

FR. AGNEL

ASHRAM NEWS

December 2023



Spreading the joy of Christmas

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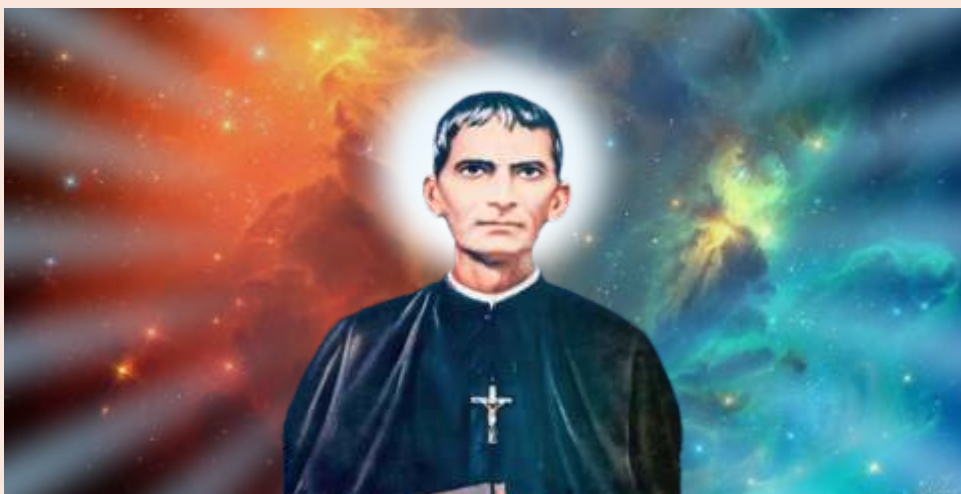
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VEN. FR. AGNELO'S 155th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Sunday, 21st January 2024

PROGRAMME

SPECIAL NOVENA SERVICES | 12th to 20th January 2024

Every day

Morning : 7.00 a.m. & 9.30 a.m.: Holy Mass and Novena Prayer in English.

Evening : 6.00 p.m. : Holy Mass and Novena Prayer in English.

N.B.

On Sunday, 14th January, all Masses and Novena Services will be held as on normal Sundays.

On Sunday, 14th January, Novena Services will be in Gujarati at 3.00 p.m.

21st January (Sunday) : 155th Birth Anniversary of Venerable Fr. Agnel

Morning : Mass followed by Novena Prayers at 7.00 a.m. & 9.30 a.m. (English)

Evening : A Solemn Concelebrated Mass will be held at 6.00 p.m. (English) in the Ashram Compound, followed by Novena Prayers.



Most Rev. Deepak Tauro, Auxiliary Bishop of Delhi,
will be the Main Celebrant on 21st January, 2024.

Thousands of devotees will participate in this Annual Novena and celebration. Over one lakh of favours, some of them truly miraculous such as cure of cancer, T.B., Paralysis etc. have been received through the powerful intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnel.

Favours obtained and petitions to be placed at the Shrine of Ven. Fr. Agnel may be sent to the following address:

Rev. Fr. Superior

FR. AGNEL ASHRAM

Bandstand, Bandra (West),

Mumbai - 400 050, India.

Bus No. 211 : Special Bus Service to Ply from Bandra Railway Station to Fr. Agnel Ashram Gate.



THE DENIAL OF CHRISTMAS!

Modern economy's greatest show of force is its ability to turn everything into an economic activity, to objectivize it, to turn it into something that can be bought or sold on the counter or on the web. Anything that exists can be sold if you are able to muster the capacity to sell it, by creating buyers for the same, and that includes junk. Look at how junkyards have created millionaires, and so many other baser things that are best left unmentioned.

Commerce does not spare anyone, it has ceaselessly exploited the woman and her body for selling cars to liquor, for selling airline tickets to condos, and all things that appeal to the baser instincts of man. The mother's love for the baby has been commercialized to sell baby formulas and by selling the idea of infants' safety, car tyres and automobiles are sold even as you read this.

But how was that cheap, although ingenious reach of modern advertising, able to almost push the world's most powerful historical, rather 'metahistorical' event to the sidelines? The reason why today, everywhere, the celebrations around the Birth of Jesus, have become so void of any meaning and incapable of impacting mankind, is perhaps humankind's lowest nadir.

Throughout history, mankind has been plagued with major upheavals, such as we saw in Covid-19, 2019-2021, that cast doubts on the very survivability of mankind, as also other major epidemics, wars, tsunamis, local catastrophes. They made every human being living on this planet, question about life on earth and its future. Surprisingly this is an odd situation.

Why should man (and woman) feel apprehensive about humanity's survival, as history is witness to the extinction and disappearance of thousands of species of living organisms, including the world's biggest. The ecological time bomb that is slowly and steadily ticking towards its final D-Day, is each day, extinguishing scores of big and small organisms that are unable to adapt or survive the rapid and grave environmental changes.

Even if the best efforts to arrest the depredation of the planet succeed which is very unlikely, the eventual survival of man and woman, to live to what he or she is called to be, will be of little or no help. The immediate apprehension of every human person, about death or destruction is only apparently about his or her physical end. It is something much beyond that, the understanding of which will elude him or her,

as long as man (or woman) fails to see himself or herself as what he or she is made to be.

The more successful the effort of the economic activity, trade and commerce forces to make wealth, physical safety and comfort of travel by land, sea or air, the comfort of footwear and clothing, the compulsion of more delicious food, to persuade modern man to make them their god, the farther mankind will reach from its destination even if, they survive the climate doomsday.

CHRISTMAS is not only the birth of JESUS, the Son of God, become MAN and become like us in all things but sin, but is a far greater and inevitable Divine intervention, without which mankind ceases to be what man and woman yearn in their inmost heart to be – immortal. The Birth of Jesus is primarily the restoration of the lost power to live forever. It is also the only means to reach that immortality, the loss of which anguishes man and woman in the event of an untoward incident leading to death.

By the Birth of Jesus, God empowers mankind with the power of immortality, such as no amount of the billions of offerings that the commerce machine offers to those who aspire for it. From the poshest apartment in Burj Khalifa, to the best private jet, and the sleekest yacht sailing in the oceans and the fastest Maserati or Ferrari, all of them, singly or collectively cannot lead anyone, even a step closer to that what Jesus brings to the world at Christmas.

Jesus, at birth makes that most radical, eye opening, contrasting statement that LIFE and

TRUE LIVING can only come and be achieved when all that commerce offers, ceases to bind us to any of them. The Birth of Jesus is man's most desirable, most indispensable and most precious event, but much more, the very reason, why man or woman are what they are, body and soul bound together. They are embedded with the inevitable human destiny that one achieves by accepting Jesus, as the Lord and Master of our life, or is condemned to live forever deprived of it, and ironically of also of what he or she yearns to possess today, during this present life.

The Birth of Jesus and His assumption of human form, which has been insufficiently described above, as historical or metahistorical event, is far beyond that, because truly speaking, it is not an event – it is the TRANSFORMATION OF MANKIND by ELEVATING HIM TO THE LEVEL OF BEYOND OUR IMAGINATION AND OUR ABILITY TO COMPREHEND.

Christmas, the Birth of Jesus, is the only reason why our life is worth living. Without being transformed by God, what will our life ever be? BRING CHRISTMAS BACK INTO OUR LIVES, by living the reality of transformed men and women, regardless of what faith you profess, and what hope you are living for, for the only hope that exists is the hope that Jesus gives, since He became MAN only to be able to give us that.

May you have a truly blessed and transforming Christmas!

Fr. J.A. Carvalho

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CHRISTMAS AND ST. JOSEPH

-Fr.Fio Mascarenhas, SJ

Jesus' first experience of masculine, paternal love came from the delighted embrace and tender loving hug of his foster father, Joseph. He was the first person whom Baby Jesus learnt to call 'Abba' (beloved *dad, pai, bapa*). Slowly, as he "grew in years, strength, and wisdom, and in divine and human favour" (Luke 2:40, 52), he learnt to call **God the Father** his own unique *Abba*. The Holy Spirit taught him, or better, revealed to him, what St. Paul could forcefully declare to the early Christians:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you ... have received the spirit of sonship! When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are sons of God, and if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Romans 8:14-17, RSV). Jesus himself spoke of this 'new' revelation when he declared, **"No one knows... who the Father is except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him"** (Lk.10:22).

Pope St. John Paul II drew attention to Joseph's fatherly role in Jesus' life in the Apostolic Letter, *Redemptoris Custos* (1989):

"Joseph was told by the angel to name the child; thus Joseph declares his own legal fatherhood over Jesus. A son's circumcision was the first religious obligation of a Jewish father, and with this ceremony Joseph exercised his right and duty with regard to Jesus... At this event, Joseph named the child, '**Jesus**': the significance of this name, the only name in which there is salvation, had been revealed to Joseph by the angel: '*You shall call the child Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*' (Mt.1:21)".

The Pope also noted that "journeying to Bethlehem for the census, Joseph fulfilled for the child the significant task of officially inserting the name '*Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth*' (Jn.1:45) into the registry of the Roman empire;" and at the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, "the ransoming of the firstborn was another obligation of the father, and it was fulfilled by Joseph." Furthermore, the Gospel according to Luke noted that "**his father and his mother marvelled at what**

was said about him" (Lk.2:23). Hence, St. John Paul II declared in the same Letter:

"In the Holy Family, Joseph is **the father**: his fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring; but neither is it an 'apparent' or merely 'substitute' fatherhood. Rather, **it is one that fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family**. Thus, the words which Mary spoke to the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple take on their full significance: '**Your father and I... have been looking for you.**' This is no conventional phrase: Mary's words to Jesus show the complete reality of the incarnation present in the mystery of the family of Nazareth. From the beginning, Joseph accepted his human fatherhood over Jesus. Following the light of the Holy Spirit, he certainly came to discover ever more fully the indescribable gift that was his human fatherhood."

