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Feast of Saint Sebastian
January 20

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THE MUSEUM OF ST. ANTHONY SHOWCASE OF INTIMACY WITH GOD



We adore and believe in One God. The saints who dedicated their lives for the sake of the Lord and His Church are honoured and revered. They intercede for us and fulfill our needs and aspirations. Amidst these saints, St. Anthony prominently excels, to gain devotion of the mass majority of the faithful. This is vividly evident by the tens of thousands of devotees who flock to the shrine, day in

and day out and more so every Tuesday. The non-Catholics too are attracted in reverence, which is a striking phenomenon. So said the Archbishop of Colombo, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith in his homily, when His Eminence blessed and declared open the new museum at St. Anthony's Shrine at Kochchikade last Sunday, January 13, 2013.

The museum which will treasure the sacred relics of

St. Anthony, would reflect and manifest the miraculous powers and the sacredness of his life. May the faithful be convinced and enlightened to be better Catholics, was the prayerful wish expressed by His Eminence.

The Administrator of the Shrine, Rev. Fr. Clement Rozairo said, that this dream of a museum came true, through the unstinted support and generous contributions of the vast

majority, who thronged to the Shrine each passing day. He wished that many more would discover their faith in God, through the exhibits on display.

Many religious dignitaries from Italy were present at the inaugurations of this first and only museum for St. Anthony in Sri Lanka. Besides the Cardinal, His Excellency Archbishop Joseph Spiteri, the Apostolic Nuncio in

(CONTD ON PG. 3)

'YEAR OF FAITH' - A SPECIAL TIME OF GRACE

His Lordship, Bishop Emmanuel Fernando



INTERVIEW WITH DEVOTEES AT ST. ANTHONY'S MUSEUM

Here is the gist of some answers, which were recorded at random interviews made with devotees, at the opening of the historic museum at St. Anthony's Shrine-Kochchikade.

QUESTION: What do you presently think of the Shrine at St. Anthony's, Kochchikade?

ANSWER: St. Anthony's Shrine in Kochchikade in some way or the other, now resembles St. Anthony's Shrine of Padua. This is not in anyway keeping with the size and the magnitude, or the architectural

(CONTD ON PG. 2)

In an introduction to the 'Year of Faith' given at the 'Dedication Service for 2013' of the Ceylon Bible Society, the Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo, Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando said that this year is a special

time of grace for the promotion of unity and communion among the Churches.

His Lordship said that the 'Year of Faith' from October 11, 2012 to November 24, 2013 was declared by Pope Benedict

XVI through his Apostolic Letter "Door of Faith" in order to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II and the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

While noting that various ecumenical initiatives are being planned for Christian unity in line with the recommendations of Vatican II, Bishop Emmanuel Fernando

(CONTD ON PG. 2)

MOHAN PIERIS - THE NEW CHIEF JUSTICE

(President's Counsel, former Attorney General)

Mohan Pieris is an old boy of St. Joseph's College, Colombo 10. He entered the Sri Lanka Law College and was called to the Bar in 1975.



Mohan Pieris
Chief Justice

In 1981, he joined the Attorney General's Department. He and his wife Priyanthi (with fondest remembrances of their late teenage daughter, Talia) are parishioners and regular worshippers at All Saints' Church, Borella.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS April 4, 2013

POSTER COMPETITION

In view of the celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, the Catholic National Commission for Clergy, Religious, Seminaries and Secular Institutes has decided to organize a poster competition for students. This is to create an awareness among the children about the vocations to the Priesthood & Religious Life. The Competition will be conducted according to the following rules.



(CONTD ON PG. 2)

Christian Unity Week



JANUARY 18th - 25th

(The conversion of St. Paul the Apostle)

Tribute to Elders of Jana Jaya Gama



Elders of Jana Jaya Gama, of Bolawalana, Negombo, were paid tribute and were presented with gift packages by Rev. Fr. Sujeewa Athukorale the Parish Priest, who presided as the chief guest, at a function which took place recently. This was organised by the Jayaraj Fernandopulle Education Development Foundation.

New grotto for Oblate Novitiate



The newly built Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes at "Sidupiyanila" the Oblate Novitiate, Bandarawela was blessed and declared open by Very Rev. Fr. Rohan Silva OMI, the Provincial Superior of the Oblate Province of Colombo, on December 15, 2012. The grotto came into reality by the donations of Mr. Joe Azzopardi from Australia and of local donors. The dedicated and restless work of Rev. Fr. Roshan Silva OMI Novice Master, Rev. Fr. Ruwan Perera OMI, Bursar and Rev. Fr. Dilan Perera OMI, were appreciated by the priests and religious, who gathered for the grand opening celebration.

Lasitha Perera

Gold Medalist Chess Championship 2012



Miss Roshell Nathasha Askey of Ave Maria Convent, Negombo excelled as the Gold medalist, of the Sri Lanka Schools Individual Chess Championship, in the under eleven girls category, which was held in December 2012, organised by the Sri Lanka Schools Chess Association. The striking feature was that Roshell collected 6 1/2 points out of 7 which qualified her as the champion. This will enable her to participate at the World School Individual Chess Championship in May 2013, in Greece, as the Sri Lankan under eleven representative. Seen in the photo is Roshell with Rev. Sr. Shirani Algama, the Principal of Ave Maria Convent, Negombo.

A ward for clergy refurbished at Negombo Hospital



A ward of the Regional Hospital of Negombo, refurbished in memory of Rev. Fr. Sunanda Wanasinghe, was declared open by Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Perera, the Episcopal Vicar and Dr. A.R.M. Thaufic, the Medical Superintendent.

The availability of such a ward would facilitate, better medical care and service towards the priests and religious of the Negombo region, was the striking comment made by Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Perera, in delivering his speech.

The Hospital Chaplain, Rev. Fr. George Perera, Dr. A.R.M. Thaufic and late Minister Jayaraj Fernandopulle were mentioned with thanks, for their services, in relation to this project. The members of the Negombo Region Hospital Development Foundation and members of the Catholic Union of the hospital were also present.

Catholic Minister called to Rest

Former Fisheries Minister, and Parliamentarian of the Puttalam District Mr. Festus Perera passed away at the age of 82. He was born and bred as a Catholic who during his tenor of office helped many fisher folk. The burial took place on the 16th, at the Wennappuwa Roman Catholic cemetery.



Sheltered by Charity



St. Vincent De Paul Society of Bambukuliya built a house with the help of the Katana SVP members. This house was built for a cancer patient who lives in the Thoppuwa parish. After blessing and opening the house, assistant parish priest of Thoppuwa, Rev. Fr. Sumith Kusmara Fernando, Rev. Sisters, members of the SVP and family members pose for a group photo.

Cecil Danicius

World Day of.....

Contd. from Pg. 1

Rules for the Poster Competition

Theme: Pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send labourers.

Age: 1st Group : Grade 6 to 9
2nd Group: Grade 10 to 13

Size of the Poster: 18" x 14" (Art Paper)

Materials to be used: Any material such as water colours, pens, ink, chalk, etc

Last date to submit : 20th February 2013

- * Must be student's original work.
- * One student can submit only one Poster.
- * Write on the back side of the poster: Name, Year (class) and School of the student.
- * Poster must be certified by the Principal / Parish Priest.

The three best posters of both categories will be given prizes & certificates. All the posters will be exhibited at another occasion (probably on Children's Day at Tewatte in March).

The posters should be sent to the following address:

Fr. J. D. Anthony,
Director - Vocations,
Archdiocese of Colombo
Archbishop's House, Colombo 08.

For any clarifications contact Archdiocesan Director for Vocations
(Fr. J. D. Anthony Tel. 0112695471/0776004767).

Catholic National Commission for Clergy, Religions, Seminaries & Secular Institutes

Year of Faith.....

Contd. from Pg. 1

said that here in Sri Lanka, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, Archbishop of Colombo has also called attention of the need to make the Bible available in all three languages, organise Bible studies, encourage family Bible reading and create awareness of the beauty of the Word of God.

Commending the work of the Ceylon Bible Society, Bishop Emmanuel Fernando who is a Member of the General Council of this institution said that we can all collaborate with each other, especially with the help of the CBS, to bring about unity among the churches and to propagate the Word of God.

The Dedication Service of the CBS for the year 2013 was held on January 12, at the Christian Reformed Church, Dehiwela under the theme 'Year of Local Churches'. Mrs Lakshani Fernando, General Secretary of CBS and Rev. Charles Jansz, President of the Christian Reformed Church also addressed the large congregation gathered at this event.

Ainslie Joseph

Interview with.....

Contd. from Pg. 1

glamour or the treasured value of the relics exhibited, but by the devotion that is ardently manifested and bestowed towards the iconic, Saint Anthony.

QUESTION: Do you see an added significance to the existing Shrine?

Answer: Yes, it offers a profound meaning to the Shrine at present, with the museum. The significance of the Saint's vibrant sacred life is brought forth and magnified, through the treasured relics exhibited, which is an invitation for many to be closer to God.

QUESTION: Will the museum be a showpiece or a place of prayer?

Answer: The devotees who used to pray in front of the statue of St. Anthony, are now presented with the unique opportunity of praying before many miraculous sacred relics of the much favoured saint. Many devotees would be attracted to pray devotedly rather than be distracted.

Kurunegala Diocese commemorates the Feast of Blessed Joseph Vaz



Situated in the historical land of worship of Maha Galgamuwa, the Kurunegala Diocese celebrated the annual Feast of Blessed Joseph Vaz, at the Shrine on Thaipongal day. The festive mass was concelebrated by His Lordship the first Bishop of Batticaloa, Most Rev Dr. Joseph Ponniah, His Lordship Most Rev Dr. Harold Anthony Perera, Bishop of Kurunegala with participation of Most Rev Dr. Raymond Peiris, Bishop Emeritus of Kurunegala together with Rev. Priests, Rev. Sisters and a large crowd of devotees.

Shanaka Muhandiram

New Priest for the Diocese of Kurunegala



Rev. Deacon Dimuthu Rohan Fonseka, born on March 19, 1982, the son of Mr. W. Simeon J. Fonseka and Mrs. H. M. Alen Herath of Mandakondana Parish will be ordained to the Holy Order of Priesthood by His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Harold Anthony Perera, Bishop of Kurunegala at 10.00

a.m. on Saturday January 26, at St. Anne's Cathedral, Kurunegala.

