

REV. FR.

THOMAS ARACKAL

S.D.B.

DIED ON 16th MAY 1991

RIP

My dear Confreres,

Fr. Thomas Arackal, 63 years of age, 40 years a Religious, and 29 years a priest, passed away at 8.20 a.m. on 16th May 1991 at St. Luke's Hospital, Tinsukia. He belonged to the Salesian community of Rua Home, Jorhat.

HIS ILLNESS AND DEATH

Fr. Thomas Arackal, quite normal in health, left Rua Home on 8th May for Doom Dooma to attend the silver jubilee celebrations of Fr. K. K. Thomas. He remained in Doom Dooma on 9th May. On 10th May he was returning with Fr. Harold in a jeep. On the way he complained of a very severe headache, and he vomitted. He was brought to the parish of Tinsukia. There he suffered another bout of vomiting and experienced more severe headaches. Before Fr. Mukala could get him some medicine Fr. Arackal had lapsed into delirium and into unconsciousness. The confreres immediately did all that could have been done. The M.C. Sisters were contacted and a doctor was brought, with whose help Fr. Arackal was shifted to St. Luke's Hospital, Tinsukia, for immediate care and attention. There the doctor declared the sickness to be serious; and therefore other specialists were also called from Dibrugarh Medical College to attend to Fr. Arackal. On hearing the news of his illness, confreres, fathers, sisters and friends rushed to his bedside, to keep watch and to pray for his recovery. The religious communities near and far who came to know of his sickness offered special prayers for him. The doctors and nurses were constantly at his side to relieve the congestion of his chest and to monitor his condition.

He was given the 'Anointing of the Sick'. The confreres and sisters took turns in keeping watch all through the day and night from 10th May. Despite all the care and love and Medical skill, the condition of Fr. Thomas continued to deteriorate. He suffered several convulsions and spasms due to the bleeding in the brain. His kidneys seemed to have failed and there were moments when everyone was in utter helplessness as to what could be done to help Fr. Thomas. His condition worsened as the brain haemorrhage continued.

The news of Fr. Arackal's sickness reached us here, at Jorhat, only at 5.15 p.m. on 10th May and immediately Fr. Philip and I left for Tinsukia. We met him in St. Luke's Hospital at 12.00 p.m., lying unconscious. He was in Coma. For a while the doctors were hopeful since he was responding to the medicines administered. That was something consoling for us. Leaving Fr. Philip behind I returned to Rua Home on 12th May. But by 13th May his condition was fast deteriorating. "He is sinking", was the news that reached us. I rushed once again to be at his side.

The doctors had given up hope sensing that Fr. Arackal's condition was irreversible and his life was gradually ebbing away. He passed the 14th and 15th night. Nobody expected him to survive the night. The doctors and the nurses intensified their love and care for him round the clock.

Fr. Philip and Fr. Chacko Kakkanattu kept vigil by his bedside throughout the night of 15th May. Fr. George Mukala had read the prayers for the dying. On 16th morning at 5.45 a.m. I returned to the hospital to relieve Fr. Philip and Fr. Chacko. Mr. Paul, Fr. Arackal's nephew, remained with me. At 6.15 a.m. Dr. Sharman came to check up Fr. Arackal, and found that he had no more sensations and reflexes. From 7.40 a.m. his condition became more critical. At 8.00 a.m. he was already struggling for breath. The doctor and the nurses came in at once. I recited some prayers in his ears while Dr. Sharman kept on feeling his pulse and heart beat. At 8.15 a.m. the doctor looked at me and said, "I could not save him". Finally the hour came on 16th May at 8.20 a.m. for Fr. Thomas Arackal to bring his consecrated life to its highest fulfillment and he was helped by his confreres, sisters and friends to enter fully into Christ's paschal mystery (Const. art. 54)

FUNERAL SERVICE

The body of Fr. Arackal was prepared and brought to Bosco Bible School, Hijuguri, where Holy Mass was celebrated. The body then was transferred to Dibrugarh Cathedral where a short service was conducted. From there it was brought to Rua Home, Jorhat, to which community Fr. Arackal belonged at the

time of his death. The community of Rua Home, other Religious communities and Parishioners of Jorhat Parish, Parents, teachers and students of Don Bosco School, Bagchung, and other friends were already awaiting his body to pay their last respects.

