



Feast of Our Lady of Lanka

SINCE FEBRUARY 11, 1869

MESSENGER

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"Go and Announce"

VERBUM TELEVISION

Sri Lanka's first TV Channel gets going

Verbum Television, Sri Lanka's first Catholic TV Channel was officially launched last Friday by the Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith at the Auditorium of the Archbishop's House.

This new Catholic TV Channel with its studios at Ragama, began operations on a small scale last June, through the Internet. With its launch last Friday the Channel will now telecast through Sri Lanka Telecom's PEO TV - (Personalized Entertainment Option) and DIALOG TV.

In a message sent by His Holiness Pope Francis to mark the occasion which was read out by His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the Holy Father while recalling his recent visit to Sri Lanka has stated that through

the work of evangelizing, the Channel should encourage and foster unity among all people in the country by taking into account the Church's teaching of respecting the dignity of all people. The Holy Father's message was signed by Archbishop Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State.

Addressing the large gathering which included the Minister of Christian Affairs, John Amaratunga, members of parliament, clergy, religious and guests, His Eminence specially thanked the Chairman of Verbum TV, Milan de Silva for his initiative and desire in seeing the need to launch a Catholic Television Channel in the country catering to the spiritual needs of the Catholic community.

This initiative of Mr. Milan de Silva came

as a blessing in disguise. With the many challenges the Church was facing with the rise of fundamentalism and threats to the faith, the Catholic Bishops' Conference felt the ardent need to have its own TV Channel to counteract false propaganda. It was at this time that Mr. Milan de Silva came to us with his proposal of a Catholic Channel and the feasibility of setting up one. The telecast through PEO TV and DIALOG TV will be an opportunity to reach out to Sri Lankan Catholics living abroad, His Eminence said.

Having our own TV Channel is like having a weapon in our hands and it is up to us to use it for the good of all and not misuse it, His Eminence said. Referring to the Decree on Media of Social Communications



His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith lighting the candle at the Launch while Chairman Verbum Television, Mr. Milan de Silva looks on.

by Blessed Paul VI, *Inter Mirifica*, His Eminence said the decree speaks on the responsible role the media should play in society. Hence the call of this Catholic Channel should be to reveal the truth that the Word of God proclaims, promote the unity of the people and improve the quality

of life in the society. His Eminence did not hesitate to tell his audience of the important place the Christian Faith had on Social Communication. He said that when the printing press was first invented by Gutenberg the first book to be printed was the Bible. It was called the Gutenberg

Bible. Guglielmo Marconi who is commonly credited with invention of the radio teamed up with the Vatican to create Vatican Radio which at that time was a new tool of evangelization.

His Eminence called Catholics to financially help to maintain this channel.

A Budget for the Poor

The new all-party National Unity Government on January 29, presented what many independent economic analysts see as the first ever interim Budget mainly for millions of poor people of Sri Lanka.

Fulfilling one of its main promises, less than three weeks after coming to office in what is widely seen as a peaceful, silent revolution by the people, the new government Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake announced sweeping measures to provide largely short-term relief to the people. He said some 1.3 million public servants would receive the biggest bonanza - an immediate salary increase of Rs. 5000 from this month and another Rs. 5000 from June. Pensioners and Samurधि beneficiaries and Mahapola Scholarship students would also receive big increases.

For more than five million employees in the private sector, the government urged private firms to give them a salary increase of at least Rs. 2500 from this month but the government spokesmen insisted that under the market economy policy, the private firms could



not be forced to do so. The Finance Minister also announced that the allocation for the vital health care and education sectors were being doubled.

The Minister had promised that prices of 10 essential items would be reduced from this month but in the interim Budget he announced that the prices of not 10 but 13 items were being reduced. These include a substantial cut in the prices of milk powder, wheat

flour and bread, sugar and canned fish. What the new government did to reduce prices was to remove the tax on these items.

Earlier last week, Power and Energy Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka, in a pre budget gift to the people announced that the price of petrol has been slashed by Rs 33 per litre, diesel by Rs. 16 and kerosene by Rs. 16. The Finance Minister in the interim Budget reduced another Rs. 9 in the price of kerosene oil. The Minister said the money required to provide all this relief

to the poor and middle-class people would be obtained by imposing new taxes on the wealthy. These would include a one-off tax of Rs.1000 million on five casinos which have been functioning on questionable registration procedures. The Minister also said a mansion tax of Rs. 1 million would be imposed on mansions valued at more

than Rs. 100 million or covering a floor space of more than 5000 square ft. But the minister said this tax was being reviewed following appeals by those who owned huge ancestral homes for generations. He said that a time period would be set to value the properties.

Pope Francis during his pontificate and spectacular visit to Sri Lanka from January 13 to 15, also repeatedly pleaded that all countries help the poor much more and care more for them in the Kingdom spirit of social justice.

Contd on Pg. 2 >>>



A free copy of the Souvenir of the Papal Visit to Sri Lanka is issued with today's Messenger. Please make sure you get your copy.

The Religious Consecrated Persons in the Church

The Year 2015 has been dedicated to the Consecrated Life in the Church by Pope Francis and I like to reflect on the concept of Consecration which can help us, the Religious, in the Church in Sri Lanka, in a special way to praise and thank God for the gift of consecrated life (Religious Life) and renew ourselves in the vocation to which we have been called in the Church.

Emphasis in the Second Vatican Council

The Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council has emphasized the notion of consecration as the true foundation of Religious life. By such emphasis, the Council has invited the Religious to live out their particular invitation from God with creative fidelity, consciously striving always for a holiness of life, more closely imitative of Jesus and be available for God's specific mission of love without undue attachments and worldliness in order to respond with inner freedom and openness to the Spirit of God.

The notion of consecration stresses primarily the overwhelming loving presence of God in a person's life and also the response of that person to God's invitation. By the profession of vows, a person answers the divine call to live for God alone by renouncing sin (Rom 6:11) and worldliness. Strictly speaking, it is only God who consecrates because God who is the Holy One makes holy. God's overpowering love leads some people to remain unmarried in the Church so that they will be fully available to pro-

mote God's values and virtues in the world as shown by Jesus during His life-time on earth. Such unmarried consecrated persons are called the Religious in the Church.

By emphasizing the notion of consecration, the Second Vatican Council has invited the Religious to be faithful to the response they have freely given to God publicly and visibly in a liturgical setting in the Church. God is always faithful. He is always reliable. His love is constant and steadfast. It is never taken away. It is unconditional love. It is the human person who fails to remain steadfast in the response given to God publicly.

Jesus: The Consecrated One

Jesus totally belonged to God and He made Himself available to achieve God's own purposes. Francis J. Moloney SDB in his book, Disciples and Prophets, p 113, says, "It is the overwhelming power of the presence of the Kingdom in His life that led Jesus to celibacy. He was taken over by the urgent presence of the Kingdom that He could do no other than give Himself to it." According to Jerome Murphy-O'Connor in his book, Jesus and Paul, Parallel Lives, p 60, "Jesus had not married even though it was a matter of obligation for Jesus (Gen 1:28). This was not because of any commitment to celibacy, but because He wanted to be entirely without ties in order to respond with total freedom when God's call came to Him."

It was Jesus' intimacy and communion with God in

prayer that empowered Jesus to remain faithful to God and God's mission entrusted to Him. In His human nature, He had to struggle at times to remain faithful to His own consecrated life. He had to face temptations, opposition and rejection in order to remain faithful to God and God-given mission. He had to resist temptations to power, wealth and prestige (Mt 4:1-11). It was because He belonged to God, His Abba, that Jesus was able to say "No" to evil and promote the values and virtues of the Kingdom, with integrity of life.

Today's Religious in Sri Lanka

Today's Religious in Sri Lanka as consecrated persons have a mission to fulfill. It is a mystical and prophetic mission. Such a mission demands constant spiritual discernment in prayer as individuals and as communities with openness to the Spirit of God and with inner freedom to choose what God wills in today's evolving context in Sri Lanka. What is discerned as God's will in prayer need to be implemented. Recourse to genuine worship and prayer should make the Religious become sensitive to the struggles and pains of the people and of the earth which is also damaged and wounded. True spiritual discernment and authentic prayer-life of the Religious will make the Religious to be prophetic in their life situations, consoling the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable persons who legitimize and give significance to evil structures and institutions. Though the Religious may proclaim that they are

prayerful and prophetic but in reality some are reluctant under the weight of traditions and customs based on wrong value systems and / or outdated spirituality.

Two issues to be tackled according to the Pope

Aboard the papal plane during the recent flight from Manila to Rome on January 19, answering questions posed to him by a journalist regarding the situation in Sri Lanka, Pope Francis referred to two issues in Sri Lanka, namely poverty and caste. He said: "The poor are the victims of the throw-away culture. We throw away people. And discrimination is a way of throwing away. These people are discarded. And there comes to mind a bit of the image of caste. This can't go on. But today, throwing away seems normal."

Today's Religious in Sri Lanka are also invited by Pope Francis, to make the poor and those who suffer under caste system which is legitimized and given significance by certain sectors in some areas in Sri Lanka, feel valued as persons with innate dignity and equal thereby eradicating as much as possible inequality and exclusion in the Church and in the society. We have the poor in the tea estates, in the slums, among the migrant fishermen and migrant workers, the peasants, the farmers, the unemployed and the under-employed.

Are we, the Religious, as individuals, groups or as communities reaching out to the poor for their development? Do we have the strategies and techniques to

lead them from less human conditions to conditions which are more human? Yes, there are some who identify themselves with the poor and the victims of caste system while some feel bound by the traditions, customs and their upbringing. I feel Pope Francis is telling the Religious in Sri Lanka: "As prophets, wake up your society." Prophets speak in the name of God. It is a papal call to bring about a meaningful desired change in Sri Lanka where everyone can feel valued and treated with respect. Before his departure at the airport at Katunayaka on 15th January, he has asked our Bishops to encourage vocations to Religious life. Surely in saying this to our Bishops, he must have come to know already the contributions the Religious as consecrated persons are making in the Church in Sri Lanka and the contributions they can make in the future. Since the Pope was making his visit to Sri Lanka during this year of the Consecrated life, had there been also an opportunity for him during his visit to speak to the Religious in Sri Lanka or at least to the Major Religious Superiors, he would have certainly given them a special message. While continuing to thank God for our vocation, we, the Religious, can continue to pray saying, "Grant to us, O Lord, your own Spirit; Re-create in us your own Spirit, Lord."

Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI
Rajabima Oblate Centre,
Anuradhapura.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Vote for the country under a Common Symbol

Rt. Rev. Dr. J. Winston S. Fernando. sss

Many political parties rallied round one common candidate under a Common Symbol for the sake of the Country. Party politics in our country have been divisive, often vindictive and have led to corruption and violence allowing the country as a whole to suffer injustices, racial and religious discrimination and violation of human and civic rights.

A good majority of people however, have transcended political ideologies, interests and party agen-

das and voted for a just society.

Therefore, it is wise and imperative to give the citizens another opportunity to further consolidate the 100 day programme for the sake of the country at the Parliamentary Election under a Common Symbol. If various political parties under their respective symbols were to promote their narrow party agendas and pull in different directions jeopardizing the continuity of the spirit of the 100 day programme now accepted by almost all the political parties and citizens, it will undo

the progress so far achieved, create a chaotic situation and confuse the people.

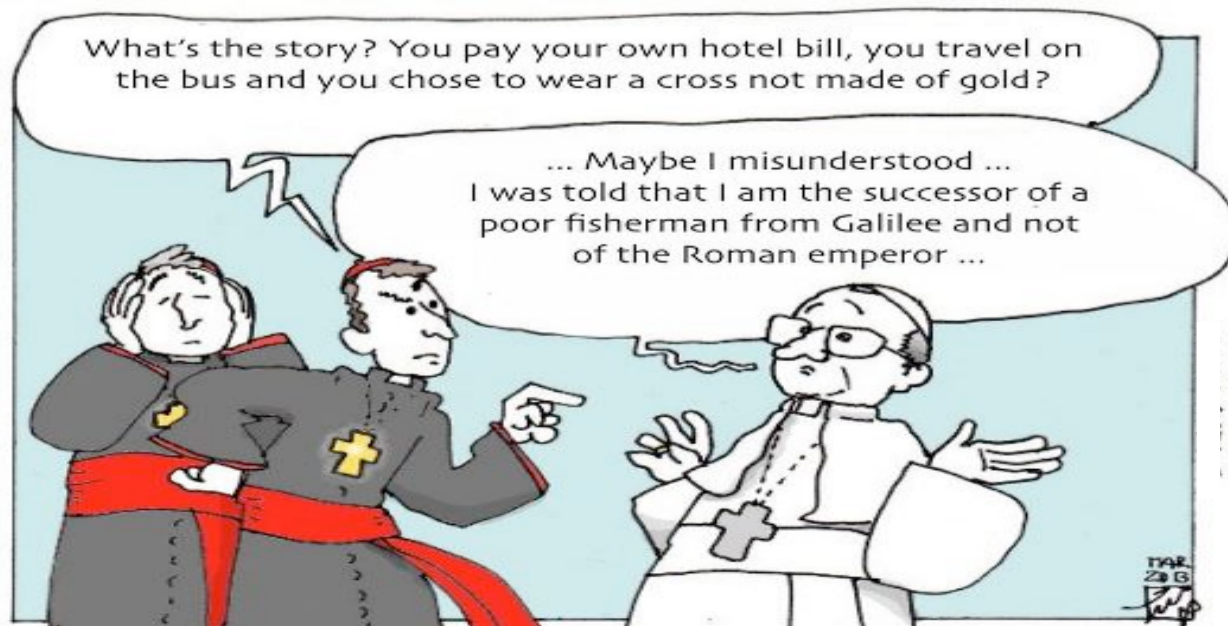
That politicians and their supporters in the main political parties have divided loyalties is a known and observable fact. Therefore, for the greater good of the country let the voters judge for themselves the fidelity and the ability of the present regime, proved with all the checks and balances in place, vote to form a stable government at the forthcoming parliamentary election under a Common Symbol.