Having completed his education from Karukuwa Sugathananda Maha Vidyalaya and Madampe Central College, Brother Dimuthu entered the Blessed Joseph Vaz Minor Seminary at Millawa on January 14, 2003. Promoted to 'Daham Sevena', Intermediate Seminary in Kalutara in 2004, from 2005 to 2012 he had his priestly formation and education in Philosophy and Theology at the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka at Ampitya.

During the 'Year of Discernment', he served in the Staff of 'Janasetha', Caritas-Kurunegala and gained experiences and proceeded in the years of formation towards the priesthood.

Bro. Dimuthu has served in the parishes of Nikaweratiya, Hiripokuna, Bulupitiya and Melsiripura. As a Deacon he has had his ministry exercised in the Parish of Kuliypitiya.

He will celebrate his first Thanksgiving Eucharist at 8.30 a.m. on Sunday January 27, 2013 at the Holy Family Church, Mandakondana (Dummalasuriya)

Rev. Fr. Ananda Weerakoon

'Intercession of Mary' Feast in Payagala



The Feast of Intercession of Mary was celebrated at St. Joseph's Church, Payagala recently. The chief celebrant was Rev. Fr. John Camillus Fernando, OMI.

Picture shows Rev. Fr. Camillus Fernando along with Rev. Fr. Nilantha Uduwaka, Parish Priest Payagala being accompanied for the Festive Mass.

D. Anselm Fernando

46th Annual Convention Sri Lanka Cursillo Movement Change of Venue

"FAITH IS TO BELIEVE IN THE THINGS WE HOPE FOR" (Hebrews 11:1). The Inter Diocesan Secretariat of the Sri Lanka Cursillo Movement, prayerfully invites Cursillo Members to the 46th Annual Cursillo Convention to reflect on the above theme on January 27, 2013, at the BONJEAN HALL, DARLEY ROAD, COLOMBO 10, commencing at 8.30 a.m.

Entrance coupons could be obtained from your Ultreya Co-ordinators.

Please note that participation at the Convention is only for those who have followed the 3-day Programme in full.

Rev. Fr. Tony Martyn - Chaplain



Church in the World

Pope Benedict XVI says Church must stand firm against 'intolerant agnosticism'



Pope Benedict XVI urged Roman Catholic leaders last Sunday to stand up to attacks by "intolerant agnosticism" prevalent in many countries.

The message during the Pope's celebration of Epiphany is the latest in a series of remarks largely seen to be rebukes to David Cameron and other world leaders attempting to introduce same-sex marriage.

Under increasing attack because of outspoken opposition to homosexual marriage, the 85-year-old Pontiff said that church leaders must resist efforts to change just to suit public pressure.

"Today's regnant agnosticism has its own dogmas and is extremely intolerant regarding anything that would question it and the criteria it employs," the Pope said before a gathering of 10,000, which included outgoing prime minister, Mario Monti, who has avoided expressing an opinion on gay marriage.

Pope Benedict anointed four new archbishops, urging them to "have courage" in the face of public pressure. Among them was his newly appointed prefect and longtime chief private secretary, George Gänswein.

The promotion of "bel Giorgio" or "beautiful George" as the Italians call him, is the latest sign that the 56-year-old German has become one of the Pope's closest, most trusted advisers.

The German newspaper Die Welt described him this weekend as "the most powerful servant of the Pope."

The Museum is.....

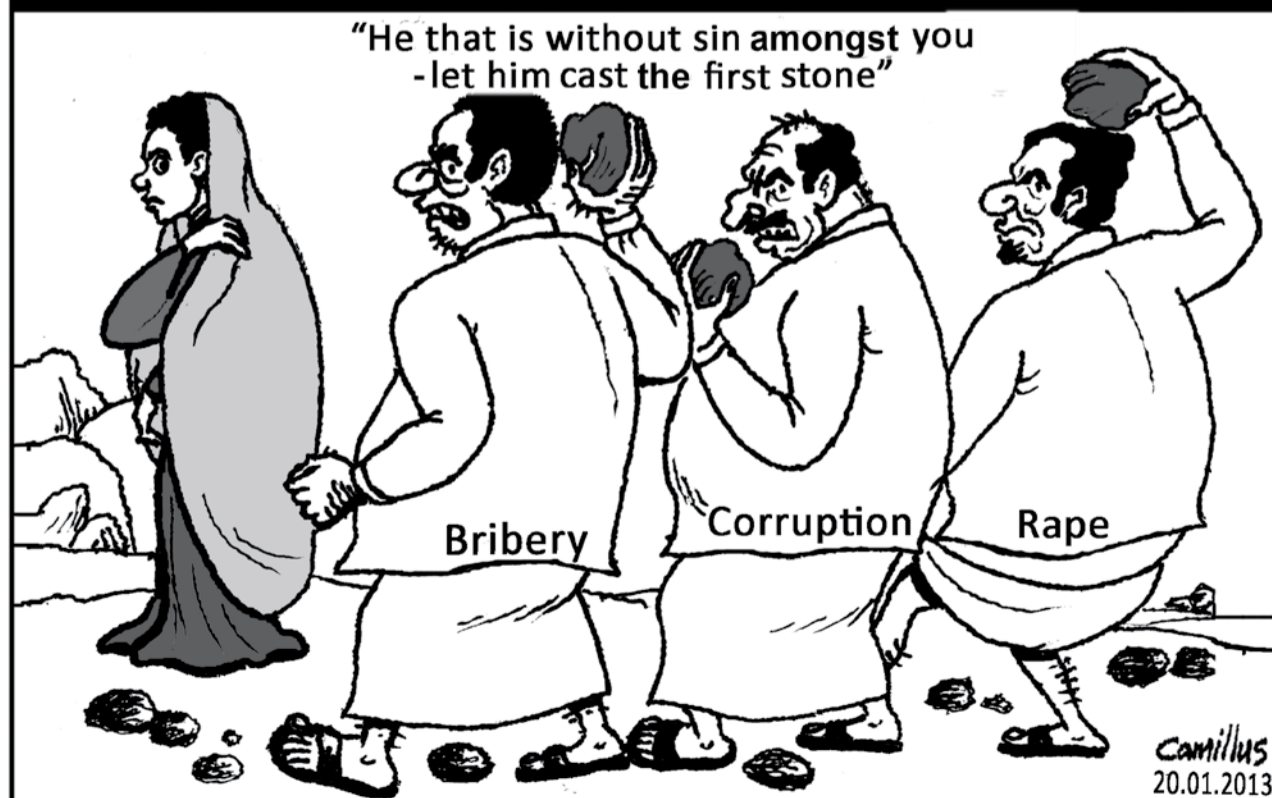
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Sri Lanka, Rev. Fr. Mario Mingardi, the Rector of the Basilica in Padua, his predecessor Rev. Fr. Eugo Paolo Poiana, Mons Reali Gino, other religious from Italy, the chaplain for the migrants in Italy, Mons Neville Joe Perera, the Auxiliary Bishops of Colombo, Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando and Rt. Rev. Dr. Maxwell Silva, together with a multitude of faithful devotees were present. Amidst the distinguished guests of honour, was First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa and the Sri Lanka Navy Commander, Admiral Jayantha Colombage who graced the occasion.

This museum was the brain child of the Administrator Rev. Fr. Clement Rozairo, which was fostered and guided by the Archbishop, and was acclaimed by all to be a spiritual inspiration. The Administrator of St. Anthony's Shrine of Padua, presented some invaluable relics to be exhibited initially, with the assurance of many more to follow. A life size statue of St. Anthony which was also a gift from Padua, was brought in procession into the midst of the gathering, at the commencement of the celebration.

SUNDAY PUNCH

by Camillus



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THE CATHOLIC WEEKLY OF SRI LANKA
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EDITORIAL

January 20, 2013

A New Year with a focus on Blessed Joseph Vaz, Kandyan kings and the sick

We must embrace this 'Year of Faith' and stay firmly with Our Lord at all times; not just at times of crises or insecurity, but always. The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, in his address on January 8th, said that we must focus on the sick. In his speech ahead of the upcoming World Sick Day on February 11th, he said our focus on the sick is a call to recognise the Holy Face of Christ in the features of our suffering brothers and sisters worldwide.

No one embodied this fine trait of caring for the sick, the dying and the destitute more than our very own Blessed Joseph Vaz. Over 300 years ago, he defied the harsh Dutch rulers of our island by propagating and keeping alive the Catholic Faith. The Dutch had banned the practice of the Catholic Faith and were promoting their Calvinist denomination across the country. But God used this fine man from India to revive the fledgling Catholic religion.

Blessed Joseph Vaz faced many trials and sufferings, but his daily joy would have been immense as many Sri Lankans embraced the Catholic Faith heroically, despite the risk of death, imprisonment or torture. For faith to survive anywhere, it needs willing hearts and fertile soil of the soul. In this, he found great refuge in the Kandyan Kingdom, under the noble kings Vimaladharmasuriya and Vira Narendra Singha, who from 1692 provided him a safe haven in which to conduct his missionary work for the Catholic Faith. This was in return for the miracles (especially of ushering in badly needed rain during a drought) he had helped provide them.

The safety of the Kandyan Kingdom and the opportunity for the Catholic Faith to flourish, despite being surrounded by constant opposition and antipathy from the Calvinist Dutch is a reminder that God is our rock and refuge. If we trust in Him then He will provide the foundation and platform for us to help build His Kingdom on earth and to assist Him in delivering souls to eternal life. We should follow the example of the brave kings of Kandy, who defied Dutch hegemony and courageously gave Blessed Joseph Vaz the freedom to promote the true faith far and wide. We need to be grateful to these wonderful kings who helped pass onto us the most beautiful gift of faith in Jesus Christ and the most awesome opportunity to be baptised in the Catholic Church – a membership, which we should never take for granted.

And, as with Blessed Joseph Vaz, we must eagerly look to care for the sick, the dying, the lost and the forgotten. We need to tend to their bodies and souls. That is our calling. That is our duty, as Christian sisters and brothers. We must never let the heroic actions of Blessed Joseph Vaz, his brave followers (our ancestors) and the most generous and hospitable Kandyan kings go to waste or be forgotten. Teach your children about these ancient peoples' wonderful lives and deeds for God. Let them be the beacon, from our own island heritage, which will help guide us on a path to eternal intimacy and life with Christ.

Perhaps more than our own modern achievements and international cricketing glories, it is the selfless heroism and complete dedication of these wonderful men of God from the 17th century we should more readily focus on and celebrate about.