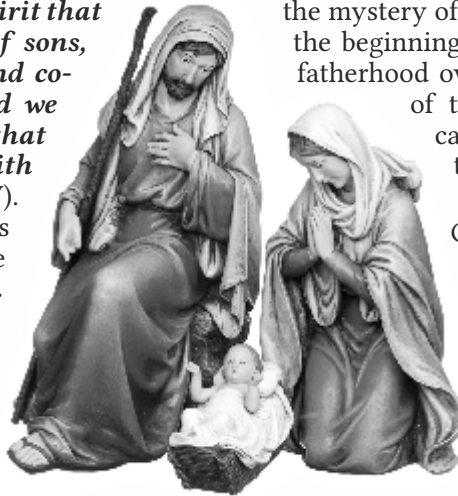
God blessed St. Joseph with special graces in order to equip him for the twin vocation of husband and father. In his prayer-time, Joseph himself surely experienced "*the love of God poured in great abundance into his heart by the Holy Spirit*" (Rom.5:5), so that with **this same love** he could then

affectionately and truly love his wife and child. The Holy Spirit also prepared Joseph to be, with Mary, the first teacher of the boy Jesus, so Joseph must have surely received the messianic gifts of "*wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude and the fear of the Lord*" (Is.11:1).

In this context, we can remember St. Paul's inspired prayer for the early Christians (and for all of us):

"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation to know him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is his infinite power in us who believe..." (Eph. 1:17-20).

Again, according to the custom of the Jews, Joseph taught his son his own trade (carpentry). The line, Jesus "*was obedient to them*" (Lk.2:51) means also that Jesus shared in the work of Joseph and



became known as “the carpenter’s son.” Thus, at the workbench, where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the redemption.

We can also remember Pope St. John Paul II’s poignant insistence that Joseph was Mary’s true husband, and noted that God spoke to him as the husband of the virgin of Nazareth: “Do not fear to take Mary your wife” into your home (Mt.1:20). According to Jewish custom, marriage took place in two steps: first, the legal marriage was celebrated and then, after a certain period of time, the husband brought the wife into his own house:

“What had taken place earlier, namely Joseph’s marriage to Mary, happened in accord with God’s will and was meant to endure. By taking her into his own home, Joseph obeyed God and expressed his generous love for the mother of God, and gave her a husband’s ‘gift of self’ ...since marriage is the highest degree of association and friendship, involving by its very nature a communion of goods, it follows that God, by giving Joseph to the virgin, did not give him to her only as a companion for life; he also gave Joseph to Mary in order that he might share through the marriage pact in her own sublime greatness.”

Jesus’ human father was obviously a man of **extraordinary faith**. The Second Vatican Council declared: “The obedience of faith must be given to God as He reveals Himself. By this obedience, man freely commits himself entirely to God, making the full submission of his intellect and

will to the God who reveals, and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him” (DV5). John Paul II tells us that “this statement, which touches the very essence of faith, is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth.”

With such childlike faith, when faced with the problem of his wife’s pregnancy before they lived together – instead of following his own humane plan (“being a just man, and unwilling to put her to shame, he resolved to send her away quietly” – Mt.1:19), Joseph “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife” (v24). He fully obeyed the angel a second time when he was told to “take the child and his mother by night” and so “he departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod” (Mt.2:14f).

There were no limits to Joseph’s faith, hope and love, and Christmas is a specially graced time for us all to grow in devotion, not only to the Infant Jesus, and to his and our mother Mary, **but also to St. Joseph**, asking that he will transmit to us his own outstanding faith and love, which enabled him to fulfill God’s unusual will regarding the birth and childhood of Jesus. *Happy Christmas!*



Dr. Fiorello Mascarenhas SJ
DMin recently celebrated his Diamond Jubilee in the Society of Jesus, and writes and teaches biblical spirituality. His contact: frfiomas@gmail.com

AGNEL CO-OPERATORS

You can join the Ashram Family by becoming a member of Agnel Co-operators and enjoy the fruits of a Special Sunday Mass offered at Fr. Agnel Ashram, Bandra, for all the members. You will also enjoy the fruits of all the prayers and good works of the Agnel Ashram Fathers and entire Agnel Ashram Family.

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CHRISTMAS - A FESTIVAL OF LOVE

- Jubel D'Cruz

More than the beautiful decorations, delicious sweets and dazzling lights in our houses, Christmas is about the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ. In the birth of Jesus, the eternal, all-powerful creator descended on earth. The festival of Christmas is also a deep reminder of God's great love. It is a time when Christ comes into our world to shower on us His steadfast love, which is His greatest gift. He shares His love in numerous ways. He comes to solve our problems and challenges. He guides us on our path ahead. Christmas is a time of renewed strength and healing too. There are myriad ways in which we can celebrate this festival. Hence, let us celebrate Christmas by sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

Despite all the fun and laughter, Christmas has a much deeper meaning for me. I have always felt that it is a good time for forgiveness because it is the birthday of Jesus Christ, who was born to forgive us and save us from all our sins. Jesus Christ came to the earth because He loves us. He came to the earth to forgive us and make us free from the burden of sins.

Christians believe that we are all sinners and without the blood of Jesus, we are all doomed and Satan can dominate us. But God loves us so much that He sent His only Son Jesus Christ to the earth so that we could have an eternal life. God forgives us of our sins every day, every hour, every minute and every second. God never sets a time or a period for forgiveness. He is always ready to

forgive us if we pray and ask for His forgiveness.

Just like we have been forgiven, we should also forgive those who have hurt us. Jesus said that unless we forgive others, God wouldn't forgive us (Matthew 6:15). As a human being and especially when we've been hurt badly, forgiving may not be that easy. But remembering the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all unrighteousness and sets us free from the power of sin and death, we should forgive others.

Refusing to forgive will make our hearts a place for Satan's seed of bitterness. Forgiving will unlock the chains in our life for God to work in our hearts.

Living with an unforgiving nature can also be harmful for our health, because many diseases, including depression and arthritis, have been associated with bitterness and the tendency to not let go. So, if there's anyone who you need to forgive — be it friends, family members or enemies; this Christmas start with them and make peace with your past. Most importantly make peace with your own self. If there ever was a time to do so, then this is it



Jubel D'Cruz is a freelance writer and the author of several books for children. He lives in Mumbai.

READER'S FEEDBACK

We have increased the number of pages of *Fr. Agnel Ashram News*, from 20 to 28, to bring you more interesting articles. We would love to hear from you. Share your views at agnelashramnews@gmail.com

This magazine is available online.
Visit us at www.agnelashram.org

EVERYBODY OUGHT TO KNOW!

-Severina Peres

On Christmas day some years ago, two of us from our parish prayer group decided to wrench ourselves from celebrations and festivities with family and friends for a few hours, to make ourselves available to welcome and greet the many individuals and families of peoples who were drawn to venerate at the huge Crib at the entrance of our Church. My Parish Church is strategically and centrally placed and inevitably people passing by do enter in to bow and worship, to offer a silent prayer of petition or simply to raise their hands in surrender to the Lord. Perhaps it is sheer faith in Jesus or could be plain curiosity which brings them in to seek the Lord; this became an opportunity for us to give them the **Real Reason for Christmas**, the birth of a Saviour, who would save the people from their sins (Mt. 1:21).

The Church, the community of believers (you and I) are called to be a witness of faith, hope and love. This is something essential and intrinsic to us, as much as food and air. As the kernel and Centre of His Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, the great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is, above all, liberation from sin and the Evil one (Evangelii Nuntiandi 9). We who believe in and have experienced a God who loved His people chose to leave His realm above, coming into Humankind to share our joy and pain, have this privilege to make a choice in our witness to Glorify God's Name. Here is some food for thought to set you going this Blessed Season, to be an instrument of Joy, Hope and Peace.

Pray first of all: The desire to make Jesus known to others finds its source and strength in Prayer. Our gratitude to Jesus, the Risen and Living Lord, who is ever present to us, impels us to pray for His Kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven. In the words of St. Teresa of Kolkata, "Christmas celebrates not only Jesus' first coming in the manger at Bethlehem, but it is meant to fix our attention on all His daily coming to us and through us and so to satiate His thirst to share His life with us." We pray each day, "Here am I Lord, send me, to the least and to the lost."

