

Venerable Fr. Joseph Vithayathil
Centenarian
'Pithavu' to All



Words of the Centenarian

“I have just entered the hundredth year of my life. Words fail to express my deep sense of gratitude towards all of you. All that I can say is, I thank you one and all from the bottom of my heart. My sufferings and prayers will be offered for your intentions. May Jesus, Mary and Joseph bless you and me now and always. May I request your prayers so that God would bless me with a happy death. Once again, my humble but heartfelt thanks to you all”.

(cf. Birth Centenary of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil and the Golden Jubilee of the Congregation of The Holy Family, Souvenir, 1964)

**Pithavu means father in Malayalam language*



Venerable Fr. Joseph Vithayathil

Centenarian

'Pithavu' to All

(1865-1964)

*“Prayer is a
Clear Vision”*

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil



Message



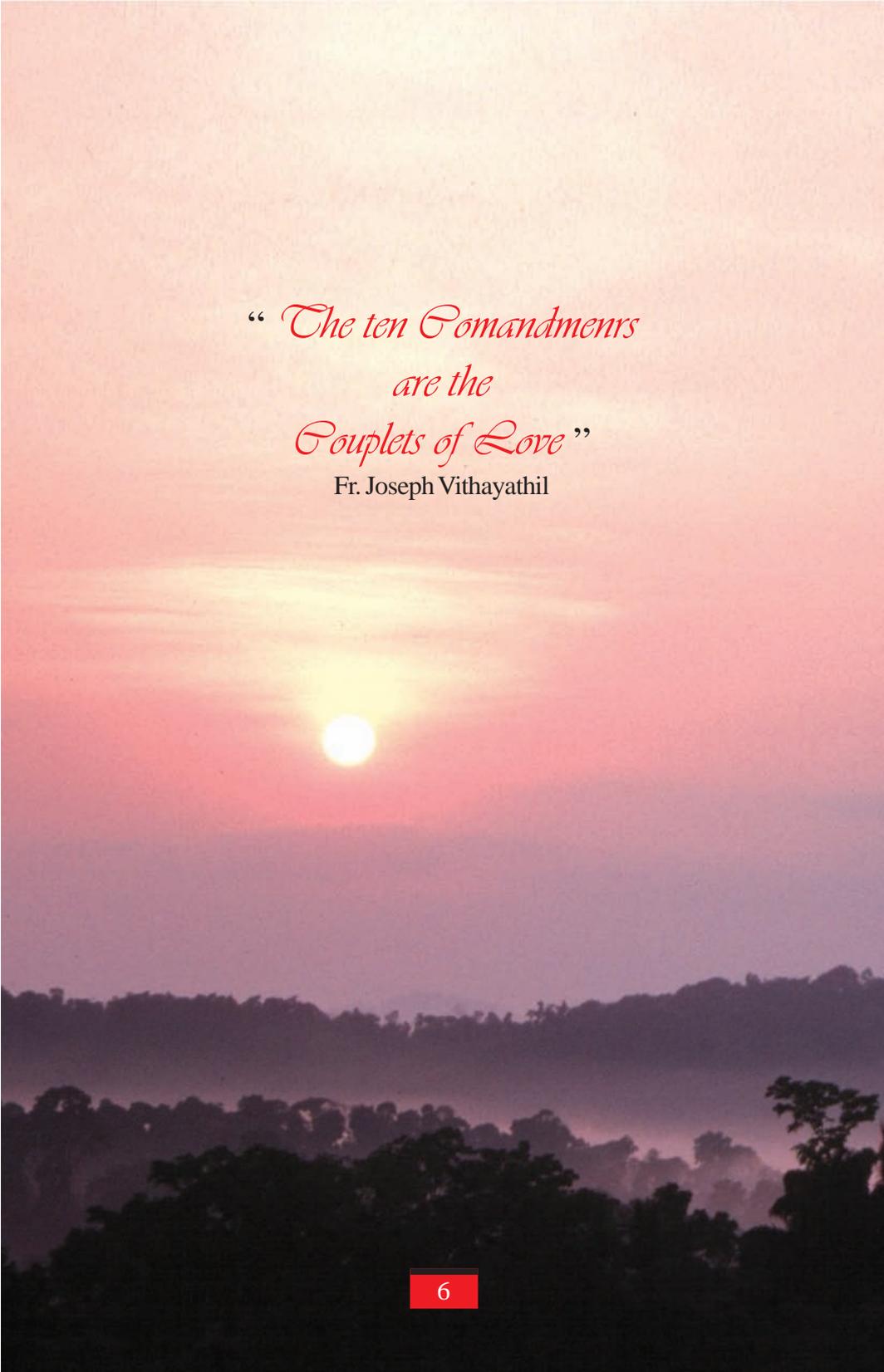
It is with great pride and joy I received the message that S.D. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil has been raised to the status of 'Venerable'. He is a great Man of God and a faithful Son of the Archdiocese of Trichur. He was ordained Priest by Msgr Adolphus Medlycott, the then Administrator of the Diocese. He served as assistant Vicar in St. Antony's Church Ollur and as vicar of eight churches where he proved himself a Good Shepherd of his parishioners and a loving `Father` to all.

