

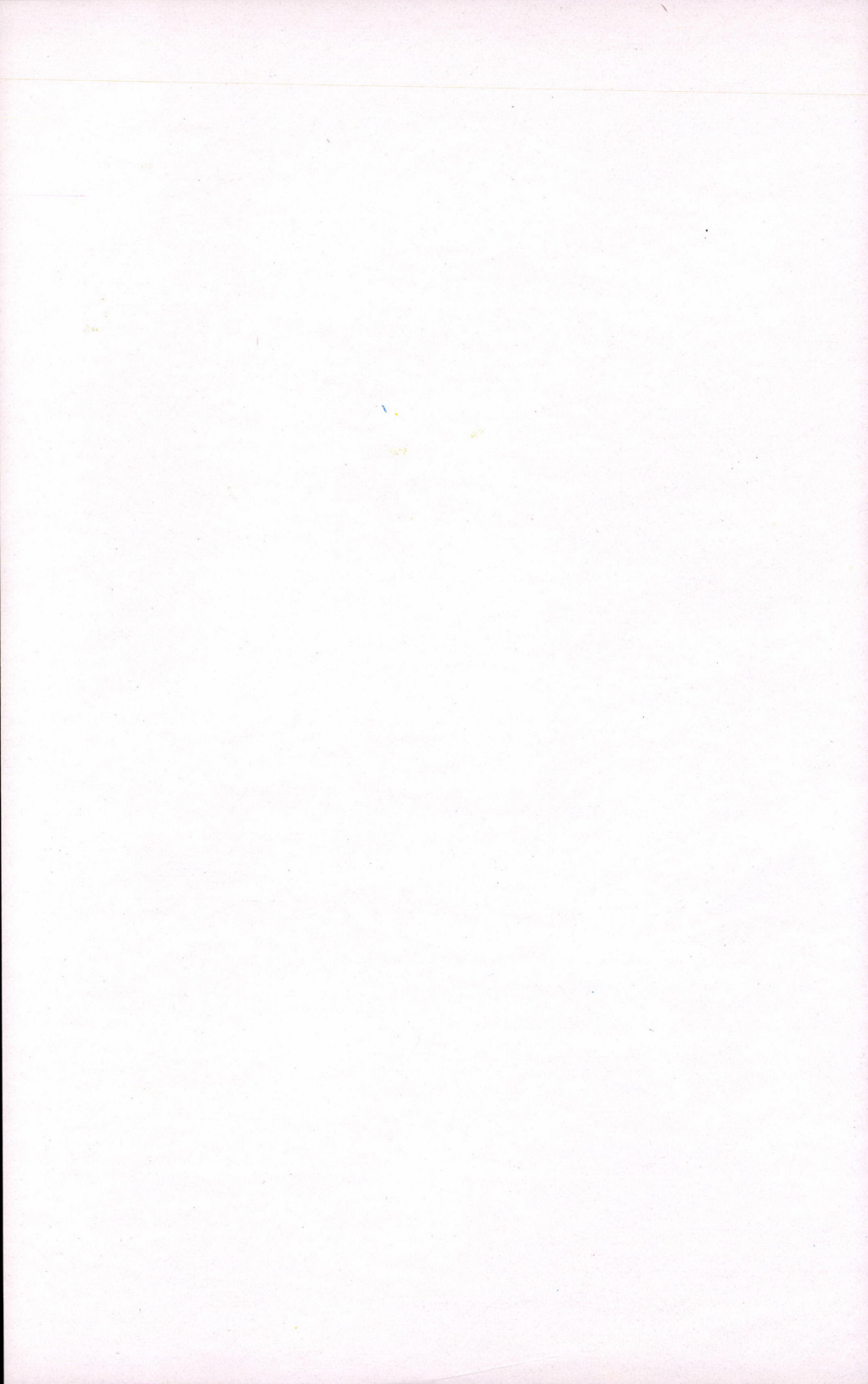
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Rev. Fr. Thomas Kochupurackal

Salesian of Don Bosco

15.06.1955 - 06.07.1994



Don Bosco School
Park Circus
Calcutta 700 017

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24.). Every confrere who lays down his life in total surrender and humble abandonment to the will of God by accepting graciously and joyfully the call of Jesus to join Him in the unending joys of eternal life is one more grain that has fallen to the ground. The single grain disintegrates and disappears to give life and to bear fruit in plenty and fruit that will last. The fullness of life is in God. All the imperfections of life are put behind and the darkness of our life is changed into the brightness of immortality.

