

Saint Chavara

The Vibrant Educationalist
and Spiritual Guide

Adv. FR FRANCIS VALLAPPURA CMI



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The vibrant educationalist and spiritual guide
(English)

Author

Adv. Fr Francis Vallappura, CMI

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

St Chavara Kuriakose Elias the founder of CMI congregation, of which I am a member, every devotee of this Saintly, Priest is engaged in expressing one's great respect, love and appreciation for him. My devotion has taken the form of a small book. I consider this as his own work because he has inspired me through out my effort.

I remember with utmost gratitude all the hands those have been extended to me in making my humble effort a success.

20th February 2015

Adv. Fr Francis Vallappura CMI

FOREWORD

There is no doubt that education plays the most important role in sustaining and strengthening the dignified life of an individual as well as that of the society at large. Although the Indian society has always been concerned about education for centuries it had kept the masses away from the stream of education, for the vast majority of Indians were considered as untouchables. The awakening of the need for education of the masses took place when Saint Chavara Kuriakose Elias came to the scene. Saint Chavara is the pioneering visionary of modern education in India. He is the one who initiated the public system of formal schooling in Kerala in the 19th Century. Primarily, he focused on the family, as it is the main unit of the educational step-up in the society. He wanted to see the family ties everywhere.

Education, for Saint Chavara, was a *community* — Service — *Project*. Women and children get their due in his vision of an educated society. The concepts of women's liberation and compulsory education for children have their origin in the thought and actions of this great visionary. This mission of specializing education in Kerala had a great impact on the church. He made

it mandatory for the churches to start schools in their compounds, which explains why a school is called a '*palli-koodam*'.

Fr Francis Vallappura CMI, through this dedicated work on Saint Chavara, projects a three dimensional image of this vibrant educationalist, whom he calls the first teacher of letters. As a spiritual guide, Saint Chavara is portrayed by Fr Francis as a pragmatic guru par excellence.

Fr Francis Vallappura has done a thorough study of all the aspects of educational and spiritual adventures of the great leader and founder of the CMI Congregation. The book is a 'Prayerful' tribute to the great educationalist at this period of his Canonisation. It is hoped that this sleek but complete literary piece will inspire the reader to imbibe the vibrant ideas and values of Saint Chavara.

Rev Fr Paul Achandy CMI

Prior General

Prior General's House

20th February 2015

A WORD OF APPRECIATION

St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a humble man from the rural Kerala fought for the rights of the poor, the illiterate, the downtrodden and the oppressed. His mighty vision transformed the thoughts, ideologies, perceptions and attitudes of an era, which saw its reflections on the social, cultural, religious, educational, artistic and literary fields. A man who walked well ahead and perceived the future in its totality and fought like a one man army to achieve equality, prosperity and freedom to the local people, made it to be accepted and appreciated even in the Kingdom of Heaven. True to the meaning of his name 'Kuriakose', 'belonging to the Lord', he lived, served and died for the highest cause of humanity and thus completed his mission on earth.

Rev Fr Francis Vallapura CMI, through this book has given a very precise account of St Chavara. The simplicity of the language and style makes it easy to comprehend and acceptable even for a child. The book is divided into different sections depicting each and every major aspect in the life of St Chavara. A reader is also made to think, analyze and reflect upon the existing social scenario. The book tells us how a very humble, normal human

being, with his sheer determination, will power and faith, treaded successfully all the uphill of poverty, disease, contempt and disregard.

I appreciate the efforts of Rev Fr Francis Vallapura CMI for his efforts in bringing out a book on St Chavara. Hope this book will help the new generations to get a glimpse of a great saint who lived and died for the cause of humanity.

Best Wishes
God Bless

20th February 2015

Dr. Meenakshy Ramachandran S.

Principal
Christ College, Vizhinjam

1. My Home



I was born at Kuttanadu in Kainakary as the second son of my parents, Kuriakose and Mariam.

My house was a small one and it reminded one of the old farmer's house.

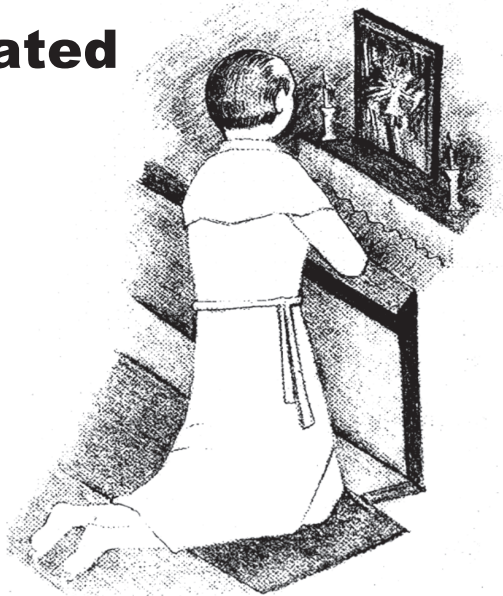
Why should I speak more about

the size and appearance of my house? It was my cradle and church.

Like Jesus who grew up "in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2/52), I was brought up by my parents with great care. The sweet memories of my home are evergreen. I remember how I prayed with my mother and how she stared at me whenever I went wrong while reciting the holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In those days itself my mother fed me with the amrita (nectar) of spirituality, dissolving it in her breast

milk. Therefore, I was able to leave my house proclaiming that "God is my share". The love and care of my parents, brothers and sisters helped me a lot throughout my life. I wanted to see the same family ties everywhere and very specially in the religious houses founded by me. The long cherished dream, to see my house spread out to the whole cosmos, became the framework of the Dharsana houses.

2. The consecrated life



*H*e consecrated himself to the Holy Family. 'To consecrate' means to keep apart oneself and to be of someone. In the Old Testament we read that the kings and priests were consecrated to God (Exod. 19/5).

Through consecration we become His precious diamond. The consecrated have the responsibility to implore God's grace for their brethren. Consecrated life in its fullness is found in Jesus Christ. God the Father offered Him for the sake of His children. Without making his father's blessings His own He enriched the people. Healing the blind, the deaf and the paralyzed was a part and parcel of His consecrated life.

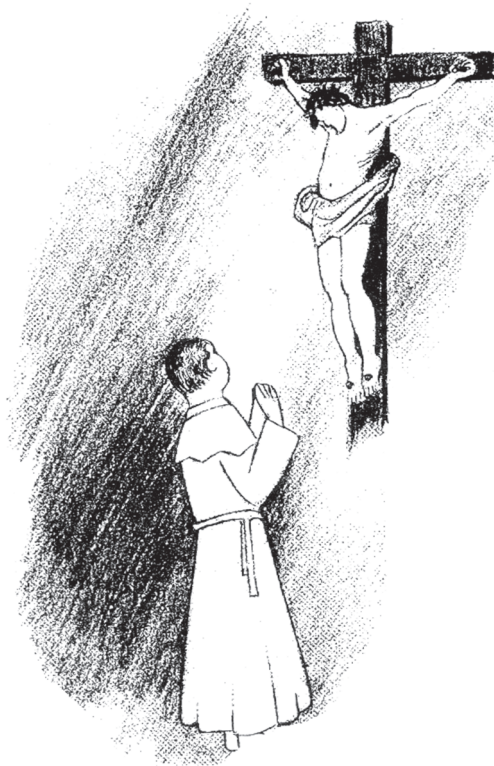
3. Listen my little Children!



*H*is declaration of "Free Lunch" (uchakanji) led him to financial constraints. He found out a solution to this

problem. Volunteers offered their service to collect Pidiyari (keeping apart a handful of grain) from the people. He made them distribute jars to the mothers. Whenever the good mothers took some grain of rice to boil they recited a short prayer to Jesus, remembering their little children, and kept a handful grain of rice apart, sacrificing their pleasures (Lk 21/4, Rom 13/8). Thus, the jars were filled. Sending the volunteers he collected the grain twice or thrice a month. This community-service-project had democracy as its foundation. It was years ago that St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias, the great educationalist, insisted on feeding the poor children when they were brought to schools for learning. In spite of the decrease in the quantity of grain collected the number of children increased and so he found it rather difficult to go on with the project. In order to solve this problem and to feed the little ones he bought a field at Kariyil and started cultivating paddy in it.

4. The Sorrowful Story of the Cross



For St Chavara Kuriakose Elias meditation meant to be in ecstasy and converse with God. When he meditated on the crucified Christ he heard his entire body narrating a story of love and sacrifice. The story of the crucified Christ is nothing but the sorrowful story of the One who embraced mercy to take him to His heavenly Father.