Current Affairs
by RMB

One of the disturbing facts about the impeachment process of the Chief Justice was the pitting of one set of people who were supporters of the impeachment carrying clubs beating others who were opponents of the impeachment while the Police looked on. Those who opposed the impeachment exercised their right of peaceful protest allowed to them under the Constitution. This pitting people against each other has now come to stay in our process of governance. But where the right of peaceful protest is denied those who publicly protest any measure of the government will have no option but to similarly arm to protect themselves.

As parents, we keep our families together by encouraging discussion and dialogue and discouraging dispute and quarrelling. So are communities and so are nations. It is the freedom and the responsibility that are the essence and the essentials of any social communion. Those in authority must realize that the only way to keep a nation together is not to force it to be together. It is the Freedom and Respect that breeds the feeling of community and a sense of belonging. That's how it is supposed to work.

The Supreme Court has ruled that the process of impeachment is illegal and the Court of Appeal has quashed the impeachment. The Supreme Court has the sole authority to interpret the Constitution and every one who swore to uphold the Constitution in his oath of office must abide by the rulings on the Constitution. Can anyone disregard the Constitution as interpreted by the only authority authorized to interpret it?

St. Timothy

Bishop Confessor - January 26

St. Paul's "beloved son in the faith" (1 Tim 1:1) and his most intimate disciple was a native of Lystra in Asia Minor (Turkey). The son of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother, Timothy probably had accepted Christianity during Paul's first missionary journey in the year 47 A.D., when he must have been a boy of about 15. By the time Paul saw him again 4 years later, he had heard Timothy's virtues and zeal so highly spoken of by the faithful of Iconium and Lystra that he decided to adopt him as his travelling companion and assistant in addition to Silas, who had come with him from Jerusalem. In order to have Timothy received well by Jewish communities, Paul had him circumcized.

Timothy seems to have remained the closest collaborator of the great Apostle throughout the next 13 years: on his missionary journeys, when he was being sent to Rome as a prisoner, and after his acquittal there when he returned east as far as Ephesus - a total of some 4,000 miles on foot and an

Governance by law must be preserved to ensure freedom

Vaclav Havel the Czechoslovak writer and President, lamented that the people of Czechoslovakia lived in a 'contaminated moral environment.' "We fell morally ill," he said, "because we became used to saying something different from what we thought. We learned not to believe in anything, to ignore one another, to care only about ourselves. Concepts such as love, friendship, compassion, humility or forgiveness lost their depth and dimension, and for many of us they represented only psychological peculiarities, or they resembled gone-astray greetings from ancient times. Only a few of us were able to cry out loudly that the powers that be, should not be all-powerful."

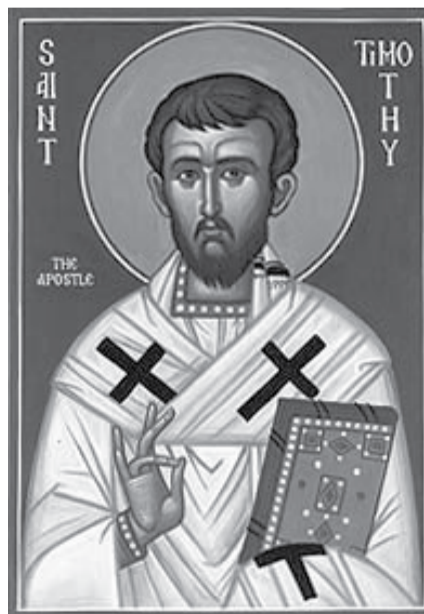
"But we are all responsible to someone or something higher than my family, my country, my company, my success - responsibility to our Creator where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where and only where they will be properly judged. The interpreter or mediator between us and this higher authority is what is traditionally referred to as human conscience." If one subordinates his political behavior to this imperative, mediated to him by a true conscience, one can't go far wrong."

That is a statement that is applicable not only in respect of political behavior but in all areas of conduct and to every one of us - politicians, journalists, judicial officers, academics, intellectuals, civil society leaders and the ordinary citizens. We cannot go wrong if our actions are guided by our conscience. It is morality and fundamental principles of liberty that are on trial today in our country.

What is in issue today

is whether we have governance according to pre-established laws or governance according to the arbitrary or discretionary rule of those people currently in authority. In short, either we have the rule of law or we have the rule of authorities. Under the rule of law, government agencies do nothing but faithfully enforce statutes already on the books. Under the rule of authorities, those in positions of executive authority have the discretion to make up new rules as they go along, and to forego enforcing the statutes on the books including the Constitution. It is of course true that laws must be executed by people in authority. But they can either be people who impartially enforce the rules as they were known—that is, who follow the rule of law—or they can be people who arbitrarily enforce the Rules. We have had a series of partial judicial decisions like the former Chief Justice's stay order on Members of Parliament forfeiting their seats in Parliament when they cross from the party they were elected on, to another party. This faulty ruling practically destroyed democracy in a Proportional Representation system of elections where the people voted for the political party and not for the candidate and hence the Member of Parliament represented the party and the Party could expel him if he did not abide by their manifesto. No longer could Parliament represent the free choice of the people.

The rule of law is vitally important because it allows a society to combine freedom and justice without being subject to the arbitrary and capricious decisions of the officials of the government.



much so that St. Paul advises him, "Let no one disregard you because you are young", and puts him on guard against certain Gnostic heresies rampant at that time. He must have been barely 32 when he was made Bishop of Ephesus, a great See that, according to St John Chrysostom, comprised all the churches of the Roman province of Asia. Interestingly, St. John Damascene states that it was as Bishop of Ephesus that Timothy witnessed Mary's departure from this world. St. John the Evangelist terms him "the angel of the Church of Ephesus."

Timothy was affectionate by nature and frail in health; Paul always showed a fatherly concern for him, praising him, beloved son, a loyal imitator and co-worker, and a dearly loved friend who was always by his side. Sadly, though, whether he was able to be with Paul in response to his summons before he died is uncertain.

Also uncertain is the where and how of Timothy's own death. But according to tradition, he was stoned to death at Ephesus under the reign of Nerva Caesar Augustus, when trying to dissuade the pagans from worshipping "Diana of the Ephesians."

equal distance by sea! At times we hear of his being sent ahead, at other times of his remaining behind to confirm new converts in their faith. During the 18 months he spent in Corinth, he was sent back North to encourage the brethren in Thessalonica (Saloniki) to remain steadfast in the face of the persecution they were undergoing.

As seen from the various letters of St. Paul (including those to Timothy), Timothy comes across as one, very young and timid, so

What a friend we find in Jesus

If you do not change your residence or location, your neighbours remain the same. The one who lives next door or in close proximity, is defined as ones neighbour. He or she could either be a friend or an enemy, or an alien neighbour, as if though living in exile.

Jesus defines a neighbour not on a geographical footing but on humanitarian terms of love. The one who is concerned for you, is your neighbour. In a parable related by the Lord, the Samaritan who goes out of his way to pick up a person, who has fallen by the wayside, hands him over to be nursed and bears the expenses incurred, is identified as a 'good' Samaritan. Jesus introduces him as an ideal and a perfect neighbour. As an extension to this parable, if the victim is taken home and personally cared for, then the good Samaritan would qualify and excel to be a 'good friend'. Hence we should realize that a good friend is far superior, to that of a good neighbour.

One could have 'so called friends', 'good friends' and 'close friends'. The closest of them, may be the best friend. How logical are we to reason it out that way? You may have shared the personal facts of life with another, whom you might consider as intimate. Have you gauged that person's integrity only as a listener or as a consoler? To what extent was that person of help to you? Was it by word or in deed, superficially or genuinely, is the matter in question? When others deserted and evaded you, did that person stand by you? These gestures and reactions of behaviour, determine the degree of intimacy and faithfulness.

A friend is not only a person who greets you and smiles with you. Not just the pretentious one who lavishes praise on you and opts to be with you in good times, for ones own advantage.

Some friends are with you in bad times too, when you cry they are passionate enough to wipe your tears and speak words of consolation, but ultimately they tend to drift away abandoning you. Everything is done to a limit and not beyond it. A true friend is one who takes you home and gives you the warmth of his company, assuring you of his strength and support. Not limited in any way, neither in loyalty nor in faithfulness.

One might be under the impression that the more you associate with a friend, the more you learn about him. This is not so, for many can be deceptive and pretentious. When every one around seems to condemn you and you have been cornered as an outcast, the attitude of your counterpart determines the genuineness and the sincerity of his loyalty. A good friend takes the initiative to step forward and boldly say, 'let all condemn you, but I will not do it at all'. He would give meaning to what he said, by being with you through every moment of your traumatic situation. While the pseudo-friend slips away in a slimy manner with flimsy excuses to cover up the lapse caused by his withdrawal and absence.

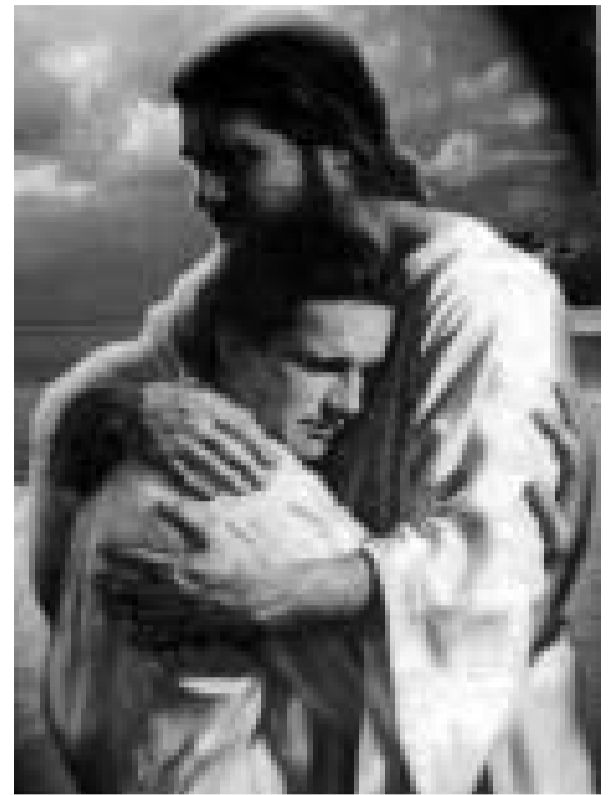
During the public life of Jesus, the crowd that thronged to be with Him, the ones who dined with Him and who were fed by Him, the ones who benefited by His miraculous powers were mere onlookers with folded arms, when He was on the way to Calvary. Simon was forced to shoulder the cross, Veronica was emotionally overwhelmed and the women of Jerusalem were moved with pity. The Apostles deserted Him, avoiding Him even upto His death and burial. In the garden of Gethsemane the selected three could not even keep awake, to be conscious of His emotional battle. Finally, Mary the mother of Jesus

and John the beloved Apostle were the only ones present at the foot of the cross, when Jesus breathed His last.