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A Budget for the...

To raise more money for the poor President Maitripala Sirisena announced that he was committing himself to a simple and humble lifestyle and said he hoped other leaders also would follow the example.

As one major step the President announced that more than Rs. 10,000 million allocated for the Presidential Secretariat had been slashed to Rs. 270 million.



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Blessed are the Poor

One of the most inspiring and consoling promises in the Gospel is the assurance of Jesus, "Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give rest" (Matthew 11:28).

In line with this widely quoted verse the new all-party National Unity Government, in its interim Budget presented in Parliament last Thursday, gave unprecedented relief to millions of people who were labouring and heavy laden.

The new Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake, in a hurriedly but well-prepared Budget announced that some 1.3 million public servants would get a pay increase of Rs. 5000/- from this month with Rs. 5000/- more to come in June. Pensioners would also be substantiated with an increase of more than Rs. 3000/- a month, with Samurdhi benefits being doubled and a substantial increase in the Mahapola Scholarship Fund.

Tackling the cost-of-living as it perhaps has never been tackled before, the Finance Minister announced substantial reductions in the prices of 13 items including milk powder, wheat flour, bread and sugar. With petrol prices being slashed by Rs. 33/- a litre, diesel by Rs. 16/- and kerosene by Rs. 25/-, most independent economic analysts say, these and other measures were major steps towards poverty alleviation for which the government led by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, is giving the highest priority much in line with the vision of Pope Francis to give foremost priority to world poverty alleviation.

The Government also announced that Ceylon Transport Board and private operators would reduce fares by 10 percent, three wheeler drivers' by 10 percent and school vans by 5 percent. Customers and passengers are complaining that their benefits have not yet been passed on to them. In this era of good governance and social justice, the economic analysts say there should be tough consumer resistance with people refusing to patronize those who refuse to reduce prices or rates.

From where will the money come for these and other benefits to the common people? For instance President Sirisena has decided that the budgetary allocation of Rs. 10,000 million for the Presidential Secretariat – an allocation made in November last year – would be slashed to a mere 270 million.

President Sirisena in a 90 minute interview with State TV on Saturday night reiterated his commitment to a simple and humble lifestyle. Mr. Sirisena said the Presidential Security Division (PSD), would be slashed from more than 4000 to about 1000, while the number of vehicles would be reduced from about 800 to a bare minimum for his personal security.

The President also said that there are about ten presidential palaces in different parts of the country and the food bill alone amounted to millions of rupees daily. Mr. Sirisena said that he would not occupy any of these palaces but would live in his private residence at Wijerama Road and work at the Presidential Secretariat. Receptions for visiting VIPs and other national events would be held at the President's House in Fort, while other palaces would be converted for practical purposes.

The Finance Minister also said that more money for poverty alleviation would be raised by imposing more taxes on the rich elite. A mansion tax of Rs. 1 million a year would be imposed on houses worth more than Rs. 100 million or 5,000 square feet, which ever is higher, on an annual basis. The five casinos operating now under dubious licences would have to pay Rs. 1000 million immediately.

President Sirisena, leading by example as Pope Francis does, urged other government leaders, politicians and top officials to avoid wasteful expenditure and luxury lifestyles so that the money saved could be shared with the poor.

As Jesus said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

Dream, dream, dream Pope Francis tells families

In the Meeting with families in Manila, Pope Francis warned against a "new ideological colonization" seeking to destroy the family.

Dream in the family

Commenting on the Gospel passage narrating the way our Lord revealed to St. Joseph His will in a dream, the Holy Father stressed the importance of dreaming in the family. He switched from the literal meaning of dreaming while asleep to the emblematic sense of planning for the future of one's family.

"All mothers and fathers dream of their sons and daughters in the womb for nine months," he said. "They dream of how they will be. It isn't possible to have a family without such dreams. When you lose this capacity to dream you lose the capacity to love."

"I recommend that at night when you examine your consciences, ask yourself if you dreamed of the future of your sons and daughters. Did you dream of your husband or wife? Did you dream today of your parents, your grandparents who carried forward the family to me?"

"It is so important to dream and especially to dream in the family. Please don't lose the ability to dream in this way. How many solutions are found to family problems if we take time to reflect, if we think of a husband or wife and we dream about the good qualities they have. Don't ever lose the memory of when you were boyfriend or girlfriend. That is very important."

Threats to the family

The pressures facing family life today are many. The countries of growing economies have families pressed by dire financial straits. Many of them are left with no option other than being separated by migration and the search for employment. This constitutes a veritable strain on many households.

The Roman Pontiff pointed out that, "While all too many people live in dire poverty, others are caught up in materialism and lifestyles which are destructive of family life and the most basic demands of Christian morality.

"The family is also threatened by growing efforts on the part of some to redefine the very institution of marriage, by relativism, by the culture of the ephemeral, by a lack of openness to life.

Pope Francis praised the way Blessed Paul VI reacted in the face of that challenge of population growth. The blessed Pope mustered sufficient boldness and fortitude to strongly defend openness to life. "He knew the difficulties families experience and that's why in his encyclical (*Humanae Vitae*) he expressed compassion for specific cases and he taught confessors to be particularly compassionate for particular cases.

"And he went further, he looked at the people on the earth and he saw that lack (of children) and the problem it could cause families in the future. Paul VI was courageous, a good pastor and he warned his sheep about the wolves that were approaching. And from the heavens he blesses us today," Pope Francis assured us.

Protect the family

We need to take a stand against the onslaughts against the basic cell of societies, both civil and ecclesiastical. "Our world needs good and strong families to overcome these threats!" the Holy Father insisted. The world needs holy and loving families to protect the beauty and truth of the family in God's plan and to be a support and example for other families.

"Every threat to the family is a threat to society itself. The future of humanity, as St. John Paul II often said, passes through the family (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 85). So protect your families! See in them your country's greatest treasure and nourish them always by prayer and the grace of the sacraments. Families will always have their trials, but may you never add to them! Instead, be living examples of love, forgiveness and care.

"Be sanctuaries of respect for life, proclaiming the sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death. What a gift this would be to society, if every Christian family lived fully its noble vocation! So rise with Jesus and Mary, and set out on the path the Lord traces for each of you."

"To protect" means to save someone or some-



thing from harm. All of us who are called to protect the family must recognize that which destroys the family. Pope Francis lays bare the root of a very strong attack against the family. He calls it "ideological colonization." It comes from outside the country, but it destroys each family from the inside.

The evil of contraception

The Pope also zeroed in on contraception as a potential hazard. Affluent nations push for anti-life legislations or measures like anti-conception and abortion in countries of growing economies. This threat wreaks havoc to the family through the privation of children. It is not the mere "lack" of offspring that is devastating. Rather, it is the willful "no" to procreation.

Unlike natural family planning, which is non-procreative, contraception is anti-conceptive. It is anti-life in essence. It willfully goes against procreation, that glorious co-operation with God to give the most sublime gift of love to the spouse: the gift of a new immortal, God-like spirit, a child of God.

"Poisoning love at its source, contraception sends off a flood of selfishness based on falsehoods. In the words of Paul VI, it "could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards... and reduce [woman] to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of [man's] own desires."

This famous prophecy is now clear to everyone. Pornography is now accessible at one click of a mouse adultery is tolerated. The University of Pennsylvania found that due to contraception, three out of four women in the United States now engage in premarital sex.

Protection, however, is not only a negative stance. It also means to keep something whole. The Pope referred to families as the "country's greatest treasure," and he asked that we "nourish them always by prayer and the grace of the sacraments."

Responsible parenthood

True love uses the mind. Responsible parenthood means avoiding breeding like rabbits - thoughtlessly - and begetting more children thoughtfully to express generous love.

The Pope described the great beauty of a large family a few weeks ago: "The sons and daughters of large families are more inclined to fraternal communion from early childhood. In a world that is frequently marred by selfishness, a large family is a school of solidarity and sharing."

The family is in danger. Protect it. The family is beautiful. Keep it safe.

But let us not just protect it with our hearts alone; let's do it with our minds and hands, as the Pope taught. And because he calls us to prophetic witness, let us protect the family with our words as well as by passing on his most insistent message (cf. *Ibid.*).

Finally, Pope Francis reminds us of our Christian duty to be prophetic voices in the midst of our communities. With Mary, Joseph served as a model for the boy Jesus as he grew in wisdom, age and grace (cf. Lk 2:52).

"When families bring children into the world, train them in faith and sound values, and teach them to contribute to society, they become a blessing in our world. God's love becomes present and active by the way we love and by the good works that we do. We extend Christ's kingdom in this world. And in doing this, we prove faithful to the prophetic mission which we have received in baptism."

Rev. Fr. Daniel Icalto



Year of Consecrated Life - 2015

Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Sri Lanka (CMRS)
Religious Congregations in Sri Lanka

2



Sylvestro Benedictine Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict

The Benedictine thinking, in other words, 'Benedictinism' is one of the important milestones in the renewal history of the Catholic Church. Its importance can be proved by various names that are attributed to St. Benedict, such as 'the Father of Western Monasticism', 'the Patron of Europe.'

St. Benedict

St. Benedict, the founder of the Benedictine Order was born in 480 AD in Nursia, near Umbria in Italy. "He was born to a noble family and was educated in Rome" says St. Gregory the Great, yet another noble son of Benedict. As a result of some social currents in his times, Benedict had later decided to flee from the world to a jungle in view of living an eremitical life contemplating the Divine.

It was during this time that many started following the footsteps of our Holy Father Benedict. Thus there arose a need for a common code of conduct. In response to this necessity, Benedict wrote a rule widely known as 'the Rule of St. Benedict'. This is often referred to as the summit of Benedictinism due to its uniqueness in simplicity, moderation, expediency and the fullness. This was a compendium of both his personal experience as a faithful monk and the knowledge he acquired from certain other holy monks in the East. Benedict's achievement in produc-

ing this rule can be partially measured by the number of heroic personalities the Rule has brought forth during the last fifteen centuries. This number includes more than 60,000 saints, 50 popes, 30 emperors and 97 kings and queens. At present the Order has nearly 20,000 men and women as its members and is functioning as a confederation of nearly 25 autonomous branches.

St. Sylvester

St. Sylvester was born to a noble family of Osimo in 1177 AD. He was one of the 12th century reformers in the Benedictine Order and thus the founder of the Sylvestro Benedictines, one of the above mentioned branches of the Benedictine Confederation. He too after being confronted by the vanities of the world retreated to a jungle following the very footsteps of his master Benedict. The fragrance of this saintly life soon spread in the vicinity and as a result certain men came seeking his way of life. In 1248 AD with a decree issued by Pope Innocent IV this community was instituted as a branch of the Benedictine Confederation.

Arrival and early apostolate in Sri Lanka.

Until 1845 AD the Sylvestrine missions were limited

to Italy. As an attempt to establish overseas missions, the congregation accepted an invitation of the then ecclesial authorities of the local Church of Sri Lanka and sent a group of monks led by Msgr. Joseph Maria Bravi OSB on the 14th of August 1845 to our motherland.

The first group of Benedictine monks was entrusted with the evangelization of the then Southern Vicariate of Colombo. It was thus the Benedictines that started their apostolate in the west coast from Negombo to Galle. They built large churches and schools and were at the service of the faithful especially of the poor.

Msgr. Bravi OSB was later elevated to the Episcopate and was succeeded by Rt. Rev. Dr. Hilarion Sillani OSB, whose tenure as the Bishop of Colombo is recognized by the Church historians as the golden era of Catholicism in the diocese. It was during his time that the church started publishing Gnanartha pradeepaya (the oldest Sinhala newspaper published upto date) and the Catholic Messenger.

After serving the local Church of Colombo for more than 40 years, the Sylvestrines arrived in the Central Province in view of quenching the thirst of the Catholic faithful in the area. Ever since their arrival in Kandy it became the hub of Benedictine missions. The Order produced some of her eminent sons to shepherd the flock in

the Diocese of Kandy such as Rt. Rev. Dr. Clement Pagnnani OSB, Rt. Rev. Dr. Bede Beckmeyer OSB (the First Sri Lankan to be appointed a Bishop), Rt. Rev. Dr. Bernard Regno OSB (also known as the coolly bishop), Rt. Rev. Dr. Leo Nanayakkara OSB, later Bishop of Badulla (an eminent scholar who was highly influential in introducing the renewal brought forth by the Second Vatican Council). Today we have Rt. Rev. Dr. Cletus C. Perera OSB, the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese of Ratnapura continuing the line of Benedictine Bishops.

Some of the undying memories of the Benedictine presence in Sri Lanka:

St. Lucia's Cathedral- Kotahena, St. Mary's Cathedral- Badulla, St. Mary's Cathedral- Galle, St. Anthony's Cathedral- Kandy, St. Benedict's College- Kotahena, St. Thomas' College- Matale, St. Xavier's College- Nuwara Eliya, and a number of churches including St. Thomas'- Kotte, St. Philip Neri's - Fort, St. Sylvester's (now St. Anthony's)- Mt. Lavinia. St. Benedict's- Madampella, St. Joseph's- Grandpass, St. Mary's- Mattakkuliya, St. James'- Mutwal, Sts. John the Baptist and Andrew's- Mutwal, St. John of the Staff, Talangama, St. Sylvester's Eukala, St. Hugo's- Burulapitiya, St. Mary's- Tudella, St. Anthony's- Wahakotte, Sacred Heart- Katugastota, Sacred Heart- Rajagiriya, St. Sebastian's- Barudalpol, St. Mary's- Thangamale.



The Charism, Motto, Vision and Mission of the Sri Lankan Sylvestrines

Charism: We seek God through solitude, community and ministry.

Motto: Ora et Labora (Prayer and Work)

Vision: Seeking God serving the church

Mission: To spread the joy of the Gospel through prayer, work and community life.

Our apostolate today...