According to his contemporaries he is a saint, a man of purity and prudence, wisdom and knowledge, discernment and direction. His deep devotion in celebrating the Holy Mass, faithfulness in imparting the Word of God to the people, his commitment in the confessional and his deep intimacy with the Eucharistic Lord are the qualities which made him a model priest. He was a beloved elderly brother to his co-priests and his residence, a refuge for them. He was a good listener to hear the problems of the people and helped them to solve them in a very peaceful and amicable manner.

I congratulate the Holy Family Sisters for this great gift of God that, S.D.Fr. Joseph Vithayathil their Co-founder and the Spiritual Director of their Foundress, Bl. Mariam Thesia has been raised to the status of Venerable. This is a call to them to become saints.

Mar Andrews Thazhath

Mar Andrews Thazhath
Metropolitan Archbishop of Trichur



“ *The ten Commandments
are the
Couplets of Love* ”

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil

Preface



'I am indeed very happy to raise an Indian, a Diocesan Priest who is also a spiritual director to the status of 'Venerable', so said Pope Francis to Cardinal Angelo Amato SDB, the Prefect for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on the occasion of the raising of S.D. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil to the realm of Venerable, which is a declaration that his holiness is approved by the Holy Church. It is a matter of great joy for all of us that S.D. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil became Venerable on Dec.14, 2015. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil wrote "Priests should become living saints and service minded pastors. This is what the faithful want"(Exh.3). He lived his own words in its fullness!!!.

People called him 'Pithavu' (an endearing term of a loving father in the family) because he cared for them, loved them and he knew their problems, their sufferings and their joys. Loving the poor and downtrodden, and doing justice to the workers became his second nature. So he was very dear to them all.

He is the spiritual director of Bl.Mariam Thresia who guided her to discern the Will of God in her life and to follow the foot prints of Jesus Christ, her only Spouse. And it was he who stood with her to carry out the family apostolate in the midst of calumnies and criticisms. As the Co-founder he helped the Congregation to face its teething troubles, to live the charism in its fullness and to grow and develop both spiritually and materially. We bow our heads before him with gratitude and love.

I humbly ask the intercession of Venerable Fr. Joseph Vithayathil that we, the members of the Congregation may live a saintly life by saying 'Thy Will be Done' always in our lives. I pray to God Almighty to raise him to the status of a Saint in the near future.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sr. Udaya CHF".

Sr. Udaya CHF
Superior General



Title

Venerable Fr. Joseph Vithayathil
Centenarian, *Pithavu* to All

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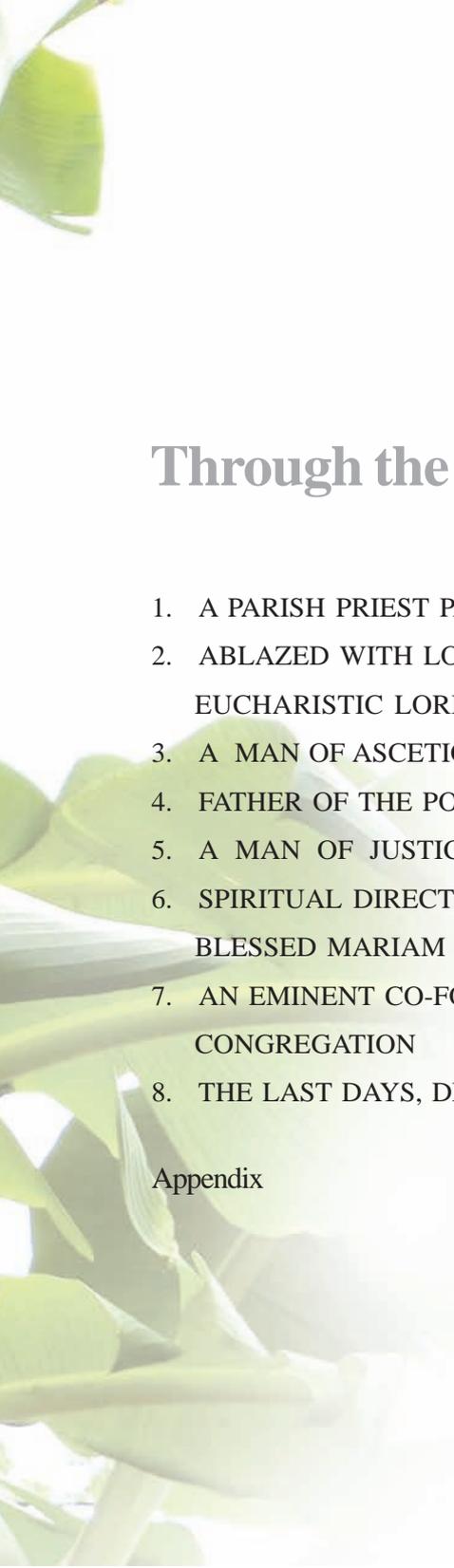
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A Glimpse into the Life of Fr . Joseph Vithayathil

