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**REV. FR.  
THOMAS  
KANNATH  
S.D.B.**

BORN : 31-05-1947  
PROFESSED : 07-04-1966  
ORDAINED : 20-12-1975  
DIED : 31-12-1995

*Dear Confrerers,*

Fr. KANNATH THOMAS (K. K.) passed away at Mercy Home, Dibrugarh at 6.30 a. m. on 31 December 1995. He belonged to the Salesian community of Amguri.

## **His Final Moments**

Fr. Thomas never complained about serious ailments though physically he looked weak. On 19 December Fr. Thomas underwent a check up at Dibrugarh. Later on 23rd when he went to collect the results the doctors advised him to take rest as his liver showed signs of damage. However, seeing the urgency of the Christmas ministry, he returned to Amguri intending to rest later. On 29th night, Bro. Boniface who was with him noticed that Fr. Thomas had vomitted blood and seeing his weak condition insisted that he should go to see the doctor. On 30th noon he was taken to Mercy Home, Dibrugarh. He looked cheerful as he was admitted there and did not give any impression of being serious. Around 3.00 p. m. he vomited blood once again. Doctor advised blood transfusion. His condition deteriorated and he spent a very restless night even though vomiting had stopped.

At 5.00 a. m. on 31st, the condition of Fr. K. K. worsened and as his breathing became difficult, oxygen was given. Seeing the situation, Fr. Provincial, Varghese Palathingal, administered the Sacrament of the anointing of the sick. At the advice of the doctor, blood transfusion was started once again. Soon after Fr. K. K. Thomas started vomiting blood again and at 6. 30 a. m. he passed away peacefully and serenely.

## **Early Life**

Fr. Thomas was born on 31st May 1947 at Vynthala, near Chalakudy in Kerala. He was the fifth of the 8 children of Mr. Kochapu and Mrs. Thresia. He was brought up in a traditionally good catholic family background. Consequently he nurtured missionary and priestly life as one of the most cherished ideals in life from his early childhood.

He entered the Aspirantate at Bandel on 4th April 1959. It was there that he came in contact with the Salesians for the first time. As an aspirant he was diligent, intelligent, studious and pious. He began his Novitiate under the direction of the then Novice Master Fr. John Med on 3rd April 1965 and made his first religious profession on 7th April 1966 at Sunnyside, Upper Shillong.

After having completed his philosophical studies in Sonada, Bro. Thomas was sent to Don Bosco Dibrugarh as Assistant and Teacher. From 1969 to 1972 he did his practical Training under Bishop Abraham who was the Rector of the house then. There he experienced the warmth and friendship of the people of Assam for whom he would spend the greater part of his priestly ministry later. The Assamese language he learned there, he perfected it in later years of his apostolate in Assam. After his perpetual profession in January 1972, Bro. Thomas went to Kristu Jyoti College Bangalore to do his theological studies at the end of which he was ordained a priest on 20th December 1975.

## **Priestly Ministry**

As a young priest Fr. Thomas worked in Dibrugarh, Doom Dooma, Senapati and Jorhat. From 1986 to 1992 he was appointed Rector and Parish Priest of Doom Dooma and since 1992 he was the principal of Don Bosco, Amguri. He had a knack for construction works and he personally saw to the building up of the boardings and Confreres quarters of both Doom Dooma and Amguri.

As Rector and Parish priest at Doom Dooma, he organised the boarding and the pastoral life of the Parish and saw to the completion of the construction works. Fr. Thomas loved being with his young boys in Amguri. After the school hours, he was always seen with his hostel students be it be at work, games or in the study hall. He knew many skills and he taught them to his youngsters. He was dedicated, enthusiastic and apostolic minded.

## **How others saw him**

It was Sunday morning, 10th December 1995, Fr. Thomas Kannath drove me from Amguri to Jorhat to catch the bus from there to Guwahati. Before he departed he gave me a warm handshake wishing me a safe journey and a merry Christmas at

home. It was impossible to imagine then, that I would be seeing him for the last time. His parting words are still ringing in my ears "Tell me when you are returning. I will pick you up. Just give me a ring!" Well, that was not to be. Within three weeks the Lord decided to call him back to Himself.

