

# A Tribute to late Rev. Fr. Joseph K. Bill

We were so familiar with his simple and down to earth teachings of catholic faith. He often said “Jesus suffered for us and died on the cross for us. So this love must be repaid. That is why we have decided to follow Jesus Christ.” He was so convinced of this in his life that he was working day and night to fulfill the same in his own life. He used to say that God repaired his heart about 45 years back when he had his first heart attack, just to spread the love and forgiveness of Jesus to every nook and corner of this world. The Almighty called him back to take rest in His presence after 50 years of sincere and faithful service as a Priest.

Fr. Joseph Kuruppampambil, Fr. Bill for short, was born on Feb 23, 1928 as the fourth son of Xavier-Anna at Thottakam, Vaikom, Kerala, India. He joined the Vincentian Congregation, a Catholic Religious Organization founded in Kerala, South India, made his first profession on May 22, 1952, final profession on January 5, 1956 and was ordained a priest on October 12, 1958 by His Eminence, late Joseph Cardinal Parekkattil, the then archbishop of Ernakulam Archdiocese.

Fr. Joseph Kuruppampambil VC joined St. Vincent’s minor seminary in 1948. He was one of the 10 seminarians of the first batch. Even before he was admitted in the seminary, while he was in the high school classes, he started a project of spreading anti-Communist literature called INTEC, which indeed was very effective in the long run. In the seminary, a group of Brothers joined together under the leadership of Brother Joseph with the idea of spreading certain devotional practices so as to foster genuine piety among the seminarians especially devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary.

Soon after his Ordination, he involved himself headlong in multi various activities both spiritual and temporal, such as parish works, and procurator ship of our Generalate. He initiated so many social activities wherever he worked. Total involvement was his characteristic note. Throughout his life he was very optimistic, always cheerful, never depressed, even in very trying circumstances. He never showed a grim face even in very tough situations he had to encounter several times in life. He was responsible for starting schools under the auspices of our congregation especially English Medium Schools, the type of which was very rare in the state at that time. He was never discouraged or lost hope.

Fr. Joseph was very adventurous and such a spirit was visible wherever he was appointed and what ever he did. His initiative, imagination, originality, his capacity to captivate hearts and minds, his ever-smiling face and every diplomatic step he took, reveal his colorful personality and unique leadership qualities. There are many orphanages and schools for the poor to his credit and initiative. It was not his nature to do things half way. He used to be totally immersed in whatever he did. Dynamism in its most intense form had been always noted in him. Even when he had been attached

to very many offices in each house, he was overly preoccupied and engrossed in preaching Popular Mission retreats and later Charismatic Retreats.

He was in the Novitiate when the first popular mission retreat of our congregation was conducted. It was in 1951. He was an active participant in it and settled some adventurous cases that disrupted the unity of families. Soon after his Ordination, he jumped headlong in organizing Popular Missions and conducting effectively various items of the Mission, which were all novel to the generality of the faithful. It was his originality and hard work that added new items and nuances to the customary practices that projected the great new Renewal Program, which was the Popular Mission. So we can say that he is one of the pioneers of the Popular Mission and to a great extent the one who paved way to its growth and spread of it throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Clarity, effectiveness and practicality marked his preaching always. His commanding personality, his musical trend always captured the attention of the audience in great numbers. He was always a crowd-puller, not only in India, but also all over the world. So many reports of total cure of the personality were coming to us. He was effectively diplomatic in his relationships with others. He was always generous to others. He practiced the principle of St. Paul that charity covers a multitude of sins. There are occasions when persons duped him in view of his generosity. He never kept any grudge against any body. Whenever he met even his bitterest enemies, he welcomed them as close friends smiling and in a considerate mood. That is why he used to say, "Unless we forgive from our hearts our Heavenly Father will not forgive the multitude of our sins. We will have to remain in purgatory until the last bit of our sins is removed. This is the importance of forgiveness in our lives. Do not forget it." We cannot forget his sterling qualities and what he did for the Vincentian Congregation especially for the African Mission and individuals in difficulties - spiritual, mental and material.

It was in 1992 that he came to the East African Mission of the Vincentian Congregation with lots of enthusiasm to preach the Good News to the people in East Africa. His first attempt in Tanzania transformed many unbelievers into true apostles of Jesus. Very soon news about this zealous Vincentian Missionary spread far and wide in the whole African Continent. His retreats attracted people in large numbers. People, irrespective of faith, nationality and color flocked to his preaching sessions. Meanwhile, he started getting requests from all over the world to conduct healing services. Consequently, he became an international preacher of great reputation within a short time. Bundles of passports and the retreat schedule he always carried will make one understand just how busy he was as a true messenger of Jesus' love and forgiveness.

The future generation would remember him as a legendary figure. In spite of his human limitations and failures, he always remained a focus of attention. Clarity of his vision, insight, his meticulous planning, boundless confidence, zeal, practicality, dynamism, leadership qualities perhaps unparalleled his capacity to remain close to all

those he came across, his simple life style, his ambition to do things ordinarily unattainable for the common man. A person who met him for the first time will definitely get himself engrossed in the mesmerizing personality. He was immersed in his preaching ministry so much so he had no time for any other entertainment except sharing the word of God.

His simple life style of wearing the priestly habit all throughout his life, whether at home or abroad elicited surprise as well as high respect from his on lookers. He never cared for his personal comforts. Hours and hours he spent for preaching, standing on his feet, causing edema in his feet. The word impossible was never in his dictionary. This year was his Sacerdotal Golden Jubilee. He did not see 50th anniversary of his Priestly Ordination. A few months before his golden jubilee in October, his Heavenly Father called him home. He had just celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in February. At a time when it was the least expected, the drop-scene of his life drama took place and all those who loved him mourn for his unexpected departure to attain his eternal life. May his soul rest in peace.

**Fr. Vincent Rathappillil**  
*(Regional Superior)*