- 1865 Born as second child of John and Anna of Vithayathil family, in Kongorpilly Village, Puthenpally parish, Ernakulam.
- 1881 Seminary training at Elthuruth and Puthenpally.
- 1894 Ordained priest at St Antony's church, Ollur by Bp. Adolf Medleycott, Trichur Diocese and was appointed assistant vicar there itself .
- 1894 Appointed Vicars in eight churches of the Diocese of Trichur where he proved himself as a parish priest par-excellence (1894-1902)
- 1902 Appointed Vicar at Puthenchira Parish. He was chosen as the spiritual director of Mariam Thesia. He guided her in the path of holiness and supported and encouraged the family apostolate ministry she started.
- 1913 Built an 'Enkanthabhavan' (solitary house for prayer) for Mariam Thesia.
- 1914 Witnessed the foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Family including the perpetual commitment of Mariam Thesia. He was appointed the chaplain of the Congregation.
- 1915 Re- constructed St. Mary's Church at Puthenchia, a monument of his architectural mind and caliber.
- 1922 Relieved from the responsibility of the Parish Priest and appointed the chaplain of the Holy Family Convent at Kuzhikkattussery. Lived there for 42 years in the Mother House of the Congregation
- 1926 Witnessed the early death of the Foundress of the Congregation Mother Mariam Thesia on 8 June 1926 at the age of 50 years. From that day onwards Fr. Joseph Vithayathil was at the realm of the Congregation and established many convents and also started schools attached to the convents and orphanages.
- 1942 Having prepared the Sisters to elect the Superior General and Council he handed over the reins of the administration into their hands and supported them in all their needs.
- 1948 This custodian of the Holy Eucharist initiated the 40 Hour Adoration in the chapel of the Mother House, which was an expression of his indescribable intimacy with the Eucharistic Lord and his deep thirst to inculcate the same in the children of God. This continues even today year by year.
- 1957 Entrusted all the Documents about Mother Mariam Thesia to Bishop George Alapatt of Trichur Diocese.
- 1964 Celebrated his Birth Centenary and the Golden Jubilee of the Congregation in the month of April. As he prayed and desired he died in the same date (8 June) of the demise of his spiritual daughter Blessed Mariam Thesia, on June 8 1964. The funeral was on 9th and his body was buried in the same chapel of the Mother House.

1. A PARISH PRIEST PAR EXCELLENCE

Father Joseph Vithayathil was appointed the assistant vicar at St. Antony's church at Ollur, the same church where he had been ordained. There proved himself a zealous priest ablazed with the love of the Eucharistic Lord. The parishioners could see him absorbed in prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the early mornings when they came to the Church for the Holy Mass. His burning love for the Eucharistic Lord continued throughout till he died in his hundredth year.

He was transferred from this parish and was appointed the Vicar of St. Mary's Church at Mukkattukara which belonged to Trichur Diocese and he served as Vicar in seven Parishes of the Diocese before he was appointed the Parish Priest of St. Mary's Church at Puthenchira. Here he served as Parish Priest for twenty years



(1902-1922) and as Chaplain of the Sisters of the Holy Family Congregation for fifty long years (1914-1964) till his death on 8 June 1964.

The written testimonies of the bishops, priests, parishioners, workers, contemporaries and the Sisters of Holy Family Congregation and other Sisters sketch very clearly the true picture of this Holy Parish Priest.

He was a shepherd who had the smell of the sweat and tears of his sheep as Pope Francis says how a true shepherd should be. The parishioners of Kandasankadavu, church depict clearly the wonderful service this young priest did for his parishioners. They speak of the times when there was a great flood in the locality and the people could not come to the church and they were all affected by the epidemic of cholera which swept away many lives of the village. Understanding the disastrous situation of his people he took bold step to go to them through the flood carrying the Holy Eucharist with him. He helped them to make good confession and distributed the Holy Communion to the people and stayed by their side consoling them and giving them courage to trust in the Lord in these difficult moments of their life. Many events like this have been recorded by the parishioners which explain the courage and care this young priest Fr. Joseph Vithayathil manifested for his sheep in different parishes.

Bishop John Menacherry appointed Fr. Joseph Vithayathil the Vicar of St. Mary's Church, Puthenchira in 1902. This Church has played an important role in the history of Kerala Church. This Church was used as the Cathedral of Cranganore Archdiocese, whose Archbishops and Administrators lived there from 1701 till 1777. The remains of four of these Bishops still rest in this church as lasting monuments declaring the ancient history of the church of Puthenchira. Here he served as parish priest for twenty long years (1902-1922) and it is here he proved himself as a parish priest Par Excellence.

A priest is ordained for the people to administer the Sacraments, especially to celebrate the Holy Mass for them in the name of Jesus Christ. They are the ministers of Jesus Christ in whom the people could see the person of Jesus especially when they

administer the Sacraments. This teaching about a Priest is fully realized in the personality and spirituality of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil.

A Zealous Priest at the Altar of the Lord.

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil celebrated the Holy Mass with a firm conviction that he was with Jesus on mount Calvary participating in his passion and death. The people who participated in his Holy Mass deposed that they were participating in the Holy Mass of a Saint. According to Mr. Antony Ambookkan, a daily participant of his Holy Mass people experienced something special in him when he was coming to the altar to celebrate the Holy Mass. There was spiritual vigour in his celebration of Holy Mass. According to Bishop James Pazhayattil he was regular and punctual in the matters of the church. People who participated in his Holy Mass experienced much spiritual fervor. This was the experience of all his parishioners as it was clear from their written testimonies and depositions.