The Holy Mass was celebrated for the repose of his soul after which the body was brought to Salesian College, Dimapur, accompanied by the confreres and laid in state in the College Chapel. From the early hours of 17th May, confreres and friends began to pour in to pay their last respects and pray for Fr. Thomas. The funeral Mass began at 9.00 a.m. and Bishop Abraham presided over it and Bishop Mathai together with nearly 55 priests concelebrated. The Chapel was filled to capacity with confreres, fathers, sisters, seminarians, boys and girls from neighbouring communities, parishioners and friends. Three nephews of Fr. Arackal had come up from the South hearing the news of his illness and were present at the funeral service. Due to the heavy rains the last rites were performed in the chapel itself. Later when the rain subsided the mortal remains of Fr. Arackal were laid to rest in the Salesian cemetery.

SHORT LIFE - SKETCH

Born on 10th April 1928 at Moozhoor, Kerala, Fr. Thomas Arackal was the 7th in a family of eight children of Mr. Philip and Mary Arackal. Only two elder brothers and one elder sister are living now. Fr. Thomas joined the aspirantate at Tiruppattur in 1948. In 1950 he entered the Novitiate at Kotagiri and made his novitiate under the great Salesian Fr. Orfeo Mondavani, of happy memory, and made his first religious profession on 24th May 1951, at Kotagiri, into the hands of Fr. Joseph Careño, the then Provincial of Madras. He did his post-novitiate studies at Kotagiri and college studies at Tiruppattur, Madras.

In the year 1954 Bro. Thomas Arackal was sent to Bandel, W. Bengal, to do his practical training since Calcutta Province was short of Brothers. After his perpetual Profession in 1958 he entered the Studentate of Theology at Mawlai, Shillong. He

was ordained a Deacon on December 8th 1961. After his theological studies he was ordained a priest along with his companions on June 29th 1962 at St. Xavier's Church, Madras. This was organized by his Novice Master, Fr. Mondevani who then was the parish priest of St. Xavier's Church, Madras.

There was a request for volunteers from the newly formed Guwahati Province and Fr. Thomas Arackal volunteered to work in the North-east. He worked in various capacities in the province: as administrator at Don Bosco, Guwahati, as Rector and Headmaster in Don Bosco, Dibrugarh, as Rector and Parish Priest in Tangla, as Rector and Principal in Bhutan, as Headmaster in Doom Dooma, as Parish Priest at Jorhat, as Headmaster in the newly founded Don Bosco School at Bagchung (Jorhat) and finally, as the confessor of the Aspirants at Rua Home, Jorhat.

FR. THOMAS ARACKAL, THE PERSON

Fr. Arackal was a good religious, a hard working Salesian and a well meaning Priest. He did whatever work was entrusted to him with great precision. His life was marked by simplicity and he carried out his responsibilities with quite dedication shunning all media cover and publicity. Fr. Thomas Thottungal speaks of Fr. T. Arackal as "spiritual, very humble and very serviceable to others". He was generous in his ways and wanted to do much good, especially for the poor. Fr. John Med who knew him from his boyhood says that he was "a man of deep feelings and strong will. He loved the poor and abandoned youngsters". He was a man of prayer, austerity and hard work. All who knew him loved and appreciated him for his gentle ways and had a good word to say about him. He had a keen mathematical mind and took personal care to help the weaker students. His constant preoccupation was to give tuition to the Catholic students who were weak in studies. He wanted a special hostel for that purpose. However, his plan could not be materialized due to various factors. This caused him much sadness.