There comes a moment in our life when all we can do is to stare in disbelief. Anguish fills our hearts to the point of numbness. Everything comes to a halt and only grief is visible and silence is the only sound we can hear. This happened on 31st December, 1995. That Fr. K. K. THOMAS was no more was not something we could believe. There were people in Amguri who dispatched messengers to find out whether it was really true or his death was wrongly reported. Only a few days before they had seen him making the usual purchases from various shops. Their collective response was one of grief and disbelief. People remained stunned. So unexpected was the tragic event. In the death of Fr. Thomas the people had felt a sense of loss of one whom they had admired and loved. Many were heard to exclaim that he was truly a loving person and that good people do not last long.

We read about death in the papers everyday. We take part in funerals. Yet it looks so mysterious so incomprehensible and so painful. When it claims someone closer home, the mystery gets even deeper; the pain becomes heartbreaking. This was my experience at the unexpected demise of Fr. K. K. Thomas. I had the privilege of living with him for eighteen years as an aspirant, cleric and later on as a priest. I cherish and consider beyond price my acquaintance with him. It was an enriching and inspiring experience. I would like to pay tribute to this valiant and brave Salesian. As I think of him, I realise how each one is so different, carefully crafted, uniquely endowed and all the more I admire his uniqueness. Though his life was short he made a lasting impression on others. He had a unique message to deliver and that was not to make compromise with truth and honesty, no matter what it costs, even if it meant displeasing some people. We can truly say that he had guts of steel and was totally free from fear. He was absolutely honest with himself and with anyone who was fortunate enough to have known him personally. He was so rich in talents and determination. Although his life was short-lived, he lived life to the full. In this connection, Fr. A.U. Thomas, one of his companions, rightly asserts "one dominant thought that I have is that he was one who did things in full steam, no half measures and compromises. Instances are his constancy at

the hobbies, music, (tabla, harmonium, trumpet) or the work in the oratories and later on in the ministry. He made up in intensity what he lacked in duration". Having said this, it must also be admitted that he was rather reserved and not given to emotional displays. It was difficult to know him intimately. Fr. V.L. Francis, another of his companion writes, "To me he was a very healthy looking person. I am surprised he died so suddenly. Certainly he was quite a sociable person, gifted in many areas, and with a quite a strong will. He impressed many with his strong personality".

Fr. M.P. Thomas speaking on behalf of his companions and their novice Master on the occasion of his funeral said the following: "Fr. K.K., as we affectionately called him was the most resourceful of our group of 18 priests and one brother. He was the perfect scout. He had an answer for every question and a solution to every problem. He was a hard worker. He worked quietly and without fuss. He was very systematic and thorough in what he did, whether it was constructing buildings or building communities. He had feeling for the group. He never missed a gathering of the group".

According to Fr. Narimattam, with whom Fr. Thomas spent the first years of his priestly ministry, he was a jack of all trades, a craftsman, a musician more practical than theoretical, linguist and a farmer. He would use all these talents especially for the boys in the hostel. He was not a person who would limit his ministry only to the work assigned to him, rather he was willing to share the administrative and missionary work, hostel and school activities, construction work, liturgy etc.

Fr. K. K. Thomas was a convinced Salesian, who sought to spend his entire life in the service of God and in helping the poor. He loved music and played the trumpet with consummate skill and perfection. He was part of the band and Indian Orchestra as an aspirant and later on as a cleric. As a boy he mastered many skills with this in mind that he could impart the same knowledge to the boys later on. He has taught many boys to play the trumpet and other instruments, besides the tabla. Boys were always attracted to him, because he could teach them so many useful things. They loved and admired him. In any exhibition in the School, whether it was in Dibrugarh, Doom Dooma, or Amguri a great attraction was the fret work and punching. People could not believe that it was the work of the students. Fr. Thomas had taught them so well and in such a short time. He encouraged

everyone to take part in the various activities of the School and in the process they learned many things by doing. The people in Amguri admired and respected him a lot. He had a great capacity to listen. There was no barrier as he could converse fluently in Assamese; even the pronunciation was so perfect that the people found it hard to believe that he was hailing from Kerala.