At present we are nearly 50 monks in Sri Lanka, attending to various missionary activities that enable us live our Sylvestro-Benedictine vocation. These activities include Parish ministry (Rajagiriya, Katugastota, Wahakotte, Thoduwawa, Ampara, Idalgashinna), Education apostolate (St. Anthony's- Katugastota, St. Benedict's- Kandy) Higher education institutes, preaching apostolate, chaplain services, foreign missions, Retreat Houses and prayer apostolate.

For further details on the Sylvestrine Congregation, please contact Very Rev. Fr. Prior, St. Sylvester's Monastery, Monte Fano, Ampitiya (081 222 36 84).

Dom. Kanishka Perera OSB

At the Launch of Verbum Television





SINCE FEBRUARY 11, 1869

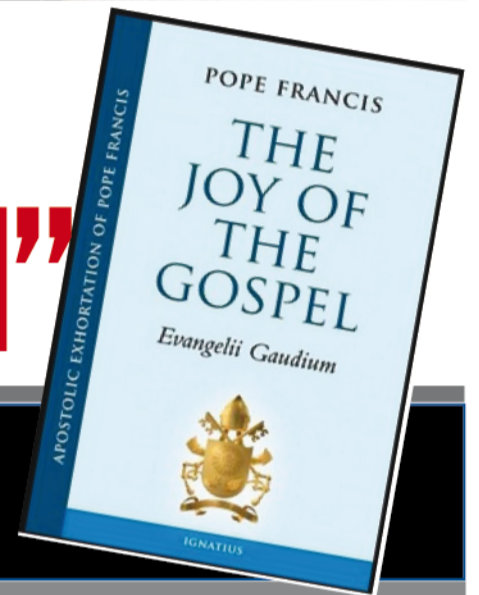
MESSENGER

ABIDE IN LOVE



“Visit of Pope Francis will enlighten Asia and the World”

His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith speaks on the successful completion of the Papal Visit to Sri Lanka



With the coming of His Holiness Pope Francis to Asia on his second visit and as the third Pope to visit the Continent, the Church in Asia indeed “sings the praises of the ‘God of Salvation’ for choosing to initiate His saving plan on Asian soil,” through His vicar. The Church in Asia can now have hopes and “pray that in the Third Christian Millenium, a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent” – “...that they may have life and have it abundantly” Jn. 10.10).

Interview by
Manohari Samaranayake

The Church in Asia is unique. Accommodating just three percent of the world’s Catholic population, it embraces a wide diversity of people; multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. It is the “little flock” envisaged by Jesus Christ when He asked His disciples to “Go and announce” as in Matthew 28:19. Thus the “Church in Asia shares His zeal,” nestling in its bosom the strength of the assurance He gave to the Church: “I will be with you till the end of time” (Mt 28: 20).

In Asia, the ‘Asianness’ of Christianity is reflected in the people – a marvellous blend of culture and ethnicity, simplicity and harmony, so dynamic and yet so beautiful.

In the afterglow of the Papal Visit, the *Messenger* met the Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, for an exclusive interview on the successful completion of the Visit of the Holy Father to Sri Lanka. The Cardinal’s joy was very evident when he spoke especially at having accomplished such a colossal task, giving an opportunity for his flock and the people at large to be touched by an icon of the modern world in the person of Pope Francis.

Q: Your Eminence, are you happy?

A: After all the doubts and the challenges that I had to face as the one who invited the Holy Father, Yes. I had hope and trust in God and in the essential goodness of humanity. In essence every human being is good and you have to harness that goodness in meeting such challenges. One has to trust that goodness. And indeed Pope Francis has that capacity to touch people all the way with his testimony of faith and simplicity. It is that, that makes me happy.

Q: What was it to have a person in the calibre of Pope Francis in Sri Lanka?

A: Pope Francis has a great personality, simple, outgoing and people who meet him somehow come away happy. He radiates the ways of a loving shepherd. He has this ability to electrify the crowds. He has the capacity to bring out the good in people. Even he did not expect the vast line up of people from the Airport to the Apostolic Nunciature in Colombo, when he arrived. He even asked me often, “From where did all these people come?” There was so much of enthusiasm among the people and I could see the Holy Father inside the jeep getting ‘electrified’ by the crowd. At one point he even got off the jeep to bless a child. It is such a blessing.

Q: The estimated line-up from Katunayake to the Nuncio’s Office was said to be around one million. Was it so?

A: It had to be. There were quite a lot of non-Catholics who had come. In fact I was hoping at least



Pic: Clifford Murray

at some place there will be no people so that the Holy Father could sit down. But it wasn’t so. Since he was standing and not sitting down, I requested him to sit down and relax but he told me that it would look “disrespectful” if he did not stand. The jeep was moving fast because of the schedule involved and I felt sad that there was no time for the Holy Father to take some more time with the people. It was the same story at the Galle Face Green.

Q: What was the Holy Father’s response when he saw such a turnout of people in a country where Catholicism is but a small percentage of its population?

A: “Marvellous.” That was the word he used when we disembarked at the Nuncio’s residence, where also there was a crowd. He was tired but amazed at the crowd turnout and said, “I never thought there will be so many. I don’t know how to enthuse them all.”

FROM GROUND BREAKING TO THE CROWNING MOMENT

PREPARATIONS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE FOR ALTAR STAGE AND DECORATIONS & OF THE DESIGN CENTRE



Where was the Altar Dais to be placed?

A key issue arose with placement of the Altar Dais. Some of the questions raised were, should it face the seaside or landside? How will the morning sun affect the vision of the faithful and the Holy Father? How will the wind affect the sound of the Eucharistic celebration? The number of faithful that could be accommodated depending on the stage placement? These questions were taken into account and a new survey plan of the Green was done with the help of the Defence ministry. A series of studies on the pathway of the sun on January 14, 2015 was done with the help of the Meteorological Department and a report was submitted to the Vatican. Following this, a decision was taken and the Altar Dais was to be constructed facing the land.



14th November 2014

The site was marked by the Sri Lanka Navy constructors, blessed by His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Maxwell Silva. The soil was moved and construction began. The process was overseen by Rear Admiral Wipula S. Jayasinghe.

The vendors along the marine drive agreed to move out. The Sri Lanka Navy worked with ceaseless dedication day in and day out, each battalion working on 12 hour shifts.



The very first design for the stamps



Invitation cards designed for the Papal visit



Official stamps

The ten rupee stamp with the background of St Peter's Basilica was created for local circulation, while the seventy five rupee stamp bearing the background of the stage at Galle Face Green was created for foreign circulation.

The Souvenir Sheet carries a mirror image of the Pietà to reflect the love of God that continues to be mirrored by the Holy Father. This has also been declared the theme of his visit to Sri Lanka - "Abide in Love" 1 John 4: 16.



A booklet and a special seal for the cancellation of the first day cover was also designed, but the philatelic bureau was unable to produce the booklet and the seal was done anew by an artist in the philatelic bureau.



Commemorative Coin

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka issued a commemorative silver coin with a face value of Rs. 500 to mark the papal visit. The coin was designed by Rev. Fr. L. G. Priyantha Silva

On the obverse of the coin is the bust of His Holiness Pope Francis which is surrounded by a ring of 33 honeysuckle flowers, as portrayed in the traditional Sinhalese artistic style. A dotted line is depicted adjacent to the Honeysuckle design composed of 120 dots. At the edge of the coin are the words 'Papal Visit Sri Lanka' in Sinhala, Tamil and English and the dates of the visit.

The reverse side of the coin comprises the official logo for the Papal visit. Below the logo is the face value of the coin (500 rupees). Surrounding the upper part of the logo is the word 'Sri Lanka', in all the 3 three languages. The edge of this side of the coin is decorated with the design of a 'Liywela' made out of 40 'Na' flowers. The 'Na' flower is the local flower attributed to the Virgin Mary and is used on the statue of 'Our Lady of Lanka'. The Na tree (Ceylon Ironwood) is the National Tree of Sri Lanka. All the numbers involved in the design are of religious significance.



The unfinished portrait

A new portrait depicting the mission and vision of St Joseph Vaz was to be completed for the canonization ceremony. The Portrait which was originally due to be completed for the papal visit was held back because it could not be completed in time. The new portrait is being done following rules of sacred arts and sacred geometry according to Christian iconographical standards by Rev. Father Priyantha Silva. This will become the first official Sri Lankan portrait of St. Joseph Vaz.



Chapel of Our Lady of Lanka at Bolawalana

The chapel is a link between the old teacher training college and the present Pope Benedict XVI cultural institute. Hence the architecture of the old chapel was preserved but renovated with new additions. While architect Sunanda Sagara worked on the structure, Fr. Priyantha

worked on the other decorations. The chapel was blessed by the Holy Father on 15th January 2015. The altar and the tabernacle were done by Mr. Risil Fernando and the carvings were perfected by Mr. Raymond Fernando according to the design given.



Galle Face Ground Plan and Event organization

His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando, the Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo was the head of the committee for Galle Face Green venue for the Papal Mass. The Ground plan and the technical arrangements such as fencing in pens the areas for the faithful and making the paths in between, organizing and allocating space for the facilities (water, toilet, electricity etc.) was the responsibility Fr. Priyantha Silva. Many meetings were held with the representatives of the Colombo Municipal Council, Ports Authority, Ceylon Electricity Board, Water Board, Fire Brigade, S.L. Navy, S.L. Air Force, Army Medical Units, Presidential Security Division, contractors and all other groups involved in the event. Below are some picture which show the progress.





25th December 2014

When thunder showers and the unruly winds blocked the way Saint Joseph moved in to pave the way. The birth of a new era brought peace to the atmosphere. Iron bars were speedily welded together.

The roof sheltered the sacred space to be. The pillars of the church, the apostles and the evangelists, moved in to shoulder the edifice. The regiform carvings were done by a group of artists under the direction of Mr. U. M. L. Jayashantha & S.A.S. Perera.

4th January 2015

Originally planned Kandyan roofs for the area of the concelebrants had to give way to the parabolic huts to cut down the costs to be in line with the vision of the Holy Father.

12th January 2015

Sixty navy carpenters completed the task. The carpets were laid, the cross was hung and the special chair was placed for the liturgical rehearsal on 13th evening.



The Ambo

The designs of the main ambo contained the tree of life, the symbols of four Evangelists and the Na or iron wood flower. The tree of life was designed according to the traditional local art including Christian iconology. The tree of life rises from a traditional punkalasa or pot of plenty signifying the abundance of Creation. Symbols of the Evangelists are also prominently placed. At its apex is the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove breathing life to the tree. The ambos were donated by Harsha Fernando of Sebastian Mill Moratuwa.



The Cross and the Candle Stands

The candle stands and the cross used at the Green were specially designed in the traditional lacquer style (usually produced in the Matale District). Taking the windy conditions prevalent at Galle Face Green into account, special candles that last for long hours were supplied by the Gandhara Company.

Story behind the Presidential chair for the Canonization ceremony

There was a desire to produce a Sri Lankan styled chair for the Holy Father. After much research the team ended up with the chair used by several kings of ancient Sri Lanka. A new chair was designed following the same concept.



chair used- right, chair not used- left

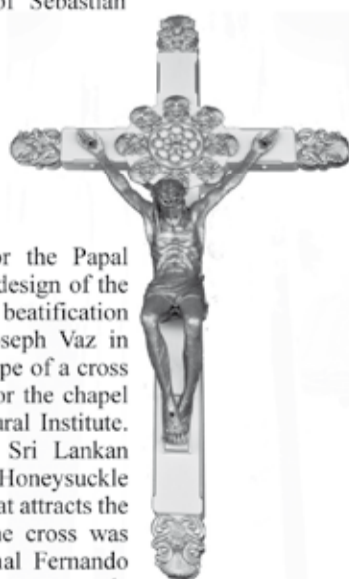
Painted in Ivory white and Gold which are considered colours symbolising heaven, the designs for the chair were also sacred in nature. The lion and the 'Annasi Mala' pine apple flower symbolised resurrection. The first chair that was designed for the Holy Father



gives a grander look. It was however not used at Galleface Green because of the Holy Father's simple nature. Sensing the desires of the Holy Father, Rev. Fr. Priyantha Silva designed a simpler chair which was ultimately used at the canonization ceremony at Galle Face Green. The chairs were donated by Mr. Amal Fernando proprietor of Amal Furnitures who himself painted the chairs.

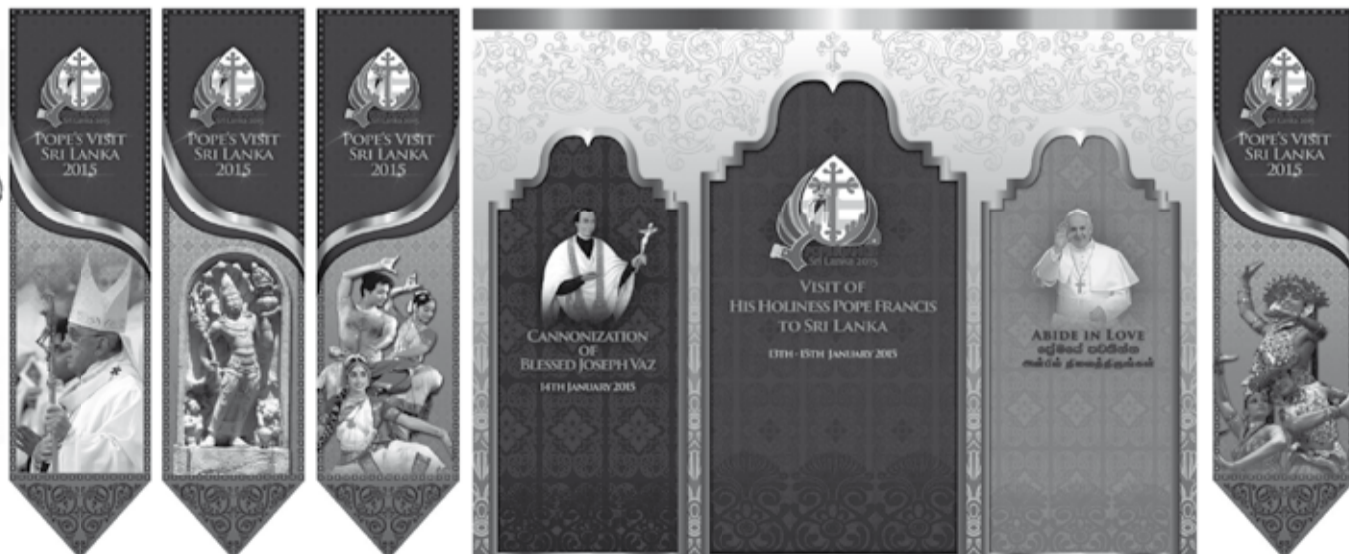
MEDIA CENTRE DESIGNS

The computer graphics were done by Mr. Kosala Perera and Mr. Tiran Perera



The Cross

The Cross used for the Papal Mass had the same design of the cross used for the beatification ceremony of St. Joseph Vaz in 1995. It is a same type of a cross that was designed for the chapel at Bolawalana Cultural Institute. The cross has the Sri Lankan design of the Honeysuckle flower, the flower that attracts the Humming birds. The cross was donated by Mr. Amal Fernando and the figure of Jesus was made by the famous fiber glass artist Ranil Fernando.



