked her husband, "when did you install that picture?" but the husband replied that such a picture was not installed. It was later known that she had that vision about the Mother of God. There were occasions during the Holy Eucharistic service people had experienced divine intervention. Often they shared those experiences with me. These experiences are all consolidated in the Meditation Shrine of our church.

In Gratitude:

Initially we did not have the financial ability to make the shrine. Often in our meetings this job was moved from the budget. I was not courageous to compel our people because many of our people are not convinced of this aspect of Orthodox spirituality. But I prayed that a time may come when I can accomplish it.



Why Do We Believe In The Intercession Of Saints?

(By Mr. Oommen Kappil)

Communion of Saints or Intercession of Saints is one of the core elements of Orthodox faith. Church, which is the body of Christ, includes the living and the departed. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." John 11:25. This verse indicates that even after death, the souls are alive. It is biblical to believe that they are in constant communication with God. The departed (which could include our parents and loved ones) will not stop praying for us just because they are not in flesh any more.

"The memory of the righteous will be a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot." Proverbs 10:7
"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5: 16

When we request others (living or departed faithful) to intercede on behalf of us, we are not asking them to forgive us or save us, rather, we are asking them to pray to God to forgive us and bless us. Forgiveness and blessings are coming from God.

Can the intercession of saints make a difference?

Let us examine a few incidents from the Holy Bible:

1. Abraham prays to God to not to destroy the city of Sodom. Refer to Genesis 18: 20-33. In Verse 28, Abraham asks God: "Suppose there are only forty-five righteous people rather than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And the LORD said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five righteous people there." Further, as Abraham pleads to God, He agrees to spare the city if there are 10 righteous people. This is the power of the intercession of the saints.

2. At the time of the wedding in Cana, Mary intercedes to Jesus on behalf of the household when it ran out of wine. Refer to John Chapter 2. Her faith and intercession leads to Jesus performing his first miracle during his public ministry.

3. Peter, at the temple gate called 'Beautiful' heals the lame person, saying, "I don't have gold or silver, In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk." Acts 3:6. Here we see God performing miracles through his disciples.

4. John 20:23. Jesus gave his disciples authority to forgive the sins of others. They are given the authority by Jesus as his representatives.

5. Shadow of St Peter healed the sick (Acts 5:15);

6. The story of the rich man and Lazarus: Refer to Luke Chapter 16. The rich man submits his requests to Abraham, (not to God) to send someone from the dead to preach to his brothers so that they will be saved.

7. The paralytic person was healed by the faith (and intercession) of those who carried him to Jesus. Refer to Matthew Chapter 9.

Those who oppose the intercession of saints often quote, 1 Timothy 2:5 "For there is

one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."). They ask, "Why do we need a mediator other than God?" We consider the saints as the representatives of God. We do not consider the saints as Gods. We are requesting the saints to pray for us to Jesus, the mediator. God is the one who accepts (or sometimes rejects) our prayers. Intercession of saints is not apart from or against Christ's mediation. Otherwise, we cannot pray for each other.

Even those who belong to some protestant churches that oppose intercession of saints do pray for others on a regular basis. They do not say, "You will receive according to your deeds" and walk away. The prayer on behalf of the sick is a legitimate intercessory prayer. It is our responsibility to pray for others. Leave the rest to God.

The intercession is not meant just as a means to ask for personal favors. St. Paul wrote, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Hebrews 13:7. When we remember our spiritual Fathers like Saint Gregorios of Parumala, we can easily relate to their life. We too can become holy like Parumala Thirumeni. Intercession should become an opportunity to consider their way of life and emulate their path towards holiness.

Conclusion

Our faith in the intercession of saints is supported by the teachings of the Bible, apostles and the holy fathers, and by the tradition of our Church. The prayers of the righteous are effective, as we have seen from the experiences of Abraham and Mary. It is the responsibility of the faithful to pray for their spiritual fathers, and it is right to seek their intercession for God's blessings and spiritual growth.

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And this year with the help our people this dream has come to reality. I know well that this meditation room was not meant to make any financial gain. But there is option for people to offer their gifts to God. Time will prove how this can become a positive milestone in our parish life.