Visualising each organ of His crucified body he meditated and with a contrite heart he prostrated at His feet. Towards the end of his meditation he lay on the cross of the good thief and listened to the soothing word of his father. He saw Christ as his Father. He drew this insight from the word of God. "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14/9). "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10/30). He spoke to Jesus freely as a child chats with his father. This throws light on his Abba-experiences. His realization of the crucified Christ was not a simple devotion to the crucifix. It was a genuine and deep prayer that united him as he was with the person of Christ and made him one with Him. His life was formed through this sort of deep prayer experiences.

5. The Long awaited sign



A woman has three dimensions, viz, the daughter, wife and mother. She lives under care and protection of

her father in her childhood. In her youth she is protected by her husband and in her old age by her son. According to the Indian concept of woman, she never deserves freedom. This concept is a misinterpretation of the Sanskrit saying "Na stri svatantryamarhati" meaning "No woman deserves liberty."

How long did we praise her for her virtuous life that was dedicated to satisfy the desires of her husband, to deliver and bring up children and to labour throughout in the kitchen for her husband and children! In the 19th century St Chavara Kuriakose Elias paved the way to the Women's Liberation Movement that makes much noise at the national and international levels today. Our leaders used to go to the Western countries and speak very highly of Indian woman's nobility and gentleness to receive the applause of the listeners. Are we aware of the atrocities on Indian women? Oppressions, dowry deaths, suicides and murders are increasing day by day. Don't these make us conclude that our concept of women is completely wrong? St Chavara's concept was totally different from this. He believed that being an important part of the society she must shine like a lamp. She is capable of sacrificing a lot for the society as she does it for her family. Her motherhood would grow to the status of a universal motherhood. What we have to do is to prepare her for that. It is only then she would come up to her glory. The seeds of this noble thought were sown in his mind by his mother who helped him to form his personality. He had to wait and wait for years to open this precious casket. The

first convent was blessed on 27th March 1867. His heart was filled with gratitude when he saw the long-awaited sign like the aged Simon of Jerusalem Temple did. He rejoiced and visualized a thousand images of the good deeds this small community would perform for the world.

6. These are my beloved Children

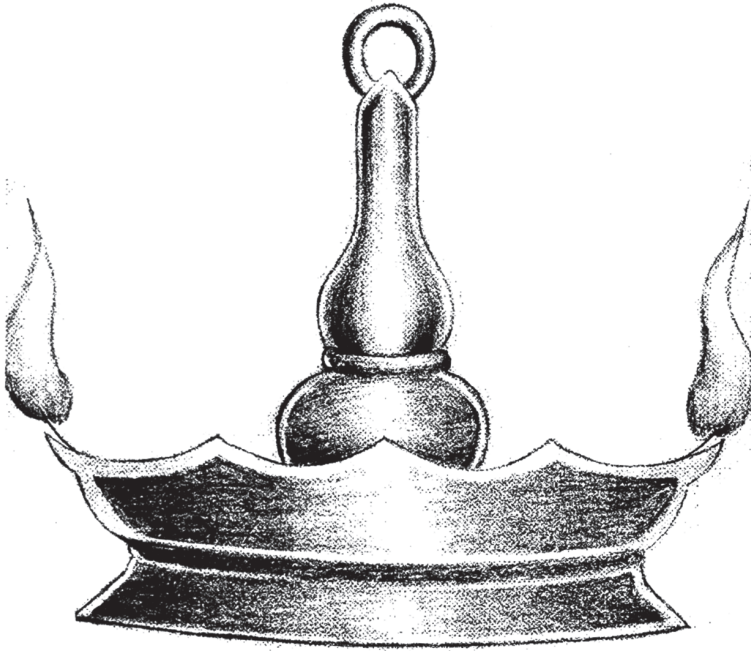


*B*lessing children is a custom of the Jewish tradition. The day kept apart for this is the previous day of the Day of Penance. Mothers would bring their

children to the elders of the society who are entrusted with the right to bless them. This is the traditional background of Jesus blessing children. The disciples prevented the children from going to Jesus because they thought that he had more serious matters to perform. But, children must not be ignored. So, He called them near and said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

Jesus has said many times that children, who are the gold mines of the Kingdom of Heaven, are His dear ones. Once the disciples approached Jesus with the question, "Who is great in the kingdom of Heaven?" He answered the question very dramatically. He called a baby and made him stand in their midst and said: "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven" (Mk 8/1-5) Like Jesus, St Chavara also understood the significance of children. Modern civilization will take time to accept his view that children are the treasure of a family.

7. To Shine and to enlighten

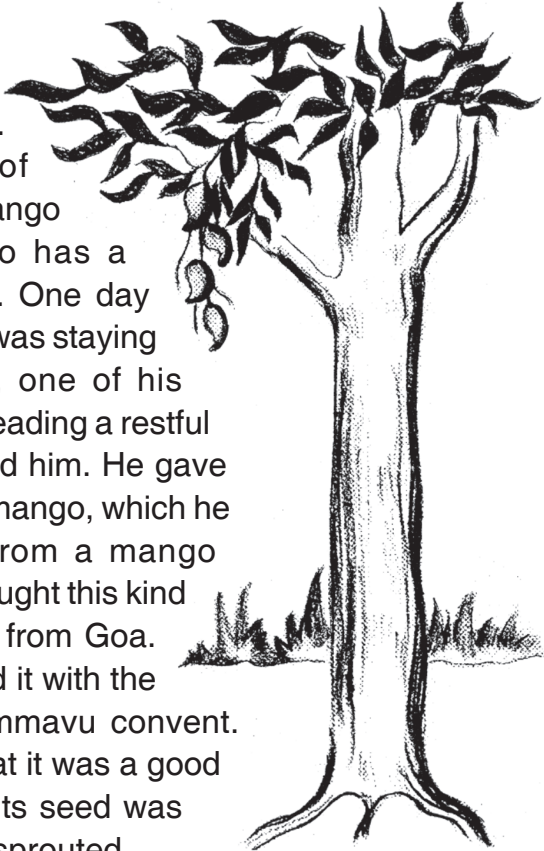


*W*ith the birth of Christ the world that was in darkness was brought back to light. The whole universe and humanity regained welfare, riches and brightness. The song of the angels was a song of happiness and brightness. It was a

hymn of felicity. It was at this moment that God revealed His supremacy over the earth and the Heavens. Mother Mary, St Joseph and Child Jesus were highly enlightened people. The visible sign of the Holy Family and that of the abode of angels is this enlightenment. St Chavara says that in order to be enlightened people we must be born in the Holy Family. He could share the transparency of God (Eccles 30:22, Phi 4/4) and manifest it. His life was an enlightened one. The Chronicle says that even when he was suffering from serious illness he was seen happy. He wanted to see the joy of his Birth and Resurrection reflected in humankind. The Holy Face of Jesus which is brighter than the sun gives peace to those who are sad. When the faces of Christians become corrupt and deceptive the discomfort and deception of the corrupt world spread out everywhere. We are able to enlighten others only if we are enlightened people. Today, when we discuss the importance of transparency, doesn't St Chavara's transparency of the soul gain much importance?

8. Everlasting Sweetness

*W*hen you hear the name "Prior Mango" your mouth waters. All the people of Kerala like this mango fruit. This mango has a history of its own. One day when St Chavara was staying at Koonammavu, one of his friends, who was leading a restful life at Aluva, visited him. He gave him then a sweet mango, which he had purchased from a mango seller who had brought this kind of good mangoes from Goa. St Chavara shared it with the sisters of Koonammavu convent. Since he found that it was a good variety of mango its seed was sown. The seed sprouted and gave plenty of sweet mangoes when it grew up as a tree. When those mangoes were ripe a share of them was sent to each monastery.



Blessed Chavara's friends enjoyed eating this sweet mango. As the fathers wanted to express their love in turn to their loving St Chavara, the mango that was sent by him was called 'Prior Mango.' The seedlings of it were planted everywhere and today the tree is found in all the houses.

See how love is returned! His life that was sweet and holy sweetened all and passed away. Even today that love blossoms in Prior Mango trees and brings forth fruits in plenty.