The design centre was headed and the designs were done by Rev. Fr. Priyantha Silva. The sub committee for stage comprised Felicia Adihetti, Kishanie Fernando, architect Sunanda Sagara, Linton Fernando, Palitha Perera, Roshan Yapa and Thiwanika Wijesinghe. Write up: Joshua Surendraraj and the team.



Picture courtesy: Studio DS and C. Murray

The Co-ordination work of the Central Committee

The pastoral visit of a Pope to a country is always a cause of joy and celebration. The announcement of the visit of Pope Francis to Sri Lanka was indeed truly joyful news to all the Catholics in Sri Lanka who see the visit of Pope Francis as a great blessing. The last Papal visit to Sri Lanka was 20 years ago in 1995 when Pope John Paul II, now a saint, presided at the Holy Mass of the beatification of Blessed Joseph Vaz, Apostle of Sri Lanka.

After the Vatican announced that the 78-year-old Pope was coming to Sri Lanka, seemingly endless meetings and preparation for the Papal visit started. Immediately after the announcement, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith called a meeting of Bishops and the would be members of the organizing committee and as the outcome of their meeting 14 committees were formed to attend to preparatory arrangements. Each Bishop was to be in charge of a committee which worked under the guidance of the respective Bishops.

The Organizers comprised of three agents, namely the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Apostolic Nunciature in Sri Lanka. In the meantime the

Government too formed an inter-ministerial Task Force to co-ordinate with the Church and their side of the organization of the events. (The Government committee was headed by the Foreign Minister Mr. G.L. Peiries and with the change of ministers, Mr. Ravi Karunanayake took over.)

The task of co-ordinating the work of all 14 committees and the Government task force was not easy. There were differences of opinions and more-over requirements of both the Government and Vatican had to be seen to. There was a very good rapport established between the Church and the Government and everything was meticulously done.

With the announcement of the election close to the visit of the Holy Father, there was a lot of pressure on the Church authorities to try and stop the visit or postpone it to some other time. But the Bishops' Conference was firm in their decision to go ahead with the visit. Moreover when the Bishops met both Presidential candidates, before the elections they had assured the Bishops that they would both welcome the Holy Father when he steps down at the Airport. Amidst all uncertainties His Eminence never wavered from the decision to wel-

come His Holiness as scheduled and encouraged the faithful to pray for His visit. His Eminence also saw this as an opportunity for reconciliation and peace in our country when he said "the Papal visit will bring about peace and harmony as the country heads for a period of uncertainty in view of the Presidential Polls."

The change of Government did not affect the preparations of the Papal Visit at all. The previous Government gave its fullest co-operation and this was continued by the current Government. There was a smooth transition of preparative. All Government agencies were more than willing to give their help. The armed forces and the Police not only provided security for the whole visit, but were also involved in many other preparations.

The whole Catholic Church of Sri Lanka was involved in the preparatives. There were many volunteers to help out and quite a number of them are non-Catholics. All the Catholics were very enthusiastic to see the Holy Father and many were very excited to welcome him.

During this period of preparations, a team of Vatican officials came twice to inspect the possible venues

where Pope Francis could visit during his stay in Sri Lanka. They also had meetings with Government officials to discuss various issues especially matters concerning security. They were more than happy to see the progress of the preparations.

The visit went ahead as scheduled and all Catholics were overwhelmed with thanksgiving and gratitude to God for the visit of Pope Francis. We were very happy to welcome the Holy Father in the best way we wanted.

Our trust in God and the vision of His Eminence with his experience of being part of the visit of Pope John Paul II was an asset. His unwavering affirmation that the Holy Father will come, created confidence in those involved in the preparations.

My personal opinion is that amidst all the confusion surrounding the Papal Visit, the hand of Saint Joseph Vaz was very evident. The whole thing was a miracle of the Saint that the canonization should take place in the country he evangelized. In fact the Holy Father told His Eminence that it was a well organized event.

Very Rev. Fr. J.D. Antony
Secretary

The Central Committee

- * The Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka
- * The Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
- * The Apostolic Nunciature in Sri Lanka

Ex-Officio Members

His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, Chairman
Archbishop of Colombo

His Excellency Pierre Nguyen Van Tot,
Apostolic Nuncio in Sri Lanka

Rev. Fr. Renato Kucic
Secretary - Apostolic Nunciature

Very Rev. Fr. J D Anthony Jayakody
Joint Secretary

Rev. Fr. Jude Samantha Fernando
Joint Secretary

Nominated Members

Rev. Fr. Tony Martyn
Asst. Secretary General
Catholic Bishop's Conference

Rev. Fr. Jeyaraj Rasiah, SJ
President
Conference of Major Religious Superiors
CMRS Secretariat

Rev. Sr. Sirima Opanayake OP
Conference of Major Religious Superiors
CMRS Secretariat

Dr. Ivan Vidanarachchi
Coordinator

Committees - Chairpersons & Secretaries

Liturgy:

Chairman
Most Rev. Dr. Vianney Fernando
Bishop of Kandy

Vice Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Ponniah Joseph
Bishop of Batticaloa

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Ignatius Warnakulasingham
St. John Mary Vianney Seminary

Finance:

Chairman

His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith
Archbishop of Colombo

Vice Chairman

Mr. B.R. Luxman Fernando

Secretary

Very Rev. Fr. Placidus De Silva
Chancellor / Rector

Reception:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Valence Mendis
Bishop of Chilaw

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Felician Ranjith Perera
Parish Priest, All Saints' Church

Publicity and Media:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Raymond Wickramasinghe
Bishop of Galle

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini Fernando
Director - Social Communications

Traffic, Security, Crowd Control:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Harold Anthony Perera
Bishop of Kurunegala

Secretary - Crowd Control

Very Rev. Fr. Francis N. Senanayake
Judicial Vicar / Director

Secretary- Security

Very Rev. Fr. Sam Quintus Perera
Episcopal Vicar- Missionary Region

Secretary- Traffic

Rev. Fr. Srinath Manoj Perera
Director- Cardinal Cooray Centre

Dr. Ivan Vidanarachchi,
Coordinator

Transport:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Maxwell Silva
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Rohan De Alwis
Director, Seth Sarana- Caritas Colombo

Medical Care:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Norbert Andradi OMI
Bishop of Anuradhapura

Vice Chairman

Rev. Fr. Chrispin Leo
St. Peter's College Bambalapitiya Colombo 4

Secretary

Dr. Maxi Fernandopulle

Spiritual:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Winston Fernando SSS
Bishop of Badulla

Secretary

Very Rev. Fr. Daya Shelton Welikadarachchi
Episcopal Vicar

Inter-religious gathering (BMICH):

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Cletus Perera OSB
Bishop of Ratnapura

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Pius Kennedy Fernando
St. Jude's Church, Ihala Katuneriya, Katuneriya

Galle Face Green Committee:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando
Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo

Secretary

Very Rev. Fr. Anthony Fernandopulle
St. Thomas' Church - Kotte.

Cultural Institute (Bolawalana) Committee:

Chairman

Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Patrick Perera
Episcopal Vicar- Negombo Region

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Quintus Fernando
Cardinal Cooray Centre, Tammita,

Archbishop's House Committee:

Chairman

Very Rev. Fr. Merl Shanthi Perera
Procurator General Archbishop's House

Vice Chairman

Very Rev. Fr. Ivan Perera,
Episcopal Vicar - Special Projects

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Rohan de Soyza
Archbishop's House

Decoration Committee:

Chairman

Very Rev. Fr. Shanthikumara Weliwita
Episcopal Vicar- Ja-Ela Region

Secretary

Rev. Fr. T D Anton Dinesh Priyasad
Member- Parish Faith Animation Team Aquinas College,

Madhu Committee:

Chairman

Most Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph
Bishop of Mannar Bishop's House, Pattim, Mannar

Secretary

Rev. Fr. Santhiapillai Emilianuspillai
Administrator
Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu

Pope's Visit arrangements by the Route Decorations Committee

Decorations for the Motorcade Route

Point	Parish	Responsible Priest
St. Thomas' College Junction (Seeduwa)	01	Air Port Round About
Dandugama Bridge	02	Seeduwa Junction
Old Filling Station	03	Dehiyagatha Junction (Church)
Thudella Junction	04	Sugath Cycle Company
Dialog-Ja Ela	05	Thudella RC Church
Filling Station at Old Negombo Road	06	End of Ja Ela Bridge (Statue of Christ)
Gunge Park Junction, Weligamulla	07	Ja Ela Carvery Centre
Kapuwatte Cemetery	08	St. Anne's Statue (Main Road)
Risula (Batagama Junction)	09	K-Zone (Colombo End)
St. Jude's Road (Cross)	10	Kondana Co-operative Shop
St. John's Road	11	People's Bank, Kanden
Nagoda Filling Station	12	Morawatta Rd (St. Sebastian's Statue)
St. Jude's Church, Welisara	13	Hemas Junction (Basilica, Nagoda)
Vijay Road	14	Mahaage Junction
Mabole Bridge	15	Kattiyawatta
Awila Town	16	Hendala Junction
Gemasu Cinema (Oiyerulla)	17	Aerawatta Road
Entrance to the Express Way	18	Audi Service Station
Hero Abans Showroom	19	Colonial Motors Pvt. Ltd.
Japanese Friendship Bridge Peliyagoda	20	Gongagoda Banda M.
Marawatte Junction Clock Tower	21	Grandpass Junction
Fire Brigade Junction	22	Grandpass Jupter Junction
Jethanarasaramaya	23	Stadium Junction
Police Station, Armour Street	24	Divulgas Junction
BMC Bridge	25	Bandaranayake Mv
Tower Hill	26	Parishwasthe Junction
Punchi Bonella Junction	27	Ananda College
Borella Junction	28	Borella Cross Road
Wijerama Junction	29	Karatta Round About
Apocalyptic Nunciature	30	Longton Place

Point	Parish	Responsible Priest
Katana	01	Katunayake
Air Port Round About	02	Seeduwa
St. Thomas' College Junction (Seeduwa)	03	Seeduwa (Bandaranayake)
Seeduwa Junction	04	Kotugoda
Dandugama Bridge	05	Dehiyagatha
Dehiyagatha Junction (Church)	06	Kepongoda
Old Filling Station	07	Delwatura
Sugath Cycle Company	08	Thudella
Thudella Junction	09	Makawita
Dialog-Ja Ela	10	Karuwona
End of Ja Ela Bridge (Statue of Christ)	11	Ja Ela
Filling Station at Old Negombo Road	12	Boothiya
Ja Ela Carvery Centre	13	Pannugama
Gunge Park Junction, Weligamulla	14	Middilbatta
Kapuwatte Cemetery	15	Weligamulla
K-Zone (Colombo End)	16	Weweriti
Risula (Batagama Junction)	17	Katukiyiya
Kondana Co-operative Shop	18	Bokatha
St. Jude's Road (Cross)	19	Tibbotagoda
People's Bank, Kanden	20	Kandana

Point	Parish	Responsible Priest
People's Bank, Kanden	21	Batagama
St. John's Road	22	Hapugoda
Morawatta Rd (St. Sebastian's Statue)	23	Udumbanayake
Nagoda Filling Station	24	Nagoda
Hemas Junction (Basilica, Nagoda)	25	Periswala
St. John's Church, Welisara	26	Karasalappiya
Mahaage Junction	27	Methumagala
Vijay Road	28	Mabola
Kattiyawatta	29	Balagala
Mabole Bridge	30	Nayakanda
Hendala Junction	31	Endaramulla
Awila Town	32	Warttil
Aerawatta Road	33	Peliyagoda
Gemasu Cinema (Oiyerulla)	34	Ragama
Audi Service Station	35	Kurukula Kinnabiyagara
Entrance to the Express Way	36	Kottawala, Thudella
Colonial Motors Pvt. Ltd.	37	Kiriya
Hero Abans Showroom	38	Sapagokanda
Gongagoda Banda Mv	39	Dalugama
Japanese Friendship Bridge, Peliyagoda	40	Mattakuliyia Seeduwa
Grandpass Junction		

Point	Parish	Responsible Priest
Grandpass Junction	41	St. John's, Mawit
Mahaawatte Junction Clock Tower	42	Mahaawatte
Grandpass Jupter Junction	43	Grandpass
Fire Brigade Junction	44	St. James's, Mawit
Stadium Junction	45	Kotahena
Jethanarasaramaya	46	St. Anne's, Mawit
Divulgas Junction	47	New Chetty
Police Station, Armour Street	48	Chesku Street
Bandaranayake Mv	49	Hulsdorf
BMC Bridge	50	Kolonnawati
Panchikawatte Junction	51	Malgawatte
Tower Hill	52	Marsden
Ananda College	53	Dandugoda
Punchi Bonella Junction	54	Borella
Borella Cross Road	55	Slave Island
Borella Junction	56	Rajagiriya, Kotla
Karatta Round About	57	Nugagoda, Delwata
Wijerama Junction	58	Tattigamulla, Colwita
Longton Place	59	Berikawattiyia, Welawatte
Apocalyptic Nunciature	60	Berikawattiyia, Welawatte