Although Jesus was so social minded and popular, yet no one other than His mother and a single Apostle could He find as friends. Believe it or not, today Jesus is a friend to us all, as before. Anyone who has not recognized this, has not discovered the reality. The best possible means that explains this is through the illustration, 'foot prints on the sand'. When one walks life's journey and while in trouble, one's set of footprints are not visible on sand. This is because it is then that Jesus carries you to safety. One could never ever find a good friend like Jesus, who carries you out of danger, when in trouble. Another pair of foot impressions ought to be beside yours, which should be the foot prints of your best friend. In his absence, Jesus steps forward to be you best friend, to see you through.

Most of the mentally derailed are victims of disappointment. When in distress and emotionally stirred, none being available to console and assure hope, would have brought about that fate. Most of the victims who commit suicide are those who have none to share their grievances and find no meaning in life. Failing to find a good friend at the hour of need, leads them towards this dismal situation of indiscretion.

Only if you could be a good friend to someone in distress by winning that person over to Jesus and by introducing Him as the 'best friend', you



too could be a 'fisher of men'. The so called friends whom we meet at parties, and social functions, to share happiness and laughter could be called 'occasional friends', or more rightly termed 'glamorous friends'. The so called friends we encounter while on the sick bed, in tragedy or at the funerals of our dear departed are ones who would console and sympathise. They are 'incidental friends' who could also be called 'emotional friends'. The friend who is with you when you are downtrodden and condemned, the one who never ever leaves or deserts you and remains with you till the end, is the best of the lot. He or she is your best friend. This best friend would defiantly give you a for-taste or a glimpse of the faithfulness and the intimacy of a 'unmatched friend', who is none other than Jesus, Himself.

RodeZo

Rich Man, Poor Man

The radical visions of St. Francis

By Joan Acocella

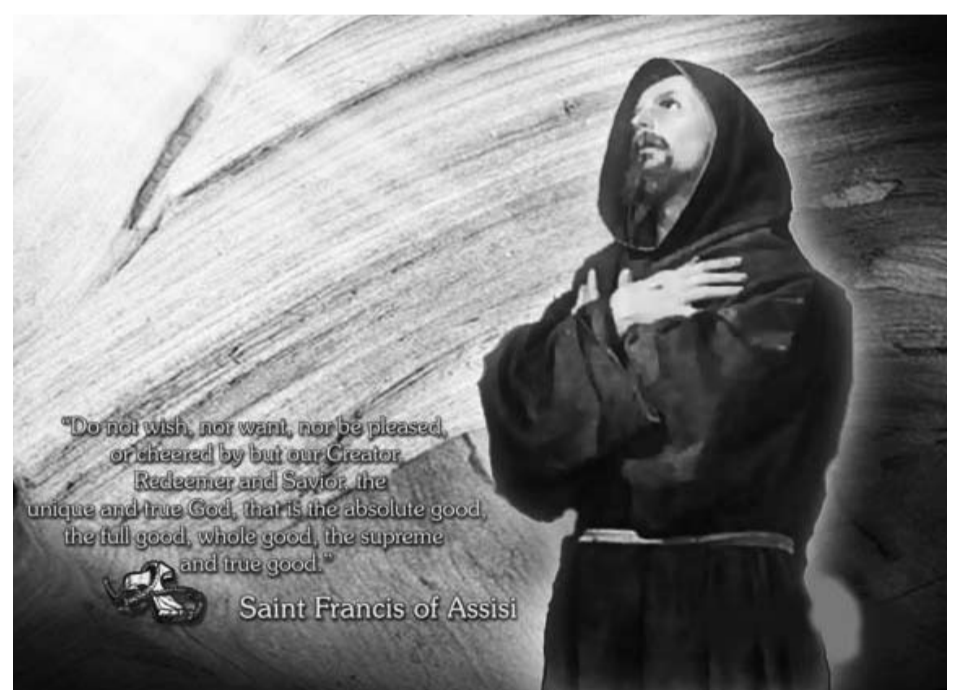
"Why you?" a man asked Francesco di Bernardone, known to us now as St. Francis of Assisi. Francis (1181 - 1226) was scrawny and plain-looking. He wore a filthy tunic, with a piece of rope as a belt, and no shoes. While preaching, he often would dance, weep, make animal sounds, strip to his underwear, or play the zither. His black eyes sparkled. Many people regarded him as mad, or dangerous. They threw dirt at him. Women locked themselves in their houses.

Francis accepted all this serenely, and the qualities that at the beginning had marked him as an eccentric eventually made him seem holy. His words, one writer said, were "soothing, burning, and penetrating." He had a way of "making his whole body a tongue." Now, when he arrived in a town, church bells rang. People stole the water in which he had washed his feet; it was said to cure sick cows.

Years before he died, Francis was considered a saint, and in eight

centuries he has lost none of his prestige. Apart from the Virgin Mary, he is the best known and the most honored of Catholic saints. In 1986, when Pope John Paul II organized a conference of world religious leaders to promote peace, he held it in Assisi. Francis is especially loved by partisans of leftist causes: the animal-rights movement, feminism, ecology, vegetarianism (though he was not a vegetarian). But you don't have to be on the left to love Francis. He is the patron saint (with Catherine and Bernardino of Siena) of the nation of Italy.

Consequently, a vast number of books have been written about him. The first of the biographies appeared a few years after his death, and they've been coming ever since. Two more have recently appeared in English. One, "Francis of Assisi: The Life and After-life of a Medieval Saint" (Yale), is by André Vauchez, a professor emeritus of medieval studies at the University of Paris. The book appeared in France in 2009 and has now been published in English, in a translation by Michael F. Cusato. The other volume, "Francis of Assisi: A New Biography" (Cornell), is by Augustine Thompson, a Dominican priest and professor of history at the



Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. The two books show that the Church is still trembling from the impact of this great reformer.

Francis came from the nouveau riche. His father, Pietro, was a successful cloth merchant in a time when the mercantile class was on the rise and clothes very much made the man. Francis went to school for only a few years, as was typical for a boy of his circumstances and sufficient for acquiring the skills a cloth merchant needed. As a teenager,

he belonged to a gang of rowdies from prosperous Assisi families who, of a night, would eat a fine dinner, get drunk, and, in the words of Francis's first biographer, commit "every kind of debauchery." Francis, a high-spirited boy, was their leader and paid the bills, which made him popular. Pietro often went on business trips to France, and Francis, in time, probably went with him. On those journeys, he would have learned both French and the troubadour style of poetry, which, scholars say, infused even

(Contd. on Pg. 15)

The Mayan doomsday revelation

The end of the Mayan calendar made many go berserk. People thought the end of the world was imminent and began making preparations to evade death. We learnt from the media how the gullible public from various parts of the world braced themselves for the doomsday.

Panic buying of candles and essentials was reported in China and Russia. An explosion in sales of survival shelters was witnessed in America. In

France, believers were preparing to converge on a mountain where they believed aliens would rescue them. In Barnaul, close to the Altai mountains, villagers snapped up all the torches and thermos flasks.

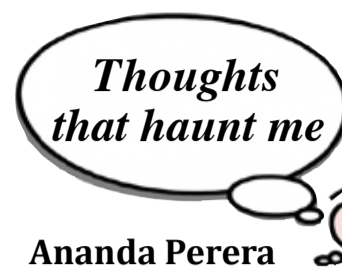
All the preparatory, frenzied activities on mass and on individual scale had one common purpose, survival. Does man think that he can exercise any possible influence to play hide and seek with death when his Cre-

ator decides to terminate his life? The idea of death is possibly the last thought that occurs to everyone. We are never prepared for it.

The prolific British playwright and novelist Somerset Maugham wrote a short story titled 'Death Speaks' in which he poignantly illustrates man's natural attitude when faced with death.

Death Speaks

There was a mer-



Ananda Perera

chant in Baghdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions. In a little while, the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, "Master, just now when I was in the market place, I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and

when I turned, I saw it was death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samara, and there death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and sped as fast as the horse could gallop.

After a while, the merchant went down to the market place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?" "That was not a threatening gesture, I said, "it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, because I have an appointment with him tonight in Samara."



The epitome of Christian faith

A few centuries ago
A man not so caring
for his ego
Saying good-bye to his
native land Goa
Sailed to an Island
called Lanka

Taking the form of a beggar
Thinking only of a mission
so bigger
Leaving his native land so dear
Having none but a linen to cover

Wanted not an office so honourable
Willed only a mission so noble
Thus settled here till he became feeble
Even amidst of pain and trouble

His love for Christ burned so bright
Made him renounce his future so bright
Urged him to refuse even what was his right
Leading him to holiness of great height

A Konkani Brahmin by birth
Set the fire for spiritual re-birth
At a time, nothing but gloomy
Transformed the blues for God's greater glory

A faith which is so much loved and lived
Touches the deep down when 'tis shared
Here comes a hero for Christian life of faith
For us to imitate in this 'Year of Faith'.

Bro. Clariyan Fernando

TAKE TIME FOR A MINUTE OF HUMOUR - SMILE!



"Isn't it strange how one hour seemed so long when you are at Church, and how short, they seem, when you are watching a teledrama.

Rev. Fr. Fraccid Anthony Fernando OMI

in the papers of the rulers of Syria sacrificing more than sixty-thousand of his own people to stay in power. We hear about the way the elected Israeli leaders are treating the Palestinians as if they are mere animals. Robert Mugabe is still clinging to power in Zimbabwe for more than 26 years at the ripe old age of eighty eight.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians writes that

the true Christian leadership is that of humility and of emptying oneself. "Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:5-8)



A CROSS

The way

By Sirohmi Gunesequera

A NEW YEAR

"Happy New Year!" chorused the children in the pre-school. Niloufer smiled as she hugged and kissed the little ones.

"Did you have a good Christmas?" she asked even though she knew that some of the kids were not Christians. She had already told the parents before the holidays to spread Christmas cheer by inviting the non-Christian children to their homes. Now she asked them for a feedback.

