



In the death of Fr. Jacob Karimpil we have lost a zealous priest, a faithful religious and a great lover of the poor. He passed away suddenly of heart attack on June 6, 1984 at Lourdes Shrine, K Pudur, Madurai. He was a salesian for 40 years and a priest for 33 years. He lived a calm but active life, busying himself with God's work mostly in quiet places and with humble folks.

Fr. Jacob was born on January 22, 1919, to Kora and Elizabeth Karimpil at Parip, Kottayam, Kerala. He was the second in a family of four boys. As a young boy he showed great interest in studies and his parents too were very keen to give him a good christian education. At an early age he enlisted himself in the altar boys association, having learnt all the prayers of the Syro-Malabar liturgy. He was also actively involved in the parish choir.

When he completed his High School examination he had several job offers. He declined them all because his goal was the priesthood. But it took him some time to find a seminary. Having learnt some Latin and Cyriac from his parish priest, young Jacob approached his bishop asking to be admitted to the seminary. The bishop, the late Dr. Alexander Chulaparambil, admired the youngster's abilities and interest, but was unable to give him a place in his seminary as he had more than enough priests in his diocese. However, the good prelate was kind enough to give him the addresses of three seminaries outside

Kerala. Jacob lost no time in writing to these seminaries enclosing all the necessary testimonials. Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee, was the first to respond. They wanted him to join immediately.

From his childhood, Jacob had been a vegetarian. Now that he was about to leave home for the seminary, his mother advised him: "Son, be prepared to eat any kind of food. Begin now itself to eat non-vegetarian food, or else you will find seminary life very hard. "It was at her suggestion that Jacob switched over to non-vegetarian food.

Fr. Jacob entered the seminary at Poonamallee on September 19, 1938. During the second world war, when the military requisitioned the Poonamallee buildings, the seminary was shifted to Our Lady's House, Yercaud. Fr. Jacob, therefore, completed his philosophical studies at Yercaud. While at the seminary in Yercaud, Fr. Jacob felt called to the salesian life. After consulting his superiors he asked to be admitted to the novitiate. He began his novitiate at Tirupattur on December 1, 1943 and made his first profession on December 6, 1944.

He did his practical training at Dominic Savio, Tirupattur (1944-46) and at

Trivandrum (1946-47). In 1947 he was sent to Mawlai for his theological studies. In 1950 he was among the first batch of salesian clerics who came back from Mawlai to continue their theological studies at The Retreat, Yercaud. He was also the assistant of the students of theology — a delicate task which he did to the satisfaction of all. On May 31, 1951 he was ordained a priest at Yercaud by Bishop Selvanather of Salem.

Ordination was for him not only the fulfillment of his boyhood dreams but the beginning of a new kind of life in Christ. He considered priesthood God's greatest gift to him... a gift to be shared in ministry.

During the 33 years of his priestly ministry he worked tirelessly wherever he had been sent. A good part of his priestly life was spent in parishes and missions like Arni, Wandiwash, Chingleput (twice), Uriurkuppam, Broadway (thrice), Arambakkam, Perambur, Basin Bridge, Koviloor and Madurai. He also worked in Dominic Savio, Tirupattur; Don Bosco, Katpadi; St. Joseph's, Katpadi; The Refuge, Broadway; St. Bede's and Rinaldi Juniorate.

Wherever he worked, his primary concern was the welfare of souls. The poor were his first choice. As a parish priest at Koviloor, he made it a point that every day

a poor child would sit at table with him and share his simple meal.

He was very much interested in the Church and was constantly on the lookout for good vocations. He sent many boys to seminaries and girls to convents and followed them up with great care.

He was a man who loved the liturgy and encouraged active participation by the faithful. He had a very special devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Even as a busy parish priest he would spend a lot of time on his knees before the tabernacle. We will never know what exchanges took place between him and the Master during those intimate moments, but we can confidently say that it was the secret of the efficacy of his apostolate. It was from the tabernacle that he drew the strength to face with serenity the inevitable crosses of life. It was his love for the Eucharist that made him compile a book in Tamil for use during the Holy Hour adoration. This book has already seen three editions.

He loved the Holy Scriptures and was a zealous apostle of the Word. He spent time pouring over the holy Book trying to deepen his understanding of the Word of God. He was convinced that a priest should never cease to study the Scriptures. He took pains to prepare well for the

ministry of preaching and was always available to conduct days of recollection, preach novenas, triduums and retreats.

Fr. Jacob's ministry at the confessional was greatly appreciated by all. Though his external manner may have appeared a little brusque, he was very kind and compassionate. He understood human weakness and was always encouraging and optimistic. He was convinced of the power of grace to transform human beings. No wonder, people from far and near came to confide in him and to seek his counsel and guidance.

As a salesian he not only loved Don Bosco but did his best to make him loved by others. His translation into Tamil of the life of Don Bosco is one example of the way he tried to make Don Bosco better known.

As a religious he was exemplary. Often he was perplexed by the superficiality of those who were not living up to their commitment. He could not understand the obstinacy of those who could not obey promptly. He himself was always an example to all in this. When asked why he was transferred often he would jokingly say it was because his services were urgently needed in many places. As far as religious discipline was concerned he was convinced that senior confreres should be the first to

set an example to the younger ones.

He lived a very simple life and everything he did was marked by simplicity. In the matter of poverty he was meticulous and strict with himself and with others but never insensitive to the needs of others. With the poor he was always generous and often went out of his way to find help for them. He showed great interest in educating poor boys. Many were sent by him to boarding schools, orphanages and even to college. He followed up these boys with fatherly concern and was happy to see them getting settled in life.

In April 1983 Fr. Jacob was sent to Rome to take part in the beatification of Mons. Luigi Versiglia and Fr. Callistus Caravario, which took place on May 15th. Fr. Jacob took the opportunity to visit many of the holy places in Italy, especially those connected with Don Bosco and the Congregation.

Fr. Jacob's mortal remains were brought to Tirupattur on June 7th and buried there in the new cemetery at Don Bosco. Numerous people from Koviloor, Uriurkuppam, Basin Bridge and St. Francis Xavier's came all the way to Tirupattur to pay their last respects to this man of God. Present were many youngsters who had been helped by him in their education. The funeral Mass was celebrated in the

chapel of Don Bosco and presided over by Bishop Michael Augustine of Vellore. A large number of priests, both salesian and diocesan, concelebrated.

Dear confreres, Fr. Jacob was called home suddenly, but he was prepared to meet his Master. It can truly be said that he died in harness and went straight to receive his reward — the reward the good Lord has promised for his loyal servants. He has gone leaving us an excellent example of a life lived in total dedication and joy. He was one of those who always had the right perspective on life where the supernatural held primacy. May his example inspire all of us to a greater fidelity and dedication in our apostolate.

Yours sincerely in Don Bosco,

FR. JOHN PETER SATHIARAJ
PROVINCIAL

For the necrology:

Fr. Jacob Karimpil, born at Parip, Kottayam, Kerala, on 22.1.1919. Died in K. Pudur, Madurai, India, on 6.6.1984, at the age of 65. 40 years of profession, 33 years of priesthood.