Government Officials involved in Route Decorations

Ministry of External Affairs-
Mr. Maxwell Keegel - Director,
Political Affairs- West Division

Ministry of Christian Affairs-
Mr. Ranjith Guawardane -

Colombo
CMC Commissioner General-
Mrs. Bhadrani Jayawardane
CMC Asst. Commissioner
General - Mrs. Shalika Ranaweera
In charge of pandals -
Mr. Dharmapriya

Dehiwala- Mt. Lavinia
M/C- Mr. Dhanasiri Amarathunga

(Mayor)Mr. Harsha Nonis

Peliyagoda
D/S - Mrs. Pubudika Bandara
P/S Chairman - Mr. Prasanna
Ranaweera U/C Chairman -
Mr. Amila Nishantha

Wattala
D/S - Mr. W. G. Premalal
P/S Chairman -
Mr. Thyagaraja Alwis
U/C Chairman -
Mr. H. M. Naushad

Ja- Ela
D/S - Mrs. Nimali De Silva

P/S Chairman - Mr. Lalith Nishantha
U/C Chairman - Mr. Shammika
Dias

Katana
D/S - Mr. Lukshman Nivialla
P/S Chairman -
Mr. P. Leelananda Silva
U/C Chairman - Mr. Dinal Perera

Abbreviations:
D/S- Divisional Secretary
CMC- Municipal Council
P/S- Pradesheeya Sabha
U/C- Urban Council

The Central Committee chaired by the Catholic Bishops Conference in Sri Lanka; the core organizing body of the visit of the Holy Father, established a separate committee for Route Decorations under the guidance of Very Rev. Fr. Shanthikumar Welwita the Episcopal Vicar for Colombo North and Ja-ela regions of the Archdiocese of Colombo, as its Chairman. This committee was entrusted with the responsibility of decorating every inch of the routes where the Holy Father was to travel.

Involvement with the Government:

From the side of the Church the visit of the Holy Father was a pastoral visit. But for the government it was an official State Visit that involves ordinary procedures of government protocol. As far as route decorations are concerned there was a good rapport and mutual understanding between the two. The parishes along the route concerned had to be connected to the respective local authorities such as Urban Councils and Pradesheeya Sabhas. The matter was co-ordinated by the Ministry of External Affairs.

Parameters of Operation:

Since it was an official State Visit there was less room for parishes to have their own unique decors. It was stressed from the very beginning to have uniformity in decorations. The above ministry suggested having only the Sri Lankan State flag and the Vatican Flag along the routes (specific areas like Madhu Shrine, BMICH, Galle Face Green and the Archbishop's House were allowed to have the Sri Lankan, Catholic Flag and the Pope's Visit flag as well). All the flags were printed by the Ministry for External Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Christian Affairs. The same ministry led by the Chief of Protocol Mr. Maxwell Keegel - Director, Political Affairs - West Division gave directions on how to put up bill boards, the use of all three major languages etc. The following urban Councils and Pradesheeya



Sabhas were responsible to finding flag poles and in fixing them and erecting pandals and overhead bill boards with the images of St. Joseph Vaz and the Holy Father (see the attached images). Their co-operation was amazing!

- 1) Kelaniya Pradesheeya Sabha and the Divisional Secretariat
- 2) Peliyagoda Urban Council
- 3) Wattala Pradesheeya Sabha and the Divisional Secretariat
- 4) Wattala - Mabole Urban Council
- 5) Ja-ela Pradesheeya Sabha and the Divisional Secretariat
- 6) Ja-ela Urban Council
- 7) Katana Pradesheeya Sabha and the Divisional Secretariat
- 8) Seeduwa Urban Council
- 9) Negombo Urban Council

The Road Development Authority (RDA) took up the responsibility of decorating the entire Colombo - Katunayake Expressway and also providing the local authorities with necessary concrete bases to erect flag poles.

The Involvement of the Church:

This massive operations were co-ordinated by the Church authorities as well. The graphic attachment shows how the areas for route decorations were demarcated through the co-operation of the respective

Deans of the area (see the attachment). The Parish Priest and deaneries concerned were supposed to purchase streamers according to the calculations of their demarcations, printed by the Finance Committee which managed all the finances. A special pennant was put on from Katunayake up to Peliyagoda. This was sponsored by a devout Catholic and a member of the finance committee. The Parish Priests also co-ordinated with the police of the area in organizing masses and providing them with their basic necessities. More than 120 school and Daham Pasal bands were placed along the route. This too was co-ordinated by the Deans of the area.

City of Colombo

The city of Colombo adapted the same process of operation, and was well co-ordinated through the Colombo Municipal Council led by the the Commissioner General, Mrs. Bhadrani Jayawardane and her assistant Mrs. Shalika Ranaweera. The CMC undertook the responsibility to fix flag poles and to erect three main pandals; one at the entrance to the city of Colombo (at Dimo Junction), at the Galle Face Hotel premises and at Orugodawatte Junction (Baseline Road). The co-ordination with government authorities and the Parish Priests were done by Rev. Fr. Freely Muthukudaarachchi, the Parish Priest of Dehiwala.

Sent by Rev. Fr. Anton Dinesh Priyasad Secretary - Route Decorations Committee

Mass of the Canonization of Saint Joseph Vaz

By Rev. Fr. Cecil Joy Perera

Sometimes when so much is experienced in one single event, it is hard or shall I say, near impossible, to put down on paper the profound impact it has made on my life.

In our tiny nation Sri Lanka, the teardrop shaped isle in the Indian Ocean, the number that gathered for the Papal Mass on January 14, 2015 was indeed significantly high. Over 600,000 people were there, some even braving the chill of the night before and the sweltering heat on the day of the Holy Mass. Perhaps there was a need in the hearts of the people, believers and non-believers in this land, to see a leader that even the secular world conceded was a man of humility, service and compassion. He epitomised the qualities of a true leader, the qualities they hope would be evident I guess, by the new leadership. They had come for a blessing from him, for them personally as well as for the nation.

For many, the Canonization of St Joseph Vaz and the Holy Mass that followed, was the highlight of our Holy Father's visit and to be there to participate, with not only the Holy Father, but also with the leaders of our local Church and those from overseas, with priests and religious and faithful from across the country and again some from overseas, was a wonderful gift from God.

The Altar platform designed in great detail by Fr Priyantha Silva looked a true picture and a worthy setting for the Eucharistic Celebration. The Navy undertook the arduous task of constructing it and under the guidance of Fr. Priyantha they became part of this wonderful miracle, though almost all of them were non-Christians.

Every stage of the Liturgical Celebration was so well planned, so that the solemnity of the Liturgy was maintained throughout, as indeed it should. The priestly vestments looked all alike, newly done for the occasion and that itself has taken the organisers, led by Fr. Indrajith Perera, to work round the clock over a long period of time. The Masters of ceremonies in charge of the sacrifices were helped by other priests, some religious and lay people who worked tirelessly to ensure that everything was in order for the celebrants before they walked up to the Altar platform.

The deacons and acolytes were extremely well trained and it resulted in the smooth-flow of the liturgy from the beginning to the end. Even they were chosen to represent all the dioceses and the religious. Their training was coordinated by Frs. Linton Perera and B.A. Sriyan.

The voices of some of the young from all parts of the country that comprised the choir, accompanied by traditional instruments as well as western ones, under the direction and training of accomplished musicians, conducted by Fr. Jude Nicholas Fernando filled the air and helped in no small measure, to draw hearts to worship. The hymns selected were known ones so that the congregation could join in with ease.

The Liturgy of the Word was well prepared and it was obvious that every person involved who proclaimed God's Word in either word or song, did so with feeling and conviction. The lecturers and cantors and those who took part in processions were chosen to represent all the dioceses, different age groups, different ethnicities and the Religious. The Gospel was intoned in Sinhala and it was done so, powerfully. It was so moving watching our Holy Father, with his head

bent, most likely recalling the words of the Gospel in the language he was familiar with and being obviously touched by it. The twin girls from the USA who are connected to the second miracle of Saint Joseph Vaz were there to take the offerings, with their parents and their little brother. The main offering was a collection of money from all Catholic parishes in Sri Lanka towards the charity projects of the Pope. The relic that was brought in the procession was the cross used by Saint Joseph Vaz during his life time to bless people. The newly carved life-size statue of Saint Joseph Vaz is a masterpiece by Raymond Fernando of Moratuwa.

In his Homily delivered in English, Pope Francis spoke simply and briefly. He described the life of St Joseph Vaz and he said that St. Joseph Vaz continues to be an example and a teacher for many reasons. He however wanted to speak of three of them.

1. He noted that St. Joseph Vaz was an exemplary priest. Pope Francis encouraged the many priests and religious present to look to St. Joseph Vaz and follow his example of :-

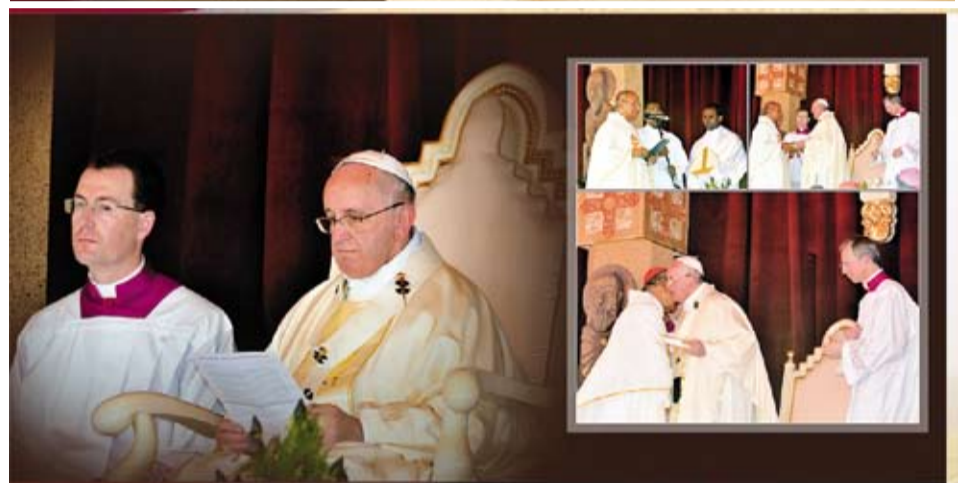
- Evangelization, making Jesus Christ known and loved everywhere
- Patient suffering in the cause of the Gospel
- Obedience to superiors and in the loving care of the Church of God.

He drew their attention to the fact that, like it was in the time of St. Joseph Vaz, so it is now, where they suffer a divided Church, experience occasional hostility and even persecution from within the Church. He said that St. Joseph Vaz was able to be a living icon of God's mercy and reconciling love, because he was constantly united with the crucified Lord in prayer.

2. Next he said, that St. Joseph Vaz was, due to his undivided love for God, able to love his neighbour, thereby transcending religious divisions in the service of peace. This example inspires the Church in Sri Lanka to serve all members of society, making no distinction of race, creed, tribe, status or religion, through providing schools, hospitals, clinics etc. In return the Church asks to be able to have freedom to carry out this mission. St. Joseph Vaz teaches us that genuine worship of God bears fruit not in discrimination, hatred and violence but in respect for the sacredness of life, dignity and freedom of others and loving commitment to the welfare of all.

3. Finally he said that St. Joseph Vaz gives us an example of missionary zeal. He reached out to all, even though his primary task was to minister to the Catholic community. Having left everything, he responded to the call to go forth, to speak of Christ wherever he was led. He knew how to offer the truth and the beauty of the Gospel in a multi-religious context and he did so with respect, dedication, perseverance and humility. He stated that this was the way for the followers of Christ today too. We are called to go forth with the same zeal, the same courage, of St. Joseph Vaz, but also with his sensitivity, his reverence for others and his desire to share with them that word of grace which has the power to build them up. We are called to be missionary disciples.

The sea of white umbrellas, that were used to protect the Ciboria carried by the distributors of Holy Communion, was a beautiful sight. There were 1350 of them, scattered around the Galle Face



Green, right to the peripheries and on Galle Road too. It helped the faithful to make their way for Holy Communion easily and orderly and the time to complete distribution was approximately 12 minutes, which was an achievement indeed. Here again, the organization of this mammoth task had been undertaken with care and precision under the leadership of Fr. Justin Chawhan SSS.

At the end but before the Final Blessing, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith said words of thanksgiving to the Pope on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka. He asked for his prayers for the country, as the country had suffered the atrocities of a civil war that lasted over three decades and we as a nation needed to live in peace with all peoples, irrespective of race, religion or language. He then requested the Holy Father to impart his Apostolic Blessing on all who had gathered.

The faithful were then asked

to lift up any religious articles that they wanted blessed by Pope Francis and they enthusiastically did so.

As the final Hymn was sung and the Holy Father, the concelebrants and all who sat at in the Sanctuary left, everyone knew that heaven had looked down upon us that day in a way like no other. We were blessed with a peace that goes beyond all understanding. There is still that sense of peace lingering in the land that keeps me thanking and praising God daily for this undeserved and bountiful gift.

Pix: Clifford Murray

At the Madhu Shrine

It was on the afternoon of January 14, that the Holy Father arrived in Madhu. Everything was arranged and there were about 2,600 policemen on duty. More than 200 Priests and 300 Rev. Sisters were at Madhu Church from the previous day, all waiting to see Pope Francis.

We had three days of liturgical preparation to prepare the people. It was on the 14th morning that pilgrims started coming to the Church. By about 12 noon, the portico area was packed with devotees. According to estimates there were around six hundred thousand people.