"Santa gave me a piggy bank so I can start saving money" said four-year old Panduka who was a Buddhist. "How did you meet Santa?" asked Niloufer. "I visited Joseph for Christmas and he had a gift for me under the Christmas tree. He told me that Santa

had left it for me" explained Panduka.

"Now that a New Year has begun, we should all forget that we belong to different religions and concentrate on doing good to everyone" said Niloufer, looking at the eager young faces turned innocently to her!

"It's so easy to lead little ones astray in a multi-religious society like ours here in Sri Lanka" confided Niloufer to her friend Rahul.

"Yes, I think religious leaders should be careful especially when talking to children. I feel that it's the extremists who divide up children. I know that children should follow a religion but they should be told that all religions teach good so they won't get mixed up" said Rahul.

"I know. In Sri Lanka, whether one goes to a church, a temple, a kovil or a mosque, children should be taught to respect each other and their different religions. Then when they grow up, they will learn to mix with those of different religions and not resort to fighting or harbor resentment" said Niloufer.

"Yes, the childhood memories of Christian children interacting with Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims will lead to peaceful co-existence" summed up Rahul.

An American soldier was travelling in a bus in Sweden in the nineteen fifties and he happened to start talking to the passenger seated next to him. The soldier was boasting about the democratic system of government that prevails in his country. He said that his president is elected by the people and if the people wanted to see him, make any complaints or requests there are ample opportunities. He can even make an appointment and meet him in the White House where the President resides.

The fellow passenger told him that they too have a democratic system of government and their legislative assembly is elected by the people. He also mentioned that Sweden has a king who is very concerned about the welfare of the people. The king goes in buses and trains along with the people to find out their problems. He gathers these problems and discusses them with the Prime-Minister and finds ways to resolve them.

At the next stop the fellow passenger excused himself and got off the bus. The American soldier could not believe that the Swedish king uses pub-

Leadership

Bits and Pieces
Madi



lic transport to know firsthand about the problems of his people. He asked one of the passengers in the bus whether what the passenger told him was true. In fact hearing his question two or three passengers turned to him and said, it is true. The fellow passenger that you were talking to and just got off the bus is our king." The passenger talking to the soldier was none other than the then Swedish King Gustav Adolf VI.

Sri Lanka is facing a leadership crisis at this moment. The members of the legislative assembly, elected by the people, think they have more pow-

er than the Judiciary. They are flexing their strong muscles against the Chief Justice. Some members of the Judiciary are threatening to take industrial action and boycott court sessions which is going to cause great inconvenience to the public.

Our leaders are afraid to go on public roads in their bullet-proof cars without a security escort preceding and following them. They need not ask people about their problems. They know that they cannot solve them. Maybe they will come to the people just before the elections and shake hands

with them and inquire about their problems. They are scared to take public transport, like the King of Sweden because the people may inundate their ears and minds with their numerous problems.

A few weeks ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus, God becoming man. He gave us a fine example of leadership. He not only understood the problems of mankind but came down to their level to experience their problems. He uplifted the whole of humanity to a sublime state that he experienced in heaven. He humbled himself to be born in a cattle-shed and bowed down and washed the feet of his disciples. He even gave his life for mankind by dying like a criminal on Calvary.

Hunger for political power is evident in all parts of the world. We read



**Art
& Architecture
in Liturgy**

Compiled by: Kishani S. Fernando

The feast in Cana indegenised

The marriage feast at Cana painted in the Unity Chapel at the Anglican Cathedral on Bauauddaloka Mawatha Colombo is also renowned artist Stanley Kirinda's last major gift to the world of art.

It was in the year 2007 that I watched Kirinda standing on a table intently leaning forward with one hand behind his back and the other holding a paint brush which gently almost lovingly fine-tuned each detail on the huge mural that almost ran around the whole room. I watched him silently from the door. He saw me and climbed down from his perch to talk to me. I remember telling him that his painting was bold and would revolutionize Christian art in Sri Lanka. He smiled and explained why he had painted Mother Mary in the way he did.



The theme of his painting is the marriage feast at Cana. But the marriage feast

here symbolizes the coming together of our countries' two main communities - the Sinhalese and Tamils who have been divided by war. As such the bride is shown as a Sinhalese lass dressed in her traditional Sinhala wedding attire and wedding jewellery, while the bride groom is shown dressed in a customary Tamil suit.

The marriage feast is in full swing. Guests from both communities are enjoying themselves. A dog sleeps under the table. Mother Mary is dressed in an orange saree with her hair held back in a bun and a simple string of pearls adorns her neck. Jesus is also there. He is dressed in the national costume. However there seems to be trouble - the wine had run out. Could not the wine here symbolise joy? And no wine symbolise that joy had run out; and that sin had taken root in the human family, eliminating joy?

Mary as a woman and mother immediately becomes aware of the lack of wine in the human family. She intervenes, intercedes and mediates with her Son. However Jesus is weary because He believes that the hour has not yet come. But Mary feels the pain and sorrow and she knows. She tells the servants to do as her Son instructs.

On the other side of the room another panel shows an excited group of servants rushing to the well in the garden to fill their water pots as Jesus tells them. Then Jesus performs his first miracle purely on the request of his dear mother.

The message of this painting is colossal. In a time of disharmony and distrust, in a time when the war between the Sinhalese and Tamils ravaged destroying everything in its path, in a time when the country was



Remembering Bl. Joseph Vaz

Pix from from left : A cross given by the Bl. Joseph Vaz to a family in Sillalai, Statue of Mary and baby Jesus given to the faithful of Wahakotte now in Mahawela, St. Anthony's statue given to Fr. Swaris' family, Crucifix given to the faithful of Putlam, Crucifix given to the faithful of Wahakotte, Cloak (blue) worn by the Bl. Joseph Vaz in

Sri Lanka, Cross planted by the Bl Joseph Vaz at Maha galgamuwa for the protection of the people from wild animals and snakes, The first statue honoring the Blessed Joseph Vaz in Kalamulla.



"I Believe" — "We Believe"

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



CCCB

earth, and He allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for Him and find Him — though indeed He is not far from each one of us. For "in Him we live and move and have our being."

29 • But this "intimate and vital bond of man to God" (GS 19,1) can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected by man. Such attitudes can have different causes: revolt against evil in the world; religious ignorance or indifference; the cares and riches of this world; the scandal of bad example on the part of believ-

ers; currents of thought hostile to religion; finally, that attitude of sinful man which makes him hide from God out of fear and flee His call.

30 • "Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice." Although man can forget God or reject Him, He never ceases to call every man to seek Him, so as to find life and happiness. But this search for God demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, "an upright heart," as well as the witness of others who teach him to seek God.

You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is Your power and Your wisdom is without measure. And man, so small a part of Your creation, wants to praise You: this man, though clothed with mortality and bearing the evidence of sin and the proof that You withstand the proud. Despite everything, man, though but a small a part of Your creation, wants to praise You. You yourself encourage him to delight in Your praise, for You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.

II. Ways of Coming to Know God

31 • Created in God's image and called to know and love Him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know Him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of "converging and convincing arguments," which allow us to attain certainty about the truth.

These "ways" of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world and the human person.

32 • The *world*: starting from movement, becoming, contingency, and the world's order and beauty, one can come

to a knowledge of God as the origin and the end of the universe.

As St. Paul says of the Gentiles: For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been early perceived in the things that have been made.

St. Augustine issues this challenge: Question the beauty of the earth, -question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air distending and diffusing itself, question the beauty of the sky... question all these realities. I respond: "See, we are beautiful." Their beauty is a profession [*confessio*]. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One [Pulcher] who is not subject to change?

33 • The *human person*: With his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the "seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material," can have its origin only in God.

34 • The world, and man, attest that they contain within themselves neither their first principle nor their final end, but rather that they participate in Being itself, which alone is without origin or end. Thus, in different ways, man can come to know that there exists a reality which is the first cause and final end of all things, a reality "that everyone calls 'God'".

35 • Man's faculties make him capable of coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal God. But for man to be able to enter into real intimacy with Him, God willed both to reveal Himself to man and to give him the grace of being able to welcome this revelation in faith. The proofs of God's existence, however, can predispose one to faith and help one to see that faith is not opposed to reason.

III. The Knowledge of God according to the Church

36 • "Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason." Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God's revelation. Man has this capacity because he is created "in the image of God."

37 • In the historical conditions in which he finds himself, however, man experiences many difficulties in coming to know God by the light of reason alone:

Though human reason is, strictly speaking, truly capable by its own natural power and light of attaining to a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God, who watches over and controls the world by his providence, and of the natural law written in our hearts by the Creator; yet there are many obstacles which prevent reason from the effective

and fruitful use of this inborn faculty. For the truths that concern the relations between God and man wholly transcend the visible order of things, and, if they are translated into human action and influence it, they call for self-surrender and abnegation. The human mind, in its turn, is hampered in the attaining of such truths, not only by the impact of the senses and the imagination, but also by disordered appetites which are the consequences of original sin. So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful.

38 • This is why man stands in need of being enlightened by God's revelation, not only about those things that exceed his understanding, but also "about those religious and moral truths which of themselves are not beyond the grasp of human reason, so that even in the present condition of the human race, they can be known by all men with ease, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error."

IV How Can We Speak about God?

39 • In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about Him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists.

40 • Since our knowledge of God is limited, our language about Him is equally so. We can name God only by taking creatures as our starting point, and in accordance with our limited human ways of knowing and thinking.

41 • All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. The manifold perfections of creatures - their truth, their goodness, their beauty - all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently we can name God by taking His creatures' perfections as our starting point, "for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator."

42 • God transcends all creatures. We must therefore continually purify our language of everything in it that is limited, image-bound or imperfect, if we are not to confuse our image of God - "the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable" - with our human representations. Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God.

43 • Admittedly, in speaking about God like this, our language is using human modes of expression; nevertheless it really does attain to God Himself, though unable to express Him in His infinite simplicity. Likewise, we must recall that "between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying an even greater dissimilitude", and that "concerning God, we cannot grasp what He is, but only what He is not, and how other beings stand in relation to Him."

(Contd. on Pg. 5)

We begin our profession of faith by saying: "I believe" or "We believe." Before expounding the Church's Faith, as confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the Liturgy and lived in observance of God's commandments and in prayer, we must first ask what "to believe" means. Faith is man's response to God, who reveals Himself and gives Himself to man, at the same time bringing man a superabundant light as he searches for the ultimate meaning of his life. Thus we shall consider first that search (*Chapter One*).

CHAPTER ONE

Man's Capacity for God

I. The Desire for God

27 • The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to Himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for:

The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists, it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator.