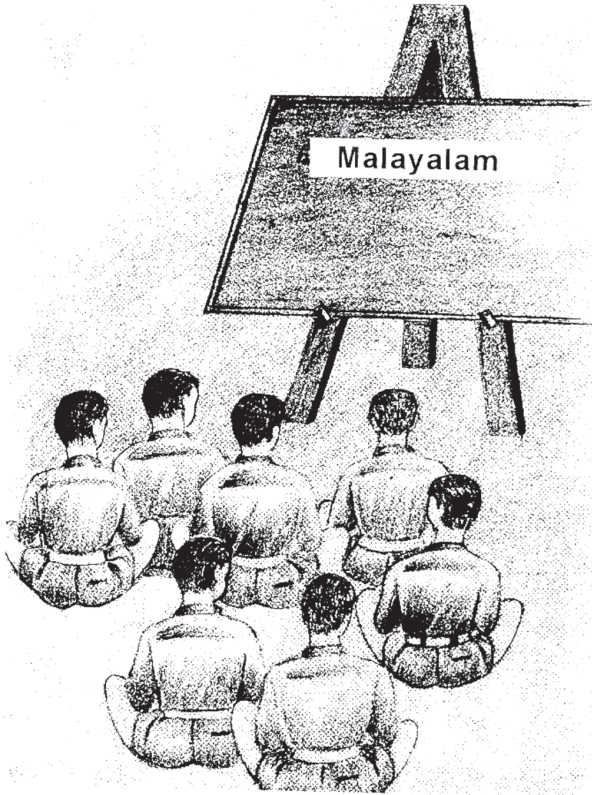
9. A book of learning in the street of Jericho



*T*he people of Jericho crowded in the street to see Jesus Christ. As Zacchaeus was of a short stature he climbed on a sycamore tree. Jesus looked at Zacchaeus and said: "Come down from the tree. I shall stay with you tonight." Those who saw this went on telling contemptuously that Jesus was accepting the hospitality of a sinner.

Nobody knew for how long Jesus talked to Zacchaeus and what the topic of their conversation was. But the transformation of Zaccheus's heart was remarkable. Jesus' words must have been very touching. St Chavara gives a new interpretation to this event of the Bible in his *Dhyanasallapangal*. He portrays his heart as the heart of Zaccheus. He wishes that he had the zeal and enthusiasm of Zaccheus in his heart while welcoming Christ. Since the preparation of his heart was not enough he sought the companionship of who excelled all others in spiritual life. "Mother (Teresa of Avila), kindly bring Christ and his mother with you to the humble heart of this poor man." St Chavara believed that he was not worthy to lead a life of great virtues and contemplation and to stay with Jesus Christ. Therefore he prayed that his heart must be transformed like that of Zaccheus. When he could not have this desire fulfilled he sought the companionship of Mary Magdalene who was highly spiritual and virtuous. He was always inspired by those who had achieved sanctity and holiness in their lives.

10. The First Teacher of Letters



*T*he Government of Kerala declared that Kerala could achieve cent percent literacy.

There were celebrations and Art rallies held in all the districts. The Government gave awards and golden shawls

to many for this achievement. But those who have done a deep study of Kerala's Temple of learning know the real cause and root of education in Kerala. There is the history of 150 years behind the growth of learning in Kerala. This history takes us to the man of divine vision and action, St Chavara Kuriakose Elias. The age in which he was born and brought up was totally different from today. In those days education was reserved only for the people of high classes. This extraordinary feature of education looked like Mount Himalaya in his eyes. He could burn this mountain into dust as if it was a heap of dry leaves. He sent a circular stating that the priests would be denied of their payment (tith) if they did not start schools in their Church compounds. This circular was considered very seriously by the Church Committees. Thus many schools were started and the untouchability that existed in the field of education came to an end. St Chavara is the man of new vision and mission who socialized education in Kerala. He dreamt of teaching apostles and not of earning teachers.

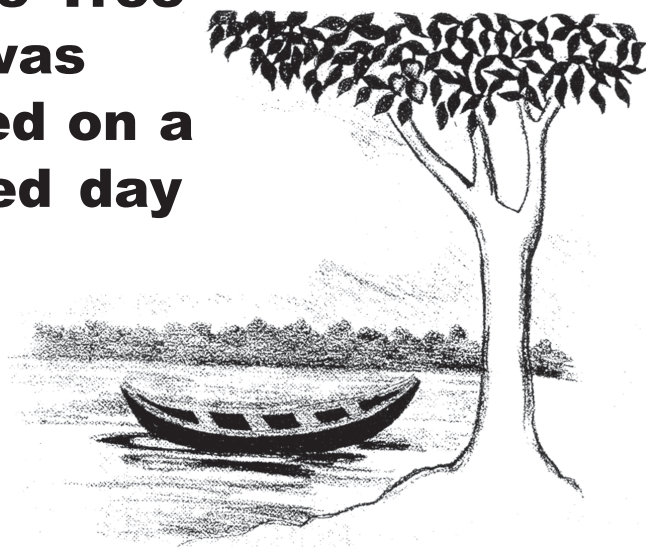
11. Misfortune of the poor man



Only a simple and poor man has the humility to depend on others. God wanted Abraham to leave his land and house to be a destitute. He gave all that he had to others and became literally a destitute. To depend on God and to humble oneself he/she has to come out of his/her false self-esteem. St Chavara had this true vision. When he was a seminarian he lost his mother, father and the only brother. God made him really go through the

experience of a destitute. God led him to the deep faith that "The Lord is his share and chalice." Only a destitute knows the grief of another destitute. Only such people are capable of loving destitutes. We become fortunate when we empty ourselves through the self-sacrifice and penance of religious life. His desire to know the destitutes of all kinds and to love them went on burning in his heart.

12. The Tree that was planted on a blessed day



*T*hough there were no transportation facilities St Chavara went to Elthuruthu to bless the new chapel. It was the first journey of the first boat. This boat which was good enough to keep eight wooden planks helped St Chavara very much throughout his life journey. When

he was unable to walk he made use of this boat to visit Mutholy, Elthruthu, Koonammavu, Pulimkunnu, Alapuzha, Pallippuram and Kalloorkadu. It was in the same boat that he made his journey to Thiruvananthapuram in order to understand the working of the printing press. From that day onwards the people attributed its ownership to the Prior, St Chavara. Nobody then knew that this boat would act as a connecting link between the two periods. The wood that was chosen to make this boat was the wood of a blessed tree. There is a history to this tree. In 1837 St Chavara and Bro. Jacob Kaniyanthara went to Arakuzha, Vazhakulam and near by places in order to collect wood for the construction of the Chapel at Mannanam. With the whole-hearted co-operation of the people there they could get enough wood and complete the construction work. Then they heard that there was a short and thick plank of wood with 22" width lying in the sandy river in the south of Vazhakulam. In fact this was the piece of wood they had forgotten to take and so the people brought it to Mannanam. With this wood a boat was made by Varkey Koikkara, of Kalloorkadu. This boat had eight sections. It's roof was made by Chacken. Thus this boat which was inaugurated on a blessed day had the luck to be the boat of the Prior.

13. Show me your face



*W*hen Abraham was ninety-nine years old God appeared to him and said, "Walk before me" (Gen. 17:1). In order to have God-realization we must walk before Him. We have to see His face. As we walk and reach closer to Him, His face will become more visible and clear to our eyes. Only then we will be able to see the image of the invisible God in the creation. When we are able to see His face reflected in all creatures our God-realization becomes perfect and complete. Abraham looked at His face and walked before Him. St Chavara could see God's

face everywhere and in everything in the universe. Let us also seek His face everywhere. Thus we can make our hearts as large as the universe.

14. The Sign Post

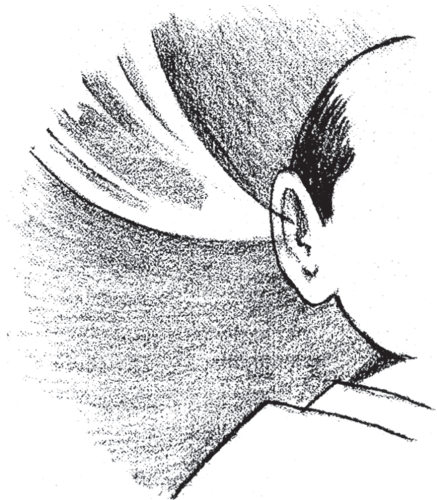


St Chavara's letter to the people of Kainakary has taught the message that a good Christian Family is equal to Heaven. The directives on family life given to them by Blessed Chavara were like a signpost of direction, which would make the family value based. This can be called the Magna carta of family life. Family is the gathering of happy people - (A gathering becomes a family when it is joyful). This small world consists of people, children who are just born and the aged who are looking forward to

their funeral. It is the happiness and satisfaction of all that makes family life joyful and interesting.

To understand St Chavara's family vision, which is based on the gospel values, it would take many more years. The corner stone of a family is love. This love must be like the gold that is purified in the furnace of forgiveness and justice. God is love and he who lives in love lives in God and God in him (1 Jn 4:16). When a family becomes a loving community, God makes this abode there. Where God resides, heavenly joy overflows. St Chavara wished that not only the families of Kainakary but also those of the whole world were true copies of Heaven.