The Event

Around 2.00 p.m. His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph, Bishop of the Diocese of Mannar where the Madhu Shrine is situated and the distinguished guests arrived. The helicopter carrying the Holy Father landed on the helipad at 3.15p.m. His Lordship Rayappu Joseph welcomed the Holy Father. There were 17 representatives from the dioceses also to welcome the Pope. This was to show the unity of the Sri Lanka Church

Two war-affected children garlanded and welcomed the Holy Father. The Holy Father went around greeting the people in the pope-mobile. On the way to the Church, 2000 children waving flags greeted the Holy Father. Going around the people the Holy Father blessed them and in some instances embraced children and old people, thereafter the Administrator of the Madhu Shrine, Rev.Fr. Santiapillai Emilianuspillai welcomed and garlanded the Holy Father after which the Holy Father met and blessed war-victims and the disabled. At the entrance to the portico eight children belonging to the four major religions (Buddhist, Hindu, Catholic, Islam) greeted Holy Father.

After lighting the traditional oil lamp, the Holy Father a white pigeon released as the mark of peace. The Bishop of Mannar gave the welcome speech which was followed by the liturgy service in Tamil and Sinhala. It was a 20 minute service. A homily was delivered by the Holy Father and a Apostolic blessing was given. The



Holy Father then blessed the crowd with the Miraculous Statue of Our lady of Madhu.

A wooden replica of the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Madhu was presented to the Holy Father by the Administrator of the Shrine, Rev.Fr. Santiapillai Emilianuspillai. The Holy Father also blessed the newly built Blessed Sacrament Church from the main Church. He left the Madhu Shrine at 4.30pm after refreshments



Pix : Michael Fernandopulle

It was on June 29, 2014, that a team from the Vatican and His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith visited the Madhu Shrine to see to the possibility of the Holy Father visiting the Shrine. They inspected the place and were convinced that the Holy Father can visit the Shrine. The July 2nd festival was under preparation and thousands of pilgrims both Tamil and Sinhala were camped out in the area. The Vatican delegates who saw this were happy with the place and environment. The Papal Visit was later confirmed by Bishop of Mannar.

Sub-committees of the main Committee

1. Liturgy Committee
2. Publicity and Media Committee
3. Traffic, Crowd Control and Security Committee
4. Transport Committee
5. Medical Care Committee
6. Decoration Committee
7. Accommodation for the Disabled Persons
8. Refreshments Committee
9. Accommodation Committee
10. Water and Sanitation Committee
11. Finance Committee

We had a number of meetings headed by the Bishop. The work was divided and the internal work in the Shrine was undertaken by the Administrator.

Construction Work.

- i. The Road was constructed – for the Holy Father to visit the people.
- ii. Helipad for Helicopter.
- iii. New building for the Pope to rest after the service.

During the preparation the four dioceses were included, namely Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Trincomalee. They were also part of the Organization Committee. The Rev. Fr. Emilianuspillai and His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph attended meetings of the Central Committee held in Colombo under the leadership of the Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith.

The Purpose of the Visit of the Holy Father

The purpose of the visit was to encourage and feel as one with the war-affected people in the North and the East. Secondly, Saint Joseph Vaz visited Mannar first and he travelled through Madhu Church to Kandy. The Holy Father is aware that this Shrine has undergone trials and tribulations during the war. In his message to the people he said, "This home of Mary, has under gone war destruction and now we all are at Mary's Home."

Intensive preparations for this visit of the Holy Father began from January 1, 2015. The Police Department actively participated in all meetings.

The Committees

The various committees

- * Liturgy Committee - Rev. Fr. S.K. Devaraja
 - I. Religious ceremony at Madhu Shrine
 - II. Spiritual Preparation committee
- * Publicity and Media Committee
 - Rev. Fr. Reginald
- * Traffic, Crowd control and Security Committee
 - Rev. Fr. S. Jeyabalan
- * Transport Committee - Rev. Fr. Vasanthakumar
- * Medical Care Committee - Rev. Fr. Desmond Kulas, Rev. Fr. Stany OMI
- * Decoration Committee - Rev. Frs. Beno Alexander
- * Accommodation for the disable persons
 - Rev.Fr. Arulrajah (CMF), Rev. Fr. Jeyabalan Croos
- * Refreshment Committee - Rev.Fr. Marcus
- * Accommodation Committee - Rev. Fr. Peppi Sosai, Rev. Fr. Avithappar
- * Water and sanitation Committee
 - Rev.Fr. A. Sebamala
- * Finance Committee - Rev. Fr. Victor (V.G), Rev. Fr. S. Emilianuspillai

Some Challenges

1. There was continuous rain in our area for nearly one and a half months and later in December there were floods and subsequent displacement of villages in and around Madhu area.
2. Due to the heavy rain the Madhu Shrine surrounding was unable to accommodate people. Once the rains stopped last December we were able to do some renovation work.
3. The Helipad was the big issue for the Pope Visit, because of the heavy rains.
4. The Liturgy Committee was headed by Rev.Fr. Devarajah Koduthor and the Sinhalese section was led by Rev.Fr. Ranjith De Mel of Anuradhapura. They prepared the liturgy very well.
5. The Decorations Committee was headed by Rev.Fr. Beno Alexander with the help of central committee. We had good decoration.
6. The Media Committee led by Rev.Fr. Reginald was well organized and attended to the programme in details.

Sent by Rev. Fr. S. Emilianuspillai, Administrator



January 13 - Arrival at Katunayake Airport



Signs the Golden Book with Archbishop His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith



January 13 - Courtesy Call on President Maithripala Sirisena at the Presidential Secretariat, Colombo



January 13 - Inter-religious Encounter at BMICH, Colombo



January 14 - Visit to the Maligakanda Agrashrawaka Maha Vihara, Maradana

Visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka - 2015



January 14 - Canonization Mass of Blessed Joseph Vaz at the Galle Face Green, Colombo



January 14 - Religious Service at Madhu Shrine



January 15 - Visit to Benedict XVI Cultural Institute at Bolawalana



January 15 - Departs for the Philippines as school children wave goodbye





Sri Lanka
you
are
my
Shangrila

*From January
13th to 15th, 2015*



Vestments for the Papal Visit



The Papal Mass at the Galle Face Green on January 14th was the most significant event of His Holiness Pope Francis' visit to Sri Lanka. We are happy to place on record that when the order for many of the needed vestments for this Mass of Canonization was given to us we were very pleased to undertake this service for the Church. The order was for 1120 chasubles with stoles for priests, 75 surplices with 50 outside stoles, 4 dalmatics, 6 mitres for 5 Italian Bishops and His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith.

All this work was done under the guidance of the Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, headed by Sisters Anne Mary and Angela, at the St. Joseph's "Sew Smart" Sewing Centre for the hearing-impaired (deaf) in Moratuwa. We are so happy to state that we did all this work with seven members of our staff within a short period of time. It did mean, however, commitment and dedication and round the clock service. Our Sisters from other Convents also came to help out. We like to thank Rev. Fathers Indrajith Perera and Nilantha Ediriwickrema for all the help and support they offered us at all times.

The primary apostates of the Perpetual Help Sisters is service to the hearing-impaired (deaf). The St. Joseph's "Sew smart" Sewing Centre is for the past students of the St. Joseph's School for the hearing-impaired (deaf) at Ragama. God in His providence gave an opportunity to our hearing-impaired Sister who is a past student of our Ragama School to offer the wine and water to the Holy Father at the Offertory Procession. The Centre has been in existence for the last 26 years and the School for 75 years. The Centre became popular among the priests for the sewing of priests' cassocks and altar-servers' cassocks. Even the Protestant clergy patronise this Centre. With such a history and background, we Sisters and the hearing-impaired feel it was a great privilege for us to handle this order for an unforgettable Papal Visit for the canonization of the Apostle of Sri Lanka, St. Joseph Vaz.

Rev. Sr. Angela Sajeewani, PH



Committee for Production of Popular Souvenirs

The Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence requested me to form a committee and proceed with the production of popular souvenir items for sale. He also advised me on the type of souvenirs we should produce. Since my company Nelu's Advertising produces this type of items I was able to produce samples within two weeks and get the Finance Committee approval for same.

The Committee comprised:

Mr. Nelu Fernando (Production, Distribution and Sales)

Mr. Nandi Anthony (Secretary and Galle Face Green Sales)

Rev. Fr. Mahendra Gunatilake (Publicity in Catholic Papers and Sales at Catholic Book Shop)

Mr. Gamini Kannangara (Sales in Churches and Shrines)

Mr. Priyanga Perera (Production of Streamers, Waving Flags and Stickers and sales at Galle Face Green)

Mr. Dinuk Hettiarachchi (Sales at Galle Face Green and Katukurunda Church)

Cargills Food City (Sales at 16 Outlets)

Mrs. Dilini Gunasekera (Sales in over 20 Churches and Schools)

Mr. Gerard William (Production of Umbrellas and Sales at over 20 churches)

Mr. Neville Abeyratne (Sales at Dalugama Church)

Rev. Fr. Merl Shanthi Perera and Rev. Fr. Rohan De Soysa (Sales at the Archbishop's House)

Mr. Siri Fernando (Consultant)

Mrs. Hiranthi Fernando (Consultant)

Transport

Mr. Jude Wijesundera (Courier Company Dart Global Logistics) - Transport of items and collection of cash

Mr. Mil Kronenberg (ECD Global) - Supply of vehicles on all Sundays for sales at churches.

Mr. Dudley Thambinayagam - Supply of vehicles on all Sundays for sales at churches.

Mr. Johnny Fernando - Supply of vehicles on all Sundays for sales at churches and at St. Lucia's Cathedral, Kotehena.

Mrs. Nirmali Samaratunga - Supply of vehicles on all Sundays for sales at churches.

Mr. Susanne Bandara of LOLC - Supply of vehicles on one Sunday for sales at churches.

Mr. Dinuk Hettiarachchi Supply of vehicles

Mr. Nelu Fernando - Supply of vehicles and sales done by Mr. Earnest Fernando and Mr. Iroshan Thushara of Nelu's Advertising - Sales at churches

We first advertised through the Colombo Catholic Press in the Sinhala, Tamil and English Newspapers i.e., Gnanartha Pradeepaya, Gnana Oli and Messenger. We then posted brochures with letters from His Eminence to Parishes, Schools, Religious Institutions etc. with essential details of how to purchase the Memorabilia from us. Thereafter posters measuring 17" x 22" were sent to be displayed in Parishes and Schools. With such prompt arrangements we were able to stop other vendors from marketing and cashing in from their own products as souvenirs.

T-shirts and caps were produced by Brandix through Mr. Ajith Johnpillai FOC as their contribution and 20,000 twelve page calendars and 2500 desk calendars FOC as a contribution from Mr. Harry Jayawardena and Miss Stasshani Jayawardena printed at Aitken Spence Printers.

The Souvenirs produced were streamers, waving flags, mugs, ceramic plates (plaques), slim crystal light boxes, stickers, key tags, calendars, pin-on badges, canvas pictures, t-shirts, caps, foldable table banners, fridge magnets, ladies and gents umbrellas.

We all worked tirelessly for four months producing and selling these items to make the Pope's Visit a reality and it became a complete success, with many obstacles faced in having the Presidential Election on January 8 and the Pope's Visit from January 13th to 15th.

I must thank all those good-hearted people who gave their immense support by coming to my office at 5.00 a.m., visiting Churches and selling Souvenirs during all the Masses held in those churches liaising with Parish Priests for 3 months.

A special Thanks goes to Mr. Gamini Kannangara who started his sale of stickers at least six weeks before the other main sales commenced. The delay of the others being the delay in producing the Souvenirs.



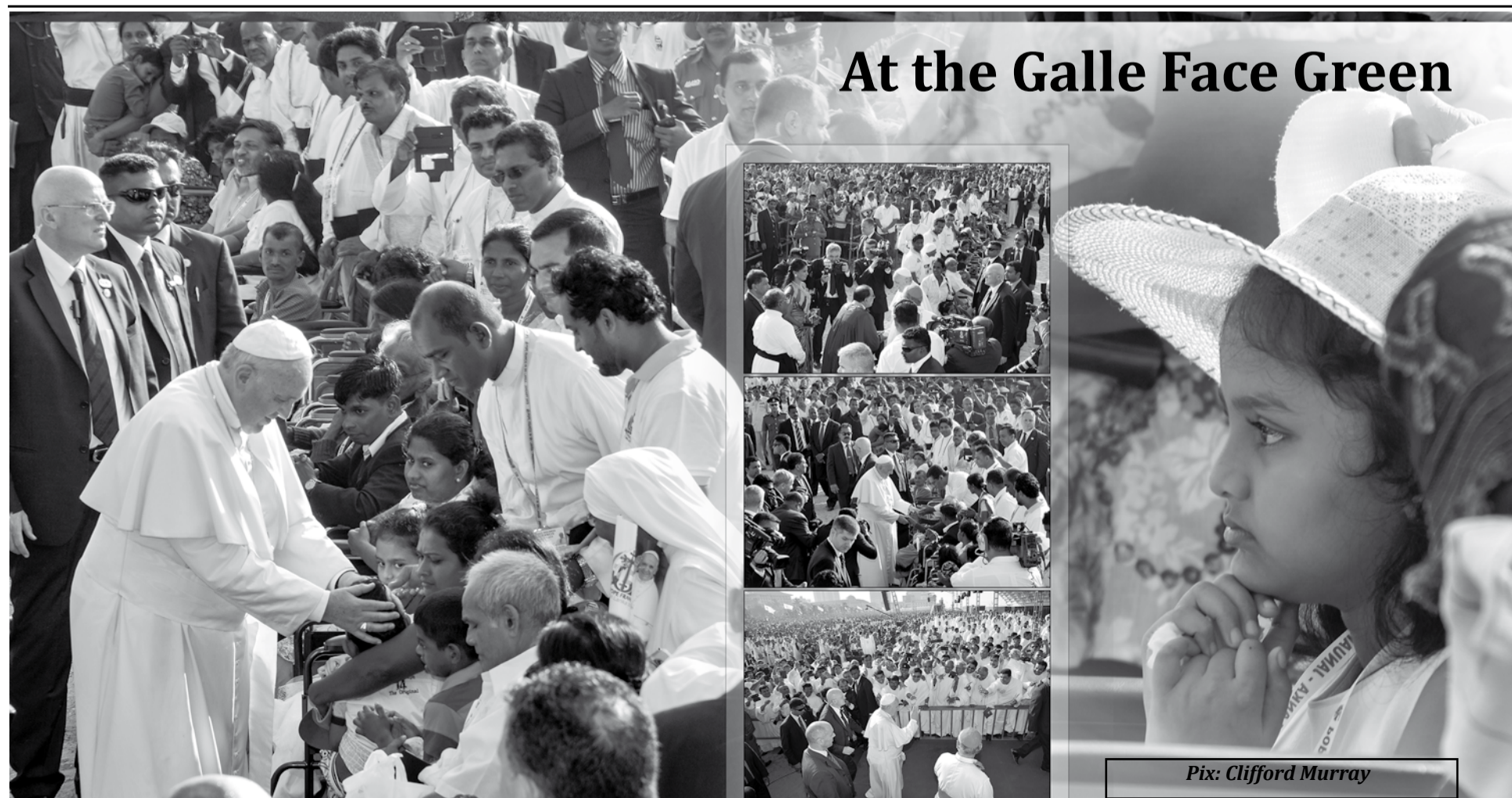
The Galle Face Green had 6 stalls and the sale of souvenirs was organized by 3 energetic people namely Dinuk Hettiarachchi, Priyanga Perera and Nandi Anthony who did the final sales along with the help of 60 boys and girls provided by the Chaplain of the YCS Rev. Fr. Pradeep Kumar and a group of cashiers from HNB provided by Mrs. Pamela Cooray.