Look out for Opportunities to speak about and give Jesus which are present to us in myriads of ways. The Holy Spirit inspires us with a quiet nudge, to make us aware of the people searching for hope, as we work through these Opportunities to Proclaim Jesus' presence and saving Power to

every human person we come across day to day. We can recollect the words of the Angels to the Shepherds, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people (Lk. 2:10). **God's Salvation is offered to all men!**

Be the first and get the best: I came across an email in my mailbox dated December 2020 inviting me to the Christmas Store at the Christmas Special - End of Season Sale. The caption read: "Be the first and get the best." Such offers grab our attention to lure us to go for the deals in the opening hours of midnight. How

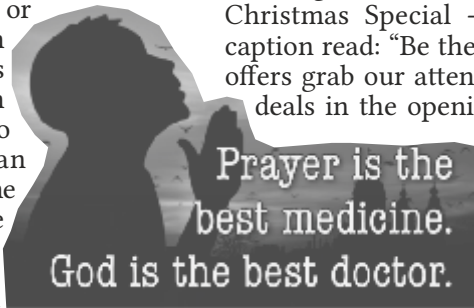
much more should we go and grab the moments to win one for Jesus, who came down to us on the morn of Christmas in a rush of love. The Holy Spirit our Helper will

inspire us with a Word from Scripture, a promise of hope, an offer of kindness. Remember to flash your warm winning Smile. Try it out, you will see it comes to you naturally and spontaneously, for we are His workmanship, created for good works (Ephesians 2:10).

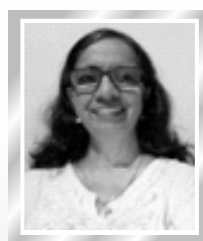
Continue your Connect, keep in touch. Plant the seed of awareness of God's Presence in Jesus and continue to make every effort to see to the Growth of the Kingdom in our midst. Life is a deep valley for some, hearts may be hardened as one feels helplessness to cope with loss and change. God has not left us to a life of misery and sinfulness. Here is where God by His **power at work within us is able to do far more**

abundantly than all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). God has sent His beloved Son amongst us as Emmanuel and Redeemer! A joyful witness of life is a silent yet powerful and effective proclamation of the Good News. Peace on earth will come to stay, when we live Christmas every day (Helen Stainer Rice).

Go tell it on the Mountains, over the hills and everywhere. Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.



Do your best and God will do the rest



Severina Peres has considerable experience in the banking sector and enjoys writing short articles based on Encyclicals and Church Documents. She is also interested in assisting senior citizens.

LIFE AND MISSION OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

-Ibonio D'Souza

St. Francis Xavier was born in Navarre, on 7th April 1506, at the family castle of Xavier, where Basque was the native language. He was the third son of the president of the council of the king of Navarre, most of whose kingdom was soon to fall to the crown of Castile (1512). Francis grew up at Xavier and received his early education there. At the age of 19, he journeyed to the University of Paris to begin his studies.

In 1529, Ignatius of Loyola, another Basque student, was assigned to a room with Francis. A former soldier 15 years Francis's senior, he had undergone a profound religious conversion and was then gathering about himself a group of men who shared his ideals. Gradually, Ignatius won over the initially recalcitrant Francis, and Francis was among the band of seven who, in the chapel on Montmartre in Paris, on 15th August, 1534, vowed lives of poverty and celibacy, in imitation of Christ. They solemnly promised to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and subsequently to devote themselves to the salvation of believers and unbelievers alike. Francis then performed the Spiritual Exercises, a series of meditations lasting about 30 days and devised by Ignatius, in light of his own experience of conversion to guide the individual towards greater generosity in the service of God and humankind.

MISSION TO INDIA

Francis left the city with his companions on 15th November, 1536, and turned his steps to Venice, where he displayed zeal and charity in attending to the sick in the hospitals. On 24th June, 1537, he received Holy orders with St. Ignatius. The following year he went to Rome, and after doing apostolic work there for some months, during the spring of 1539, he took part in the conferences which St. Ignatius held with his companions to prepare for the definitive foundation of the Society of Jesus. The order was approved, and Francis was appointed at the earnest solicitation of John III, King of Portugal, to evangelize the people of the East Indies. He left Rome on 16th March, 1540, and reached Lisbon about June. Here he remained for nine months, giving many

examples of apostolic zeal.

On 7th April, 1541, St. Francis set sail for India as the papal nuncio and Legate of John III, King of Portugal by the ship 'Santiago'. The sea journey of around thirteen months was most arduous and dangerous one, landing at Goa on 6th May, 1542. However, consumed with the final goal in mind, these hardships fell by the wayside. On board, Francis never relished the luxuries provided to him. He was always searching for the sick or hungry passengers and took great care of them. Even in Goa, he never sought royal treatment but instead chose to stay in a hospice at Old Goa.



The first five months he spent in preaching and ministering to the sick in the hospitals. He would go through the streets, ringing a little bell and inviting the children to hear the word of God. When he had gathered a number, he would take them to a certain church and explain the catechism to them. He later published a catechism in Konkani, which was incidentally, the first booklet published in the Jesuit press in Goa.

About October, 1542, he started for the pearl fisheries of the extreme southern coast of the peninsula, among the simple, poor pearl fishers, the Paravas. About 20,000 of them had accepted baptism seven years before, chiefly to secure Portuguese support against their enemies; since then, however, they had been neglected. Using a small catechism he had translated into the native Tamil with the help of interpreters, Francis would travel tirelessly from village to village instructing and confirming them in their faith. His evident goodness and the force of his conviction overcame difficulties of verbal communication. He devoted almost three years to the work of preaching to the people of Western India, converting many, and reaching in his journeys even the Island of Ceylon. Many were the difficulties and hardships which Xavier had to encounter at this time, sometimes on account of the cruel persecutions which some of the petty kings of the country carried on against the neophytes, and again because the Portuguese soldiers, far from seconding the work of the saint, retarded it by their bad example and vicious habits.

MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

In the spring of 1545, Francis started for Malacca. He laboured there for the last months of that year, evangelising among the mixed population of the Portuguese commercial centre at Malacca. Although he reaped an abundant spiritual harvest (baptising 10,000 of them), he was not able to root out certain abuses, and was conscious that many sinners had resisted his efforts to bring them back to God.

About January, 1546 Xavier left Malacca and went to Moluccan Islands (Spice Islands) where the Portuguese had some settlements, and for a year and a half, he preached the Gospel to the inhabitants of Amboyna, Ternate, Branura, and other lesser islands. It is claimed by some that during this expedition, he landed on the island of Mindanao, and for this reason, St. Francis Xavier has been called the first Apostle of the Philippines.

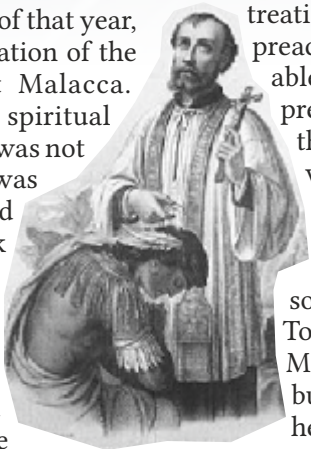
By July, 1547, he was again in Malacca. Here he met a Japanese nobleman Angiro from whom he obtained much information about Japan. His zeal was at once aroused but the idea of introducing Christianity into Japan, but for the time being the affairs of the Society demanded his presence at Goa, whither he went, taking Angiro with him.

BACK IN INDIA

During the six years that Xavier had been working among the infidels, other Jesuit missionaries had arrived in Goa, sent from Europe by St. Ignatius. Moreover some who had been in the country had been received into the Society. In 1548, Xavier sent these missionaries to the principal centres of India, where he had established missions, so that the work might be preserved and continued. College of Holy Faith, founded several years previously, was turned over to the Jesuits, and Francis began to develop in into a centre for the education of native priests and catechisms for the diocese of Goa, which stretched from the Cape of Good Hope to China.

YEARS IN JAPAN

On 15th August, 1549, a Portuguese ship bearing Francis, the newly baptised Angiro, and several companions entered the Japanese port of Kagoshima. The entire first year in Japan was devoted to learning the Japanese language and



translating into Japanese, with the help of Pablo de Santa Fe, the principle articles of faith and short treatises which were to be employed in preaching and catechizing. When he was able to express himself, Xavier began preaching and made some converts, but these aroused the ill will of the bonzes, who had him banished from the city. Leaving Kagoshima about August, 1550, he penetrated to the centre of Japan, and preached the Gospel in some of the cities of southern Japan. Towards the end of that year he reached Meaco, then the principal city of Japan, but he was unable to make any headway here because of the dissensions then rending the country. He retraced his steps to the centre of Japan, and during 1551, preached in some important cities, forming the nucleus of several Christian communities, which in time increased with extraordinary rapidity.

EXPEDITION TO CHINA

After working about two years and a half in Japan, he left his mission in the charge of Father Cosme de Tores and Brother Juan Fernandez, and returned to Goa at the beginning of 1552 to attend to certain disagreements between the superior who had been left in charge of the missions, and the rector of the college. This, however, being arranged, Xavier turned his thoughts to China, and began to plan an expedition there. With the help of friends, he arranged a commission or embassy to the Sovereign of China, obtained from the Viceroy of India the appointment of ambassador, and in April, 1552, he left Goa. At Malacca the party encountered difficulties because the influential Portuguese disapproved of the expedition, but Xavier somehow managed to overcome this opposition, and in the autumn



he arrived in a Portuguese vessel Santa Croce at the small island of Shangchuan near the coast of China. While planning the best means for reaching the mainland, he was taken ill, and as the movement of the vessel seemed to aggravate his condition, he was removed to the land, where a rude hut had been built to shelter him. In these wretched surroundings he breathed his last on December 3, 1552, at the age of 46.