The very sign that many of our people instantly came up with donations to complete the project is an indication it will be a blessing for all. Several people worked hard on this project. I am avoiding their names only because they are too many and I am afraid that I may miss some names. The artist Mr. Tiruvalla Baby did a good design of the room. Several members offered the pictures of saints, crosses, picture frames, candle stands, etc. People who did physical labor some way or the other are to be appreciated. I thank everyone who had their slice of work on this project. Our special gratitude is due to His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, the Metropolitan our Diocese who graciously agreed to dedicate this room. I just pray that the Lord bless everyone who worked with this project.

St. Mary, Mother of God

Dr. Yuhanon Mar Dimitrios (Metropolitan, Diocese of Delhi)



Among all the saints of the Church, St. Mary occupies a preeminent position. This prominence is the consequence of her role as the Mother of God (Theotokos), a title that was underscored by the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) and firmly establishing it in the spirituality of the Church. St. Mary thus appears not only as the person who was favoured to bear the Son of God, but because of her acquiescence to God's offer, she represents the pinnacle of synergy, the process by which human beings cooperate with God for the advancement of the salvific plan. Thus, she represents the reversal of the fatal fall of Eve in the Garden of Eden, and so is also given the designation "the second Eve." The concept and role of St. Mary in the Malankara Orthodox Church can be appreciated only in the connection with its Christology and ecclesiology.

While the Holy Scriptures do not contain this information, the Church tradition names St. Mary's parents as Joachim and Anna, information contained in the Protevangelium of St. James. Her early years are shrouded in silence, except for the generalized picture that she was resident in the Jerusalem Temple. From this point the New Testament informs us that she received the annunciation of the birth of the Son of God (Lk 1: 2ff), a point obliquely stated in St. Matthew's infancy narrative (Mt. 1:20). St. Luke very succinctly suggests that many of St. Mary's experiences went past her comprehension, and it was only the passage of time that unpacked their significance for her (Lk 2:19, 50-51). Both St. Matthew and St. Luke record that she was affianced to Joseph who belonged to David's family. It is in this way that Jesus' ancestry is ultimately traced to the Davidic line. St. Matthew's narrative (St. Mt 2:1ff) has King Herod making an attempt on the life of the young Jesus, occasioned by the arrival and query of the Wise Men. Operating through a divine revelation, St. Joseph takes the mother Mary and the little Jesus and flees to Egypt. A revelation in a dream at a later stage conveys the death of those who sought the life of Jesus and so St. Joseph returns with St. Mary and the child to their native country and opt to settle in Nazareth for fear of Herod's son who now controlled Judea. St. Luke alone records the event of St. Joseph and St. Mary taking the young Jesus to Jerusalem to attend the Passover and is somehow lost. After three days the parents return to find Jesus discussing with the teachers.

We do not glimpse too many occasions when St. Mary is sighted during Jesus' public ministry. There is the anecdote of how she, accompanied by other family members, attempt to obtain a meeting with him, which Jesus supposedly does not acquiesce to. St. John, however, has the narrative of Jesus, along with his disciples and St. Mary attending a marriage feast at Cana and during the course of which the wine runs out. St. Mary intercedes with her Son Jesus, the consequence of which leads to the transformation of the water held in six stone jars into the most qualitatively superlative wine. We then find references to St. Mary only during the last hours of Jesus when she is numbered among the women who watch his crucifixion. St. John has the poignant story of committing her to the care of his Beloved Disciple, an indication that by this time she had no family to look after her.

The increase in the respect and reverence to St. Mary in consequence of her developing faith, which is seen in Acts of the Apostles, is continued in the early Church. And it is on the basis of the popular devotion to her that the Second Ecumenical Council held at Ephesus in A.D. 431 declared that St. Mary be addressed as the "Mother of God" (theotokos). It must be borne in mind that St. Cyril of Alexandria's opposition to Nestorius' advocacy for the use Mother of Christ (christotokos), the controversy that constitutes the background for this ecumenical council was based not only on this popular piety, but also on the sound theological principle that what was in question was more than a mere use of a term. What was at stake was the very foundation of the belief that God had become man. In pursuing the belief that Christ was fully God and fully man, the Alexandrian Church father stressed that to address St. Mary as merely the Mother of Christ alone sundered this unitive concept.

This high reverence for St. Mary forms the underpinnings for the Orthodox Church's hymns which extol her as the Second Eve and a second heaven. Many of the hymns use the events of the Old Testament to interpret the mystery of how God could have become a human through the agency of St. Mary. For instance, a favourite event is to interpret the appearance of God to Moses in the burning bush as a type of how Christ was incarnated; just as God appeared as a fire in the bush, but the bush was not consumed, so also Christ was born of St. Mary without consuming her. And since Christ is borne by the Cherubim in heaven, so also St. Mary is figured as a second heaven because she bore the Son of God. In all these instances, what is stressed is St. Mary's obedience and submission to the will of God, thus reversing the disobedience and self-oriented character of the first Eve which paved for humankind's fall into sin.