15. If you listen



*O*ne who comes to stay must be ready to sit. If you want to stay in love you must sit in love. You must sit facing the other. Who is sitting in front? She is the beloved

devotee of Christ who sits at His feet listening to His divine word (LK 10/39). The devotee who sits at the feet of her master picks up whatever her master says and copies them in her heart. There we find perfect silence and concentration. No other sound is heard there. It is in silence that God speaks to us. The devotee constantly listens to the voice of God. In a similar way St Chavara achieved God realization by sitting before God. He began to know more of himself and God. He knew his nothingness. When he became aware of himself he started praising God. Mother of Jesus also had sat before God looking into his eyes. She grew in wisdom. Let us now pray for the grace to sit looking at God and grow in wisdom and knowledge as St Chavara Kuriakose did.



16. My Father's Name is Love

*I*n St Chavara's Colloquies with the Heavenly Father there is a meditation on the parable of the prodigal son. He is proud of portraying himself as the prodigal son as

he had dived deep down into the love of the heavenly father. He has thrown off the dresses his father had given him and has now come in tattered clothes. He says "I am going to my father wearing these torn clothes. If the journey is delayed I will die. But, how can I go in this dress to my father?, he asks. How can I stand before His glory? If I lie down outside the compound wall of my father's house and cry who will hear me? Who will unlock the lock of my father's gate for me? Who will inform my father of my coming back home? Even if someone does so, won't he push me out with anger instead of looking at me? Won't the servants look down upon me and reject me when they see my deplorable appearance? How can I appear in front of my loving and great father? How can I ask him forgiveness? No. How should I be afraid of my affectionate father? He finds some answer to these questions and so says, "He will receive me ardently. He will forget my ingratitude and welcome me as his son. Because, my father's name is love. He is full of love and blessings."

17. Hi! Only upto here

*I*ntimate friends who invite us to walk with them would say, "Only upto here." They walk very close to us. We are called to walk with Jesus. St Chavara had this beautiful experience many a time.



We find three kinds of walking in the Bible. They are walking with, walking behind and walking before looking into the eyes of the other. Adam and Eve walked with God (Gen. 3/8). Henock who walked with God was taken up by God (Gen. 5/24). Noah walked with God. He had eternal rest with Him. Intimate friends walk together and share their dreams. St Chavara walked with Jesus and shared his dreams with Him. The disciples always walk

behind the master. They walk courageously and with a sense of security because they know that their master is with them and walking in front of them (Ps 23). St Chavara tried his level best to identify himself with his Master in his thoughts and deeds. During his meditation he tried to walk

with Jesus. Let us also walk with Jesus, keeping ourselves very close to Him. By walking with him we can share our dreams regarding His people.

18. The Sweet Canopy



God desires to be with man. He wants to enter into his life and make man's life His. Man's existence becomes complete only when God becomes one with him. We find a suffering God who suffers because he is not able to get lost in the history of man. God's desire or longing to be one with man was fulfilled when Christ was born. When

the Word became flesh (Jn 1/14) the Father became one with him. The father allowed him to be in Him and with Him. Christ renews the covenant of blood when He offers himself to the Father saying, "I thirst" (Jn 19/28). St Chavara knew that he would be one with Jesus only through the cross and death on the Calvary. Therefore, Mount Calvary turned out to be his wedding canopy and the cross his bridal chamber.

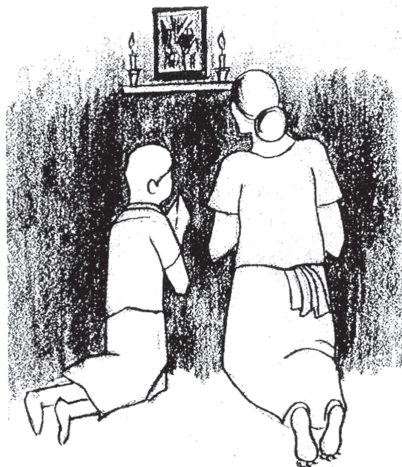
19. Vocation : A Challenge



*T*here will be challenges in the life of the people who are called by God for religious life. If their vocation has no challenges it is like the gold that is not purified in fire

and so lacks brightness. For Abraham (Gen. 12/1), Moses (Ex 4/10-12) and all others who responded to God's call positively, their vocation was a challenge. Little Kuriakose also had challenges, which made him shine like pure gold. When he was a seminarian his only brother and parents passed away. Their deaths changed him into an orphan. It was then the responsibility of Bro. Kuriakose to save the family from its deplorable condition. His paternal uncles took him home and forced him to give up his seminary life. But Kuriakose handed over his responsibilities to his sister and continued his seminary life, trusting in God who wanted him to be Blessed Chavara, the Father of thousands.

20. My Lucky Lottery Ticket



*T*he number of people who sell their fortune is increasing day by day. In every look and corner we can hear the announcement, "It is tomorrow... tomorrow..."

tomorrow." I wonder whether there were this type of lotteries in those days. His aim was not to get lakhs of rupees which would perish soon but to prepare for a good future. In some lotteries everyone gets money drawn by lot either tomorrow or the day after. The only way to have this luck is devotion to the holy family. The investment is very little. He says, "From the day I could lisp as a child my mother made me recite the prayer, Jesus, Mary and Joseph be with my soul." St Chavara has mentioned this in his compunction of the Soul. His lottery lot was drawn on 3rd Jan 1871 for which he had prayed without ceasing. Yes it was a lucky death. He could chant the mantra "Jesus, Mary and Joseph" and die peacefully, looking at the portrait of the Holy Family, which he had placed on his table sacredly.

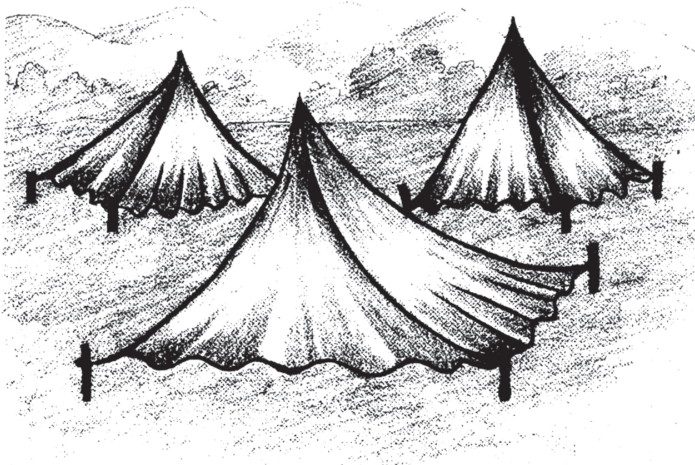
21. A moment in the Valley of Olive Mountain

Everywhere 'Hosana' was heard. In the Valley of Olive Mountain thousands had gathered to proclaim, loudly, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mat 21/9). St Chavara also stood there watching the scenes and said as if in a soliloquy, "Lord, may this servant also join them and sing 'Hosana.' " When he put his steps forward someone stretched a branch of the olive tree

enthusiastically. He joined the little children. The tender branches of olive went on dancing in his hands when he said 'Hosana.' When he entered the city of Jerusalem the people were troubled and asked, "who is he?" For the inhabitants of Jerusalem this was a serious question. But the people were concerned with the question: "What was Jesus?" He was the source of charity. What they whispered between the shouts of 'Hosana' was about the merciful deeds of Christ.



The Blessed must have stood in the Valley of Olive a thousand times to sing 'Hosana' to Jesus. Because of this experience he was more concerned about the Christian search to know what Christ was rather than 'Who he was.' He could, therefore, imbibe this fact. This root cause of all his charitable deeds was nothing other than this conviction.



22. The tents for us to stay

*W*hen we try to dive deep down into St Chavara's charism we find that the usages 'to sit', 'to walk' and 'to converse' mean much more than the usual ones. 'To stay' means 'to live.' In the Old Testament staying was comfortable and restful. There was hospitality and celebration in this staying. There were no worries, tensions and anxieties in it. We find that the staying that St Chavara refers to is also peaceful, joyful and happy. In the Bible it is said that God rested on the seventh day keeping himself away from all activities (Gen. 2/24), after the creation of the whole universe. God saw his image in all his creation and enjoyed it by listening and watching carefully. In other words, his resting was a celebration of his creation. The

Israelites who obtained the promised land made a house to stay with God. In the New Testament we see Jesus who resides in the house of God the Father. When the word became flesh and came on earth to live with us he had to go through the pain of rejection. This sorrowful experience has found expression in St Chavara's compunction of the Soul.