Divine Preacher of the Word of God

Fr. Vithayathil was a man of divine wisdom which was very clear from his collection of spiritual books. His vast knowledge of spiritual matters and deep reflection on the Word of God raised him to the realm of a divine preacher. According to Mgr. Joseph Kavalakkatt he prepared well before he imparted the Word of God. He taught the principles of theology to them and the parishioners said though his sermons became very long in his old age still people thronged to the churches of Puthenchira and Kuzhikkattussery to listen to his sermons which helped them to renew their lives.

A Merciful Father in the Confessional.

A century ago this “Maria Viyani” of Kerala church fulfilled the dreams and exhortations of present Pope Francis by celebrating the Mercy of God Almighty in the confessional. In his Apostolic Letter, “Rich in Mercy” Pope Francis wrote that all confessions should be a celebration of the loving embrace of ever loving and merciful God and the penitent”. This was very true of this holy priest. He was a man of reconciliation between God and man. He tried his best to bring people back to God and faith. He was ready to do any sacrifice for the conversion of sinners. He was dedicated to this Sacrament and was ever ready to spend time to this ministry.

Many of the priests of the Diocese chose him as their confessor not because of his age but because of his holiness. According to some witnesses he would sit in the confessional even at midnight if somebody came to make confession with him. Such was his commitment in administering the sacrament of reconciliation which imparted the feeling of love and mercy of the Heavenly Father.

An Epitome of Obedience

His letters and applications to the Bishops, his Mass register and seven volumes of his account books are the proofs of the obedience of this holy parish priest from the day of his ordination in 1894 till his death in 1964. A total of the sixty eight petitions he wrote to Bishop John Menacherry (4), to Bishop Francis Vazhapilly (15), to Bishop George Alapatt (44), to Mgr. Mathew Edakulathur (3) and 2 promissory notes to Fr. Abraham Palathingal, the procurator of the Diocese speak volumes about the submissiveness and filial love he expressed towards his ecclesiastical authorities. The virtue of humility, the excellent virtue of this holy priest is expressed very clearly in the terms he used at the end of his petitions, such as 'humble son', 'humble servant', 'with humility', 'humbleness', and 'meekness'. One of his biographers wrote that when Bishop George Alapatt administered the last sacrament to him at the age of 99 he requested the Bishop to grant him exemption from obligatory prayers, and the Bishop blessed him with the words "granted". This was his obedience to the church statutes. Just after a week, Fr. Joseph Vithayathil said good bye to this world and flew to the bosom of the Heavenly Father. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil lived faithfully and totally the traits of a parish priest all through out the seventy years of his priesthood and gained the good name from his parishioners, co-priests, Sisters and from all- "A Parish Priest Par Excellence".

***“Priests should become living saints
and service minded pastors.
This is what the faithful want”***

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil



2. ABLAZED WITH LOVE FOR EUCHARISTIC LORD

The words of his exhortation on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee day is an excellent proof of his burning love for the Eucharistic Lord. This venerable priest spoke with such a deep love for the Lord,

“ A great event- yes, a wonderful act, an extraordinary gift from God has been given here. Yes, the heaven itself is here in our midst. Leaving heaven, the abode of prosperity, with his heavenly hosts the Eucharistic Lord has come to this poor convent,

to this remote village, to this humble dwelling and amidst these sinners in order to be with us. He accepts our cordial reception with joy. He desires our hospitality. We should welcome, honour and adore this divine guest, the Eucharistic Lord. ... Longing for our visits, Jesus, the King of Kings, dwells in this poor house, in this small room in the form of a host concealing his royalty, splendour, power and his own very Being The Lord of heaven, the infinite love dwells here longing for the love of his creatures. Oh! What a marvel!.”(Exh.1)

These words with burning love for the Eucharistic Lord express well his deep reverence and very intimate relationship with the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He sees in the Holy Eucharist the living Christ, the very person of Christ living amidst us who mingles with us and talks to us and does everything for us. For him Lord Jesus is a father, mother, friend, colleague, brother and all to whom he can open his heart, mind and soul to be loved, strengthened, consoled, cared, corrected, taught and embraced with an everlasting love. This is the reason why Fr. Joseph Vithayathil spared his best time – the cool early morning - for his Lord. His contemporaries without any difference, young and old, learned or illiterate, students and teachers, Bishops, priests and Sisters say with one voice that Fr. Joseph Vithayathil is the custodian of Blessed Sacrament.

Almost all the parishioners have reported the scene of Fr. Vithayathil going to the convent chapel in the early morning with a lantern in his hand to pay his first visit to his loving Master and Lord.

Fr. Vithayathil with deep insight and divine foresight initiated forty hour adoration in the chapel of the Mother House of the Congregation at a time when perpetual adoration and forty hour adoration were rare. Here the people crowded to adore the Lord, to praise him and seek his blessings for their various needs..This deep love and reverence to the Eucharistic Lord which he instilled in the hearts of the people years ago is still alive in the parishioners generation after generation. Some contemporaries of his reported that his example was a source of inspiration for them to start perpetual adoration in their institutions.

