

R. I. P.



Rev. Fr. Thomas Mattam

S. D. B.



The Community of Sacred Heart College, Shillong, was fortunate to have had Fr. Thomas Mattam with us for the past one month, and share in the blessings of the great and final sacrifice which he offered to God – the offering of his own life, the culmination of 30 years of consecrated life in the Salesian Congregation.

Under the shadow of the shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus came Fr. Mattam to spend his last days. This was the place where he had spent many years of his dedicated life of service; and his life's work culminated most beautifully during the month of June, the month dedicated to the sacred Heart of Jesus.

Many an eloquent sermon has been preached from many a pulpit by great preachers, but Fr. Mattam preached the most sublime of all sermons from his bed of suffering. He showed us the marvellous example of total self-surrender to the will of God.

Fr. Mattam was attended to in a most beautiful way by the sisters and nurses from the Rapsbun Nursing School. Sister Elizabeth and her team of dedicated nurses lavished upon him a care and concern that was most extra-ordinary. The community of the Sacred Heart College ceaselessly prayed for him and watched over him. Many masses were offered for him, and each day groups of brothers prayed and sang beside his sick bed.

One could truly witness in a very tangible way the words of our constitutions :

'The community surrounds its sick and aged confreres with care and affection' (art. 53).

When the moment of departure drew near, we could almost visibly realize the words of our constitutions being truly lived out :

'The Community supports with greater love and prayer the confrere who is gravely ill. When the hour comes for him to bring his consecrated life to its highest



the Salesian Congregation. He made his first religious profession on 24th May, 1956. He was ordained a priest on 2nd May 1965. His first appointment was in the Novitiate, and from there he went to St. Paul's Seminary, Upper Shillong, where he served in the capacity as Prefect of the Seminary. From St. Paul's he came to St. Dominic Savio's Church, Mawlai, where he worked very zealously for the Christians of Mawlai. He was responsible for the building of the present Boarding house and Father's quarters in Mawlai. He was also responsible for building many chapels in the parish. There is a beautiful chapel at the Barapani Dam Site, which is a beautiful monument to the zeal of Fr. Mattam. In the month of October 1977, he became the Headmaster of Sacred Heart Boys' High School. Here he really worked hard to improve the school, and was tireless in his efforts to do good to the boys of the Mawlai area.

On 20th October 1980, he was travelling to Mawbri, when his jeep collided with a truck, and he was thrown out from the jeep with very serious injuries. For days he was unconscious and hovering between life and death. After being in the Civil Hospital for some months, he was treated in Nazareth Hospital, and then taken to Vellore, where he had a remarkable recovery. Of course at this time, he was operated on several times, to adjust the bone in his leg, and silver screws were inserted into the leg. At first it was thought that he would not walk again, but he showed a tremendous resilience, and recovered to be able to walk with a stick, and then gradually without the help of a stick. He continued to walk with a limp, and would tire very easily after some strenuous efforts. He was determined to walk, and did walk. After his recovery he was sent first to the Novitiate, then to the philosophate in Dimapur, and finally to Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, as the administrator. His last appointment was to be the Headmaster of the school of Nongthymmai.

When we look at the life of Fr. Mattam, we find in him a man who was deeply involved in the lives of the people he served. The fact that he was involved for so many years in the different houses of formation, speaks



having the hiccups which were indications of the pain he was suffering.

Fr. Mattam was truly a suffering servant of God who accepted his share of the cross without complaint. The great deal of suffering he underwent make us recall to our minds the song of the suffering servant of Yahweh in Isaiah. 53 which we may aptly apply to him :

'Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing  
Ours the sorrow he was carrying...  
Like a lamb led to the slaughter house,  
Like a sheep dumb before his shearers,  
He never opened his mouth...'

From the evening of 15th June, those who were near Fr. Mattam, realized that he was sinking very fast. On the 16th Morning he was quite calm, but when they were dressing the bed sores, he did suffer intensely. At about 8.35 p.m., all came to his bedside, because Nurse Albina was not able to get the pulse. The sisters from Rapsbun had been called, and Dr. Louis Jala was there. At about 8.40 p.m. we gave him the final anointing of the sick. The fathers and brothers were whispering into the ear of Fr. Mattam, ejaculatory prayers in English, Malayalam and Khasi, and then in one most serene and beautiful moment with a simple smile of recognition on his face, he gave back his soul to God. He passed away so peacefully, that we hardly realized that he had left us. How beautiful it was to hear the moving strains of 'God be with you till we meet again', by the entire community as the nurses closed his eyes in death.