28 • In many ways, throughout history down to the present day, men have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behaviour: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations, and so forth. These forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a *religious being*:

From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole

St. Sebastian - upheld by all

The New Year was ushered in with the prayers and supplications of many Catholics who very ardently and religiously flocked to their parish churches to celebrate the feast of Mary the Mother of God, amidst the showery lighting and bursting of deafening firecrackers, to show the world that we have indeed stepped into a New Year of Grace and Faith.

We open the New Year with the month of January with its balmy breezes wafting through the rustling foliage of the ever green and lush Sri Lanka.

In many parishes, the festivities of Christmas and the New Year continue and neatly dovetail into the celebration of another popular festival of a saint whose popularity remains undimmed across so many centuries. Starting from the South, the cathedrals, the churches, the shrines and the colleges dedicated to the beloved soldier saint dot the island right up to the North end of the country.

St. Sebastian whose place in the pantheon of Catholic saints, may perhaps be only second in popularity and prominence to the wonder worker saint, Anthony, is venerated and celebrated on an unprecedented scale in many or may be in all the dioceses of the country during this month. St. Sebastian was an early Christian saint and martyr, who is said to have been killed during the Roman emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians. He is normally depicted in art and literature tied to a post or tree and shot with arrows. This is the most common artistic depiction of St. Sebastian. However, Church history tells us that he was rescued and healed by one Irene of Rome. Shortly afterwards, he confronted and challenged Diocletian, criticized him severely and as a result was cruelly clubbed to death. He is highly

venerated, deeply respected, and prayerfully invoked in the Catholic Church as a perfect model of unyielding courage, heroic and enduring faith and fearless determination in the face of threats, challenges and dire consequences for adhering firmly to the true faith in Jesus Christ, the king of martyrs. His powerful intercession is also sought by people who carry the crushing burden of the cross of suffering, especially from infectious diseases.

The details of St. Sebastian's martyrdom were spoken of, by the 4th century Bishop Ambrose of Milan. St. Ambrose stated that he came from Milan and he was already venerated there in the 4th century.

St. Sebastian is an extremely popular saint, traditionally designated as the patron saint especially of soldiers and athletes who often wear his medal or relics as a pious sacramental.

It has been said that the work of a martyr begins, not ends the day he dies. A martyr is one who bears witness to Jesus Christ by paying the ultimate price for his loyalty to Him by the shedding of his blood.

Three famous and hugely popular shrines dedicated to St. Sebastian in the Archdiocese of Colombo, among many are found in Moratuwa, Kandana and Katuwapitiya.

Three well known churches erected in his honor, among so many, in the diocese of Chilaw are at Katuneriya, Godella and Madampe.

The connection of the popular saint to St. Ambrose was evidenced in the fact that the original church at Katuneriya, going back in history more than 125 years, was a very small one built at the location where the present cemetery is and which had been dedicated to St. Ambrose. According to the annals relating to the parish, it was one zealous and

indefatigable Oblate Missionary by the name of Fr. Chunevel of happy and revered memory, with great foresight and vision who was responsible for the present gigantic, beautiful and imposing edifice dedicated to St. Sebastian that stands majestically today like a sentinel in a very spacious, salubrious and sprawling coconut estate.

It is arguably the largest parish in the Diocese of Chilaw in terms of its Catholic population and even the number of priests and religious who have very generously dedicated their life to the service of the Church.

Whether it is a Christian soldier like St. Sebastian in the ancient city of Milan or the Jews in Auschwitz or the many in Sri Lanka who lost their lives in the most relentless war that sadly dragged on through 30 long years, the death of the innocent is the ultimate abomination. Today, people are so callous and casual about this. Starvation, abortion, political machinations—all this cry out that something is terribly wrong in and with the world. This is particularly and starkly true when the innocent victim is a child. One group of victims, the martyrs like heroic St. Sebastian proclaim the message that all of us believers must hold on to, in the worst possible situations. We surely think of them as witnesses to the Faith and indeed they do give a powerful testimony to life after death. But they also remind us that God certainly brings good out of evil.

Innumerable innocent people have died because they were in the way and seemed expendable or because of the greed and sinfulness of man. We honor the martyrs like St. Sebastian because they thought that the loss of life was not the ultimate disaster. Let us listen to them during this month as we greatly rejoice and celebrate their birth into heavenly glory, in order to put our experience

of life into perspective. The martyrs like St. Sebastian remind us very powerfully that God continues to bring immense good out of evil.

We have been horrified by dreadful crimes against generous missionaries and apostles in recent years. They are too many to describe within these limited parameters. There have been so many during this century. These were awful, horrible and utterly hideous events. But even out of these things which, were only permitted by God and perpetrated by the free will of human beings, He can bring incredible and immeasurable good. As scripture says, 'Their blood cries out'.

You and I are not likely to be martyred for our faith. We have not earned such a glorious fate. But fortunately we can all aspire and strive to become 'White Martyrs'. When the time comes, we will probably die of—strokes, heart attacks, cancer, getting hit by a car or even in this, our crazy land today, by the thrust of a knife or the hack of a rapier. But surely, die we will and that goes without saying and the majority of us will know that we are dying when we are dying. This will afford us the same opportunity that St. Sebastian had, to surrender ourselves freely to God. The ultimate natural evil of this ephemeral life is death.



It will terminate our biological existence. It is also the opportunity for the ultimate victory which is eternal life. St. Paul put it so well. "Death where is your victory? Death where is your sting?"

Jesus is often called the first martyr. But Salvation assuredly did not need to come through the murder of the Messiah. But that is how it came, so we could know, in all sufferings and sorrows of life that our Creator is also our Redeemer, that He would bring joy out of sorrow, hope out of despair, love out of hate, life out of death and eternity out of time. This is our undying hope. It alone makes sense.

So, a very happy and joyous feast to all those who celebrate the glorious memory of St. Sebastian whose work begins anew today as we invoke his blessed name.

Rev. Fr. Joe Paul Fernando,
Katuneriya

I believe..... Contd. from Pg. 8

IN BRIEF

44• Man is by nature and vocation a religious being. Coming from God - going toward God, man lives a fully human life only if he freely lives by his bond with God.

45• Man is made to live in communion with God in whom he finds happiness: "When I am completely united to You, there will be no more sorrow or trials; entirely full of You, my life will be complete" (St. Augustine, Conf 10, 28, 39: PL 32, 795).

46• When he listens to the message of creation and to the voice of conscience, man can arrive at certainty about the existence of God, the cause and the end of everything.

47• The Church teaches that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, can be known with certainty from His works, by the natural light of human reason (cf Vatican Council I, can. 2, § 1: DS 3026).

48• We really can name God, starting from the manifold perfections of his creatures, which are likenesses of the infinitely perfect God, even if our limited language cannot exhaust the mystery.

49• "Without the Creator, the creature vanishes" (GS 36). This is the reason why believers know that the love of Christ urges them to bring the light of the living God to those who do not know Him or who reject Him.

(Excerpts from Catechism of the Catholic Church)

St. Titus

Bishop Confessor - January 26

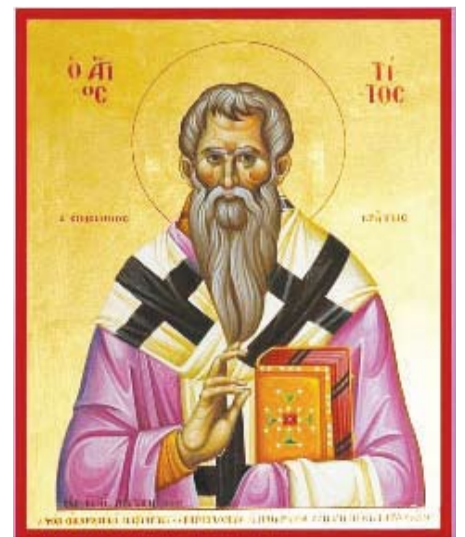
St. Titus, another beloved disciple of St. Paul, is thought to have been a native of Antioch. A Gentile by birth, he was sent to Jerusalem to gather reports on our Lord's miracles, and there became one of the 72 disciples.

From Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians we learn that Titus acted not only as his interpreter and secretary, but as his co-worker and fellow-missionary, whom he highly esteemed for his truly Christian zeal and solitude, and on whom he came to depend more and more as time went on.

In 64 A.D., Titus,

whose brother-in-law was governor of Crete, was chosen by Paul, to carry on his missionary work in that great island, which is 120 miles long; the Epistle to Titus contains detailed instruction on selecting and installing presbyters in each of the cities of Crete. In 65 A.D. he was sent to preach the Gospel in what is today Dalmatia (Yugoslavia) but he seems to have returned to his episcopal labours in Crete the very next year and to have

died a peaceful death there in his 94th year. His body was laid to rest in the Cathedral at Gortyna and remained there until the Saracens destroyed the city in 823. Then his head was taken to the Basilica of St. Mark at Venice, where it is venerated to this day.



* APPRECIATION

A loving tribute to the servant of God - Rev. Fr. B.A. Thomas

Beloved Father, on January 26, 2013 we keep alive within us as it is the 49th heavenly birthday of yours. What a tremendous love you had for the Catholic Church! It was your keen desire to establish a group of Monks and Nuns whose main concern would be to intercede for the people of God through prayer and penance. Your filial love for our dear Blessed Mother was so much that you wished these Rosarians would mount guard before the Blessed Sacrament day and night almost 'round the clock' to have an uninterrupted prayer. Thank you dear Father. "Monastery is a place guarded by God... Sing for Joy for; I am coming to live among you (Zach. 2: 9-10). It is the dwelling place of God's

unique presence like the tent of meeting. God is met day by day where the Trinitarian fills the entire place and is recognized and honoured as the only Lord."

You, beloved founder, as a loyal son you offered a gift to the Church. Monastic Community is compared to Moses who in prayer determined the fate of Israel's battle. (Ex. 17: 11) We have been taught by you that we are a precious gift also to the local Church to which we belong. Our saintly Thomas Cardinal Cooray OMI knowing the value of a Contemplative Monastery went all the way from Colombo to meet you at Tholagatty and made a humble request to have a Rosarian Monastery (a Prayer House) near the National Shrine of

Our Lady of Lanka. Because he knew that the Monastery represents the heart of the local Church where the Spirit always groans in supplication for the entire community and where thanksgiving rises unceasingly. We are glad to learn from the very document 'Ecclesia de Eucharistia' of Pope John Paul II that as Pastors and guides of all God's flock, the Bishops are the chief guardians of the Contemplative Charism. The Holy Father says that Bishops must nurture the Contemplative Communities with the breaking of the Word and Eucharist Offering where necessary with spiritual assistance of properly trained priests.