According to the Sisters, even at the ripe old age of ninety he used to kneel down on every first Friday for the holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament and take part in the adoration. He insisted on having the altar decorated beautifully with fresh flowers and to light all the candles to adore their Master and Lord. The way he knelt in front of the Blessed Sacrament made one feel that he was pouring out all his heart's feelings to his best friend and the lord of his life. His serenity and calmness, his boldness and readiness to do the right things at the right time, his prudence and fortitude, self composed and self sacrificing life is a manifestation of his strong conviction that every good he possessed came from the Holy Eucharist.

Sisters and people have hundreds of experiences to narrate about favours which they have received from his deep intimacy with the Eucharistic Lord. All these experiences express quite well that Fr. Joseph Vithayathil was a man of Holy Eucharist.

***“The Lord accepts our
cordial reception with joy.
He desires our hospitality.
We should welcome, honour, and adore
this Divine Guest, the Eucharistic Lord”***

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil



3. A MAN OF ASCETICISM

The lives of desert Fathers and Saints are a clear proof that holiness takes deep and strong roots only in the soil of asceticism. The life of Indian sages is deep rooted in asceticism. They live in forests on water and green leaves and seldom speak to people but are always enveloped by the Divine.

According to his contemporaries Fr. Joseph Vithayathil always lived a life of prayer and penance. This parish priest, who contemplated God day and night and who spent his time with the Eucharistic Lord followed the life of his master by practising penance and lived as an ascetic of great purity of mind without the least blemish of sin. It was his ascetical exercises which moulded in him a man of purity and sanctity, a man of wisdom and knowledge.

His life of asceticism and penance became his life style when he was appointed by God to be the spiritual director of Blessed Mariam Thresia. Since he knew it was not easy to direct Mariam Thresia who had severe temptations from the devils as well as extraordinary experiences from God, Blessed Mother Mary, Holy Family, Saints and Angels, he depended solely on prayer and penance. The sharp calumnies and ridicules from the people and misunderstandings and criticism from the priests and the authorities put him to acid test but he found this life of penance and renunciation a source of unfailing help in every such trial.

The list of penance that he has given to the junior Sisters is an excellent example of how he trained the Sisters to lead a life of penance for the atonement of one's sins and for the sins of the whole world. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil exhorted the Sisters, "For a perishable body weighs down the soul and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind" (Wisdom 9/15). Having been well aware of the penitential life which Mariam Theresia, foundress of the Congregation led, he gave good training to the Sisters from the beginning onwards. Sr. Mary Salome one of the junior Sisters who received training from him has kept the list of the penance he has given to her batch of junior Sisters between the years 1934 - 1938. This list and the words of his contemporaries show his discipline of life and his interest in the spiritual life of his daughters in the Congregation.

He reflected well the words of St John where he says, "Disordered bodily desires, disordered desires of the eyes, pride in possession is not from the Father but from the world" (1Jn.2/16). And he knew well that the worldly pleasures will surely ruin the spirituality of the people so he trained himself and others to have mastery on them so that they may grow in the Spirit of the Lord. According to Fr. Antony Tharakan, his confessor Fr. Vithayathil used to practise different ways of atoning for his sins, through mortification of all kinds, fasting and abstinence during advent and lent. All this he did for the sole purpose of controlling his body and mind with prayer and penance.

These ascetical practices of this elderly holy priest were acclaimed by the words of Mar Mathew Pothanamuzhy, the first Bishop of Kothamanglam Eparchy during the funeral oration of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil on June 8, 1964. He said, though a secular priest he led the life of a true religious. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil reached to the summit of holiness through prayer, penance and asceticism.

***“Life in the world is not everlasting.
We should dedicate ourselves
for Eternal Life”***

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil

4. FATHER OF THE POOR AND NEEDY

The day Joseph Vithayathil was anointed as a priest he took a firm decision to follow Jesus the poor in every dimension of his life which he faithfully followed till his death at the age of 100(one month less). This is one of the secrets of his holiness. Since he followed his Master, Jesus the poor whole heartedly, he could always encounter Jesus in the poor and needy without any difference of caste colour and creed. His merciful heart burned with love for the poor families around especially to the families of the downtrodden and outcastes.

According to Miss Kalikutty, a Harijan he was interested in the poor people. He did not allow them to work in the rain during the months of October and July (heavy rainy seasons in kerala). He used to send rice and curry for them to their homes, when they were struggling during the monsoon. He would give generously to those who sought his help. Also people said that he kept two wooden cots in his presbytery in order to give to the poor people when they were bedridden or dying. This was his compassionate love for the poor.

Another expression of his love towards the poor is very much clear in the way he distributed land for the poor and handed over the title-deed in their hands which nobody could imagine in those days. Also he took initiative to construct a road in the village so that travelling and transportation of things may be easy for the



people. People considered him as a man who built up the society in such a way that both rich and poor lived happily with due dignity. The schools he started were for the uplift of women folk and the poor in the society. He was always keen to give education to the unprivileged of the society. According to Mother Anasthasia who worked in his school as high school teacher he used to give fee concession to the poor students and also provided food and clothes for them. Sharing everything he had with others was a second nature to him. His workers used to describe his mercy that father fulfilled all their needs, once he came to know them. The compassionate love which filled his heart from his Master, Jesus the poor, flowed to the poor and gave him the good name ‘Father of the poor’.

