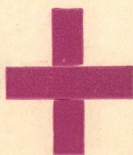


St. Joseph's Church
Chingleput - 603 002
India

FR. THOMAS PUDUSSERY

It was the evening of February 21, 1974, A lone cyclist was seen pedaling frantically towards the Chingleput parish office. The blood-drained face the terror-stricken eyes and the nervous demeanour of the cyclist spoke clearly of a tragedy even before he could utter a single word. The assistant parish priest was dead.

Just a few minutes earlier FR. THOMAS PUDUSSERY, the assistant parish priest, had been driving his motorcycle towards Malrosapuram for the purpose of screening the "Life of Christ" to the villagers there. But he never reached his destination for destiny had decreed otherwise. The life-journey of this simple and hardworking young priest came to a sudden end in the middle



of a highway. However we have reasons to hope that he was not quite unprepared for such unexpected summons. Just a few days earlier, he had made his monthly retreat. In the morning of the tragic day he had made his confession and spent a considerably long time in intimate communion with Jesus in the blessed Sacrament. Did he have some sort of a premonition? We do not know.

All those who have known him will recall that throughout his life he manifested a certain sense of urgency. He was a ceaseless worker, often denying his body even needed relaxation. For him rest was always a change of occupation.

Even as a boy Thomas was noted for his earnestness and hard work. His headmaster wrote of him: "He is a quiet boy, obedient and law-abiding. He impressed me as a very well-behaved boy... He was hard working... and spiritually inclined."

His piety and good behaviour won him the confidence of his companions for we learn from his parish priest that he was the honorary secretary of the Marian Sodality even before he thought of joining the aspirantate.

In 1954, exactly twenty years ago he joined the Sacred Heart Aspirantate in Tirupattur, South India. He completed his High School and went to Yercaud for his novitiate. There was nothing extraordinary about Br. Thomas as he went through the years of philosophy, practical training and theology. During this entire period of formation, his records show that he maintained a spirit of hard work, docility and a genuine love and attachment to the congregation.



During his theological studies, he was greatly involved in social work and youth activities. During this time he also qualified himself as a scout master, for he knew that as a salesian his work would undoubtedly be with the young.

After his ordination Fr. Thomas was assigned to Sagayathottam, where he had spent three years as a cleric, doing his practical training.

The day he arrived, recalls Fr. Matthew Orathel, the Rector, was a regular working day. There was a small group of confreres at the entrance to welcome him. They cordially greeted him and invited him for a cup of tea. Fr. Thomas, before even entering the house had observed that the pump at the entrance which used to be roaring with activity was very silent that day. So before settling to tea he enquired of the confreres why the pump was idle in such a scorching weather. They told him that it had been idling away for about a week owing to some unidentified disorder.

He sipped his tea hurriedly, went to his room, got into his working suit and picking up the tool-kit from the storeroom, went straight to the well determined to set the pump in order.

After a few minutes of intense and skillful activity, the pump started roaring again, throwing out abundant water to the delight and relief of all the confreres. This was characteristic of him, concludes Fr. Matthew. He never backed out from work, no matter how tiring or annoying it turned out to be.

He spent three years at Sagayathottam. The boys remember him with fond affection because he took great interest in their welfare. He provided them



with more recreational facilities. He pioneered the construction of a basketball court and also offered to coach the boys in the new game.

In 1973 Fr. Thomas was transferred to Chingleput as assistant parish priest. He spent only nine months in the parish. But within this short period he won the love and esteem of his parishioners and was highly appreciated by the various christian communities in the area.

The news of his tragic death shook almost the entire community of Chingleput. Account of the tragedy was flashed to thousands through Malai Murasu, a Tamil evening daily. Hundreds gathered to pray and mourn. During the condolence meeting the people unveiled his portrait and solemnly dedicated a memorial tablet. Dr. S. F. Sundararajan, the vice principal of the Chingleput Medical College, said of him: "He was a devoted and worthy disciple of his Master. He reached out to all, transcending the barriers of place and creed."

He was indeed a devoted disciple of his Master and the Lord took him unto himself.

May the example of Fr. Thomas Puduserry inspire us to be better religious. He loved all and was loved by all. While I am confident that Fr. Thomas is enjoying the bliss of heaven, yet I ask all our confreres to be generous in offering up suffrages for the repose of his soul. May he rest in peace. Requesting your prayers for this Mission at Chingleput and for me,

Yours in Don Bosco

George Chemmarappallil

Parish Priest

