



January 3

FR. VENANZIO VILLANOVA

1916-1988

Birthday:	23-11-1916	Italy
First Profession:	08-12-1940	Tirupattur
Ordination:	06-08-1949	Shillong
Died:	03-01-1988	Vellore

EARLY LIFE

Venantius Villanova was one of the 12 children of Luigi and Maria Villanova of Sernaglia della Battaglia, in the diocese of Treviso, Italy. He was born on November 23, 1916. From his earliest years young Venantius had a desire to be a missionary priest. At the age of 19, he entered the Salesian minor seminary of Ivrea where his cousin, Angelo Codello, had preceded him. September 23, 1939 was one of the happiest days of his life, since on that day he landed in India, the land of his missionary dreams. Here in his second fatherland, he went through the different stages of Salesian priestly formation, starting with the novitiate at Tirupattur. He made his first profession on 8 December 1940. During the years of World War II, he was interned at Dehra Dhun. After the war, he continued his theological studies which he had started in the camp, and was ordained a priest at Shillong, on 6 August 1949.

MINISTRY

The first appointment of Fr. Venantius was to be Assistant Parish Priest, with Fr. Fedele Cozzi at Polur. Then in 1951 he was appointed Parish Priest in the same place. There he worked for twenty long years, building up Christian communities in the various villages of the parish. In 1969, one of the substations, Veeralur, was upgraded to a separate parish and the zealous missionary moved into the less-developed area, to extend God's Kingdom there.

On Sunday 3 January 1988, Fr. Venantius was on his way to Vellore, together with a group of people, to participate in the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Simon Cardinal Lourduswamy, organized at Vellore. Some three kilometres away from Polur they suffered a fatal accident when the van overturned and Fr. Villanova passed away on the way to the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, at about midday (3 January 1988).

CHARACTERISTICS

1. **“Nallayan Samiyar” (Good Shepherd):** No figure describes Fr. Venantius better than that of the Good Shepherd. From the day he set foot on Indian soil till he breathed his last, nearly fifty years later, he had no other desire than that of saving souls. He made himself all things to all men. Adapting the words of St. Paul, we may say that he made himself all things to all the poor. The poor village people had a deep insight into his life when they called him, “Nallayan Samiyar”.

2. **Evangelization of the rural population:** Today we hear much about Basic Christian Communities, grass-root level Christian living, moving out of the cities into the interior etc. Fr. Villanova was doing all that and more, many years earlier without using those big terms!

3. **Human warmth:** He was very gentle, affable, kind and caring with any person he met. He always made personal enquiries about their health and well-being and was ready to be of any service when they were in need.

4. **Education:** He was fully convinced that without education no social advancement could be done in the villages. During the years he was a missionary, it was a common sight to see Fr. Venantius accompanying a big contingent of boys and girls to the various boarding schools, at the beginning of June. It has been said that there was not a single B.A. degree holder at Polur and Veeralur before he came on the scene. Today's teacher population of that area stands as a monument to the long range-planning of the zealous missionary.

5. **Confessor and spiritual director:** On arriving in a village he would invariably sit in the confessional thus bringing God's peace and pardon to souls. He was the confessor of so many religious and priests. He would travel by scooter to Polur, Arni, Pallikonda, Vellore, Tirupattur and other places to exercise the ministry of reconciliation to priests, religious and ordinary faithful.