“God called us to Love others”

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil





5. A MAN OF JUSTICE

The justice of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil is different from the justice of the world because his justice is mixed with compassion of Jesus which raised his justice to the realm of holiness. Following the good example of his patron saint St. Joseph he also lived a life of justice with its full Gospel meaning.

His justice towards God is well expressed in his love for prayer. Fr. Antony Irimpen reported this truth of his life very beautifully. According to him Fr. Joseph Vithayathil had the conviction that God deserves our love and he always gave Him due reverence and obedience. He gave God the first place in his life in an exceptional manner, His faithfulness in carrying out all his spiritual exercises were the expressions of his life of justice towards God who called him to be his priest..

Justice towards God which Fr. Vithayathil fulfilled in his life clearly reflected in his dealings with his fellow brethren. It was a time when inequality and injustice were the order of the day. The poor and the low caste, the laborers and workers were treated by the rich very cruelly not being given the proper wages for their hard work .These cruelties suffered by the poor workers pained his heart and he showed such a fatherly care and concern towards the laboring class. To him liberty, equality and fraternity were not



slogans to be shouted at the streets, but to be practised in one's dealings with others.

The grateful words of the workers who received such fatherly love from him is enough to explain the life of justice of this holy man of God. According to Naduthiry a low caste man, who worked as his bullock-cart driver, Thamban (master) gives everything they need in their lives. Many witnesses reported that he used to give workers more wages than what was due to them. Besides they were given food also.

To the workers who came from different places and who were allowed to stay in the convent compound, he donated ten or fifteen cents of land and helped them financially to build their houses. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil protected the rights of the individuals and respected each person. This is what echoed in the words of all the workers who worked for him and in the words of the people who knew his life of justice in their lives.

***“We should find dignity in doing
work for our existence.
Do not consider labourers low.
We are purified when we work”***

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil

6. SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR OF BLESSED MARIAM THRESIA

Blessed Mariam Thresia, the chosen one of God was puzzled and disturbed between the mystical experiences and the fierce attack of the devils. This innocent soul prayed to God Almighty who knew her more than anybody to give her a spiritual director who would direct her towards God in the midst of these experiences. God heard her prayer and answered her in the person of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil..

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil was chosen by God to direct Mariam Thresia in her pursuit of holiness. From the day he accepted her as his spiritual daughter in 1902 till her death in 1926 he was purified in the crucible of sufferings and criticisms. Since he was strong in his spirituality and pure in his personality, all the arrows that were aimed at him did not touch him but made him more and more powerful in the Holy Spirit. All these fiery criticisms came to an end when they both died on the same date: Bl. Mariam Thresia on June 8, 1926 and Venerable Fr. Joseph Vithayathil on June 8, 1964. According to late Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil there was something extraordinary in this and it shows that God has approved the sanctity of their lives. This is the opinion of all the witnesses in the Diocesan Inquiry.

Fr. Vithayathil was a prudent spiritual director because he was filled with the Wisdom of God through his deep and intimate relationship with God. By the power of the Holy Spirit he could discern the interventions of God in her life and the tricks that the devil played to seduce her to him. But empowered by the Holy Spirit Fr. Vithayathil induced strength in her so that she could defeat the devils in all temptations against, faith, hope and chastity and won the victory over them. He stood firmly at her side when she was misunderstood by the authorities, family members and others. He was hundred percent prudent in directing Mariam Thresia in the way of holiness. All the witnesses are of the same opinion.

The family apostolate started by Mariam Thresia was ridiculed by many and she was criticized and mocked at by several but Fr. Vithayathil firmly stood by her. It was his support and encouragement that helped Thresia and her companions to visit the sick and suffering, dying and desperate, broken and helpless people in their houses. They went forward boldly and courageously breaking the prevailing customs and conventions of the society and followed the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Thresia was strongly committed to the family ministry because she knew her spiritual father was guiding her along the path of God Almighty.

One day Blessed Mother Mary told Fr. Vithayathil, “ See the good things which happen in the families through the family visit of Thresia and her companions”(Diary, Fr. Joseph Vithayathil, p.78). Again one day when Mariam Thresia did not visit a dying person because of the fear and scolding from her father and brothers, Blessed Mary told Fr. Vithayathil to admonish her strongly for not going to help that person and Fr. Vithayathil corrected Mariam Thresia and instructed her that she need not be afraid



when she had to fulfill the Will of God (cf. Diary p.92.) Thus he helped Mariam Thresia to start a new ministry in the Church — Family Apostolate.

As a holy spiritual director Fr. Joseph Vithayathil succeeded in his God-given mission to lead a holy soul in her pursuit of holiness discerning the will of God for her. It was he who built the 'Ekanthabhavan' (house of solitude) for her which was the first convent of the Congregation. And he guided, directed and supported Mariam Thresia in the foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Family and thus to fulfill the Will of God in her life. He was there to witness her perpetual commitment and the foundation of the Congregation in 1914. Since Bishop John Menacherry appointed him as the chaplain of the Congregation he co-operated fully with Mother Mariam Thresia for the growth of the new Congregation. God allowed this holy spiritual director to witness the death of the foundress, his spiritual daughter, in 1926. And from that day on words he became the Mother and Father for the Congregation till his death in 1964.