Fr. Arackal had gone through difficult days in his ministry especially when he was in Bhutan where he experienced the

miraculous protection of Mother Mary, when his very life was in danger at the hands of violent men. He attributed his safety to the motherly intervention of our Blessed Mother Mary towards whom he had a filial love and devotion. He also had a deep love for Don Bosco and a meticulous devotion to his duty. "In him we had a good Salesian priest and religious. The Province of Dimapur has lost a valiant son of Don Bosco, but it has gained another patron in heaven" said Fr. Provincial in his funeral oration at Dimapur. Fr. Jose Maliekal who knew Fr. Thomas from 1949 onwards has this to say of him, "he was jovial, affectionate and full of goodness. We could feel goodness in him".

Rua Home and the Don Bosco School, Bagchung, miss him much. Mrs. A. Handique sums up the feelings of the staff and students in the following words: "Fr. Arackal was loved by all, young and old. In his busy schedule he always had time to listen to others and advice, especially to children. They came first and he was very understanding to their problems. He was a principled man and lived his life by those principles. He was helpful to the downtrodden. His untimely death has created a void in our lives which can never be filled".

CONCLUSION

Fr. Arackal is no more. But he lives in the hearts and minds and memories of those who came in contact with him. Fr. Arackal as I knew him was a very affectionate person and I had a special appreciation for him. He lived by the courage of his convictions and unimpressed by public opinions. He had a heart for the needy and the helpless. Perhaps, one of the many reasons why people fondly remember him is due to his capacity to extend sympathy to those who needed it most. He was intelligent and he helped the students with his mathematical ability.

His absence evokes sentiments that are deep for words. Even for us, who so firmly believe in the truth of resurrection it is not easy to accept the final parting of loved ones in whom we have sensed something unseen and eternal. Life comes to an end when life is most needed and persons disappear when

there is real scarcity of personnel. *Gaudium et Spes* says, "Such is the nature and greatness of the mystery of man as enlightened for the faithful by the Christian revelation. It is therefore through Christ, and in Christ, that light is thrown on the riddle of suffering and death which, apart from his Gospel, overwhelms us. Christ has risen again, destroying death by his death, and has given life abundantly to us" (art. 22). If we have loved him in the past let us continue to love him in the future. For 'the memory of departed confreres unites, in a love that will not pass away', "those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ" (Const. 54).

FR. ALEX PULIMOOTTIL, S.D.B.

Rector,

Rua Home, Don Bosco,

Jorhat, Assam

Necrology

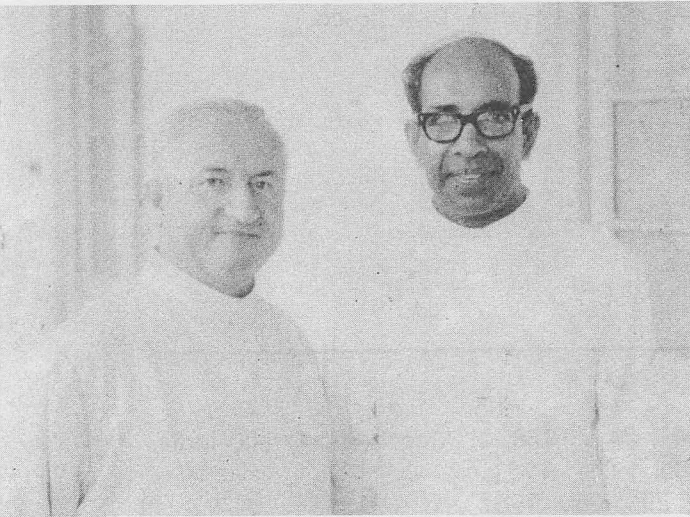
Born on : 14 . 04 . 1928, at Moozhoor, Kerala, India

Profession : 24 . 05 . 1951

Ordination : 29 ; 06 . 1962

Death : 16 . 05 . 1991

MOMENTS
WITH
THE LORD



WITH
THE
RECTOR
MAJOR

RECTOR
OF
THE
SALESIAN
COMMUNITY
OF
DON
BOSCO
TECHNICAL
SCHOOL
PHUTSHOLING
BHUTAN