Dear Father Founder, today more than in the past our modern society is marked

by dispersion, a lack of silence and illusory values that have come to the forefront. Intercede before the Throne of God in heaven that we the Rosarians and daughters may not be deceived or corrupted by the clamour of worldly values, but stick to your holy precepts of prayer and penance as an uninterrupted intercession for the people of God. As the Monastery nourished by the Holy Spirit would remain genuinely and wholly directed towards the contemplation of God! Help us from heaven today that we the Rosarians may be ever faithful to our prayer mission and welcome those who wish to draw strength and spiritual vigour from our prayer especially from the Eucharistic Adoration in which our typical Holy

Rosary is prayed contemplating the wonderful mysteries of the life of Our Lord and that of our Blessed Mother Mary.

Help us more and more to bear in our hearts the sufferings and anxieties of all those who seek our spiritual help.

We pray to the Lord our God that the Church may soon recognize the virtues of your life and the precious gift that you offered to the Holy Catholic Church, and may grant us the joy of the day of your Beatification according to the Holy Will of God. Mother of the Most Holy Rosary, deign to honour thy servant on earth.

Amen.

Sr. Mary Laetitia CR

Blessed Joseph Vaz

Unique Apostle, a pivot to history

On January 16, 2013 Catholics in Sri Lanka commemorated Blessed Joseph Vaz known as the Apostle of Sri Lanka. Blessed Joseph Vaz came to Sri Lanka in 1687 under the guise of a coolie. He ministered to forlorn Catholics in Sri Lanka for 24 long years amidst the Dutch persecution. It was Blessed Joseph Vaz who saved the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka from extinction during the Dutch period. He also laid the foundation for an indigenous Catholic Church in our country. Blessed Joseph Vaz, a Goan, a native Indian, a missionary in his own right, was a revolutionary with an entirely different set of ideals more in tune with the Gospel of Christ. From the time he heard of the sad plight of Catholics in Sri Lanka who were undergoing a severe persecution under the Dutch rulers, he longed to visit the island and help the believers.

During his time the Dutch challenged the supremacy of the Portuguese at sea and forbade the presence of any Catholic priests in the island. In 1686 Joseph Vaz embarked on his courageous task and began his mission in Jaffna. During his 24 years of work he was able to re-establish the Catholic Church, publish Catholic literature and organize small Christian communities under lay leaders who looked after the faithful and conducted religious services in the absence of priests. He laid the foundation for a truly local Church and had a fruitful Apostolate. Blessed Joseph Vaz proved himself to be an embodiment of Christ. He walked barefoot all over the country visiting the scattered Catholics attending to their spiritual needs. He fasted daily unless he was ill and slept on a mat. When an epidemic of small pox spread in Kandy in 1697 Blessed Joseph Vaz and his companion Fr. Joseph Carvalho nursed both Christians and non-Christians.

Blessed Joseph Vaz and other oratorians who followed him had to work hard in Sri Lanka during the Dutch persecution of Catholics. They were never disheartened and they looked after the spiritual welfare of the Catholics under severe oppression, victimization and humiliation. They went from place to place leading simple, serene and austere lives. As proved in Sri Lanka there was and is so much diversity because of religious, linguistic and regional differences. Fr. Joseph Vaz saw clearly that he had to work extremely hard to resolve the differences between a dominant culture and sub cultures. He was interested in evolving a shared work culture, where cross culture differences were minimized and people work with respect for one another.



The following excerpts from the pamphlet of (A letter from Ven. Joseph Vaz) written by Fr. Cosme Jose Costa S.F.X. testify to the above. (Quote) (without having the differences between a dominant culture and sub cultures. He was interested in evolving a shared work culture, where cross culture differences were minimized and people work with respect for one another. The following excerpts from the pamphlet of (A letter from Ven. Joseph Vaz) written by Fr. Cosme Jose Costa S.F.X. testifies to the above. "Without having attended any Missiological faculty, non-existent in those times and in spite of being educated in a Western way in Goa, the genius of Fr. Joseph Vaz conceived the most important thesis of Missiology; Adaptation towards the external inculturation with a sense of belonging to the culture of a missionary that makes his

own, and even better incarnation of himself in to the culture of those whom he is going to evangelize".

Blessed Joseph Vaz was a unique apostle who became a pivot to Sri Lanka's religious and cultural history. Unlike the European missionaries during the Portuguese era he did not implant Western culture along with the Christian Faith. He wanted to set up a Catholic Church adapted to the country and suited to its needs and circumstances. In fact the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka under Blessed Joseph Vaz and his fellow oratorians witnessed excellent forms of cultural adaptation. The oratorian priests including Fr. Joseph Vaz being Easterners were in a better position than the European missionaries to understand and appreciate indigenous culture. They, rather than transplanting foreign forms made an attempt to present the Catholic religion to suit the cultural traits in this country.

Surveys show that Fr. Joseph Vaz had emphasized on two things in his instructions to the priests of his oratorian congregation who opted to work with him. This was to overcome parochialism (looking at the problems at their own perspective only) and ethnocentrism (believing that their own culture is the best). One cannot find better guide lines than these for managing cultural diversity. A pivot in Sri Lankan religious history the best lesson that one can learn from the life of Blessed Joseph Vaz in terms of managing cultural diversity is how to blend the cultures in such a way that one provides strength for the weakness of the other. That is, one should complement and supplement rather than supplant. Blessed Joseph Vaz introduced oriental forms of worship, prayers and Catholic drama. He himself composed Catechisms, a summary of Catholic Doctrine, meditations on the way of Christ to the

Diamond Jubilee



Michael and Joyce

Michael and Joyce Pieris celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of their marriage on December 29, 2012 with a Thanksgiving Eucharistic Service at All Saints' Church Borella, where they got married in the year 1952.

Rev. Fr. Travis Gabriel, Rector of St. Peter's College officiated at the Service with several other Priests participating.

Rev. Fr. Benedict

Joseph, National Director of Catholic Communication Centre delivered an inspiring Homily on family life and especially about the services rendered by Michael to the electronic media, for several decades.

The Holy Father, Benedict XVI imparted the Apostolic Blessings to both Michael and Joyce on the occasion, with prayers for the happiness on their Christian life together for 60 years - 1952 to 2012.

cross and devotions and litanies to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sinhala and Tamil. Blessed Joseph Vaz organized Catholic feasts and processions with a national outlook. There were dances with sticks (Lee Keli Natum) and traditional music at the feast of St. Anthony, celebrated in Kandy, in the reign of King Wimaladharmasuriya II. It was Blessed Joseph Vaz who introduced carrying tender coconut palms in place of olive branches on Palm Sunday. The church structure and usages, ecclesiastical set up, Catechetical instructions, prayers and hymns and Catholic culture in Sri Lanka, could be traced to the traditions set up by Blessed Joseph Vaz. From the moment the saintly young priest Fr. Joseph Vaz had come to know the sad plight of Sri Lanka's Catholics he was determined to heed God's call and give himself totally to this mission undeterred by numerous challenges, risks and disappointments. Following the footsteps of Blessed Joseph Vaz if parents and Catechists could impress upon every child that the background of each individual is different and one is no better than or worse than the other, and encourage them to develop tolerance and appreciation for culture, race and gender differences, surely then we can think of an integrated Sri Lanka once again. Blessed Joseph Vaz who was an unique apostle, was finally made a saint by the Catholic Church, recognizing him as a pivot to Asia's religious culture. He leaves an unparalleled saga of missionary adventure. In fact he is considered the greatest missionary Asia has ever produced.

Miran Perera

Frist Holy Communion at Ss. Peter & Paul's Cathedral



Fifty one children received First Holy Communion at Ss. Peter & Paul's Cathedral, Ratnapura, presided over by the Most Rev. Dr. Cletus Perera, Bishop of Ratnapura. Also in the picture are Rev. Fr. Nicholas Gabriel, Rev. Sr. Calista, teacher Rankika Anthony, teacher Maridas and the recipients.

Theobald Samaratunga

Lawrentians 'Go Biz with Green'



Go Biz with Green was the theme for the year's Commerce Day at St. Lawrence's Convent that was held on October 23, 2012. The event was an effort of the students of the Commerce Society comprising students of the Advance Level Commerce Stream.

Mr. Gajendra Liyanarachchi, Associate Member of Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, UK and Chartered Institute of Marketing, UK was the chief guest at this event.

Sherline

Baby Jesus nestled by Mary and Joseph



Baby Jesus nestled by Mary and Joseph within a birds nest, beneath the trunk of a tree, was an innovative crib, which attracted many, to the Velankanni Church in India

Mary Dissanayake

"Wanni" - Jesus and family

After the war, Jesus speaks.....
That He is still surrounded by check-points
He has lost His birth and education certificates
And He is unable to get His father's death certificate either
His mother wants to be helped to get her
Marriage certificate and her son's documents.

My place is visited by different people
from different places.
Yes, of course they listen to me and to my family
They also sympathize with us
At the end they all disappear....

And He also says "some of the" roads,
Schools and hospitals are....
As it was in the beginning,
And "some of the houses" that were destroyed
Are not yet being rebuilt.
He needs to share "some certain secrets" too.

I feel that He and His family need our support
So let us visit 'A Family in Wanni'
During this Holy season and stretch our hand out
According to the needs of the family
So than we all can celebrate "This Year - 2013"
Truly, Honestly and Happily!

Sr. A. Christina Lourdes (H.F.)

One becomes a best or better

One song can speak a moment,
One flower can wake the dream,
One tree can start a forest,
One bird can herald spring.

One simile begins a friendship,
One hand clasp lifts a soul,
One star can guide a ship at sea,
One word can frame the goals.

One vote change a nations,
One sunbeam lights a room,
One candle wipes out darkness,
One laugh will conquer gloom.

One step must start each journey,
One word must start each prayer,
One hope will raise spirits,
One touch can show you care.

One voice can speak with wisdom,
One heart can know what's true,
One life can make a difference,
You see, it's up to you!

*A. Desmond Croos
St. Claret Minor Seminary*

Spirit of God, what matters most

Spirit of God is a mighty call
Without any doubt its so tall
Tear not you will never fall
In faith and trust one in all.