It was the plan of God to use Fr Vithayathil as his instrument to reveal to the world the virtuous life of Bl. Mariam Thresia. According to the Will of God and by the order of Bishop John Menacherry, the then bishop of the Diocese of Trichur, Fr Vithayathil wrote the history of Mariam Thresia (Diary) in which he noted down every day all the experiences that Mariam Thresia shared with him and everything he himself witnessed in her life. On the basis of this Diary he himself recorded her Biography also and kept intact all the 55 letters she wrote to him and her Autobiography which he made her to write. He entrusted all these documents to Bishop George Alappatt in 1957 the then Bishop of Trichur Diocese with a note that all these documents might be opened only after his death. These are the primary sources which shed light on the life of Mother Mariam Thresia: the spirituality, personality, mystical experiences, diabolical attacks, her family apostolate and the foundation of the Congregation.

“The rainbow will appear on the sky when there are dark clouds.” You should live with a challenge receiving the hours of suffering as hours of joy”

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil

7. AN EMINENT CO-FOUNDER OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY FAMILY

A century old Congregation of the Holy Family bow her head in front of the fond memories of her foster father, Venerable Fr. Joseph Vithayathil. It is true that people say, what St. Joseph was for the Holy Family of Nazareth, so was Fr. Joseph Vithayathil for the Congregation of the Holy Family. After the death of the foundress, Mother Mariam Thresia(1926), it was Fr. Vithayathil who led the Congregation through its teething difficulties till 1942 when the General Council was formed for the first time.

These truths were well expressed by the then Superior General, Mother Josephine on the occasion of the Birthday Centenary of Fr Joseph Vithayathil and the Golden Jubilee of the Congregation in 1964. According to Mother behind all the great achievements of the Congregation all could see his life of perseverance and above all his deep devotion and invincible faith in God. His life was similar to the life of St. Joseph, the head of the Holy Family of Nazareth. ... These words of Mother Josephine still echo in the words of all the witnesses of the Diocesan Inquiry



Since Fr. Vithayathil knew the foundress for a long span of twenty four years he knew very clearly the spirituality, personality, vision and mission of Mother Mariam Thresia. As a man of holiness and prudence he trained the Sisters in the same spirit of the foundress and inculcated in them the spirit of family apostolate. His fidelity to the foundress and founding charism is the greatest treasure that he handed over to the Congregation generations after generations. It was Fr. Vithayathil who took initiative to form the General Council in 1942 and he handed over the administration of the Congregation in their hands. And in every need he stood by them and encouraged them to lead the Congregation in the spirit and charism of the foundress till his death in 1964. This proves the greatness of his personality.

Sisters have volumes to say about the care he has given to the material, spiritual and temporal growth of the Congregation. He spent all his life and money for the growth of the Congregation and he did not have a bank account when he died.

According to Mgr. Sebastian Chereath, the whole priestly life of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil was so much interwoven with the life, trials, and prosperity of the Congregation, that at every step in its march towards its goal, in every obstacle it has tided over and in every success it has attained, one could see the heroic virtues of this man of God. In all this one could exclaim in truth that Fr. Vithayathil is the Holy Family Congregation and the Congregation of the Holy Family is Fr. Vithayathil” (cf. Golden Jubilee Souvenir,).

***“Freedom is love.
To live with freedom means
to live loving”***

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil

8. THE LAST DAYS, DEATH AND FUNERAL

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil was sick every now and then from 1957 onwards, so doctors advised him to take rest but this good soldier of Lord Jesus Christ worked day and night for his people and for the growth of the Congregation. He went up and down in search of sinners to bring them back to the love of Heavenly Father. His love for the poor, interest in visiting the families and his concern in the material and spiritual welfare of the members did not allow him to take rest. His poor health deteriorated day by day.

After the grand celebration of his Birth Centenary in April 1964, on May 29 he was found very sick and he almost lost his power of speech. When the news of his sickness spread the people of all walks crowded around him and they all wanted to see their 'Pithavu', who loved and cared for them. In the Diocesan Inquiry almost all the witnesses have reported the way he faced the sickness with serenity and calmness. According to Mr. Antony Ambookan Fr. Vithayathil was ready to accept death happily at any time. He had no anxiety about death. As he lay dying one could see an extraordinary grace and spirit radiating from his face.

This respected priest of the Diocese received the last sacrament from the hands of Bishop George Alappat, the then Bishop of Trichur Diocese and waited calmly and joyfully for the Lord to come and receive him. On 8 June amidst the prayers of several priests, Sisters and parishioners his soul flew to the bosom of God Almighty at 6.30.am. His desire to die on the same date of the death of his spiritual daughter, Blessed Mariam Thresia (8 June 1926) which he revealed to Justice Joseph Vithayathil, was granted by God - he died on 8 June, 1964.



As everybody expected the funeral function was grand and the presence of Cardinal Joseph Parekkatil from Ernakulam Archdiocese, Bishop Mathew Pothanammuzhy from Kothamangalam Diocese, 150 priests from different Dioceses, and hundreds of religious Sisters from different congregations and the large crowd of his parishioners and the VIPs from all walks of life made it fitting for a holy priest like him..