He was a man of perfection. He distinguished himself by striving for excellence in whatever he did. He was very systematic and thorough. The residential building in Doom Dooma and the Hostel in Amguri give ample testimony to this fact. He had a tremendous capacity for work. Whatever task was entrusted to him he did with admirable dedication and commitment. Physically he was a tough person, although towards the end he looked a very tired man. His stoic endurance was well-known, but that must have cost him his life. Little did he suspect that his liver was totally damaged. He worked to the very end and he expired peacefully in the early hours of 31st December 1995.

Although rough and tough in many ways he showed great concern for the sick and delicacy for others. He was very sensitive to others' feelings. "The last two years that I was with him in Amguri," says Fr. Anand, "he never took a decision and never bought anything expensive without first seeking my opinion." He showed great displeasure and disapproval if anyone dared to speak bad words or indecent language in his presence. While he was in Amguri people loved to visit the place. He had a knack for making people feel at home and treating them well.

## Conclusion

We believe the words of St. Paul, "Life spent for the Lord is not vain" (I Cor. 15,58). Death is inevitable and all of us have to leave this world when our time comes. What matters is not that we die but how we live and how we will be remembered by others. In that sense, Fr. K. K. THOMAS' life has been a wonderful inspiration. We will always remember him with respect, admiration and love. Suffering and death remains a mystery, but we do see some light in nature. We see here that strange truth, that paradox, that death produces life. A seed must die to produce a new plant. Ultimately we cannot reach eternal life without first dying to this life. Death is the inevitable lot of all human beings. Death is certain, what is uncertain in the minds of many is the meaning of life and death. Is life nothing more than what Macbeth

said it is, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing?" Only Jesus has the answer to death, whether it be brought on by disease, accident or old age. The preface for the Mass of Christian Death proclaims our faith: "In Christ who rose from the dead, our hope of resurrection dawned, and the sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven".

Fr. Thomas is no more! The 48 years of lively life, 29 years of Salesian religious life and the 20 years of fruitful priestly ministry of Fr. Thomas came to an abrupt end. It is impossible to believe that a dear confrere who was so active till yesterday and is no more today. Even for us who so firmly believe in the truth of the resurrection it is not easy to accept the final parting of loved ones in whom we have sensed something noble, eternal and beautiful.

Gaudium et Spes says, "Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by his death, and has given life abundantly to us" (art.22). In the gospel we are never allowed to lose sight of the Paradox of dust and divinity which we are. Nor are we allowed for a moment to lose sight of the thrust and counterthrust of human existence: the tension in which our life stands, between the actual and the possible, between what is in the mind of man and what is eternally in the mind of God; between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God.

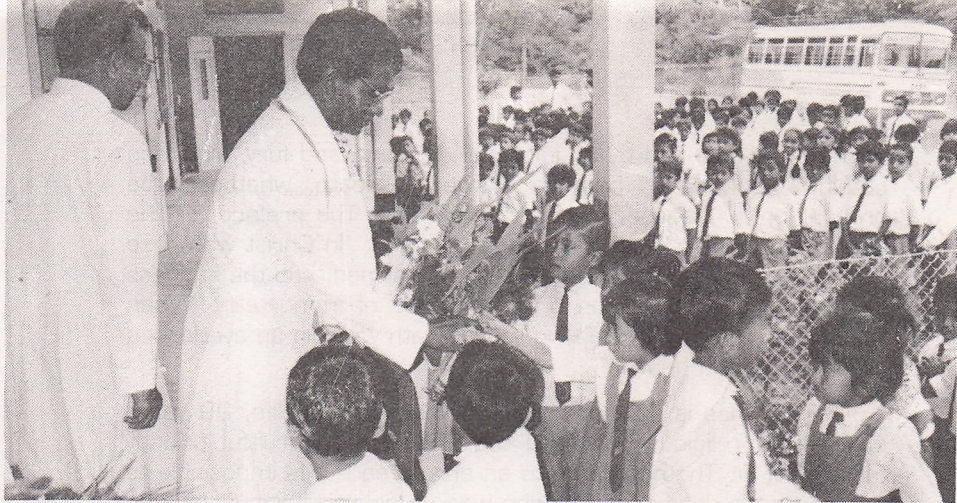
Although Fr. Thomas is not with us physically, he lives because Christ lives. If we have loved him in the past let us continue to love him in the future. For "the memory of departed confreres unites, in a love that will not pass away, those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ" (Const.54).

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*Vice-Provincial*

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