HIS LEGACY

It is truly a matter of wonder that one man in the short span of ten years (6th May, 1542 - 2

December, 1552) could have visited so many countries, traversed so many seas, preached the Gospel to so many nations, and converted so many infidels. The incomparable apostolic zeal which animated him, and the stupendous miracles which God wrought through him, explain this marvel, which has no equal elsewhere. St. Francis Xavier is considered the greatest missionary since the time of the Apostles, and the zeal he displayed, the wonderful miracles he performed, and the great number of souls he brought to the light of true Faith, entitle him to this distinction. He was canonised with St. Ignatius in 1622. In 1927, he was named patron of all missions.

MORTAL REMAINS OF "GOENCHO SAIB"

Soon after his death, his body was placed in a Chinese-style wooden coffin, and packed with lime to hasten disintegration. However, when it was exhumed two months later, it was found to be incorrupt. As per his wishes, his body reached Goa on March 16, 1554. It was buried in three different countries before reaching its final resting place in the Basilica of Bom Jesus, Old Goa.

On the orders of the then Portuguese Viceroy, it was subject to a critical medical examination by Dr. Cosmos Sarasvati and the Vicar General Dr.

Ambrosia Ribeiro and their report was that "there had been no embalming of any kind, no artificial preservatives were used, blood from a wound near the head was fresh; the flesh was intact and covered with natural skin, flexible and in no way dedicated; there was no trace of corruption."

The body of St. Francis is currently enshrined in a silver tomb in the Basilica of Bom Jesus, Old Goa. The silver casket, enclosing the coffin of the saint is embellished with silver and gold ornamentation. The silver casket is lowered for public veneration only during the exposition, which occurs every 10 years. Hundreds of thousands of devotees from near and far descend on Old Goa, each year, from Nov 23 to December 3, to attend the novenas and feast of St. Francis Xavier, who is popularly called 'GOENCHO SAIB'.



Ibonio D'Souza is the author of the widely read motivational tome 'Rise And Shinethe lotus way', columnist, and a social activist.



There is no Joy Greater than the Joy of GIVING

Alex Pereira and Family, Juhu, Mumbai

We are pleased to inform you that we have initiated an amount of Rs. 25,000, towards the needs of the Balbhavan orphanage children of Fr. Agnel Ashram, Bandra.

Melissa Antony, Trinity World Holidays P. Ltd., Santa Cruz (East), Mumbai

We would like to offer a donation of Rs. 3,81,319 for the Balbhavan orphanage and Fr. Agnel Ashram from our company - Trinity World Holidays. We, as a corporate, would like to make the donation as per our CSR activities.

Gina Fernando, Mumbai

Thank you for your prayers, it means much to me. I have transferred an amount of Rs. 1000 as a small token of love. I had previously requested prayers and have received the email stating our intentions are being prayed for. I sincerely request the same now. Please continue praying for our intentions.

Dr. Mayookh Ramesh Dave, Vadodara, Gujarat

I am pleased to send a donation of Rs. 59,906 via NEFT transfer, for the upkeep and maintenance of the orphanage boys.

S. Antoniammal/Johnson, Thenkasi Dist, Tamil Nadu

We have transferred our small donation of Rs. 3,000. Father, please pray for my family.

Poonam & Gaurang Mehta, Khanjurmarg, Mumbai

We have donated an amount of Rs. 15,000 to the account of Society of St. Francis Xavier, Pilar, towards the one year Sponsorship for one boy, in continuation with his Yearly Sponsorship Scheme.

Mahesh Kapadia, Vile Parle (East), Mumbai

We are pleased to donate an amount of Rs. 41,407 to Fr. Agnel Ashram and the Balbhavan orphanage, as thanksgiving for financial favours received through the intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnelo.

-Fr. Allam Sagar Manoj Kumar

If you plant a tree at an exposed place, it becomes very vulnerable. It is at the mercy of every wind that blows. If it survives at all, it will be in a twisted or disfigured form. If you want a tree to grow in its full potential, you must plant it in a more sheltered place and you must not plant it on its own. Rather, you must plant some other tree with it. It is of vital importance to get the space between those trees and they must be close enough to be able to provide shelter and protection for one another. Yet they must not be so close that they will stifle one another. They must be planted far enough apart to ensure that they each have room to grow to its full potential.

It is not good for a tree to be alone. Nor is it good for us to be alone. For our wholeness, and for our mental health, we need ties of love and friendship with other human beings. God has made us not for isolation but for community. We are not complete in ourselves. We need other people in order to become what God intended us to be.

This is where the family comes in. Trees planted in the form of a little grove are a good image of the family. In the ideal family, there is both closeness and space. The closeness means the members are able to provide support for one another. The space ensures that they do not stifle one another. Each member has the closeness, intimacy, and warmth that he or she needs, yet also has the space to grow to his or her potential. This is a great challenge: How to achieve closeness without stifling or dominating one another.

In the family, we learn to form relationship with others, something that is vitally important for us. Inability to relate is a great handicap and great sadness. Without close relationships, we are at the mercy of cold winds of anguish and loneliness. In the little community of the family, we learn to bond with others. Here we make room for others in our lives. Here we learn to share with one another, and become responsible to and for one another. It is within the family that a child learns to use the word 'we' for the first time. Without the word 'we,' there would be no community, no sharing, and togetherness.

On the other hand being so close involves risk. We have the possibility of helping and healing one another. But we also have the possibility of hindering and hurting one another. Sometimes, people keep their best behaviour for outside the home and their worst for inside the home. They are angels outside it and devils inside it.

Harmony in the family can be achieved only by practice of virtues St. Paul talks about: kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, mutual forgiveness, and above all, love (Col. 3:12). These are the virtues

which build and foster community. But they are not easy virtues to practice with consistency. In our society, the family is under lot of pressure. The family is very fragile today. For instance, today four out of ten children are born out of marriage. One in five is brought up in a one-parent family. Almost four in ten marriages end in divorce. There is another tendency to push the elderly and the weak to the margins. In our strength, it is easy to forget those who are weak and elderly people. There is a saying: 'One mother can take care of ten children, but ten children cannot take care of one mother.' Under God, we owe everything to our parents.

Indeed, the family is built on bonds of commitment, fidelity and self-sacrifice. Here the Holy Family serves as a model. In the Holy Family, we see exemplified the primary obligation of parents which is to love and care for the children. Mary and Joseph sacrificed their own life for the sake of child Jesus. They uprooted themselves and went in exile. The Holy Family did not have it easy. As homeless refugees, the Holy Family shared the fate of the many oppressed families in our world today.

But because of their deep faith in God, and love for one another, they stayed together and came through it. It was by living in a community of love with Mary and Joseph at Nazareth that Jesus was able to grow in wisdom and in favour with God and people (Lk. 2:52).

Here we need to understand clearly that there is no such thing as a perfect family. Every family goes through rough times. Every family has to make sacrifices like the Holy Family. Wherever human beings are living under the one roof, misunderstandings and conflicts occur. All of us are wounded by sin. What is important is how we deal with these problems, and how we resolve these conflicts with holy anointing of the Holy Spirit.

My dear faithful in Jesus Christ, in the community of family we have a place, we have bonds, we have an identity and we have roots. Even if the family knows hardships, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Hardships can be channel of a grace. Trees that grow on hard ground, have firmer roots, and thus are better equipped to meet the inevitable storms.



Fr. Allam Sagar Manoj Kumar is from the Diocese of Guntur. He has authored two books on *Important Feast Days in the Liturgical year* and contributed Articles to various National and Local magazines. He is also available for talks and retreats: allamgnt2020@gmail.com

Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues College of Engineering, Bandra, receives Autonomous Status from University Grants Commission



Established in 1984, Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues College of Engineering, Bandra (W), Mumbai, has always offered emerging courses as per the evolving needs of the society. Fr. CRCE received permanent affiliation from the University of Mumbai in 2019. University Grants Commission (UGC) has given recognition to the college under 12B & 2(f).

Recently, UGC granted **Autonomous Status to Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues College of Engineering, Bandra, for 10 years**, from academic years 2024-25 to 2033-2034, as per the clause 7.5 of the UGC regulations, 2023. Autonomy will empower the college to design curriculum, as per the industry norm and provide good learning experiences to the students.

The college is **accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with A Grade for five years**. Also, the **Computer Engineering Undergraduate Programme is accredited by National Board of Accreditation (NBA)** for academic years 2023-24 to 2025-26.

Fr. CRCE is one of the top engineering colleges in India and, over the years, has produced alumni in top positions.

Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues Institute of Technology, Vashi, conferred autonomous status from the academic year 2024-25



Agnel Charities' **Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues Institute of Technology (FCRIT), Vashi, Navi Mumbai**, stands tall as a prominent educational institution, fostering academic excellence and holistic development. It has proven itself as one of the leading engineering colleges in Mumbai University.

With its state-of-the-art infrastructure and a dedicated faculty, FCRIT has carved a niche for itself in the realm of technical education. The institute's commitment to innovation and research reflects in its diverse programs, offering a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application. **The Innovation Centre** will provide budding engineers, a platform to transform their ideas into products. The research and development culture is blossoming in the institute with various prestigious tie-ups with industry.

FCRIT is conferred autonomous status by University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, from the academic year 2024-25. This change brings in new responsibilities and the institute is ready to set new benchmarks with the academic flexibility that comes in with autonomy.

FCRIT not only nurtures budding engineers but also instills values of leadership and community engagement, shaping individuals equipped to thrive in the ever-evolving world.

Fr. Conceicao Rodrigues Institute of Technology, Vashi wins laurels at Thane Zone Inter Collegiate matches



The FCRIT (MEN) team stood first among 33 teams, in the Thane Zone Inter-Collegiate Football matches, organised by the University of Mumbai at Birla College, Kalyan, from 26th to 28th October, 2023, and won the gold medal and the winner's trophy.