The Orthodox Church holds it as part of its faith article that St. Mary continued to be a virgin all her life, addressing her as the Virgin Mary or the Virgin Mother. It believes that the Holy Scriptures do not contradict this belief and interprets the statements

APOSTLE OF INDIA - ST. THOMAS

St. Thomas, known by other names Judas Thomas or Didymus, who was one of the twelve disciples of Our lord Jesus Christ, is the Apostle of India and the guardian & father of Malankara Church. In the list appeared in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts he is referred as 'Twin'. As per the witness of St. John, it is Apostle Thomas who said bravely at Bethany, "Let us also go, that we might die with him". Being humanly logical, Thomas doubted the resurrection of Jesus and demanded to touch Jesus' wounds before being convinced. After seeing the risen Christ with his own eyes and by touching His wounds, Thomas professed his faith in Jesus, exclaiming "My Lord and my God!"



In the light of traditions which have a great deal of history to back them up, we believe that St. Thomas, the Apostle, landed in Cranganore which is a coastal harbor city in Kerala, India, in 52 A.D. The Legend described in the Acts of St. Thomas relates the mission of St. Thomas in India.

Gundafor, a first century king in India, wanted to build a palace and sent his envoy Abban to Jerusalem in search of an Architect. By the guidance of providence, Abban brought Thomas as a carpenter for his master. Coming to India Thomas undertook to build a palace for Gundafor, but spend the money entrusted to him for the poor. Asked to show his progress, St. Thomas explained that the palace he was building was in heaven, not on earth. Angry Gundafor imprisoned Thomas. By this time, Gad, the brother of the king expired and he appeared in a vision to the King and told it is really true that the mansion entrusted to Thomas is being built in heaven. The King believed in Thomas and released him from prison. Now the coins and stone-inscriptions received in Archeological excavations reveal that King Gundafor was undisputedly ruled in India during the first century. Our Church believes this legend and teaches in our Sunday school lessons.

He converted high caste Hindu families and consecrated priests. He built churches and erected cross. These Christians became the foundation of the Church in India and are known as St. Thomas Christians. Towards the end of his life, St. Thomas pushed his missionary journey towards east coast near Madras. Apostle was murdered with a lance by a low caste fanatic, while the saint was praying, at Little Mount, a hill in Mylapur, in 72 A.D. His body was brought to Mylapore and was buried there. The entire relics are known to have removed from India to Edessa and later to Ortona in Italy.

Various writings such as the Acts of Thomas, the Apocalypse of Thomas, the Gospel of Thomas and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, dating from the 2nd to the 4th centuries, are linked with name of St. Thomas. Some of them are apocryphal and some are considered Gnostic in origin. Christians all over India celebrated the 19th centenary anniversary of the arrival of St. Thomas in 1952. Government of India had officially honored the blessed memory of St. Thomas and depicted his picture on Indian Postage Stamp in 1972. Our Father St. Thomas is remembered in the fourth Thubden in every Holy Qurbana and celebrates his feast on July 3, every year. Many of the Churches of Malankara Orthodox Church are dedicated to the patronage of St. Thomas.

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in the New Testament to the brothers and sisters of Jesus as either referring to brothers and sisters born to Joseph through a previous marriage or his cousins. Indeed, the New Testament could be seen as very supportive of affirming the continued virginity of St.Mary. When Joseph and Mary go up to Jerusalem and inadvertently leave Jesus behind in the Temple, there is no mention in the gospel to any of his siblings who accompanied them. And in the Gospel of St.John, Jesus hands over charge of his mother Mary to his Beloved Disciple, a situation which would have been unwarranted if Jesus had other brothers or sisters.

However, it must be also stated that in the devotion of the Orthodox Church to St.Mary no role or description is made other than her being the Mother of God. In the iconographic tradition of the Church, St.Mary is usually presented as holding in her arms the child Jesus. Similarly, in the hymns which focus on St. Mary, she is asked to intercede to her Son, affirming the biblical principle that there is only one Mediator between God the Father and humankind. In fact, constant stress of the Church is on the fact that there is only one person, Jesus Christ, who has been exempt from the taint of humankind's sin. It can, therefore, be inferred that the Orthodox Church does not believe that St.Mary was immaculately conceived or that she has a special mediatory role alongside Jesus Christ in the salvation of humankind.