23. Letters and food



Even when there were schools, benches and teachers provided with the public assistance, there weren't enough students.

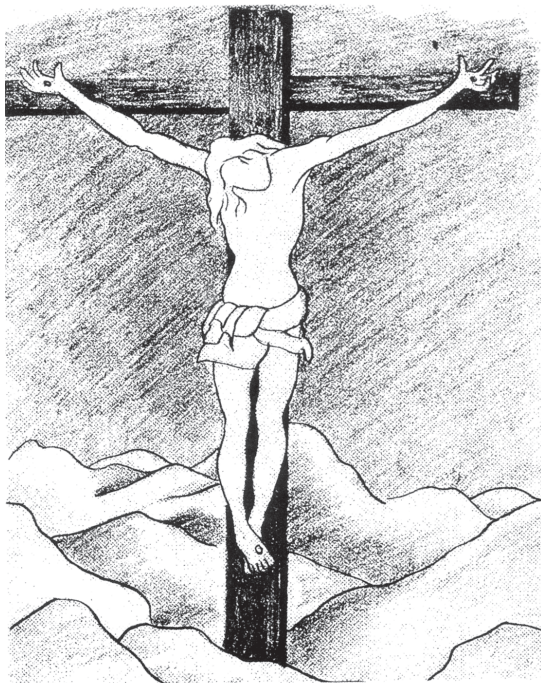
The poor parents wanted their children to work in farms and plots of land in order to earn their livelihood. People took years to understand St Chavara's deep faith that those little children of the poor also were the Children of God. With the help of the people St Chavara started a project in order to solve the problem of these schools. He made arrangements to draw the attention of poor children by providing food (kanji) at noon. Today this is a large project, carried out by all state Governments of India, spending crores of rupees. This charitable deed, giving food along with the letters of learning, was invented by the great humanist, St Chavara. All the children who attended the school were given food, which was required to fill their stomach. It was this sumptuous food that drew the children to schools. This noon meal declaration gave rise to many financial problems.

24. To be filled and to fill



*J*esus liked the lap of his Mother more than any other place in this place in this world. He considered the lap of

his Mother as the visible lap of his heavenly Father. Jesus was born and brought up on this lap (Compunction of the soul 2/231). Jesus had his short sleep also on her lap. It was on the same lap that the body of Christ was placed after his death on the Cross. It was Mary's lap that gave him the greatest degree of comfort, happiness and fulfilment. Saint Chavara asked God to make his heart like the holy lap of Mary. His greatest desire was to feel his presence always and so he prayed, "Oh Lord, please don't leave us until we become one with you" (Letters VII/6). He wanted to share his experience of bearing Jesus who played and enjoyed on the lap of his Mother with his fellowmen. He became a man of God who was filled with God and was able to share his God and grace with others. We must have the same charism, that is, to be filled with God's grace in order to fill others with the same.



25. God-Realization

St Chavara considered prayer as Mount Calvary and it was also the wedding canopy and the bridal chamber of glory. He who wished to have God-realization had a deep and sweet experience of it in the holy moments of prayer. He prayed, "When you go to the bridal canopy of Calvary I'll also follow you. You must add me among your brides." He begged God to give him the grace to follow Jesus when he entered the bridal chamber, the Cross. The bridegroom went to the bridal chamber wearing silk clothes,

garments, bangles and gold ornaments which had precious stones in them. When Jesus was going like any other bride St Chavara asked Him to take him also with Him (Colloquies with the Heavenly Father). The soul, that becomes one with God in prayer, is not satisfied unless she is able to suffer and carry the cross as Christ did. She longs to have union with the suffering Christ. Prayer must lead us also to the same God-experience.

26. The Sound of Silence



*D*ay speaks to day always. Night imparts knowledge to night (Ps. 19/2). The words coming from the sound of silence will not be exhausted. This gift of speech is given

to all who live in God's love, sit before Him and walk with Him. When our hearts are filled with His holy love we can also converse with God always. Here meditation becomes an experience. Meditation is conversing with God. It is sitting close to Him and talking to Him (Dyanasallapam p.140). If we love we will have matter to talk about. No one has to teach us to talk like this, says St Chavara. This is the quietness we experience in union and it is beyond words. Our mind must get lost in this quietness. St Chavara lovingly invites us to find self-realization in this mystical union.

27. Abba, Father!

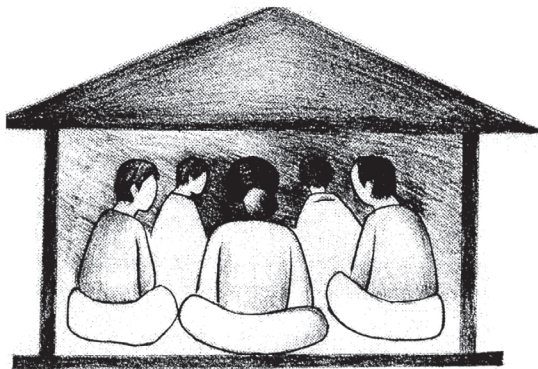
Saint Teresa of Little Flower could think of herself as a playball of Child Jesus and a little baby sitting in the arms of God, the Father. Saint Chavara, who had left this world two years before her birth, had a spiritual realization of his own. His deep relationship with God, the Father is highlighted in his 'Compunction of the Soul' and Dyanasallapam. The prodigal son of his compunction of the Soul is totally different from the description given by the Bible scholars. St Chavara sees his Heavenly Father in the father of the prodigal son, meditates on Him and portrays Him with all His virtues (goodness). He says that God who forgives all his sins is his Father and he is His



son. This is his Abba experience. This is very much visible in his 'Compunction of the Soul' which was written after thinking and meditating a lot. His Abba experience was a mystical experience. This goes beyond father-son relationship and becomes the everlasting filial love of the Heavenly father who loves the son unconditionally.

28. The joy of a family when the members get together

The core of Saint Chavara's vision is the family. His reflections on families were unique. He saw God as the Father and the rest of the family as His little children. This experience makes him call us "born with" (kudepirannavar). His heart could hold the whole world in it because he considered the world as a joint-family. He did not differentiate between the enemy and the friend. Differences in castes and religions did not have any significance in his family. His family vision included not only the family of humans but also the families of heaven, plants, birds, the sky, animals, minerals etc. In other words, the whole universe was conceived as a single family. He believed that if one of the rings or links was broken the relationship of the whole family would become shattered. It is in this moment of reflection that his concept of family gets mixed with that of nature and environment.



29. The Character of childhood is upto the crematorium

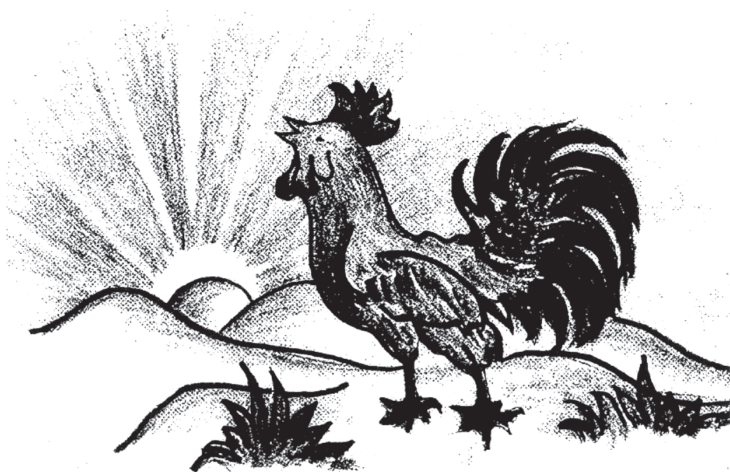
There is no doubt regarding the influence of a person's childhood on his life in general. Affection of the family and its model roles will influence us throughout our lives. Saint Chavara's parents were very much concerned about his good upbringing. When he was a child his loving mother offered him as a devotee to the Mother of God in the Church of Vechoor. He has made a reference to this event in his poem

'Compunction of the Soul' (I, p. 53-54). He says that he could then sit at the feet of Mary and know God. His mother was very earnest in teaching him to pray. Along with the nectar of love she gave him training to pray. When he was able to lisp she taught him to recite the sweet names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This training



influenced Saint Chavara till the end of his life. From that day onwards till the end of his life, he made the Holy Family stay in his heart and mind with due respect. He felt that the role played by his mother in making him grow up as a man of prayer was very significant and therefore, it was indescribable.