As requested by the parishioners his body was taken to Puthenchira Parish, where he was parish priest for long twenty years. Then the body was brought in a big and solemn procession to the Mother House of the Congregation at Kuzhikkattsserry. Here the body of this Holy Priest was respectfully buried at the foot of the altar of the Holy Family Convent Chapel. Bishop George Alapatt was the main celebrant of the function and after the function he told me personally , said Archbishop George Panikulam, “His tomb and his records must be specially kept. They may be needed later. His tomb will have to be opened”.(positio no.1221)

The funeral function and paper reports of that day expressed the high appreciation and reputation this old priest of the Lord gained through his saintly life in this world.

**“I have worn a garland of jasmine to
welcome the bridegroom.
The wrinkles on my face are the powder
and sandal paste.”**

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil

Chapel of the Mother House

This is the chapel of the Mother House of the Congregation of the Holy Family. It is here the tomb of Venerable Fr. Joseph Vithayathil is situated spreading the fragrance of God's love and Mercy to the people





◀ **Tower of Sacred Heart**

This tower of Sacred Heart in the Mother House has been installed as a memorial of the Sacerdotal Silver Jubilee of Fr. Joseph Vithayathil. It stands as a proof of his intense love for the Sacred Heart. This same love and mercy he imbibed from Sacred Heart,

he lavishly showered to the poor and needy. It is Fr. Vithayathil who instilled the devotion to Sacred Heart in the hearts of his parishioners.



Devotion to St. Joseph and Belfrey ▶

Fr. Joseph Vithayathil had a special love and devotion to St. Joseph his patron saint and the father of the Holy Family of Nazareth. In his homilies and conferences he often exhorted the people to follow the good example of St. Joseph who sacrificed himself for the welfare of Jesus and Mary, and thus tried to foster a peaceful family life. The personality traits of St. Joseph such as silence and justice influenced his life and he is known as a man of deep silence and justice. He inculcated the devotion to St. Joseph in the people of his parishes.

Belfrey

It is Fr. Joseph Vithayathil who built this belfrey with farsightedness. To the people who criticized him for the construction of this tall belfrey he answered that a day will come when they have to use this belfrey to proclaim a great good news to all the people of this place. His prophetic words came true when the bell rang from this belfrey to acclaim the news that Mother Mariam Thresia, the daughter of this soil, was declared “ Blessed “ on 9 April 2000.

It is a fact of immense rejoicing that a second time it rings to proclaim once again to the world that the humble servant of God

Fr. Joseph Vithathayathil has attained the glory of the ‘ Venerable’ on 14 December 2015!!!.

Monstrance

This is the monstrance used by Fr. Joseph Vithayathil when he initiated the Forty Hour Adoration in the Chapel of the Mother House of the Congregation in 1948. The same monstrance is used today in the Perpetual Adoration Chapel of the Mother House where the Eucharistic Lord is being adored and glorified continuously for hours daily.

Chalice and Paten

This is the chalice and the paten used by this holy priest, Fr. Joseph Vithayathil for the long years of his blessed priesthood and kept devotionally in his Museum in the Mother House at KuzhikkattUsserry. Holy Mass being the focal point of his life, he instilled love and devotion for the Holy Eucharist in his parishioners for the seventy long years of his priesthood.



Appendix

Rev. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil (1865-1964) is a priest of the Diocese of Trichur, Kerala, India. During his life time his contemporaries including bishops, priests, Sisters of various congregations and Holy Family Sisters to whom he was the co-founder found in him a saintly priest, a prudent spiritual director and a beloved Father. His tomb which exists in the chapel of the Mother House of the Congregation, at Kuzhikkattussery, Diocese of Irinjalakuda, Kerala State stands a source of consolation and peace to all his devotees..

The processes of canonization was started in 2003 by Bishop James Pazhayattil, the then Bishop of Irinjalakuda . Fr. Joseph Vithayathil became ‘ Servant of God‘ in 2004. In the Diocesan phase Rev. Fr. George Nedungatt SJ was the Postulator and when he retired Rev Fr. Benedict Vadakkekara OFM(cap) was appointed as the Postulator for the Roman Phase. Sr. Rosemine Mathew, CHF the Collaborator, guided by the Postulator wrote the ‘*Positio*’ of the heroic virtues of this priest of God under the direction of the Relator Rev. Fr. Joseph Kijas OFM (conv). The ‘*Positio*’ was submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 2013.

The ‘*Positio*’ was unanimously approved by the Theologians (2014) and the Cardinals (2015). Thus by the grace of God Almighty His Holiness Pope Francis raised this holy priest to the status of ‘Venerable’ on December 14, 2015.

Pope approves decrees for 17 on path to sainthood

2015-12-15 Vatican Radio



(Vatican Radio) On Monday, 14 December 2015, Pope Francis received Cardinal Angelo Amato, SDB, Prefect for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in a private audience. In the course of the audience, the Holy Father authorized the Congregation to promulgate decrees regarding:

No.7. *The heroic virtues of the Servant of God Joseph Vithayathil, Diocesan Priest, Co founder of the Congregation of Sisters of the Holy Family; born in Puthenpally, India, on 23 July 1865, died at Kuzhikkattussery, India, 8 June 1964.*