They were able to sell almost all the items to the value of Rs. 4.5 Million and achieved a profit of 1.5 Million. Nelu's drivers and supervisors did a won-

derful job in trying conditions as Police were not allowing them to go from stall to stall through the crowd.

Finally, I wish to thank all the Parish Priests for helping us with young people and for the tables to do the sales. Rev. Fr. Mahendra Gunatilake for selling all the Souvenir items in the Colombo Catholic Bookshop for Rs.2.2 million and also Rev. Fr. Merl Shantha and Rev. Fr. Rohan de Soysa for the sales at the Archbishop's Book Shop, the Library and the Colombo Bookshop in Pettah.

Nelu Fernando (Parishioner of St. Joseph's Church Nugegoda.



Pix: Clifford Murray

At the Archbishop's House



Pix: Clifford Murray

The Visit to Bolawalana

Although the Holy Father's arrival at Benedict XVIth Cultural Institute Bolawalana was scheduled at 8.15 a.m., he reached Bolawalana 8 minutes earlier availing himself more time to move with the people.

At his arrival the Holy Father was welcomed to the Institute by the Archbishop of Colombo, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith and Rev. Fr Quintus Fernando, who accompanied him to the Chapel for a short Service of blessing. A group of girls from Holy Cross Convent, Gampaha greeted the Pontiff sprinkling him with Jasmine flowers.

Before the service, Pope Francis knelt and prayed silently for some time after which he imparted the blessing by reciting the Prayer of Blessing. He prayed that the Lord may bless the future students and instructors of the Benedict XVI Cultural Institute which is the main scope of the formation of youth and promo-

tion of dialogue among people, so that guided by His Word and Spirit they may be witnesses of His Love and Truth.

The singing of the group 'Soul Sounds' filled the Chapel with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

After the Sservice the Holy Father greeted those who were inside the Chapel, especially Rev. Fr. Vito Perniola (oldest Jesuit in Sri Lanka who is 102 years) and fisher families from the parishes of Pitipana, Grand Street, Duwa and Sea Street.

As he came out of the Chapel the Holy Father unveiled the Commemorative Plaque that read, "At the invitation of His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith the Benedict XVI Cultural Institute was blessed by His Holiness Pope Francis on January 15, 2015."

Before his departure the Holy Father posed for two group photographs with the all those

who contributed to the project. *We take opportunity to thank:* Saundarie David – Soul Sounds Commander Ravi Gunasinghe (Navy) Wing Commander Chinthaka Muthuthanthri (Air Force) Architect - Chinthani Jayasinghe (UDA) Project Architect - Sunanda Sagara Jayasinghe (senior lecturer University of Moratuwa) Project Engineer - Vasantha Ratnayake

- Rev. Fr. Quintus Fernando



The meeting of two renowned Jesuits. His Holiness Pope Francis a Jesuit meets another Jesuit, Rev. Fr. Vito Perniola, Sri Lankas renowned Church Historan at Bolawalana. Fr. Perniola is Italian by birth.

The Departure





Stamp for the Pope

on a red background. According to the Christian iconographic colour language, blue represents earthly nature and red the divine nature, which are the two natures of Jesus Christ whose vicar today is the Holy Father. In the stamp with the blue background the molding line of the colonnade of the St. Peter's Basilica is seen rising from the left lower corner towards the right edge. The molding line is continued in the red stamp leading it still higher. A canonization of a Saint usually takes place in Rome. However here under special circumstances the

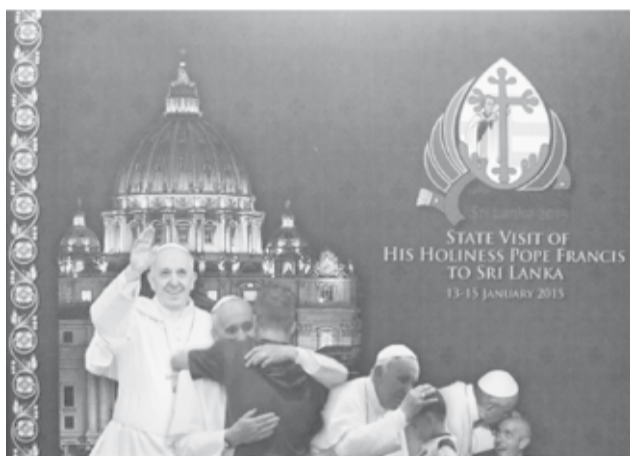


the Pietà, depicting Mother Mary holding the body of Jesus under the cross, signifies the unfathomable love of the Creator God in giving His own Son to be persecuted and killed by man for the salvation of man. The Virgin Mary the Mother of Jesus participated in this love by sacrificing herself and her Son for the will of God.

The background of the Souvenir Sheet depicts a marble stone background reminding us of the words of Jesus: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matthew 16:18) to St. Peter the first Pope whose office is continued to this day in the Papacy.

The two portraits of Pope Francis and the background of the Rs. 10 stamp were illustrated by Pulashti Edhiriweera, since the Philatelic Bureau was of the view that designing of stamps should be done by a registered stamp designer. The designing of the whole including the Stamps, First Day cover and Folder were carried out by the priest in charge of the stamp for the occasion Rev. Fr. L. G. Priyantha Silva, who designed the first Christmas stamp for Sri Lanka in 1980.

The Sri Lanka Philatelic Bureau of the Department of Posts issued two postage stamps in the denominations of Rs. 10.00 and Rs.75.00, a Souvenir Sheet and Stamp Folder to mark the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka on January 13, thks year. The highlight of the visit was the Canonization of



Blessed Joseph Vaz, at a special Eucharistic celebration at the Galle Face Green. It is these two themes that are represented in the design of this special issue.

The Rs. 10.00 stamp with the portrait of His Holiness Pope Francis, has the picture of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City set on a blue background. The Rs. 75.00 stamp with the portrait of His Holiness Pope Francis, has the picture of the stage made for the Canonization Holy Mass at Galle Face Green - designed according to typical Sri Lankan eastern architecture,

ceremony was extended and carried out in Sri Lanka.

The Souvenir Sheet carries a mirror image of the Pietà to emphasize the love of God that continues to be mirrored by the Holy Father and has been declared the theme of his visit to Sri Lanka - "Abide in Love" (1 Jn 4:16). The sculpture of Michelangelo Buonarroti in



The Central Bank of Sri Lanka issued a commemorative silver coin with a face value of Rs. 500 to mark the visit of Pope Francis to Sri Lanka.

On the obverse of the coin - in the middle is the bust of His Holiness Pope Francis, surrounded by a ring of 33 honeysuckle flowers as portrayed in the traditional Sinhalese artistic style. The number 33, is a Sacred Number according to the Christian tradition, since it is the number of earthly years of the life of Jesus. A dotted line is depicted adjacent to the Honey-



Coin for the Pope



suckle design composed of 120 dots. 120 is a complete number according to Sacred Biblical Numbering and is the number of the persons who received the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost. At the edge of the coin are the words 'Papal Visit Sri Lanka' in Sinhala, Tamil and English and the dates of the visit, '13-15 January 2015'.

On the reverse side of the coin - in the center is the official logo for the Papal Visit 2015. Below the logo is the value of the coin Rs. 500 with the word 'Rupees'

in all the three languages. Surrounding the upper part of the logo is the word 'Sri Lanka', in all the 3 three languages. The edge of this side of the coin is decorated with the design of circular dots. 40 and 3 are Christian Sacred Numbers. The 'Na' flower is the local flower attributed to the Virgin Mary and is used on the statue of 'Our Lady of Lanka'. The Na tree (Ceylon Ironwood) is the National Tree of Sri Lanka. The coin was designed by Rev. Fr. L. G. Priyantha Silva

A gigantic and an unforgettable welcome

On the first leg of his second Asian tour, Pope Francis, was greeted on his arrival outside the Airport in Colombo Sri Lanka by 40 elephants draped in colourful traditional perahera costumes. This unique welcome was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



In lighter vein

A few days later during his visit to the Philippines, Pope Francis met with 40 Jesuit priests at the Apostolic Nunciature. During the meeting, the Filipino Jesuits jokingly told the Pope, "You were welcomed by 40 elephants in Sri Lanka. Now you have 40 Jesuits." Quick on the repartee, the Pope responded, "The elephants in Sri Lanka were better dressed," drawing much laughter.

- Pix : Andrew Wijesuriya



"Help us in that search - for a true healing of hearts"

SPEECH OF HIS EMINENCE MALCOLM CARDINAL RANJITH DELIVERED AT THE CANONIZATION MASS ON JANUARY 14, AT THE GALLE FACE GREEN, COLOMBO



Most Holy Father,

It is with great joy and feelings of filial affection that we the citizens of Sri Lanka and members of the Catholic Church welcome you today into our midst. I am sure that by now you have had the opportunity to experience the simple and genuine faith of our people and the loving sense of loyalty and respect with which they have surrounded you from the moment Your Holiness touched our soil. In this I must say that joining the millions of your admirers in the world, our own people, Sri Lankans of every religion, race and social colour have welcomed this pastoral visit of yours to our beautiful little island home with deep respect and love. What is more, over and above the gift of your presence on this soil, you have given us the gift of a Saint: Saint Joseph Vaz. That gift makes us truly happy, for Sri Lanka has now its own saint, the pride of Goa and God's precious gem for Sri Lanka.

We thank you for this most precious gift whose life and service here in his adoptive land, saved the faith of the Catholics during a difficult and painful period of their history and left a lasting legacy to the unending love of God for us. God truly inspired this holy man to give up his own beloved homeland and people and

launch out into the unknown, like Abraham, and to single handedly revive the faith of our ancestors. We thank the Church in Goa for this precious gift of their son to us. There are in fact many who have come to join us today from this lively Church along with their patriarch and we welcome them too with grateful hearts.

Your Holiness, Sri Lanka as you mentioned in your speech to us on the 8th of February last year at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, is called "the Pearl of the Indian ocean," on account of its natural beauty and its shape, the pearl being the shape of a tear" - and pearls are indeed formed as you mentioned on a tear of an oyster.

In the recent past we have shed many tears on account of the internal conflict that caused so many victims and drained away our resources. We are still struggling to rise up from that sad past and to usher in a time of true reconciliation, peace and progress for our people. The journey is difficult. We need your prayers and blessings as well as your paternal guidance. Indeed on that occasion you did promise us your prayers and we thank you for that. We call upon you to kindly help us in that search - for a true healing of hearts, the strength to ask pardon from each other for the senseless violence unleashed then, to forgive and forget that sad past and

to arrive at a process of a give and take that will build bridges of understanding between the parties hurt in the conflict. We are still far away from reaching that goal. We hope and pray that your august figure which teaches us the sublime ways of religion to overcome such hurdles will help us to reach out to one another.

We call upon our beloved Saint Joseph Vaz to intercede for us in heaven so that Sri Lanka maybe able to achieve the miracle of peace soon and may be able to reach out to the goal of true progress and happiness for all its people irrespective of all our differences.

Holy Father, our nation blessed by the teachings of the great world religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity does possess the moral and spiritual strength and nobility needed to generate such peace but we will all need to make that leap towards each other with a genuine spirit of reconciliation, trust and a sense of reciprocity.

Holy Father, do bless us in this resolve. We thank you for your presence among us and call upon you to impart your paternal and apostolic blessing on Sri Lanka, our beloved and beautiful home and on all its people.

Thank you.



Saint Joseph Vaz

1. Joseph Vaz was born on a Friday on April 21, 1651 in Benaulim, Goa, baptised on a Friday and died on January 16, 1711 a Friday in Kandy-Sri Lanka.
2. The day Joseph Vaz was born, Cristovam Vaz, his father saw a star in the sky during mid-day and wrote in his personal diary that his son would become a great man.
3. The doors of Cortalim Church, the neighbouring church, opened on its own when young Joseph Vaz went to visit the Blessed Sacrament during the nights from his paternal home at Sancoale.
4. As a young boy he was called "Little Saint." He recited

Patron of Goa, the Apostle of Kanara and Sri Lanka

the Rosary on his way to the Church and school.

5. He wrote "the Letter of Captivity" or "the Deed of Bondage" to Mother Mary on August 5, 1677.

6. He resolved to eat kanji (rice broth) for his food throughout his life.

7. He started the first indigenous order in Asia, the Milagristas or the Oratorians. The Oratorians served the Church of Sri Lanka and other countries for 150 years.