Our confrere **Thomas Kochupurackel** laid down his young and youthful life on 6th July 1994. On that day his mortal and fleeting life ended, to begin the unending blessedness with his Lord and Master who had said, “Come you Blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”.

His death was not unexpected. He had suffered for quite some time and the doctors had tried to give the best possible medical care and attention. But they knew that the killer disease of cancer had spread to his entire system. It took a long time for Thomas to accept the fact that his days were numbered and he had to be prepared for the inevitable. But when it did come, he

was prepared. Surrounded by his brothers and friends, comforted by the love and concern expressed in numerous ways especially at the time of his sickness, Thomas breathed his last.

Thomas was born on 15th June 1955 in Kerala at Madakkathanam, in the district of Kottayam, of the late Thomas Kochuparambil and the late Clara Thaiparambil. In June 1968, he entered his first Salesian House at Don Bosco Vaduthala, Cochin. He came to Bandel in June 1969 where he completed his Higher Secondary studies in 1974. He began his novitiate at Sunnyside, Upper Shillong, under the direction of Fr. Leo Heriot and received the cassock on 1st January 1975. On 24th May 1975, he made his first profession as a Salesian of Don Bosco. He completed his philosophical studies and graduation from Salesian College, Sonada.

Immediately after this, he started his Practical Training at Don Bosco School Park Circus as Assistant and Teacher. During this time he got involved in all the activities of the school and through his jovial and attractive ways, was a very popular brother among the students. He made his perpetual profession on 23rd May 1981.

For his next and final journey towards priesthood, he went to Kristu Jyothi College Bangalore, to do his theological studies. He was ordained a priest at St. Joseph's Parish, Veluppadam in Trichur by Mgr. Joseph Kundukulam. His first appointment as a priest was to Don Bosco Azimganj as Asst. Headmaster and Boarding

In-Charge. In 1988, he was transferred to Don Bosco Alaknanda New Delhi as Vice Principal. During these years he completed his M.A. from Trivandrum University and B.Ed from Annamalai University. He arrived in Don Bosco Park Circus in June 1990 as Asst. Principal Primary Section.

He put his heart and soul into the new work and with his jovial and enthusiastic ways brought many people close to him. Within a few months, doctors detected that he had cancer. I remember the young doctor who saw the first biopsy report of Thomas saying, "with the best medical attention and care Father will not live for more than five years". In fact, Thomas did not live for even two years from that time. At the news of his sickness, arrangements were soon made to take him to Bombay Tata Cancer centre. I remember accompanying Thomas to Bombay where we stayed for three weeks during which time he underwent two surgeries. The Salesian Provincial house was very helpful and supportive. We all thought that the decease was checked and with the successful surgery, Thomas would be fit to carry on his work.

He was back again to his work with constant medical attention. There followed further surgeries and chemotherapy. Dr. Anil Poddar a leading cancer surgeon of the city was looking after Thomas. The personal care and attention, the ready availability and optimism of Dr. Poddar can never be forgotten. He did everything in his power to fight the killer decease.

By May 1994, it was clear that nothing more could be done to save his life and it was now a question

of time. Together with Fr. Jose Pellissery, Thomas went down to his home town to visit his relatives and dear ones. It was a difficult journey and very painful too. Fr. Jose was constantly at his side. On their return, the community went to the airport to receive them. When we saw Thomas from a distance, our hearts sank. He could hardly walk and there was a marked deterioration in his condition. Barely three weeks later he was no more.

On 22nd June early morning his condition became very critical. The doctor was called. The confreres from the nearby communities rushed to his side. He received the anointing of the sick and anxious moments were spent by all those who were around. Surprisingly he showed signs of improvement and recovery. Round the clock attention by nurses, sisters and confreres specially assisted by Fr. Jose Pellissery helped Thomas to go on with great courage and resignation. He was surrounded by the love and affection of large number of students, staff, parents and friends. Confreres from near and far came to visit him. He had expressed his desire to remain on at Don Bosco Park Circus because here the boys were around and their presence gave him great support. After all he worked for them and they in turn loved him. Fr. Provincial understood the mind of Thomas and readily acceded to his request to be near the students of the school.

