

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**BEATIFICATION OF FATHER KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
AND SISTER ALFONSA MUTTATHUPANDATHU**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

***Nahru Stadium of Kottayam
Saturday, 8 February 1986***

"I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth".

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. These are the words of Jesus of Nazareth, and he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit when he uttered them. How full of meaning they are for us today!

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to the little ones" .

What things has the Lord hidden? What mysteries has he revealed? Truly the deepest ones, the mysteries of his own divine life, those known here on earth only by him, only by Christ himself. For he says: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" .

And behold, the Son does reveal these things. At the same time he reveals the Father. The Father is revealed through the Son. And to whom does the Son reveal these things? He reveals them to those whom he chooses: "for such was your gracious will", Jesus tells the Father. He reveals these things to the little ones.

2. Today, in this Sacred Liturgy, we wish to unite ourselves in a special way with Christ the Lord. Together with him we wish to bless the Father, for the particular love which he has shown to a son and daughter of the Church in India. We praise the Father for his countless blessings during the two thousand years that the Church has existed on Indian soil. With Christ we glorify the Father for the love that he has shown to the little ones of Kerala and all India.

The Church throughout the world rejoices with the Church in India as Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Sister Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception are raised to the ranks of the Blessed in the great Communion of Saints. This man and this woman, both members of the Syro-Malabar Church here in Kerala, advanced to great heights of holiness through their wholehearted co-operation with the grace of God. Each possessed an ardent love of God, yet

each followed a distinct spiritual path.

3. Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born here in Kerala, and for nearly all of his sixty-five years of earthly life he laboured generously for the renewal and enrichment of the Christian life. His deep love for Christ filled him with apostolic zeal and made him especially careful to promote the unity of the Church. With great generosity he collaborated with others, especially brother priests and religious, in the work of salvation.

In co-operation with Fathers Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, Father Kuriakose founded an Indian religious congregation for men, now known as the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. Later, with the help of an Italian missionary, Father Leopold Beccaro, he started an Indian religious congregation for women, the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. These congregations grew and flourished, and religious vocations became better understood and appreciated. Through the common efforts of the members of new religious families, his hopes and works were multiplied many times over.

Father Kuriakose's life, and the lives of these new religious, were dedicated to the service of the Syro-Malabar Church. Under his leadership or inspiration, a good number of apostolic initiatives were undertaken: the establishment of seminaries for the education and formation of the clergy, the introduction of annual retreats, a publishing house for Catholic works, a house to care for the destitute and dying, schools for general education and programmes for the training of catechumens. He contributed to the Syro-Malabar liturgy and spread devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family. In particular, he dedicated himself to encouraging and counselling Christian families, convinced as he was of the fundamental role of the family in the life of society and the Church.

But no apostolic cause was dearer to the heart of this great man of faith than that of the unity and harmony within the Church. It was as if he had always before his mind the prayer of Jesus, on the night before his Sacrifice on the Cross: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" . Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to maintain unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church. His success in this, as in all his many undertakings, was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer which characterised his daily life, his close communion with Christ and his love for the Church as the visible Body of Christ on earth.

4. Sister Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception, born a century after Father Kuriakose Elias, would gladly have served the Lord with similar apostolic projects. And indeed, she possessed a personal devotion to Father Kuriakose from early in her religious life. But the path to holiness for Sister Alphonsa was clearly a different one. It was the way of the Cross, the way of sickness and suffering.

Already at a very young age, Sister Alphonsa desired to serve the Lord as a religious, but it was not without enduring trials that she was finally able to pursue this goal. When it became possible, she joined the Franciscan Clarist Congregation. Throughout her life, which was a brief thirty-six years, she continually gave thanks to God for the joy and privilege of her

religious vocation, for the grace of her vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

From early in her life, Sister Alphonsa experienced great suffering. With the passing of the years, the heavenly Father gave her an ever fuller share in the Passion of his beloved Son. We recall how she experienced not only physical pain of great intensity, but also the spiritual suffering of being misunderstood and misjudged by others. But she constantly accepted all her sufferings with serenity and trust in God, being firmly convinced that they would purify her motives, help her to overcome all selfishness, and unite her more closely with her beloved divine Spouse. She wrote to her spiritual director: "Dear Father, as my good Lord Jesus loves me so very much, I sincerely desire to remain on this sick bed and suffer not only this, but anything else besides, even to the end of the world. I feel now that God has intended my life to be an oblation, a sacrifice of suffering" (20 November 1944). She came to love suffering because she loved the suffering Christ. She learned to love the Cross through her love of the crucified Lord.