From the time of his death, he was laid out in the parlour of Sacred Heart College, and the streams of people coming to pay respects to the mortal remains of Fr. Mattam was indeed most edifying, and a beautiful tribute to the man who served so many people, so well.

Fr. Mattam was born on 29th October 1929, at Kurumulloor, Kottayam, in Kerala, and after completing his High School studies he joined the seminary of Poonamallee. On completing his philosophy he joined



fulfilment, his brothers help him to enter fully into Christ's paschal mystery' (art. 54).

On February 7th 1986, during an operation Fr. Thomas Mattam suffered a cardiac arrest, and was revived by artificial respiration. Unfortunately he never recovered his consciousness, and for days he was hovering between life and death. At the time of the Papal visit to Shillong, Fr. Mattam was quite healthy, and even on the morning of his operation he was quite undisturbed by the thought of this operation; after all, he had been through so many operations in the past few years. On Friday 7th February, we heard that Fr. Mattam had not recovered from the anaesthesia, and immediately Fr. Provincial rushed to Shillong to see what could be done. On February 13th, Dr. Ajaya Mahanta from Gauhati Medical College, was brought to Shillong and she stipulated that there was only a 25% chance of his pulling through. Dr. Ajaya Mahanta would do the E.E.G., only later when he could be taken to Gauhati.

On 1st April 1986, Fr. Mattam was brought to Gauhati, with the vehicle of Nazareth Hospital, Shillong. He was accompanied by Dr. Angeles. On 6th April 1986, Fr. Lukose left for Vellore with the medical reports from the doctors of Gauhati. He met Dr. Bhanu Pant and Dr. Lily John in Vellore, and then Dr. Ramamurthi in Madras, all specialists in Neurology. Their report was that there is no treatment for this particular case, except nursing and the stimulation of the nervous system through physiotherapy. On May 5th, Fr. Mattam was brought to Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, where he was attended to, night and day by nurses of Rapsbun, and the sisters of Sacred Heart Convent, Mawlai. He was continually being fed through the nose, and the nurses at his bedside were doing everything they could possibly do to help him. Conjestion of the lungs, and of course, the bed sores which had to be dressed every day, and which were as large as the palms of the hands of a man, caused him much suffering. These sores were very deep and very painful, and one could hear the loud groans and screams of pain when these were dressed. Very often he was



of a man of quality. He was always available for confessions, and with his limp, each morning he would go most willingly to the Savio Juniorate for the purpose of hearing confessions. In the parish he rendered valuable service as a confessor. In one of his good-nights, before he left the Sacred Heart College, he spoke of his ardent desire to be able to teach and educate boys. He had truly the Oratorian Heart. He was a man of simplicity, living a very simple way of life, with no pretensions, and no other ambition but to serve and do good. He moved easily among the poor and the simple, and had a wonderful understanding of the people, for whom he gave the best part of his life. Except for a few months, he worked his entire priestly life in the Khasi Hills. While we mourn the death of this wonderful confrere, we do ask God in his generosity, to send us many other young confreres who will take the place of Fr. Mattam.

Fr. Thomas Mattam has passed from this life to the presence of the Lord – the giver of Life. There in his presence may the Lord wipe away all tears from his eyes, may there be no more death, no more mourning or sadness, (cf. Rev. 21, 4) and may His Light shine on him eternally.

Yours fraternally in Jesus Christ,

**Fr. Leo J. Heriot, S.D.B.**

Sacred Heart College,  
Shillong – 793 008

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**For the Necrology :**

Rev. Fr. THOMAS MATTAM

**Born** on 29th October 1929

at Kurumulloor, Kottayam, Kerala.

**Died** at Shillong on 16th June 1986.

**1st Religious Profession :** 24. 5. 1956

**Ordained priest :** 2. 5. 1965