At the University of Mumbai's Thane Zone Inter-Collegiate Basketball tournament held at FCRIT, Vashi, on 23rd October, 2023, the FCRIT (MEN) team, placed first out of 11 teams, took home a gold medal and the winner's trophy.

Agnel Happenings

- Vashi



On 23rd October, in the Thane Zone Inter-Collegiate Basketball competition, organised by the University of Mumbai at FCRIT, Vashi, the FCRIT (WOMEN) team emerged victorious, securing the gold medal and the winner's trophy. They claimed the top position, among five participating teams.



The Women's Volleyball team of FCRIT achieved the first runner-up place among 11 participating teams in the Thane Zone Inter-Collegiate Volleyball competition. The University of Mumbai hosted this event at Birla College, Kalyan, on 28th October, 2023.

Yuva Fiesta 2023-24 at Fr. Agnel Multipurpose School and Jr. College, Ambarnath

The annual youth festival, **Yuva Fiesta** was held at **Fr. Agnel Multipurpose School and Jr. College, Ambarnath** from 6th to 9th November 2023. The students of Std. XI and XII participated in the festival which gave students several platforms to showcase their artistic and sporting talents.

The students were divided into four teams - Gold Gladiators, Red Titans, Green Paradise and Blue Spartans. The teams competed with each other to bag maximum points.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by **Rev. Fr. Trevor Pereira** (Asst. School Manager) and **Ms. Antoinette Viegas** (School Administrator).

The first day opened with a Marathon which was followed by other team sports such as Football, Box Cricket and Volleyball. The next day was dedicated to art and culture. The students and teachers were dressed in their traditional best.

Competitions like face painting, henna art, tattoo art, themed dress make-up, bouquet making, rangoli and wealth out of waste, added colour to the youth festival. There was also a cooking competition in which students made mouth-watering starters, salads and desserts.

The day ended with delightful performances by the students. They sang and danced to a blend of soulful and foot-tapping melodies. The Grand Finale came in the form of a fashion extravaganza.

The last day was one of thrilling tele-games which gave everyone a great adrenaline rush. The festival ended with the **Red Titans lifting the Yuva Fiesta 2023-24 trophy.**



Yuva Fiesta Marathon Teams.

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND MYSTICISM

-Leon Bent

This is a toast to St. John of the Cross, (and the power of sacrificial love – mysticism) whose feast is celebrated on 14th December.

One of the greatest theologians of the modern era, Karl Rahner S.J., once said: "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or no Christian at all." William Johnston, in his Book, *Mystical Theology*, concludes with the enigmatic, strange words of the dying Hamlet: "The rest is silence." St. John of the Cross called mysticism, "The science of love – to be in love with God!"

Bernard Lonergan says, being in love with God involves a plunge into darkness and torment, as much as an ecstatic rise to spiritual heights. He goes on to say that mysticism is an invisible treasure. St. Teresa of Avila, a close companion of St. John of the Cross, both Carmelites, taught that, mysticism is centered on the Cross of Jesus, and the absolute renunciation of all things for the love of God. St. John of the Cross, the mystical Doctor of the Church *par excellence*, insists there is no difference between mystical theology, mystical wisdom and mystical prayer.

St. Paul's love of God is 'the living flame of the Holy Spirit.' The love of God lights a fire in the depths of one's being. The *hesychasts* speak constantly of the divine fire. Hesychasm, in Eastern Christianity, is a type of monastic life in which practitioners seek divine quietness (Greek *hēsychia*), through the contemplation of God in uninterrupted prayer. Such prayer, involving the entire human being - soul, mind, and body - is often called "pure," or "intellectual," prayer or the *Jesus Prayer*.

In solitude and retirement, the hesychast repeats the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The hesychast prays the Jesus Prayer 'with the heart' – with meaning and intent. I listen to the name Jesus sung in Hebrew a thousand times, like a mantra, by three sisters and their brother, until it becomes a part of my very being. Truly uplifting and beautiful at pre-dawn!

St. John of the Cross, OCD (Order of Discalced Carmelites) was a Spanish Catholic priest, mystic, and a Carmelite friar. He was one of the greatest Christian mystics and Spanish poets, Doctor of

the Church, reformer of Spanish monasticism, and co-founder of the contemplative order of Discalced Carmelites, with his 'mystical other,' St. Teresa of Avila. He is a patron saint of mystics and contemplatives and of Spanish poets.

St. Teresa of Ávila, the celebrated mystic, enlisted his help (1568) in the restoration of Carmelite life to its original observance of austerity. A year later, at Duruelo, he opened the first Discalced Carmelite monastery. Duruelo is the site where a small farm house was converted to house the first monastery of friars of the reformed Carmelites.



In "Noche oscura," perhaps his best-known work, he describes the process by which the soul sheds its attachment to everything, and eventually passes through a personal experience from Christ's Crucifixion to his glory. *The Dark Night of the Soul* (*La noche oscura del alma*) is a *phase of passive purification of the spirit in mystical development*. The lyric consists of eight stanzas "in which the soul sings of the fortunate adventure that it had, in *passing through the dark night of faith*, (aridity) to union with the Beloved."

His most famous work is surely *The Dark Night of the Soul*. It is, in fact, a poem never named by the saint. Some parts of the book touch on the trials of life, and the Christian virtue of fortitude. Others believe the book refers to clinical depression. I like to think that the book portrays the journey of a soul from obscurity and anxiety to loving peace and spiritual perfection. It is filled with hopeful messages, but for me, the warnings and clever presentation of the spiritual side of deadly sins and attitudes, make for one of the most self-revealing reads of any saint. He has a way, like no other, of convicting readers, to be honest with themselves and spiritually self-aware, but not accusatory or judgmental.

Dark Night is a top-three, of the desert-island type of book every Catholic must read. Yes, it can be said that he is known as, "of the Cross" because of his spiritual zeal for suffering in forgiveness, identifying well with Christ on the Cross; but there's another interesting reason, which is a bit more telling. After a vision he has of the Crucifixion, in which his point of reference was

from that of the Father, the First Person of the Blessed Trinity, from which he drew a remarkable sketch of what he kept in mind: An overwhelming and heart-rending view of Jesus hanging on the Cross.

The image is striking and leaves a deep impression of the pain the victim surely suffered. Just as John was gifted in illuminating the minds of Catholics, with a more lofty approach to spirituality, he also captured a towering perspective of the “suffering servant.” You may have noticed that, some of the descriptions of the suffering servant could apply to a leper, such as “his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness” (Isaiah 52:14) and “he was despised and rejected by humankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain”...Here it refers to Jesus!

St. John of the Cross' four volumes: *The Dark Night of the Soul*, *Spiritual Canticle*, *Ascent to Mount Carmel*, *The Living Flame of Love*, in which is articulated the path to union with God that, is the true goal of human life that surpasses understanding.

Saints are a sign; and if T. S. Eliot, the great English poet is right, perhaps, for the moment the necessary and only sign. They are icons of Christ and the Cross, icons of Christ on the Cross.

St. John of the Cross had a profound inner fire, which is the Holy Spirit, in the depths of his psyche. This divine fire causes intense suffering. St. John says people “suffer many infirmities, injuries and weaknesses of the stomach.” His partner in mystical love, St. Teresa of Avila complains of deep physical and mental suffering in the opening pages of *The Interior Castle*. The mystics explain that intense quiet and painful turmoil coexist. The theme of Jesus, rejected, shamed and forsaken, runs through the New Testament. Death and glorification. Emptiness and plenitude, is the pattern of spiritual experience throughout the Bible. The radical emptiness of the Incarnation is followed by an equally radical glorification. This was the life of Jesus.

St. John of the Cross urges the contemplative to become nothing! This is done through union with 'Jesus Crucified,' a union that, comes from love and is enacted in spiritual marriage, wherein the bride and bridegroom become one. Erotic and voluptuous love of the Song of Songs, is a total gift, a total self-emptying, a total forgetfulness of self, the pouring of oneself fully into one's spouse, and the two become one at the 'moment of orgasm.' One dies fully for the other, in total generosity –

akin to the *kenosis* of Jesus on the Cross – where he hung – naked!

Ignatius' transformation occurred while he was lying in bed due to a broken leg. He turned from a life of sin, after he read the 'Life of Christ,' and prayed with shameless persistence – while watching the river Cardonner flow gently by – his life took a complete “U Turn,” and he embraced Christ instantly. What was his conversion like? Radical and Total: The “Anima Christi” (Latin for 'Soul of Christ') with its mystical cry: “*Hide me within Thy wounds!*” This is my favourite sacred, sanctifying space, too, drawn from the Litany of the Sacred Heart Rosary!

The chief characteristic of his conversion was a radical conversion to Christ – the first week of his *Spiritual Exercises* closes as the participant kneels in imagination, at the foot of the Cross and asks, “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What am I going to do for Christ?”

As St. John of the Cross lay dying, he asked the friars who surrounded him, to recite the “Song of Songs” – a Book from the Old Testament. “*May the vision of your beauty, Lord, be my death,*” he uttered feebly. The Lord Jesus is the mirror into which the bride gazes with all-consuming love. She sees the bridegroom, the Word of God, who is beauty itself...This is ecstasy! This is extravagant, apparently wasteful, prodigal love! This is majestic union! This is a foretaste of eternal bliss!

