

Dear Rev. Fathers and Brothers,

On January 3, 2021 we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry of our founding Father, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara into the heavenly Bliss. First of all, I do wish each and every member of our beloved Congregation a most happy Feast and prayerful wishes of the Founder's Day.

This day was supposed to be the concluding day of our year-long celebration of the Chavara Jubilee which was inaugurated officially on January 3, 2020 at Mannanam. But because of the COVID-19 pandemic we could not hold any of the planned programmes and hence the Chavara year is extended for one more year and the formal conclusion will be taking place next year.

We are fortunate to have this great saint as our founding father as he, with his extraordinary sanctity, dynamic, and vibrant personality, broad vision and powerful push, ever remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration to every generation. '*Chavarapithavu*' as he is fondly called by his children today, was a man who walked ahead of his time to give leadership not only in the church, but also in the social, cultural and literary spheres leading to a reformation. Being an ardent lover of the Church and a proud son of St. Thomas Christians, it pained him too much that Kerala Church did not have a saint of its own. Therefore, "seeing that a lot of good has not been done due to the absence of a *Thapasa Bhavanam*" he along with other founders initiated to start a House on Hilltop -*Beth rauma*. Today CMI Congregation is the fruit of that great vision and we are fortunate to be the torchbearers of that great vision. There are a lot of writings today with regard to his unique contributions in various areas. But I wish to bring to the kind attention of our members a few important aspects of his life which we need to take as guidelines for us, the members of the congregation which he along with Fr Thomas Palackal, Fr Thomas Porookara and Bro. Jacob Kaniathara founded.

### **1. His ardent Love for the Church**

St. Chavara had a deep love for the Church and a genuine concern for the spiritual growth of its members. Being a man guided by the Holy Spirit, he could never sit idle and ignore the problems that affected the spiritual and social growth of the church and the people of God. He proactively responded to the signs of the time as guided by the Holy Spirit and got involved in the concerns of the time for the greater glory of God and good of the Church. He wrote to Popes and Cardinals who held relevant responsibilities in the Church regarding the need of unity and harmony in the church and he expressed a greater degree of obedience, docility and loyalty to the Holy See. He was ready to rise above the petty and narrow-minded outlook of his time and tried for greater integration and unity among the members.

## **2. A Man of Contemplation and Action**

Blending of contemplation and action was the distinguishing characteristic of his spirituality which he has bequeathed to us. He is widely acclaimed as a great visionary who took several concrete steps in order to impart spiritual vitality to the 19-century old Church in India and to reform the ecclesiastical and social life. All this he could achieve through his intimate union with God, which was sustained by his prayer and mystical life. St. Pope John Paul II in his sermon during the beatification of Chavara in Kerala in 1986 said: "Bl. Kuriakose Elias' success, in all his many undertakings, was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterized his daily life, his close communion with God and his love for the Church, as the visible body of Christ on earth."

## **3. An Apostle of the Holy Eucharist**

The core element of Chavara's spirituality is found in his deep and intimate devotion to the Holy Eucharist. He is rightly called an apostle of the Holy Eucharist. His contemporaries give testimony to his Eucharistic life. With utmost dignity, devotion and recollection he celebrated the Sacred Liturgy and participating in the Liturgical celebration along with him was an experience for who joined him. People have experienced him spending hours before the Eucharistic Lord on his knees totally immersed and absorbed in prayer.

To use his own terminology, he preferred to shut himself up in the tabernacle with Jesus. In one of his letters to the members of the women religious congregation he started, he wrote: "Behold I have locked up your hearts in the tabernacle of Jesus. I have done the same with mine as well. Let us stay there until the day of resurrection" (CWC IV (1990), 85).

## **4. A Man who believed in Divine Providence**

Being deeply rooted in faith, St Kuriakose Elias was an epitome of profound trust in Divine Providence. He undertook several initiatives in the church and in the society not for the credit of being the pioneer. As a versatile genius St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara gave remarkable leadership in the fields of religious life, education, printing, language studies, literature and women empowerment. In all his achievements he invariably saw God's providential hands, and gratefully acknowledged the divine will: "Are all those things that God made me do, within my power? How have you arrived so far? Who made you leave your family? How come you were ordained a priest? How did you join the monastery? Where did the religious congregation come from? Who appointed you prior? How have you reached here? Are you worthy of any of these? Not, certainly not! So what? God's will is done. It will always be done!" (CWC III (1990):1).

Today being his feast day, and 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his entry into the Heavenly bliss, let us be committed and loyal CMIs who never lose sight of the very purpose of our call in this congregation. Let us dedicate our life for God and His Church and become people who can harmoniously blend contemplation and action and radiate fragrance of Holiness!

May our *Chavarapithavu* bless us abundantly!

Yours fraternally in our Lord,

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI  
Prior General