8. He entered Sri Lanka (Ceylon) dressed as a coolie, a real beggar during the Dutch persecution.

9. He built the first church in Sri Lanka and dedicated it to Mother Mary.

10. He always kept a sack of rice to be distributed after Holy Mass to the poor. And that sack was never empty!

11. He established lay leaders, catechists, the Muppus and Annavis, small human communities, inculturation, much before Vatican II.

12. He was a man who thought ahead of his times.

13. Disguised as a baker

man, dhobi, coolie, servant, businessman, porter, fisherwoman, etc served the hidden Church of Sri Lanka.

14. Imprisoned as a Portuguese spy for two years, he was dragged into the City of Kandy bound in chains.

15. He issued a command over snakes that they would never bite a priest.

16. He used the time spent in prison Tamil and Sinhala.

17. When the drought ravaged the island, he was requested by the Buddhist King of Kandy to pray for rain. He performed the 'Miracle of Rain' in Kandy.

18. Served selflessly as a nurse, cook, doctor and gravedigger to all the communities during the epidemic of small pox and buried 10-12 bodies per day. The King abandoned his Kingdom and lived in the Jungle for the fear of contracting the disease.

19. He never kept any money with him. He had nothing to owe! Nothing to call his own! He wore only one cassock, which was patched and stitched all over.

20. He was called "Sa-

manasu Swami," the angelic priest by the people of Sri Lanka. He stands as the first and singular missionary to mission to the east.

21. He educated his companion John who accompanied him and requested the Superior of the Oratorians to ordain him a priest. John, who later returned to Goa, was the first Dalit priest.

22. He always slept on a mat on the floor.

23. God blessed him with 30 years of priesthood, 24 fruitful years in the Sri Lankan Vineyard.

24. He walked bare foot throughout his life (59 years 6 months, 26 days) or rather 60 years. He was wiry-thin and walked through the jungles, etc like the wind.

25. He died in an odour of Sanctity on January 16, 1711, on the day and the time that he had foretold!

26. Before dying he spoke and advised those gathered around him in Sinhala "You will not be able to do at the time of death what you have not done during your lifetime."

27. The King of Kandy

requested that the body lay in State for three days.

28. Thousands poured in to the Church to pay their last respects to the great Missionary that Goa gave to the Universal Church.

29. Nobody knows now where his body lay buried. Perhaps he does not want to be recognized! Such is his humility.

30. He sent the Crucifix given to him by the Pope, to Goa, now preserved in the Oratory Room of Blessed Joseph Vaz at Sancoale, Goa, India. The only relic in India. The Oratory Room, over 400-years-old and is being visited by thousands of devotees from all over the world.

31. The jackfruit tree that he played under and climbed down from the window, to visit the Blessed Sacrament in Cortalim Church, quietly during the nights, still stands witness to the Holy Son of Goa.

Rev. Fr. Romualdo Robin Rodrigues
Parish Priest, Our Lady of Good Hope Church, Candolim, Goa



The Litany

*Lord have mercy on us
Christ have mercy on us
Lord have mercy on us
Christ hear us
Christ graciously hear us
God the Father of heaven
Have mercy on us,
God the Son, Redeemer of the world,
Have mercy on us,
God the Holy Spirit
Have mercy on us,
Holy Trinity, One God,
Have mercy on us
Holy Mary, Mother of God
Pray for us,*

- Saint Joseph Vaz, who was born in the village of Benaulin in Goa.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who was trained in Catholic piety by devoted parents, Christopher Vaz and Maria Miranda,
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who in tender age lived a holy and pious life in the home and among your fellow students.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who was endearingly known as "the Little Saint" from your childhood.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who preferred to pray long into the night, even while the family members lay down to sleep.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who experienced being raised on high and embraced by a luminous light while in ecstasy.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who was called to the Holy Priesthood in order to save the flame of the Catholic Faith being extinguished from the Land of Sri Lanka.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who decided to walk bare-foot all your life as a vow on the day of your ordination.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who spread the sweet odour of sanctity in the area around Canara.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who was shocked and saddened to learn of the plight of the Catholics in Sri Lanka due to a persecution.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who returned to Goa to revive the Oratorian Fraternity and thereafter was made its distinguished Superior.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who sold yourself before the immaculate Mother of God, in the hope of bearing up all life's difficulties for the sake of Christ and of involving yourself totally as a slave in the work of evangelization.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who disguised as a ship's labourer reached Mannar in search of Catholics under the yoke of persecution.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who as soon as you reached Jaffna contracted the deadly Dysentery and was removed to the jungle to be left abandoned to yourself.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who revived and regained health after an old woman looking for fire-wood was providentially led to serve you with herbal - porridge.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who despite the harassment of the Dutch Governor started reviving Catholic life making Sillalai your centre of Missionary activity.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, mindful of the request of a childless couple at Pullikulam prayed and obtained the grace they asked for.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who while travelling bare-foot through the forests made dangerous wild animals and poisonous snakes to retreat by the power of the Holy Cross.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who searched for Catholics who had taken refuge in Wahakotte and Galgamuwa areas due to the cruel persecution of the Dutch and revived them and confirmed them in the Catholic Faith.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who while attempting to enter the Kandyan Kingdom was arrested at Weuda as a spy by order of King Wimaladharmasuriya.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who suffered all insults and humiliations as a prisoner, accepting everything as the Holy will of God.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who at the island-wide drought respecting the King's request prayed with confidence and brought down a miraculous shower.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who during the deadly small-pox epidemic treated all the sick with medicine and food and even carried their corpses for burial irrespective of clan or creed.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who won the King's confidence and being released from prison organized missionary activity with great zest and fervour even in the Dutch occupied areas.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who with great devotion prayed the Holy Rosary at all times, thereby teaching us to be devoted children of Our Blessed Mother.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who was attentive to the pain and anguish of everyone who sought relief and fatherly consolation.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who faced life's challenges and threats with great trust in Divine Providence.
- Blessed Joseph Vaz, who while experiencing the Love of God brings all to Christ with your exemplary life of humility.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who with great compassion brings about solace to those heavily burdened and affected with sufferings.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who intercedes before God on behalf of childless couples to bless them with offspring.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, who enriched the earlier Church with lay-leadership, setting an example to the present-day Lay-faithful.
- Saint Joseph Vaz, patron of travellers protecting all those who have recourse to you, until the end of their journeys.
- Saint Joseph Vaz who counselled your followers that what could not be performed during one's life could never be accomplished at the moment of one's death.

Lamb of God who take away the sins of the world.

Spare us, O Lord

Lamb of God who take away the sins of the world

Graciously hear us, O Lord!

Lamb of God who take away the sins of the world.

Have mercy on us

Pray for us, O Saint Joseph Vaz Apostle of Sri Lanka,
That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let Us Pray

Oh! God of all Kindness we thank you for the grace of granting us Saint Joseph Vaz as the Apostle of Sri Lanka.

We also beseech You through his intercession to protect us from all trials and tribulations that threaten Our Faith even as he protected the Faith of our forefathers when faced with bitter persecution.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

(Contd from Pg. 1)

His Eminence Speaks



Q: The Holy Father need not have come to Sri Lanka. The Canonization could have been done in Rome. Why did he want to come to Sri Lanka?

A: The Holy Father came to Sri Lanka to see, learn and experience Asia. The Canonization was something that developed after the Holy Father decided to accept our invitation. He really wanted to have an experience of the opportunities and challenges that the Church faces in a typically Asian context. He did not come here to lecture or tell us what we ought to do. He came as the Successor of Peter to strengthen the faith of everyone: Faith in God and in one another. Being originally from South America he knew about the Church there. The situation in North America too is quite familiar to him. So also the situation in Europe, having been a student in Germany. He had not been to Asia before becoming the Pope. And so, Pope Francis felt that his visits to Asia would help him to learn about us. He also thought that the Church in Asia, in its turn, can enrich the heritage of the Universal Church. For that purpose he came: To learn first-hand and to see how the Church in Asia could contribute to the Universal Faith.

Q: So this second visit to Asia is more a learning experience for the Holy Father?

A: The visit has to be seen in the light of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* where he speaks on the Church's primary mission of evangelization in the modern world - to evangelize and transform. Just like the way we can learn from others, the Church in Asia can give the richness of its culture and traditions to the Universal Church. It can also learn from the other Churches.

Q: What was the impact of this Papal visit on the country?

A: First, I must mention that the visit had no political implications whatsoever. Some people however tried to interpret it that way. The declaration of an election in the middle of the preparations for the visit was quite uncalled for. It took us all by surprise. Many wanted us to cancel or postpone the visit. But we did not ask and could not make the Pope do that. If we did he would have given up on the visit. Who are we, but a small dot in the world map? How could we ask him not to come once everything was arranged? Moreover, I knew that this Papal Visit would benefit the country. Yes, God did the miracle. The Holy Father's coming mellowed the possibility of post-election violence and there was a smooth transition of power. It never happened that way before. But trust in God we did, and it gave us good results. The country moved into a path of healing, reconciliation and true progress smoothly and the visit of such a holy person helped us.

Q: When did Your Eminence invite the Holy Father to Sri Lanka?

A: It was when I went to congratulate him on his election, before he appeared from that window on the 13th of March 2013. I proposed that

he should come to Asia in order to experience how the little flock in Asia is faring in the midst of a sea of "others." It was necessary that the Universal Shepherd experiences the diversity of cultures, traditions, religions, ethnicity that colour Asia. Asia is a Continent where two thirds of the world population lives and I thought the Holy Father's visit will be both exciting and challenging especially as we are living in a time of economic upsurge here. Secularism is invading our Continent and our strong religious affiliations need to be protected. It was important that the Universal Church should be aware of this situation and the doors that it opens to evangelization. Besides, the role of St. Joseph Vaz, the humble missionary of Christ provided many clues to the powerless way of evangelization.

Q: The Holy Father's visit to the Maligakanda Agrashrawaka Maha Vihara, Maradana created quite an impact. Can you comment on this?

A: There was actually no such visit on the itinerary. But the Ven. Banagala Upatissa Thera, who is also the President of the Maha Bodhi Society, had written to me asking me if the Holy Father could visit his temple. He had even asked the Apostolic Nuncio to visit the Temple. On the two hour journey to Madhu I discussed this matter with the Holy Father and I explained to him about the importance of working together with the other religions in a country like ours. I said it could be a great blessing if the Holy Father could visit the temple for even five minutes. Since there was a meeting scheduled with the Bishops on our return from Madhu, the Holy Father asked me whether the temple was close enough for him to make a quick visit. When I answered in the affirmative he suggested that we make a quick visit there and that is how it happened. It was a great moment. He liked the visit very much. I too was happy as I had suggested this to him.

Q: What happened at the Temple?

A: This is the temple where the sacred relics of the chief disciples of the Buddha; Sariputta and Moggallana Maha Theras are enshrined. The Holy Father removed his shoes on entering. He was taken to the place where the monks held a special exposition of the relics and chanted pirth blessings on the Pope. They also explained the significance and the history behind the relics.

Q: Was the Holy Father given a sum up of our traditions and customs before he arrived?

A: Yes. We had to do that especially for the welcome ceremony on his arrival. The Holy Father was

told about the two children who garlanded and welcomed him. That in keeping with the local culture two children will go down before him in worship. If we did not prepare him, he would have been alarmed that we were treating him like a God. Then, on our journey to Madhu I told him about how Christians live in a culture that makes us porous to the values of all the other religions and how that too enriches us.

Q: The Inter-religious Encounter at the BMICH became an important highlight of the Papal visit. Can you comment?

A: We really worked very hard to organise and solicit the clergy of the different religions to come for this meeting and we were very pleased to see a high participation of Buddhist, Hindu, and Islam members of the clergy present for this encounter with the Holy Father. There were over 500 Buddhist monks present.

Q: Were there representatives from the Mainline Churches also?

A: Yes. They were all there and there were two representatives from the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. We saw to it that the Holy Father had time to speak with all of them. He was keen and enthusiastic in establishing a rapport with other religions.

Q: Madhu finally became the apex of the Holy Father's visit. It showed to all the Holy Father's sincere attachment to the Blessed Mother. What were his feelings at the Madhu Shrine?

A: In Madhu he saw the tremendous devotion of the people to the Blessed Mother. Those who flocked there that day were also non Catholics. There was a large Hindu presence as well. Our Lady has been close to these people for over 300 to 400 years and it is a very significant presence especially in the war years when she gave protection to them. The Holy Father saw this rallying factor around the Blessed Mother and was touched by that devotion.

Q: The Holy Father hugging the gift of the replica of the Miraculous Statue at Madhu became the talk of the Catholic community...

A: Keeping the statue close to his heart, showed how the Holy Father recognised the greatness of the Blessed Mother - Our Lady of Madhu and her closeness to the people especially the suffering ones. Our Lady did not separate her children into different communities and religions. She was close to all of them. She is a Mother to all and this unity should be the same always. The Holy Father saw that and was touched by it.

Q: Were any comments made on the new administration in the country?

A: In a general manner the Holy Father was pleased with the new President. He was touched by his simplicity and edified by his attitude.



PRAYER TO SAINT JOSEPH VAZ

Almighty and Eternal God, Our loving Father, we thank you for listening to our humble prayer and pleading and granting us the great blessing of having our beloved Apostle of Sri Lanka, Saint Joseph Vaz as the First Saint of our Motherland. Father, we thank you from depths of our hearts for the gift of our faith which Saint Joseph Vaz laboured so valiantly to preserve during the Dutch persecution. We thank you for the many wonders and miracles that have been worked through his intercession over the past three hundred years. Help us to deepen our faith, strengthen our hope, and enkindle our love, to make us spirit-filled witnesses to Jesus Christ Our Lord and the Good News of salvation. Bless our dear land and grant lasting peace, reconciliation, unity and prosperity to Mother Lanka and her people. *Amen.*