Fr. Provincial in his letter to the confreres at the death of Thomas had these things to say. "Tom was known to have a very pleasant character and quite witty with those who knew him. He was a welcome person in any company. That is why he had many friends.

Tom was very creative and had a very pleasant way with youngsters". He introduced a number of new activities in the school for the benefit of students and parents. Thomas was the one who started "Daddy Cricket" in the School and now it has become a very popular annual event for the parents and children. Children were always kept busy with activities like games, tournaments, competitions in singing, drama, elocution, story telling, fancydress, etc. During the tiffin time of the students he was always seen with the boys in the typical Salesian style. Thomas organized educational tours to Delhi, Jaipur, Agra, Bombay, Goa, etc. He loved to be with boys and was looking out for ways to be creative and offer something different and interesting for them.

He was loved by all the members of the staff especially of the Primary section. They were ready to cooperate with him as he introduced new activities and plans for the students. He certainly had a way of getting the goodwill and affection of his colleagues without making them feel unwilling or hurt. During his prolonged sickness and suffering they were by his side and showed their affection and care by their visits to the nursing home, their prayers, and numerous other signs of concern and care. During his last days, whenever they had a little free time, they would take turns to visit him to bring consolation and strength.

The Salesian community at Don Bosco Park Circus is deeply grateful to all the people who have joined us in this journey of faith and suffering with Thomas our confrere. In a special way our grateful thanks go to Dr. Anil Poddar who almost right from the beginning treated

Thomas. Dr. Poddar was always ready and willing to go to any length and try everything possible that medical science could do for Thomas. He was like a member of the family. His services and kindness will never be forgotten.

Among the confreres, no one was as close to Thomas as Fr. Jose Pellissery, especially during the latter part of his illness. Although other members of the community were always around, Jose took up the care of Thomas as a special ministry. He put aside everything and attended to Thomas with selfless care and concern. Thomas became very attached to Jose and in fact asked Fr. Provincial to keep him on for sometime more here at Don Bosco Park Circus, although he was on transfer to Kathihar. I must admit that Thomas was indeed very lucky to have the help, love, affection and round-the-clock service from his own confrere Fr. Jose Pellissery. The Community is deeply grateful to him for all that he did with such love. We were all aware of the sacrifice and inconvenience, the sleepless nights and anxiety that he had to undergo.

A special mention must be made of the sisterly care and attention given by the Sisters of Mary Immaculate. May God bless them richly for their sacrifice and dedicated attention to Thomas. We are grateful to the family members of Thomas, his brothers and nephews who were with him during his illness. We are indebted to all the doctors, nurses, parents, friends, benefactors and well-wishers of the school who shared our pain and anxiety and who offered us sympathy and support.

The entire School community at Don Bosco Park Circus was filled with sorrow and a deep sense of loss at the news of the death of our confrere. Condolences poured in from all over. Large number of friends and well wishers of the School came to pay their last respects to the departed soul. The expressions of solidarity and love were really overwhelming. There was a beautiful Eucharistic celebration attended by the clergy and religious. On 7th July, there was another Mass in the large School Assembly Hall for the staff, students and parents. The hall was packed to capacity. Immediately after this mass, the body of Thomas was taken to Bandel for the final rites. Rev. Fr. Provincial presided over this Eucharist in which he was assisted by a large number of Salesians and others who had come from near and far. After this moving ceremony, the mortal remains of Thomas were laid to rest.

May I dwell a little on the reflections of Fr. Provincial. "While we calmly accept the death of a senior person, we are not that prepared for the death of a young person. Why? Is it because we value that which the young person could still have done? Do we perhaps measure the value of a person by what he/she does, achieves? ... If the passing away of Thomas, helps us to confront our value system regarding life and its aims, then his death was worthwhile. Nay, necessary I would wish that as we mourn the death of Tom, we can ourselves die to a worldly way of living and start living for values that Jesus promotes"

Fr. Thomas Pulickal
Rector
Easter Sunday, 1995.