Even on his death-bed, St. John of the Cross became the ravishingly, alluring tender and faithful bride of Jesus! This is spiritual marriage – awakening, illumining enlightenment - a gigantic love-affair!

One of the greatest Catholic mystics, St. John of the Cross, through radical self-offering enacted the poignant Ignatian prayer: “Take, O Lord, and receive...! – The offering of the Founder of the Jesuits whole self with childlike simplicity – to the Father and the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit!”

LEON BENT: I say this with the greatest humility – some people who know me well, consider me to be a mystic! If at all this is true, it is not an honour, not a privilege, either, but definitely God's gift and calling!



Leon Bent is the author of several Books and his Researched Articles, are published by Digital Online Portals worldwide, with a reach of, at least, 18 million readers

**DEVOTEES FLOCK TO FR. AGNEL ASHRAM, BANDRA,
TO COMMEMORATE THE 96TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF VENERABLE FR. AGNELO**

At Fr. Agnel Ashram in Bandra, a suburb of Mumbai, **Bishop Henry D'Souza of Bellary**, presided over a concelebrated commemorative Mass and hailed Venerable Agnelo as a man of simplicity, goodness and holiness.

The Mass was preceded by novenas in English, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil and languages from November 11. Many people of other religions too attended the nine-day prayers. People from Gujarat came in large numbers.



Most Rev. Henry D'Souza, Bishop of Bellary

Bishop Henry D'Souza said Father Agnelo had worked tirelessly for the people, encouraging his faithful to build family life, through prayer and encounter with God and sacraments. The prelate also encouraged people to walk with the poor as Venerable Agnelo had done.

Bishop Henry D'Souza, who is also the chairman of the Office of Social Communications under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, urged people to become aware of the power of social media that can help, enable, inspire and transform. At the same time, it could also harm, degrade, enslave and even destroy by spreading falsehood, intolerance and violence, he added.

"Please accompany children and youth to become responsible consumers of digital media," he pleaded.

Devotion across India

Devotees flocked to shrines dedicated to Venerable Fr. Agnelo in various places in India on his 96th death anniversary.

"Venerable Fr. Agnelo is an inspiration for Catholics in their journey of faith," said **Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão**, president of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, in his homily during the commemorative Mass on 20th November at Pilar hillock, 13 km southeast of Panaji, capital of the state of Goa.

Venerable Fr. Agnelo, a renowned 20th century preacher, confessor and administrator, was a member of the Society of the Missionaries of St. Francis Xavier, a Goa-based religious congregation.

"Venerable Fr. Agnelo, took Jesus as his model and strengthened his relationship with him through prayer and served the poor and the needy, thus became an inspiration in our journey of faith," Cardinal Ferrão elaborated in his homily on the theme, "Walking together in the footsteps of Venerable Fr. Agnelo to our sanctification."

Concelebrants included Archbishop Anil Couto of Delhi, Emeritus Pilar Bishop Alex Dias of Port Blair, and Pilar superior general Father Nazareth Fernandes.

Cardinal Ferrão hailed Venerable Fr. Agnelo as a person who had strong communion with Jesus, love for Scripture, regular participation in the Eucharistic Celebrations and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He also highlighted the saintly priest's role in imparting these values to his community.

He said one felt increased responsibility towards the needy and the impoverished when he or she experiences Jesus. The cardinal wants the faithful to extend their faith journey by embracing others as siblings, drawing inspiration from Venerable Fr. Agnelo's altruistic service as a pastor in Siroda, Kumta and Sanvordem and spiritual guide at the Patriarchal Seminary of Rachol.

Novena Masses, conducted in both Konkani and English, dedicating each day to intentions such as youth, family, priests and religious, children and vocation, civil leaders, mission, sick, environment, and laity. Masses were also conducted in Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam.

Venerable Fr. Agnelo D'Souza, died in 1927 at the age of 58. The Vatican has accepted the cause for his canonization and in 1986 declared him Venerable, the second stage in the four-phase canonization process. The process of beatification is lengthy and a miracle, attributed to the intercession of Venerable Fr. Agnelo and sent to Rome, is now studied by the doctors. Devotees are requested to pray unceasingly for Venerable Fr. Agnelo's beatification.

The month of December is such an exciting month for us. It is the month signalling we are at the end of the year. It is Christmas this month - the birth of Jesus Christ. It's a month of dances, parties, sweets and decorations at home. Also carol singing and midnight mass, basically a very festive season of cheer.

Everyone finds December an exciting month. So let's begin on a happy note...



Santa Claus. True story...

Who does not love Santa Claus? With his white beard, twinkling merry eyes and red suit with white trimming, he cuts a jovial

figure that appeals to all. St. Nicholas was born during the third century. His parents were wealthy and raised him to be a Christian. He used his entire inheritance to assist those as Christ would - the needy, the sick and the suffering. He became the Bishop of Myra in modern day Turkey and was known for his generosity to those in need and his love for kids. His feast day is 6th of December.

Do you know why stockings are hung or shoes set before the fireplace at Christmas?

This is because St. Nicholas had heard that a poor man intended to abandon his daughters to a life of sin because he was unable to pay the dowry required.

At night, St. Nicholas flung a bag of gold into the house. Thus for the eldest daughter, the father was able to give a dowry. St. Nicholas did the same act for the second daughter. I guess by now the father was agog with curiosity as to his benefactor. So he laid in wait and managed to catch St. Nicholas throwing a bag of gold for his third daughter's dowry. I guess he must have profusely thanked St. Nicholas. The bags of gold are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fireplace to dry. So the practice of placing stockings and shoes began to grow in popularity.

Why did St. Nicholas act so secretive about giving gifts? It is said that he did not want people to thank him, instead he wanted people to thank God. That was how generous, kind and spiritual he was. This makes us love Santa Claus much more, doesn't it?

Quiz

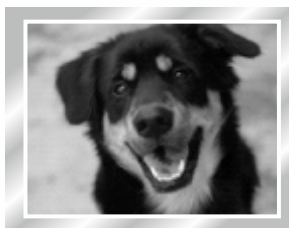
All about Santa

1. What was the original colour of Santa's suit?
2. How does Santa travel?
3. In which country is St. Nicholas best known as a patron saint of sailors, fishermen, ships and all places with harbours?
4. Which company in America gave Santa Claus his first red suit?
5. In which country is St. Nicholas a patron saint of agriculture?



Miracle at Christmas - An angel of cheer and comfort

It was a few days after Christmas in 1999, when a black dog with a little white around his mouth wandered into a family's front porch and settled there as if he lived there all his life.



Whenever anybody left the home, the dog would follow the person, then follow them home and lie down on the porch after this.

However, there was lots of grief in that home because the father-in-law, 91 years old was gravely ill and was expected to die.

But because of the presence of this dog, the family felt soothed and this gave them some distraction from their grief.

They all wondered whose dog it was and did he intend to stay?

The family made him comfortable with food, water and a blanket to keep warm. They also called up radio stations, animal shelters and neighbouring farms to find out if someone had lost a dog. The father-in-law wanted to live long enough to see the new millennium and he did. He passed away on January 2.

Later, the family soon found out that the black dog's name was Bogart and he was a rescued dog living about a mile and a half from the farm. The farm took him back and the family explained how the dog helped them bear their loss bravely. His

cheerful companionship had warmed their hearts. They knew the dog was sent like a Christmas miracle to cheer them up and perhaps because of the dog, the grandfather hearing about him, felt he was an angel and got more courage and determination to live long enough to see the new millennium. So it's true that angels come to visit us when we least expect them to.

Smile Please



1. What do you call it when a snowman throws a tantrum?

Answer: A meltdown!

2. After a crime, a detective noted that he thought it was foul

play, not an accident.

The other detective said, "You mean, he was playing with the birds? Fowl play?"

3. A man and wife were both in the internet business. But it was the husband who lived, ate and breathed computers. His wife finally realised how bad it had got when one day after applying ointment to his leg that was hurt, he said, "No, not there! Scroll down a little."

4. The young couple invited an elderly pastor of their church for dinner. While they were busy in the kitchen, the pastor asked their only daughter, "What is your mummy preparing for me?"

"Goat," said the little girl.

The pastor who was a vegetarian looked shocked. He had clearly told the couple that he never ate meat.

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes," The little girl continued, "I heard dad tell mummy. Today is a good day to have the old goat for dinner."

5. An old gentleman was dying and on his deathbed, his wife questioned him, "Tom dear, is there anything I can do to make you happy? I will give you anything you ask for."

The old gentleman who liked good food especially his wife's cooking murmured, "I can smell some chicken and ham. Please get me some."

The wife shook her head, "Don't be silly. Not a bit you will get. Why, I am cooking it for your funeral!"

6. What does Santa suffer from if he gets stuck in the chimney? Claustrophobia.

What is the Good Word? Christmas Decorations



1. The decoration place at the topmost part of the tree.

2. Ice shavings and it means sparkle.

3. The shepherd's staff.

4. The crown of thorns

put on the head of Jesus.

The origin of the Christmas card



Henry Cole was an educator and a patron of the arts. However, he did have too many friends.

In those days to correspond, letters were used. At

Christmas everyone was sending letters to relatives and friends.

The letters sent had to be responded to. But Cole was a busy man and he fretted over the piles of unanswered letters. It was very impolite not to answer mail. So Cole being an intelligent man hit upon an indigenous idea. He approached an artist friend, J.C Horsley and asked him to design an idea that Cole had sketched in his own mind.