30. Repentance that destroys selfishness



Though the Israelites were unfaithful God showered his mercies on them (Hosea 11/1-9). It is not on the basis of the sanctity of the human soul that God showers His mercy on him. God showered his mercy even on Jacob who was deceitful and clever (Gen. 32/10). The mercy of God is the love that chases humans. Jesus is the fullness

of God's mercy. Jesus himself becomes the name Mercy (1 Jn. 16/7). Throughout the poem 'Compunction of the Soul' we see how Saint Chavara who remembers the mercies of God one by one stands before the mercy of God and Jesus Christ with a bowed head. He addresses God as Mercy, the Compassionate and the Sea of Mercy. He renounces his name to be one with God's name. God expects this kind of repentance from us because it destroys our selfishness and pride.

31. The Family of Holy Trinity

*I*n the Holy Trinity there are three persons viz. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are love in themselves. The unity and oneness of a family that has different members is visible in the Holy Trinity. Theologians name it as mystery of the Trinity. The mutual acceptance, giving and sharing of families are found always in the Trinity. Perfect unity, other centredness, everlasting peace, inner harmony, joy and welfare are the visible features of the Trinity. Saint Chavara experienced the Trinitarian love in his earthly holy family. The coming and living together of Palackal Thoma Malpan, Porukkara Thoma Malpan and Fr Chavara Kuriakose Elias was a period of blessed days to the Church of Kerala. It was like the union of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This experience of their

sharing, co-operation and love on earth was just like that of the Trinity in Heaven. We can be very much proud of the fact that the Carmelite Congregation was founded by the combined efforts of these three men of God, who were God-centered, other-centered and ready to accept corrections and suggestions. Since they made the Spirit of the Holy Trinity flow in our soil endlessly the Church of Kerala received many gifts of the Trinity through them.

32. Obedience: The Stone of Sacrifice

Saint Chavara has given the name 'cholvili' to obedience. Through our obedience we must allow the Holy Family execute its power. This word 'cholvili' is a product of his family-vision. It is a call mentioning name of the person. The father calls his children, by name. When the father calls, his children turn to him. When children say 'yes' to their father's call, 'cholvili' (obedience) becomes perfect. When the father calls his children they know his desire or will. Blessed Chavara believed strongly that each call of the Father's aimed at forming his children according to His will. Therefore, he sacrificed his life on the sacrificial stone of obedience by renouncing all his personal desires and likes.

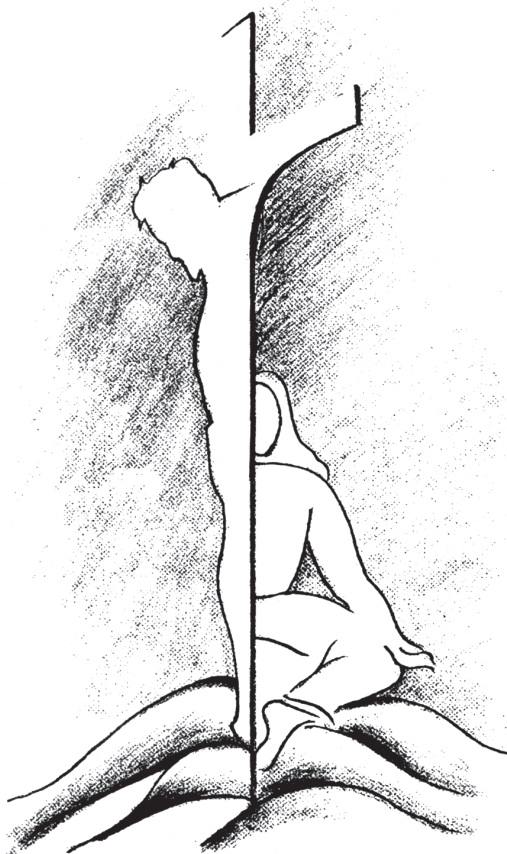
33. The Last Sunrise: the Rise of All

*T*he highcastes dominated the society of that time. They did not allow the low castes to walk in the path they walked. The low castes were considered as untouchables, sinful and dirty to look at. This attitude, Saint Chavara thought, was not at all Christian. He believed that all people, irrespective of their caste, learning and riches were equals and children of the same Heavenly Father (Ps. 33/5-6; Pro 18/5-6; Heb 4/16). This was his Dalit philosophy. This philosophy made him dream of the possibilities to lead the Dalit to the bright shore of learning.



The untouchables were not given admission even in the schools run by the Government. In that context giving education to those people was a revolutionary act. In order to have the realization of this desire he decided to start schools for the Dalits alone. It was really a difficult task to make his colleagues and others convinced of this necessity. Facing all the oppositions he made two schools for them, one at Mannanam and the other at Arppookkara. They were not big schools. The foundations of these sheds were made by the public. The walls were of bamboo sheets and the roof with palm leaves. What promises the Government of India and the expert rulers made for the upliftment of the Dalits according to India's Constitution (after 1947) were anticipated by Saint Chavara in the middle of the nineteen eighties and his plans were materialized at Mannanam and Arppookkara, two small villages of the small state, Kerala.

34. God-Realization



*I*n the Holy Bible mountains are pictured as places of solitude and holiness. Because, that was the faith of the people. God appeared and spoke to Moses and Elijah revealing himself on mountains. The prophets prayed and

rested on mountain peaks (Exod 17/10, 1 Kings 18/42, 2 Kings 1/9). Mount Hermon praised God joyfully (Ps. 89/19). Evangelists of the synoptic Gospels have stated that Jesus went up the mountains to experience His Father's presence in a deeper way and to converse with Him. Saint Chavara considered Mount Zion as his Father's House where he could become one with his Heavenly Father.

Zion was the holy place obtained by God after establishing a relationship with the Israelites through the covenant he made with them. He expressed his strong desire to become a member of God's family by sitting in his prayer room, which he considered as mount Zion. When God appeared on Mount Zion with all his glory the Israelites got frightened and remained in the valley without going up. When we go through the first stage of our encounter with the father and stand before his wonderful presence we also will be frightened and anxious like the Israelites. Saint Chavara was fully aware of God's holiness and his own sinfulness. He spent hours in his prayer room, Mount Zion, to fill up the gap or differences between them.

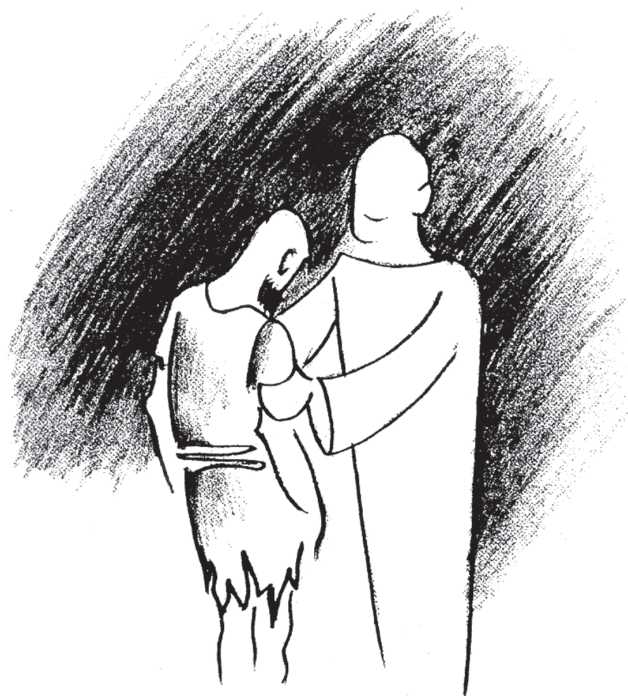
35. Owning a Name



*T*he Naming Ceremony is a very significant function. Usually names of grandparents are given to their grandchildren in order to retain these names in future years. The idea of making them lasting underlies this practice. So when Elizabeth wanted her son born of Elizabeth and Zachariah, to be named as John, the relatives were surprised. All the names mentioned in the Bible are meaningful. There is a close relationship between the

name and the personality of the person concerned. They lived according to their names. The names Yahweh, Moses, Jesus, Joseph and Mary are a few names to list. In the 'Book of Ruth' there is a character, named Ruth. The meaning of her name is the blessed (Prasada), but she had to suffer a lot in Moab before she returned to Bethlehem. Those who saw her started asking whether she was Naomi. Then Naomi replied, "Don't call me Naomi because I'm Mara now." The meaning of 'Mara' is sorrow (Ruth 1/19). God's plans and projects lie hidden in names. This is what Naomi, in the 'Book of Ruth,' makes us understand. Saint Chavara tried to live the name Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family, which he had chosen for himself. The Son glorified His Father's name on earth. Mary and Joseph saw their existence in the Father. Saint Chavara believed and experienced the Holy Family on earth as a continuation of the Trinity. He desired to glorify the name of God by receiving the name of the Holy Family. Through his short life he wanted to make all feel God's presence in the world. God is now pleased to make His name glorified through the person of Blessed Chavara Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. Like him we must associate our names with that of God, to live in His name and to make it realized.