Sister Alphonsa knew that by her sufferings she shared in the Church's apostolate; she found joy in them by offering them all to Christ. In this way, she seemed to have made her own the words of Saint Paul: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" . She was endowed by God with an affectionate and happy disposition, with the ability to take delight in ordinary and simple things. The weight of human suffering, even the misunderstanding or jealousy of others, could not extinguish the joy of the Lord which filled her heart. In a letter written shortly before she died, at time of intense physical and mental suffering, she said: "I have given myself up completely to Jesus. Let him please himself in his dealings with me. My only desire in this world is to suffer for love of God and to rejoice in doing it" (February 1946).

5. Both Father Kuriakose and Sister Alphonsa bear witness to the beauty and greatness of the religious vocation. And I would like to take this occasion to direct my thoughts particularly to the men and women religious who are present here and to all the religious in India.

Every one who has been baptised into Christ has discovered a pearl of "great value" and a "treasure" worth all that one has in life . For all the baptised share in the very life of the Blessed Trinity and are called to be "light" and "salt" for the world . But within the great family of the Church, God our Father calls some of you to follow Christ still more closely and to dedicate your lives with a special consecration through the profession of chastity, poverty and obedience. You, the religious of the Church, bear public witness to the Gospel and to the primacy of the love of God. By a permanent commitment and lifelong fidelity to your vows, you seek to grow in union with Christ and to contribute in a unique way to the life and mission of the Church. And what a vital contribution is yours!

In a rich variety of forms, you live to the full your evangelical consecration. Some of you have heard the Lord's personal call to the contemplative life where, though hidden from the world, you offer your lives and prayers for the sake of all humanity. Others have been called to an active apostolic life, where you serve in teaching, health care, parochial work, retreats,

works of charity and many forms of pastoral activity.

No matter how you serve, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, never doubt the value of your consecrated life. Whether your service resembles the great apostolic endeavours of Father Kuriakose, or takes the form of hidden suffering like Sister Alphonsa, whatever it may be, it is important in the life of the Church. Remember the words of Saint Paul, in today's second reading, "we know that in everything God works for good" . Even when you feel discouraged or weighed down by personal failures or sin, trust even more in the love of God for you. Turn to him for mercy, forgiveness and love. For as Saint Paul says in the same reading: "the Lord helps us in our weakness" . It is in him that we End our strength, our courage and our joy.

Without the vital contribution of men and women religious, the charity of the Church would be lessened, her fruitfulness would be diminished. Thus, I pray that the beatification of these two exemplary religious of India will give you renewed zeal for your precious vocation. In your own love for Christ may you be inspired by their fervour. And like them, may you keep the simplicity of the "little ones" of the Gospel. Be pure of heart and filled with compassion. Be always eager to please the Lord. For it is to the little ones that the mysteries of God are revealed .

6. And now, I wish to greet all who have come to Kottayam for this celebration. I greet my brother bishops and all the clergy and faithful who have come from the other dioceses of Kerala. With respect and esteem I thank all the other fellow Christians as well as our Hindu and Muslim brethren and the followers of other religions who honour me today by being here. I am grateful for the presence of the civil authorities and I invoke upon all the people the blessings of joy and peace.

Truly extraordinary is this day in the history of the Church and Christianity on Indian soil. It is important, too, in the history of the pastoral ministry of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Saint Peter. It is the first time that he has had the joy or raising to the glory of the altars a son and a daughter of the Church in India, in their native land.

Therefore we sing together with the Psalmist in today's Liturgy. Together we give thanks:

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord
to make music to your name, O Most High;
Your deeds, O Lord, have made me glad;
for the work of your hands I shout with joy.
O Lord, how great are your works!" .

Truly great are the works of God! And the greatest work of God on earth is man. The glory of God is man fully alive with the life of God. The glory of God is the holiness of each person and of the whole Church.

Holiness is the work of divine grace. When we proclaim it solemnly in the midst of the People of God in this land, we give glory to the Most High. In the words of Saint Augustine

we praise God, saying: "In crowning merits, you are crowning your own gifts".

7. Truly extraordinary is this day! The Prophet Isaiah says: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" .

Today it is given to us to penetrate more deeply into these divine thoughts. It is given to us to know better the divine ways.

And behold, what ways! What ways!

The Apostle writes: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" .

These are the divine thoughts.

These are the divine ways.

Today it is given to us to see how these thoughts are accomplished in Blessed Kuriakose Elias and Blessed Sister Alphonsa. Today we see how these ways of God lead through their hearts, through their earthly pilgrimages, to the glory of the altars.

8. "Father, it is true", Jesus says, "you have graciously willed it so" .

And he continues: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" .

Jesus speaks in this way. And he speaks to everyone. We are called to holiness. We are all called to communion with him: with his Heart, with his Cross, with his glory.

Jesus speaks in this way. And together with Jesus so do Blessed Kuriakose and Blessed Alphonsa. Their hearts are united with the Heart of the Divine Redeemer and are filled with love for all the sons and daughters of your blessed land. Amen.