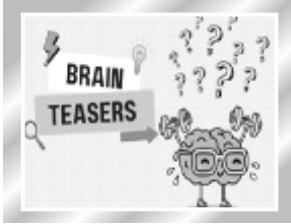
Then Cole took Horsley's illustration - an image depicting a family celebrating the holiday with images of them helping the poor. He had thousand copies made by a London printer.

The image was printed on a piece of stiff cardboard around five inches in size.

At the top was the salutation - To allowing Cole to personalize his responses and there was a generic greeting too on each card - A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year.

This really was the first Christmas card and, through the ages, its popularity remains undiminished, although it has to be said in an age of such technological advancement like ours, emails, phone calls and WhatsApp messages are also gradually replacing the old-fashioned Christmas greeting card.

Brain Teasers



1. What comes once in a minute, twice in a moment and once in a million years?

2. I have keys but no locks. I have space but no room. You can enter

but you can't go outside. What am I?

3. If eight peacocks lay twelve eggs in two days, how many peacocks will lay 100 eggs in three days?

4. Two fathers and two sons went out for a meal. They each ate a burger, however only three burgers were eaten? How is it possible?

What's cooking? Christmas cuisine from around the world

In China, celebrating Christmas is becoming popular and one tradition that has been adopted is to share decorative apples on Christmas Eve with your loved ones.



The apples are carved

with an encouraging

message and wrapped in colourful paper, ready to be presented. They are known as peace apples.

In Japan, Christmas fried chicken is popular especially since KFC in Japan began to promote fried chicken as a Christmas meal.

The Christmas Pudding originated in England in the 14th century and it is often considered good luck for all members of the home to stir the mixture and make a wish. Also various items would be stirred in it like coins, silver thimbles, wishbones, rings, etc. Thus, while eating, the family would get one of those items and everyone would get happy as they found a particular item.

And let's end with a food that would not be appetising for most of us. In Southern Africa, Mopane worms are rich in protein and vitamins and are actually the caterpillars of a moth. They are often regarded as a delicacy and this dish is quite loved.

Inspiring Christmas Quotes



"Christmas is a day that holds all time together."
- Alexander Smith

"Christmas is truly Christmas when we celebrate it by giving the light of love to those that need it the most."

- Ruth Carter Stapleton

"Santa Claus is anyone who loves another and seeks to make them happy and who gives himself by thought, word or deed in every gift that he bestows." - Edwin Grover

"And that of course is the message of Christmas. We are never alone. Even when the night is darkest, the wind is coldest and the world seemingly most indifferent." - Taylor Caldwell

"May you never be too grown up to search the skies on Christmas Eve." - Anonymous

Well, that is all for this month. Merry Christmas. Take care and enjoy the festive season with its spirit of good cheer and message of peace.

Answers

Quiz

1. Tan. 2. In his sleigh with flying reindeers.

3. Greece. 4. Coca-Cola. 5. Russia.

What's the Good Word?

1. Star - Star of Bethlehem. 2. Tinsel. 3. Candy cane. 4. Wreath.

Brain Teasers

1. The letter M. 2. A computer. 3. Peahens lay eggs not peacocks. 4. They were grandfather, father and son.



Christine is an author of over 30 books available on Amazon worldwide in paperback and Kindle. She also enjoys playing the piano and has a YouTube cooking channel Christine D'Sylva's fusion kitchen.



FR. AGNEL'S BLESSINGS

THANKSGIVING FOR MIRACLE

VADODARA, GUJARAT: A few days after the birth of our princess, Akira, she had heavy fever, breathlessness and convulsions. She was admitted to NICU and was later diagnosed with chikungunya. The infections spread all over her body and doctors said that only a miracle could save her. My husband and I prayed to Ven. Fr. Agnelo. After an hour or so, a miracle happened. My daughter's infection level reduced drastically and all reports came normal. After 17 days in the hospital, she was discharged. I cannot thank Ven. Fr. Agnelo enough for his kind intercession.

-A. & R. Rathod

THANKSGIVING FOR THE GIFT OF A CHILD

KALINA, MUMBAI: We would like to thank Ven. Fr. Agnel for blessing us with the gift of a child and for the good health of our family. A thanksgiving offering has been given to the Ashram.

-F. Rego

THANKSGIVING FOR PRAYERS ANSWERED

BANDRA: I am thankful to Ven. Fr. Agnel for blessing me in every way. I have come to the Ashram and made a love offering.

-D. Jack

THANKSGIVING FOR FAVOURS RECEIVED

UDUPI: We have been blessed with many favours, through the kind intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnel. An offering has been made to the Ashram.

-V. Aranha

THANKSGIVING TO VEN. FR. AGNEL

PUNE: I am very much thankful to Ven. Fr. Agnel for helping me at all times. I have come to the Ashram and made an offering.

-D. Suppaya

THANKSGIVING FOR ANSWERING PRAYERS

ANAND, GUJARAT: My prayers have been answered. I have received many favours, through the kind intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnel. A thanksgiving offering has been made at the Ashram.

-K. A. Latelia

BLESSINGS ON THE FAMILY

JUHU: Through the kind intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnel, our family has been blessed abundantly. With a grateful heart, I have come to the Ashram and made a love offering in thanksgiving.

-D. Sutari

THANKSGIVING FOR FAVOURS RECEIVED

MULUND: Through the kind intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnel, I have received many favours. With a grateful heart, I have made a love offering to Fr. Agnel Ashram, Bandra.

-R. Fernandes

THANKSGIVING FOR BLESSINGS RECEIVED

ANDHERI (EAST): Ven. Fr. Agnel has blessed our family in many ways. We are indeed grateful for the favours received and have made a thanksgiving offering to the Ashram.

-G. B. Rose

THANKSGIVING FOR SAFE RETURN OF DAUGHTER

VASAI: I would like to thank Ven. Fr. Agnel for the safe journey of my daughter Zelia Lopes back to India. A thanksgiving offering has been sent to the Ashram.

-N. A. Lopes

THANKSGIVING FOR PRAYERS ANSWERED

MUMBAI: Through the kind intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnel, my kids and mother are keeping good health. A love offering has been sent to Fr. Agnel Ashram, Bandra.

-A. Pinto

THANKSGIVING FOR FAVOURS RECEIVED

VIRAR: Through the kind intercession of Ven. Fr. Agnel, our family received several favours. A thanksgiving offering has been sent to the Ashram. We have tremendous faith in the constant intercession of the Venerable.

-D'Silva Family

THANKSGIVING FOR GOOD HEALTH

CHEMBUR: Ven. Fr. Agnel has blessed me immensely. I am indeed grateful for all the favours received and have made a thanksgiving offering at the Ashram.

-R. Fernandes

THANKSGIVING FOR BLESSINGS RECEIVED

KHARGHAR: I am thankful to Ven. Fr. Agnel for all the blessings received. Ven. Fr. Agnel, has his devotees all over India and the world. With a grateful heart, I have sent a love offering to the Ashram.

-C. Pereira

THANKSGIVING FOR FAVOURS RECEIVED

BANDRA: Ven. Fr. Agnel has blessed me in many ways. I always look up to him for his kind intercession with Lord Jesus. A thanksgiving offering has been given to the Ashram.