36. Turning and turning back

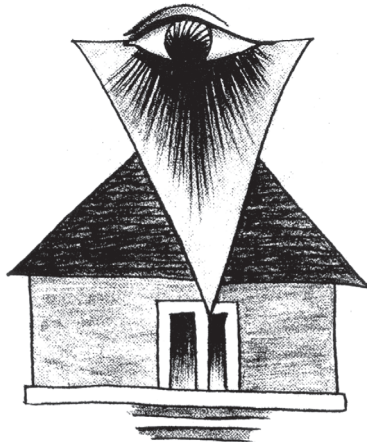


*T*he story of creation is the history of the Father's turning to the world. Through the creation, thus, the Triune God turned to human beings. Along with man the whole creation turned to Him. This is the sum and substance of the Paradise (Gen 2/15, 18/23). Later we find that man who was completely God-centered turned away from Him. Without God he turned to himself. Turning to others,

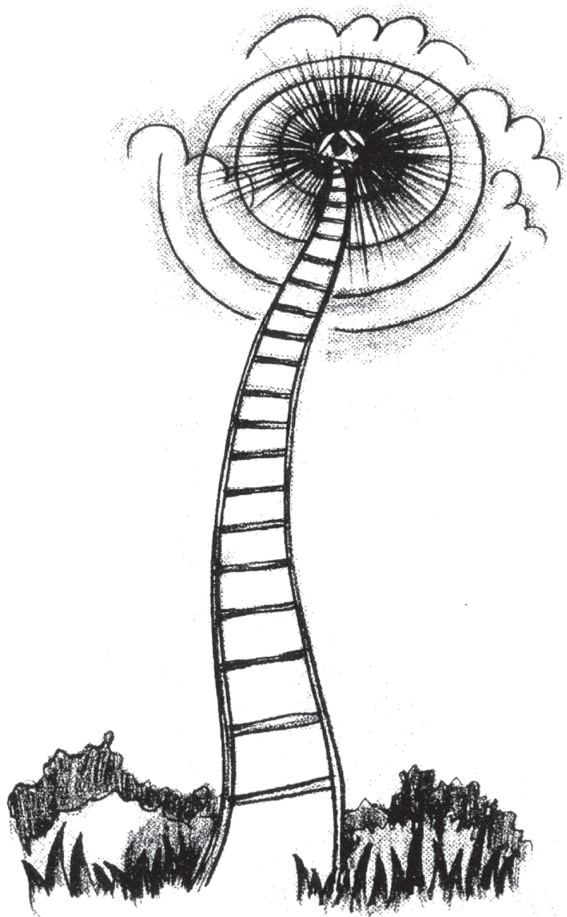
turning to the creation, is the turning back or sin (Gen 3/5-6). Man felt that when he turned away from God, God turned away from him. When he lost God's presence he felt that he was in hell. On the other hand when he felt God's presence his life was heavenly. It is the story of man's turning to God and turning his back to God we read in the Bible. When God called Abraham, he turned to God. Never in his life did he turn his back to God. But for his children, the Israelites turning to God and turning their back to God were their common characteristics. The Holy Family could experience God's saving grace in the history of salvation. This family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph always turned to God. Saint Chavara dreamt of a people that turned their face to the Holy Family and from there to God.

37. The House of Vision: The Ideal House

Saint Chavara was a man of visions. He acquired this capacity by sitting and meditating in the presence of the Eucharist for hours. Only if one gets God-realization can he live that experience. Vision is a gift given to prophets. They see the future plans of God and make the people aware of them. Those who have visions can see as God does. Saint Chavara who had experienced the God of visions was a seer and a prophet. He had definite and clear perceptions regarding himself, others, the Church and the society. Therefore visualizing the future generations he made religious houses of vision (Dharshana Bhavans). He wanted all the inmates of those to have visions for the benefit of the people.



38. The Ladder of Dreams



Saint Chavara found the ladder of Jacob's dreams very attractive and interesting. The ladder which was fixed

on earth had its extreme top end touching the sky. He saw the angels of God going up and down the ladder. Saint Chavara considered this ladder of dreams as Mother Mary. This ladder which was the connecting link between the earth and the sky was a symbol of Mother Mary the door through which the children of God entered Heaven. This idea is expressed in his '*Compunction of the Soul*' 12/177. Our Holy Mother who opened the door of Heaven for us, according to him is the blessed among women and the most merciful. The first Mother of the world, Eve, was deceived by the serpent. God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3/15). Through Mary this prophecy came true. Saint Chavara portrays Mother Mary as the dove of the *Song of Solomon* (2/14). His vision of the Church as "through Mary to Jesus" is visible throughout his '*Compunction of the Soul*'. Saint Chavara who was a devotee of Mary wanted to become a constant companion of her. Therefore he said, "If I get a share of your sufferings everything will be glorious, in my life" (*Compunction of the Soul* 7/161-164).

39. The Cry of the Canaanite Woman



The Canaanites were people of low status and mobility. They were worthy to be with the rich and the high class. The Canaanite woman was of a tribe that was

looked down upon by the Jews. But she was motherly and so she was ready to do anything in order to make her daughter healed. The woman who was humble and of strong faith pleaded again and again to Jesus. But Jesus who went on testing the minds of people kept silence. But the Cannanite woman could conquer His silence with her strong and changeless faith. She said, "Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (Matt 15/27). She knew the order of Jesus' service. So she took benefit from it. Jesus who was silent blessed her because of her constant request. Therefore, Christ said, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire! (Matt. 15/28). The Gospel passage which describes her strong faith inspired Saint Chavara very much. He meditated on this passage and tried to be like her. He wanted to be the dog which could eat the loaves of bread fallen from the dining table of Jesus and Mother Mary in order to become one with them. This is an evidence of the simplicity of his spirituality. Saint Chavara who made himself the poor of Yahweh is definitely the follower of the Divine Word.

40. The Holy Apparition

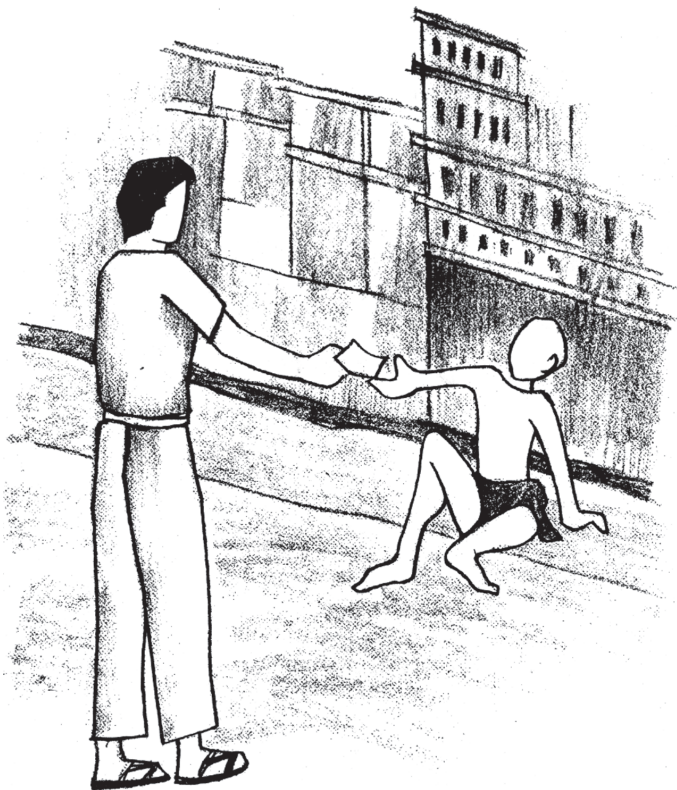


*W*hen Saint Alphonsa was a novice she fell sick again. She couldn't do anything without the help of others. So, she found it really difficult to complete her novitiate.

The superiors thought of sending her back to Bharananganam. But, for the first time, she desired to complete her novitiate if God wanted her to do it. Knowing her desire Mar James Kalassery, the Bishop of Changanassery, told the superiors that she should not be sent to Bharananganam and if it was time for her to die she must be allowed to die in the novitiate itself.