You can even face a brawl
Remain steadfast to grab this haul
Yes, its God's Blessings that will prove it all
Victory will be at your beck and call

How happy it is to ponder on Gods ways
Why not come to me God always says
Behold God in all troubles you face
Success will be always with God's grace

Francis

St. Sebastian

St. Sebastian pure and noble soldier
Youthful preacher early Christian martyr
Intercede with Jesus help us as we pray
We your clients praise your name today.

Milan's dear patron come lo and behold
Faithful to Jesus valiant and bold
Preaching Christ with never-failing zeal
Blest by God with mighty power to heal

Feeding the poor and strengthening the weak
Your fervent converts martyrdom did seek
Healing cripples making wounded whole
Bringing grace to every needy soul

Emperor's threats you did not care to heed
Arrows did pierce you causing you to bleed
Quickly healed you bravely preached again
Struck with cudgels cruelly you were slain

Glorious with God we honour you today
In grievous illness heal us all we pray
Make us pure our feeble faith renew
To the Lord let all our hearts be true

What it says in
the Readings

Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are
life; you have the message of eternal life.
(Jn. 6:63)

LITURGICAL CALENDAR YEAR C
20th - 27th Jan. 2013

**Sun: SECOND SUNDAY OF
ORDINARY TIME**

Is. 62:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Jn. 2: 1-11

**Mon: Memorial of St. Agnes, Virgin &
Martyr**

Hebr. 5: 1-10; Mk. 2: 18-22

**Tue: Memorial of St. Vincent,
Deacon & Martyr**

Hebr. 6:10-20; Mk. 2: 23-28

Wed: Hebr. 7: 1-3, 15-17; Mk. 3: 1-6

**Thu: Memorial of St. Francis de Sales,
Bishop & Doctor**

Hebr. 7: 25-8:6; Mk. 3: 7-12

**Fri: Feast of The Conversion of
St. Paul the Apostle**

Acts. 22: 3-16 or 9: 1-22; M. 16:15-18

**Sat: Memorial of SS. Timothy &
Titus, Bishops**

2 Tim. 1: 1-8 or Tit 1: 1-5;

Lk. 10: 1-9

**Sun: Is. 62:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-11;
Jn. 2: 1-11**

Prayer of the Faithful

*Response: Lord make all of us to experience the
maternal care of Mary our Mother*

For the leaders of the Church that they may
build it into a sacrament of unity, love and peace. Let us
pray to the Lord.

*Response: Lord make all of us to experience the
maternal care of Mary our Mother*

For all those in public office that God may give
them a strong and unselfish love so that they may work
for the progress of all people. Let us pray to the Lord.

*Response: Lord make all of us to experience the
maternal care of Mary our Mother*

For couples who are experiencing difficulty in
their marriages: that in their need they may find the help
of Christ. Let us pray to the Lord.

*Response: Lord make all of us to experience the
maternal care of Mary our Mother*

That Christ may touch us and transform our
lives, especially in moments of sorrow and hurt. Let us
pray to the Lord.

*Response: Lord make all of us to experience the
maternal care of Mary our Mother*

**Living with Christ
Morning Prayer**

Almighty and ever-living God,
I approach the sacrament
of your only-begotten Son
Our Lord Jesus Christ,
I come sick to the doctor of life,
unclean to the fountain of mercy,
blind to the radiance of eternal light,
and poor and needy to the Lord
of heaven and earth.
Lord, in your great generosity,
heal my sickness,
wash away my defilement,
enlighten my blindness, enrich my poverty,
and clothe my nakedness.
May I receive the bread of angels,
the King of kings and Lord of lords,
with humble reverence,
with the purity and faith,
the repentance and love,
and the determined purpose
that will help to bring me to salvation.
May I receive the sacrament
of the Lord's body and blood,
and its reality and power.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading:
Is. 62: 1-5

To the Israelites who returned from exile the Lord through the prophet promises a restoration of the splendor and glory of their city. This gives hope for a New Jerusalem. This will be done out of mercy and love.

Second Reading:
1 Cor. 12: 4-11

Looking at the different gifts and talents that the people have, St. Paul tries to show the converts how the spirit would work in different people in different ways and that they should accept and respect this.

Gospel: Jn.2: 1-11

It is the story of the first miracle of our Lord at Cana in Galilee. The Lord makes use of this opportunity to perform his first miracle and to manifest his glory to His disciples.

Reflection

Today's readings demand from us respect and a complete surrender to the ways of the Lord for God knows what is best for us and to the world. He also has a purpose for everything, and has a message and a mission behind everything. We for our part should surrender ourselves and place our entire trust and hope in the Lord, for He is good and His love is without end, and His ways are right for the world. Besides He also is merciful and forgiving.

In the first reading the Israelites who were living in exile are freed and are brought back to Jerusalem. The Lord promises them a re-glorification of their city, Jerusalem, and will do it out of His mercy and love. He had a purpose for this exile and now he has a purpose for this re-glorification. Therefore God acts out of mercy, forgiveness and love. Let us place all our trust and hope in the Lord.

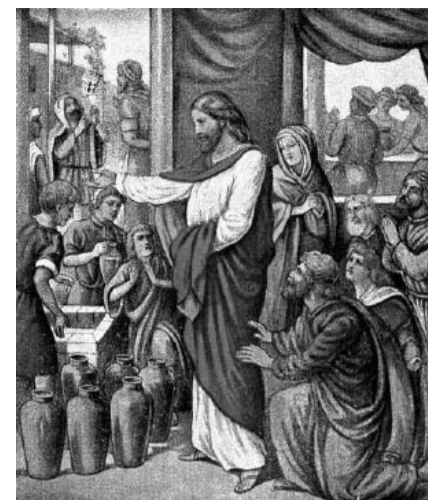
The second reading speaks of the numerous gifts that the people could possess, but it reminds them they are all from the same Lord and through the same spirit. Therefore we should respect His purpose in us. To one is given the utterance of wisdom, to another knowledge, to one faith, to another prophecy...etc. But it is the same spirit. Therefore we should respect these as the Lord has a purpose. We should not only respect these gifts but also should not demand from people what they do not possess. By way of an example just because I am called to be a prophet I should not demand all others to be prophets. Other may be called to be healers, miracle workers, men of wisdom, and men of knowledge...etc. We should believe in the fact that the Lord has His own plan for each and everyone of us, what is important is that we work in the Lord's spirit and not in the spirit of our own.

In the Gospel when the wine ran short the Lord had His own purpose behind it. Even Mother Mary too had to wait till the time of the Lord was to come because the Lord wanted to make use of this opportunity to perform His first public miracle and to manifest His glory to the disciples. Thus we see God has a plan for everything and for everyone in this world and for everything that happens has a purpose. Therefore we should respect and surrender ourselves to His will with all hope and trust.

Aid Story

A young builder had just set up in business on his own. An old friend of his family, now a wealthy brewer, came to him and said "Jim I want you to build me a house. Here are some rough plans. Use the best materials. I leave you a free hand. Bring me the bills whenever you like. Make a thoroughly good job of it." Jim took the job on, and at first meant to carry it out conscientiously. But gradually a greedy desire for more profits made him skip the work, using cheap materials while charging for the best quality, employed second-rate workmen, and so on.

When the house



was finished, Jim took the keys to his friend, also the bills. The brewer wrote out a cheque. "Here you are Jim" he said "You can keep the keys and here are deeds of the property. The house is your own Jim, my present to you. I hope you will be happy there for the rest of your days. The builder settled down in his new house. The winter came. The damp crept up the walls; the winds whistled through the cracks, rain came through the roof, the windows jammed.

"And I've got to live in it the rest of my life," thought him. "What a fool I was not to do a good job of it."

We are each of us building our own character and soul, and God has given us a free hand, with His grace to help, what we make of our soul in this life, we shall be for all eternity.

Rev. Fr. Ciswan De Croos

Rich Man, Poor Man

Contd. from Pg. 5

his most earthy writings, notably the "Canticle of Brother Sun," said to be the first poem in the Italian language, in which he addresses the sun, the water, and the wind with humble adoration.

Francis's world was filled with violence—between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, between Assisi and other towns, and, in the town itself, between the merchant class and the local nobility. It wouldn't have been a rare day when Francis saw somebody being knifed. In 1202, around the age of twenty-one, he himself went to war, in a battle between Assisi and Perugia. He was apparently glad to go. He got to wear fine clothes and ride an excellent horse. But Assisi was soon defeated, and Francis spent a year in a dank prison, with rats, before his father was able to ransom him.

It was probably in prison that the change in Francis began. As his friends noticed, he had lost heart for revelry. Outside the city walls he found a little abandoned church, and he spent whole days there, praying. Finally, he began sleeping there as well. Pietro di Bernardone's business, as Augustine Thompson explains it, may well have been secured by his wife's dowry. When she died, therefore, a good chunk of the family's holdings would go to Francis, who, if he was going to be communing with God all day, would be a poor guardian of the enterprise. When Francis was about twenty-five, Pietro took him to the town's ecclesiastical court and explained how the young man had disregarded his responsibilities. Francis agreed with what his father said, and renounced all claims on his family. Then, we are

told by early biographers, he stripped naked, placed his clothes at his father's feet, and said that from then on God, not Pietro di Bernardone, would be his father. There is no evidence that Francis ever again conversed with his parents.

In a document called his "Testament," written shortly before he died, Francis said that his conversion was due to his work with lepers, a number of whom lived outside Assisi. He explained, "God allowed me to begin my repentance in this way: when I lived in sin, seeing lepers was a very bitter experience for me. God himself guided me into their midst and among them I performed acts of charity. What appeared bitter to me became sweetness of the soul and body." Lepers were horrifying to people at the time, not only because of their unsightly affliction—black boils, truncated limbs—but because the disease was thought to be caused by sin. If a leper wanted to approach a town, he had to do so at night and ring a bell to warn people of his presence. In Roberto Rossellini's "The Flowers of St. Francis" (1950), the best of the many movies made about the saint, a leper, sounding a bell, goes past the hut where Francis and his fellows are bedded down. Francis rouses himself, catches up with the man, and embraces him. We see the leper only darkly: his blackened skin, its clammy sheen. We see Francis's face directly, with no tears, just an ardent gaze. This is one of the most appalling and thrilling scenes in Western cinema, and it epitomizes the idea that evidently fired the young Francis. As he saw it now, the more a person was despised, the more he or she resembled Jesus in his last agonies, when he was abandoned by almost all the people he had come to save. To obey Jesus, therefore, you had to join those who were abandoned.