-C. Sawant

OUT OF THEIR BOUNTY

R. Hatkar	Mumbai	50,000	Hiren/Abhilasha	Thane	2,700	Antony O.	Kerala	1,000
T. George	Navi Mumbai	20,000	G. Nautiyal	Thane	2,500	B. Dutt	Kolkata	1,000
Delisa	Vasai	15,000	H. Mascarenhas	Mumbai	2,500	B. Makwan	Gujarat	1,000
Gaurang/Poonam	Mumbai	15,000	Robinson	Thane	2,500	B. Philip	Kerala	1,000
M. Creado	Mumbai	15,000	A. Elavia	Mumbai	2,000	B. Pynadath	Mumbai	1,000
R. Dumasia	Mumbai	15,000	A. Noronha	Thane	2,000	B. Sequeira	Mumbai	1,000
R. Pinto	Mumbai	15,000	A. Sequeira	Mumbai	2,000	C. D'Souza	Tamil Nadu	1,000
M. Porathur	Gujarat	13,000	Anil	USA	2,000	C. D'Souza	Pune	1,000
M. Raiyan	Mumbai	11,000	B. Shah	Kerala	2,000	C. Henry	Pune	1,000
Preethi/Perin	Thane	10,500	Dr. J. Paul	Kerala	2,000	C. Jacob	Kerala	1,000
S. Amonkar	Mumbai	10,002	E. Ittoop	Kerala	2,000	C. Mange	Thane	1,000
D. Singapuri	Australia	10,001	H. Gonsalves	Kerala	2,000	C. Mendes & Fly	Mumbai	1,000
B. Watson	UK	10,000	H. Kenny	Mumbai	2,000	C. Soares	Mumbai	1,000
G. Verghese	Thane	10,000	Irudayaraj M.	Tamil Nadu	2,000	D. Alphonso	Mumbai	1,000
Johnny	Tamil Nadu	10,000	M. Pereira	Mumbai	2,000	Daniel	Palghar	1,000
Jos V.	Kerala	10,000	N. Bafna	Mumbai	2,000	Darragh Smail & Co.	Kerala	1,000
K. Martis	Mumbai	10,000	P. Hendricks	Tamil Nadu	2,000	E. D'Sylva	Mumbai	1,000
K. Valsamma	Kerala	10,000	P. Thakker	Thane	2,000	F. Cardoz	Thane	1,000
M. Abraham	Pune	10,000	R. Francis	Kerala	2,000	F. D'Souza	Mumbai	1,000
M. Verghese	Chennai	10,000	R. Pinto	Mumbai	2,000	F. D'Souza	Goa	1,000
S. Mathew	Kerala	10,000	R. Valentine	Mumbai	2,000	F. Fernandes	Mumbai	1,000
S. Mehta	Mumbai	10,000	S. Gandhi	London	2,000	F. Menezes	Mumbai	1,000
S. Patel	London	10,000	S. Kapadia	Rajasthan	2,000	F. Thekketh	Kerala	1,000
U. Macwan	Gujarat	9,500	S. Tribhuvan	Pune	2,000	Fittech Inds.	Mumbai	1,000
K. Saldanha	Mumbai	9,000	S. Umarani	Tamil Nadu	2,000	G. Arputharaj	Tamil Nadu	1,000
B. Dalal	Mumbai	8,000	Stany	Mumbai	2,000	G. Patel	Mumbai	1,000
S. Manivanan	Mumbai	8,000	T. Sebastian	Kerala	2,000	G. Pereira	Vasai	1,000
B. Patel	London	7,500	V. Lobo	Pune	2,000	J. Fernandes	Mumbai	1,000
S. Noronha	Mumbai	6,500	V. Shah	Mumbai	2,000	J. Gala	Mumbai	1,000
A. Pereira	Mumbai	5,000	Y. Tribhuwan	Maharashtra	2,000	J. Parmar	Gujarat	1,000
B. Parmar	Mumbai	5,000	R. Johnson	Kerala	1,800	J. Pereira	Vasai	1,000
B. Sheth	Mumbai	5,000	B. Jain	Mumbai	1,611	J. Saldanha	Mumbai	1,000
C. Moras	Karnataka	5,000	Virginia/Violet	Gujarat	1,600	J. Thomas	Kerala	1,000
C. Raj	Tamil Nadu	5,000	R. Laxmikantam	Mumbai	1,501	K. George	Ahmednagar	1,000
C. Rumao	Palghar	5,000	A. Henrigues	Mumbai	1,500	K. Olivera	Navi Mumbai	1,000
E. Gonsalves	Mumbai	5,000	A. Jadhav	Lakshadweep	1,500	K. Tambe	Ahmednagar	1,000
F. Almeida	Mumbai	5,000	A. Kuttikadan	Thane	1,500	L. Jain	Mumbai	1,000
Faustina	Mumbai	5,000	P. Joseph	Kerala	1,500	M. Antony	Kerala	1,000
G. Gazdar	Mumbai	5,000	R. Parmar	Gujarat	1,500	M. Lopes	Palghar	1,000
G. Pereira	Mumbai	5,000	Rajeshri/Jayshree	Mumbai	1,500	M. Martis	Mumbai	1,000
G. Solanki	Mumbai	5,000	W. Gonsalves	Palghar	1,500	M. Mathai	Kerala	1,000
I. D'Souza	Mumbai	5,000	M. D'Mello	Thane	1,250	M. Surveyor	Mumbai	1,000
J. Malaviya	Navi Mumbai	5,000	N. Atram	Mumbai	1,250	Melvin/Austin	Navi Mumbai	1,000
J. Puthur	Kerala	5,000	M. D'Souza	Pune	1,200	N. Paulose	Kerala	1,000
N. Mogre	Maharashtra	5,000	G. Bhatt	Mumbai	1,100	P. Devassia	Kerala	1,000
Princeton	Mumbai	5,000	J. Shah	Mumbai	1,100	P. D'Lima	Goa	1,000
R. Parikh	Mumbai	5,000	Sheela	Mumbai	1,050	R. Alphanso	Vasai	1,000
S. Barboza	Mumbai	5,000	A. Gogate	Gujarat	1,001	R. Ferrao	Goa	1,000
S. Fernandes	Goa	5,000	D. Kapadia	Gujarat	1,001	Rubine	Navi Mumbai	1,000
Subramaniam R.	Mumbai	5,000	J. Desai	Gujarat	1,001	S. D'Souza	Mumbai	1,000
T. Anand	Mumbai	5,000	N. D'Souza	Mumbai	1,001	S. Fernandes	Mumbai	1,000
Z. D'Silva	Vasai	5,000	N. Yadav	Pune	1,001	S. Gnanastephen	Kerala	1,000
R. Vijay	Navi Mumbai	4,000	R. Shah	Mumbai	1,001	S. Joseph	Kerala	1,000
H. Bharucha	Vasai	3,500	U. Kanani	Mumbai	1,001	S. Lobo	Mumbai	1,000
M. D'Souza	Mumbai	3,500	A. D'Souza	USA	1,000	S. Narvekar	Mumbai	1,000
S. Gonsalves	Vasai	3,500	A. Fernandes	Mumbai	1,000	S. Sales	Tamil Nadu	1,000
A. Thomas	Kerala	3,000	A. Honavar	Mumbai	1,000	S. Varghese	Kerala	1,000
B. Pawar	Mumbai	3,000	A. Jacob	Kerala	1,000	Sajayan	Kerala	1,000
D. Pereira	Mumbai	3,000	A. Mankar	Vasai	1,000	Sharon	Mumbai	1,000
J. Patel	Mumbai	3,000	A. Nadar	Mumbai	1,000	T. Davar	Pune	1,000
K. Sangani	Mumbai	3,000	A. Nicholas	Mumbai	1,000	T. Gandhi	Mumbai	1,000
N. Asher	Mumbai	3,000	A. Rodrigues	Mumbai	1,000	T. Thomas	Kerala	1,000
R. D'Souza	Mumbai	3,000	A. Santhappan	Tamil Nadu	1,000	V. Allen	Kolkata	1,000
S. Babulal	Mumbai	3,000	A. Shinde	Thane	1,000	V. Pereira	Mumbai	1,000
S. Inigo	Tamil Nadu	3,000	A. Thomson	Kerala	1,000	V. Susha	Mumbai	1,000
Techno Prod.	Chennai	3,000	A. Witteric	Mumbai	1,000	Z. Mistry	Mumbai	1,000

Bob's Banter

by Robert Clements

Santa, besides the Still Waters..!

Santa Clauses, decorations and Christmas trees! All lit and ablaze! Santas in every mall, striding down streets, and Christmas trees, set up, lighting the sky and ground below! Such excitement! Every store screams 'Christmas Sale' with discounts as the shop window seductively beckons you in!

They told me Christmas in New York would be sheer excitement! People smile, people wish you on the streets! Oh yes, there's exhilaration as children scream about Santa's gifts while fathers grin and mothers smile to see such festive cheer.

Ah yes, the music! It's not just from homes where carols play, nor just malls where flash choirs sing out the Christmas message but in snow filled parks and by the riverside too, loud carols bring in the happiness of the Season...

There's joy there and deep contentment! Peace and calm!

I stare at the water stillness, and hear echoing words, "He restores your soul!"

Not my mind, not my heart, nor body that craves excitement and new experiences all the time, but my soul whose cry for restoration comes not from the 'Ho! Ho! Ho!' of Santas in malls, not from axed trees lit by powered generators, not from carols sung by trained singers, but from the stillness of creation, from waters that are windows to the 'peace that passeth understanding!'

I turn back to the city lights, for a moment troubled with new thoughts, "Are the carols, the Santas, the trees and gifts all wrong?"



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...and it is here by the riverside I walk, and slowly look at the waters below.

Suddenly, sights, sounds, and Santas cease. There is a stillness in the waters, and as the East River flows by me towards the nearby sea, a calm warms me, far greater than the excitement behind in city lights.

"What?" I ask the river, "Can be greater than the happiness this December brings to the city?"

The waters are still, but as I stare a message lifts up to me, "He leads me besides the still waters!"

"The Lord is your shepherd," cry waters below, "you shall not want anything! He makes you lie down in pastures green! He leads you beside us waters!"

I look down and nod.

"No," say the waters, stirring within me, "In carols sung, trees lit, Santas seen and gifts given, feel the stillness that comes from a Christ child born to bring peace! Feel the calmness of that manger!"

And suddenly, like a Hallelujah Chorus breaking forth, the sights and sounds of the city bring a joyousness much greater than just a month of excitement: A lifetime of Stillness!

"He leads you beside the still waters!" the angels sing, as I smile at a Santa, carol singers and lit trees and whisper, "your messages of joy are right, it's just that we've read you wrong..!"

Robert Clements is a newspaper columnist, whose column has graced over 80 newspapers and on certain days has a readership of over 6 million. He can be contacted at bobsbanter@gmail.com

*96th Death Anniversary of Ven. Fr. Agnelo
at Fr. Agnel Ashram, Bandra,
on 20th November 2023*



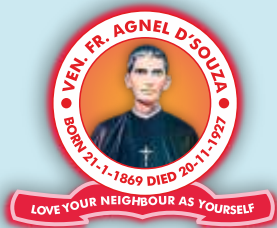
Most Rev. Henry D'Souza, Bishop of Bellary, was the Main Celebrant.

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For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given...
His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace

**Fr. Agnel Ashram Community and Balbhavan Children
wish all our Friends, Benefactors and Well-Wishers
A Blessed Christmas & A Happy New Year!**



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