In thus developing a devotion to St.Mary the Orthodox Church extols her who exemplifies what it means to be transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. No doubt St.Mary symbolizes what it means to find favour with God. And in so praising her, the Church recognizes that it fulfills St.Mary's prediction given in the Magnificat:

“For, behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed ” (Lk 1:48).

ST. GREGORIOS OF PARUMALA

Saint Gregorios of Parumala is popularly known as 'Parumala Thirumeni'. Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Gregorios of the Malankara Orthodox Church who passed away on November 2nd 1902, became the first declared saint from Malankara (Kerala, India) naturally to be called, 'Parumala Thirumeni'. He shines in the cloud of witnesses as a bright luminary giving rays of hope to millions in their suffering and struggles.

Mar Gregorios was born on 15th June 1848 (M.E. Mithunam 3, 1023) to Kochu Mathai and Mariam of Pallathetta family in the Chathuruthy house at Mulamthuruthy. He was called by the name 'Kochaippora' and was given the baptismal name 'Geevarghese'. Kochaippora had two brothers and two sisters; Kurian, Eli, Mariam and Varkey. Kochaippora was the youngest and was therefore the most beloved to everyone. Unfortunately, his mother passed away when he was only two years old. His eldest sister Mariam became to him all that a mother was meant. Mariam was married at that time and had a child of Kochaippora's age.

He was ordained as a reader-deacon (Korooyo) on 14th Sept, 1858 at the age of ten by Palakkunnath Mathews Mar Athanasios at Karingachira Church. Koroyo Geevarghese continued his training under Geevarghese Malpan until the latter died due to small pox. Although Deacon Geevarghese was also infected with small pox, he miraculously survived it. Afterwards Deacon Geevarghese moved to Pampakuda to continue his studies under Konat Geevarghese Malpan. In the mean time Deacon became associated with the visiting Syrian Bishop Yuyakim Mar Coorilos. Mar Coorilos had great admiration for the deacon and was pleased to ordain him as full deacon, priest and co-episcopa within few months in 1865.

The new priest's short stay at Mulanthuruthy Marthommen Church gave him an inner conviction that he should lead a hermit's life in a quieter place. Therefore he shifted his residence to Vettickal Dayara. At Vettickal Dayara, Corepiscopa Geevarghese started a strenuous life of prayer and fasting. Having heard about the vigorous asceticism practised by corepiscopa Geevarghese, the then Malankara Metropolitan Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius made him a 'Ramban' (Monk Priest) in 1872.

Being pleased with the Ramban Geevarghese, the Patriarch decided to consecrate him as Metropolitan. On December 10, 1876 the Patriarch consecrated six priests as bishops including Ramban Geevarghese at St. Thomas Church, N Paravur. He was given the new name Geevarghese Mar Gregorios and was given the charge of Niranam Diocese. Mar Gregorios was only 28 years when he was made a bishop. Since he was the youngest among all the bishops, he was dearly called by all as 'Kochu Thirumeni'. The first thing the new bishops undertook was a special fasting-vigil for forty days at Vettickal Dayara under the leadership of 'Kochu Thirumeni'. This fasting was both symbolic and effective in the pursuit of new life in an old church. Mar Gregorios took charge of the Niranam Diocese and started staying at Parumala. There was at Parumala, at that time, a land donated by Arikupurath Koruth Mathen to the church and in this

plot a small building was erected by the Malankara Metropolitan Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius. This building was known as 'Azhippura'. Mar Gregorios lived there along with few other deacons who came for priestly training. They worshipped in a thatched chapel during that time.

Mar Gregorios engaged in a three-fold activity of tireless service for the church:

Diocesan administration, Ministerial formation of deacons, Missionary witness of the church through inner spiritual and theological consolidation, along with evangelical reaching out. In addition to these, Mar Gregorios undertook the task of building a church and seminary at Parumala. The diocesan administration, in the mean time, was extended to two more dioceses, Thumpamon and Quilon. The newly constructed church was consecrated in 1895. Mar Gregorios was the co-celebrant for the consecration of two ex-Roman Catholic priests as bishops: Fr. Alvaris as Alvaris Mar Kulus for Bombay-Mangalore Diocese; Fr. Rene Vilatti as Rene Vilatti Mar Timotheos for America.

Mar Gregorios believed that the church should engage in educational activity especially to facilitate primary education and English teaching without discriminating gender or religion. Accordingly he started schools at Kunnamkulam, Mulamthuruthy, Niranam, Thumpamon, Thiruvalla etc. The missionary task of the Church was also evinced by his outreach programme to the socially down trodden communities at Chennithala, Kalikunnu, Mallappally, Puthupally, Kallumkathara etc. He also organized evangelical awakening programme for non-Christians at various places like Aluva, under the leadership of the Seminary students.

A major task of Mar Gregorios was to motivate the clergy for effective ministry. With this aim, he formed the Malankara Syrian Clergy Association and took many progressive decisions and made many suggestions for the effective functioning of the priestly ministry.

Mar Gregorios was already a piles-patient. It became chronic in 1902. Treatments proved futile and slowly His Grace became physically weaker and weaker. At last the blessed soul left the earthly abode on 2nd November 1902. The funeral was conducted at Parumala on Tuesday the 3rd of November 1902 in the presence of thousands of people and hundreds of priests. The many testimonies to the saintly intercession of Mar Gregorios made Parumala Church and the tomb a centre of pilgrimage. In 1947 Mar Gregorios of blessed memory was declared a saint by the then Catholicos of the church, His Holiness Baselius Geevarghese II.



St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Vattasseril



St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Vattasseril, Malankara Metropolitan, was a bright light for the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church that illumined during her dark and tumultuous times and possessed the vision to bring the Church triumphantly from the bonds of foreign oppression. Thirumeni dedicated his entire life to secure the freedom and welfare of the Holy Church. His Grace faced many troubles and obstacles as well as received constant physical and verbal abuse via threats and physical attacks as he courageously led the Church to her independence. He confronted the dangers and obstacles directly responding with vigor, strength and remarkable conviction and confidence in God's justice and plan, which was a product of his continual fasting and prayer. God protected Thirumeni throughout his life whether in Kerala or abroad as he sought the freedom of the Church from foreign powers. His great triumph lay in the ability to unite the entire Church, both the priests and laymen to follow his lead. He was incredibly gifted in many fields, a multifarious genius. He was a spiritual leader, a theological educator, scholar of languages, literature and traditions. He was a dignified, valorous and noble personality with a remarkable commanding power.

St. Dionysius was born to his parents, Joseph Vattasseril of Mallappally and Eliamma Kolathu Kalathil of Kurichy on 31st October 1858. Following his elementary education at C. M. S. Middle School in Mallappally he completed his high school education from C. M. S. High School, Kottayam. In 1876, while still a high school student, he was ordained as a sub deacon by H. H. Moran Mar Pathrose Patriarch.

Dn. Geevarghese studied at the Orthodox Theological

Seminary (Old Seminary or Pazhaya Seminary), Kottayam for four years thereby undergoing his theological training. Dn. Geevarghese soon became a great Syriac scholar under the careful tutelage of St. Gregorios of Parumala, who taught him at Seminary. In 1879 Dn. Geevarghese was ordained as a full deacon and in 1880 he was ordained as a priest by St. Gregorios. By 1880, Fr. Geevarghese had become an authority in the Syriac, Church History, Faith and Doctrine, the Church Fathers, and Theology. In recognition of his incredible expertise in Syriac and theology he was designated as Malankara Malpan. He spent his spare time reading, studying, and thinking which translated to his many renowned writings such as "Doctrines of the Church". He also used his scholarship to edit and publish the order of Church worship to be used by the ordinary faithful for meaningful participation in worship. He was appointed as Principal of M. D. Seminary, Kottayam as he was both a great scholar and administrator. In 1903, he was blessed as a Ramban (monk). He also served as the Manager of Parumala Seminary. In 1908 he was consecrated as H. G. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Metropolitan and served as the Assistant Malankara Metropolitan. The next year he became the Malankara Metropolitan and served and led the Church in that capacity until his departure from this life in 1934 when he and the Church triumphed in establishing the official constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

H. H. Moran Mar Baselios Geevarghese II Catholicos of blessed memory remarked in the speech at the burial of Vattasseril Thirumeni, "When we look at the highest solemn position held by Vattasseril Thirumeni and his deep and firm faith in God, he seemed similar to Moses who led the sons of Abraham from the captive land of Egypt to the promised land of freedom and happiness. There is no doubt about it. Moses had spent his entire life for the freedom of his people but he could not enter the Promised Land. He was only able to see the Promised Land from a distance. Likewise the Moses of the Malankara Church has also watched the freedom of his Church from a distance". Vattasseril Thirumeni was a good orator who was well aware of the importance of the vitality and moral persuasiveness of words when delivering the speeches to the faithful. Spiritually, he was transformed by Christ and bore no scars from sin. His humility and withdrawal from the praise of this world kept many from seeing the incredibly pious and faithful life that Thirumeni lived. In addition to not publicizing his own spiritual advancement he also avoided spiritual hypocrisy and arrogance throughout his life. Prayers and fasting were the pillars that were Vattasseril Thirumeni's spiritual foundation. He faced all the challenges with the power he had gained through his valued spiritual life. In addition to the liturgical hours of prayer, Thirumeni spent much time in private prayers and silent meditations behind closed doors and away from the attention of people. In spite of his busy schedule, he was also able to focus on three to four lessons from the Holy Bible everyday. Despite Vattasseril Thirumeni's literal application of Christ's instruction to pray in private and not for others to see, many recognized that His Grace was a living saint amongst them.

Kuriakose Mar Gregorioso (Pampady Thirumeni):

A Personal Reflection

Rev. Fr. M. K. Kuriakose,



Knowing the limitations of reflecting on a person whom I never met I am making this humble attempt to express my personal feelings. I am hesitant to touch upon the life of a saintly person because it is impossible to fathom the spiritual depth of anybody. In the case of Pampady Thirumeni this attempt is simply a personal witness of how we the Orthodox reflect on lives of saints and help ourselves and others to reach the heights that other saints climbed.

I am indebted to two authors who brought light to my life, first Prof. K. M. Kuriakose and second Mr. K. V. Mammen who through their books allowed me to open my eyes to a saint's life. I heard some anecdotes from different people about His Grace. One day His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan of the American Diocese shared the incident of Pampady Thirumeni's love of animals and the way they responded to him. The incident was that of the female dog that used to come to the Aramana (bishop's residence) everyday. The pregnant dog did not appear for a few days during the confinement and one day it returned to the Aramana. His Grace asked, "where are your babies?" The dog instantly went and brought one of its babies in its mouth and left in front of the bishop. I later searched for books on His Grace and found the above authors.

My reading progressed and my life changed slowly. Let me express three of the major points I learned and that which I am trying to practice in my life.

1. Humility in Real Life:

His Grace has shown utmost humility in all aspects of life. Whether it is towards his teacher a Hindu or to the members of the General Body of the parishes, His Grace dealt with them soberly and gently. His Grace could solve problems in parishes not with arrogance and administrative power but with humble approach. Often people with humility are considered weak. Pampady Thirumeni proved that humility is strength.

2. Faith-filled Courage in Real Life:

His Grace faced life without any fear of consequences because he knew that God is in charge. Even when His Grace did not have much to eat at the Aramana, he gave to the needy from what he had. The incident of giving away a little measure of rice that is kept of dinner to a beggar, shows his courage to give to others ignoring one's own needs. But God provided His Grace with more than what he gave to others. I learned this truth more powerfully from His Grace. True faith is true courage.

3. Respond to Evil with Good:

It is a rare thing to see in the world of today. All problems begin when people use evil means to respond to situations to solve problems. From the Church's court cases to parish administration, there is severe tendency in the minds of people to retort using evil ways. Pampady Thirumeni will not respond any evil with an evil response instead, His Grace would pray over the matter and take the suffering. Goodness cannot be destroyed because goodness is from God. No one can kill God and so is the case with goodness. Temporarily goodness may appear to be losing but those who can suffer to the end will be victorious. Often I have taken a lot of abuse from many people because I did not respond evil with evil. Most of our people are revengeful. I used to have the same mentality but fortunately I got enough strength when I read from Pampady Thirumeni to take a soft approach to problems. Many considered it a weakness. I don't worry about convincing people about it because people do not think spiritually. Most of our people are trained in the worldly demeanour system that is alien to Christ.

I hope many will read from this great saint and convey that simplicity and truthfulness to others as well. I used to read a small portion from His Grace's biography just before night. Often I slept with tears still rolling down from the eyes but when I woke up I had an inexplicable joy and peace to begin the way with hope and trust in God.

I am happy that I could share these feeling with other members of the Indian Orthodox Church about what I learned from a saintly bishop of our Church. Hope God will raise many more bishops of the same kind.