Then Fr Louis asked her to pray to Father Chavara. She prayed the novena alone as well as with others to Fr Chavara. On the ninth day her condition became worse. Rev Mother Ursula thought that she would die on that day itself. Therefore, she visited her at times. But, to her surprise she heard an unusual talking from Alphonsa's room. Hearing the noise Sr. Alphonsa's mistress ran to her and showed some jesters to know the reason for the noise making during the time of grand silence. Then Sr. Alphonsa said, "Mother, here is our Great Father Prior. May I implore his blessing because he has healed me." With no one's assistance she got up from her bed, went to the chapel and prayed thanking God. This apparition is recorded by Sr. Alphonsa in her own handwriting.

41. Whom shall I thank?



*H*elping others is a virtue while committing a sin is persecuting others. Therefore, charity is not keeping away from hurting others. In Saint Chavara's life this concept was very much followed. It was a life of actions done, expecting no reward at all. He was helpful to all. He neither made claims for them nor expected anything in return.

His mind was very generous in doing good even to his enemies. He had left spaces in his diary in order to fill them up with the names of benefactors whenever he remembered their forgotten names. He remembered God's blessing always with gratitude. He used to recollect God's graces everyday and so that he could become the benefactor and the well-wisher of all. There is no wonder in it.

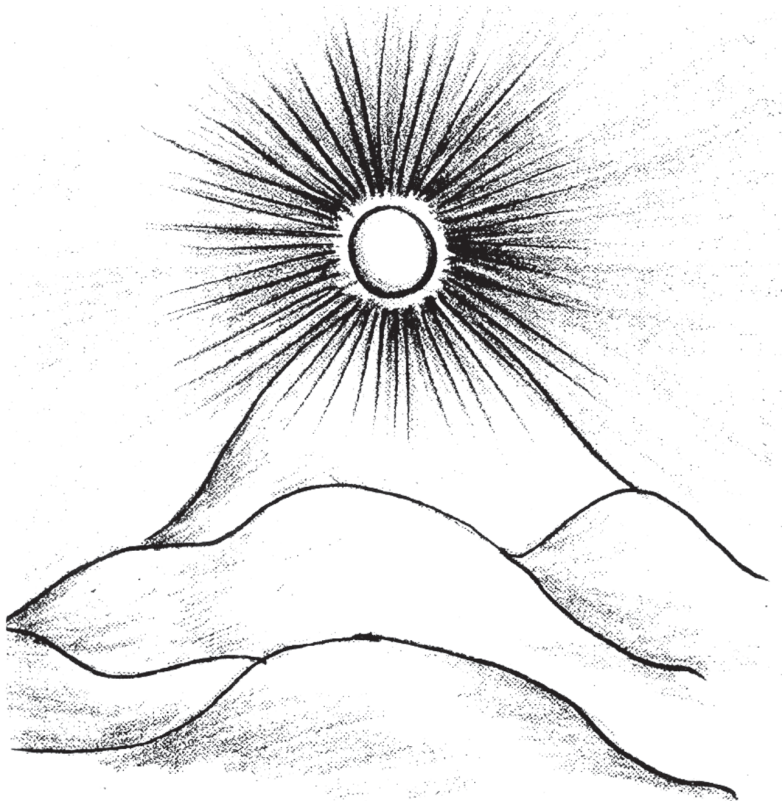
42. 'A meeting of Mercy and Justice'



The meeting of Mercy and Justice is a very painful process. Throughout the Bible we see the meeting of

justice which demands strictness and mercy, and which is an embodiment of compassion. It was just to punish Israel because she was not faithful. The moral uprightness of Israel turned against her. But finally we find how mercy won over anger. God said that he wouldn't manifest His anger by destroying Ephrem because he was not like the humans. We find the meeting of mercy and justice in Jesus Christ. In Jesus we can see a new meaning for mercy and it is nothing else but justice. His justice is in giving equal wages to the one who comes first and the other who comes last (Matt. 20/1-16). Justice becomes mercy here. Stoning and killing the sinful woman was moral justice. But when she was left free by Jesus, His justice was turned into mercy. We find similar experiences in the life of Saint Chavara. If, feeding the poor, especially of the low class, is a deed of mercy, making them, learn is part of justice. As in the life of Christ, Saint Chavara's life also was a meeting ground of mercy and justice.

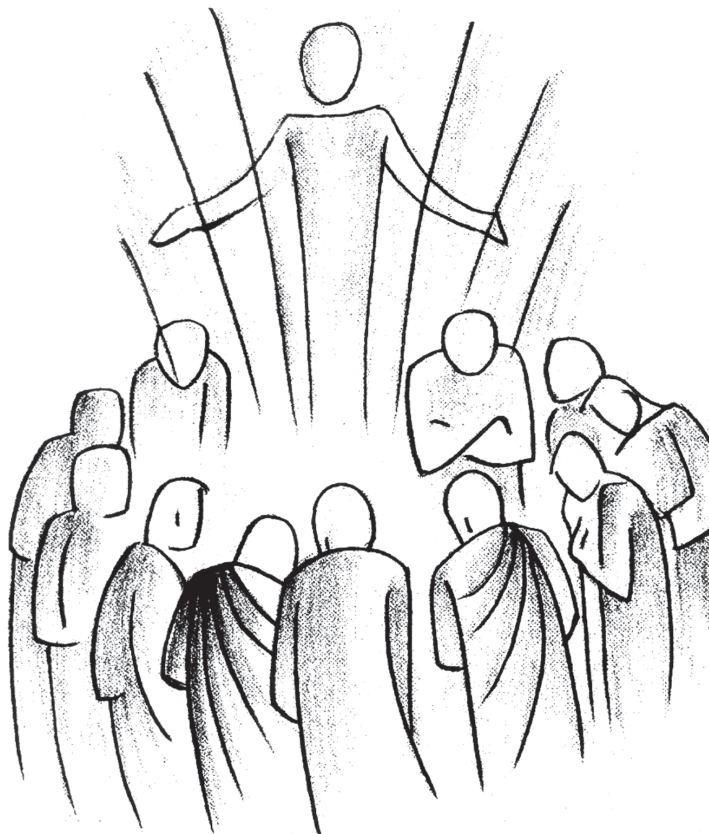
43. To be like God



*J*erusalem Temple is situated on Mount Zion. This is the reason for the fame of Mount Zion and Jerusalem Temple. Here is the eternal home of God's mercy. Saint

Chavara considered his prayer room as Mount Zion where God resided. He could experience the presence of the unconditional love of his Father there. Saint Chavara often compared Jesus to Mount Zion. "Here is the tent of God with humans" (Rev. 21/3). He lives with them and they will be His people. This was the experience he had in his prayer room. This is the experience of the human soul that becomes one with God and rests in him. In our prayer also there must be this union and living together. When God's glory was manifested on Mount Zion people were scared of going near. But what Saint Chavara saw on Mount Zion was Jesus, the mediator of getting the new covenant. He sang songs of gratitude and praises there always. This experience of getting lost in Jesus must be our experience too, especially when we pray and meditate.

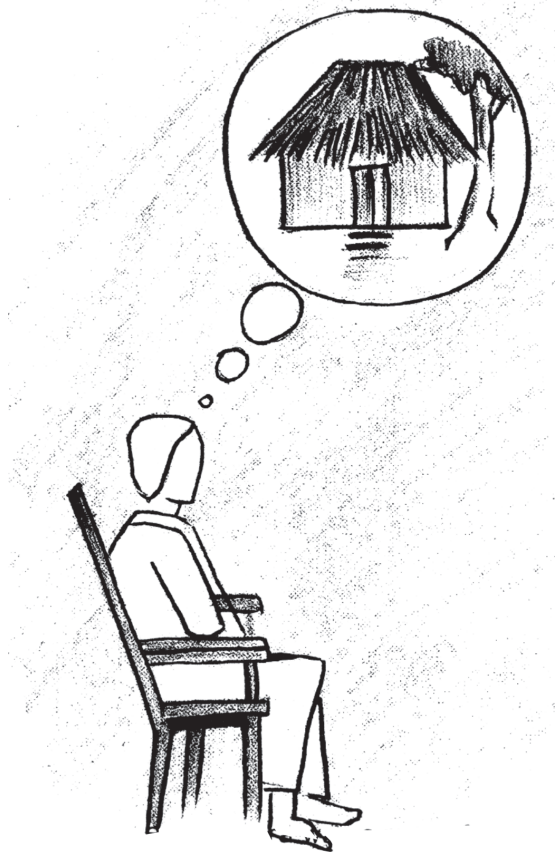
44. Moments of bliss



*I*n 'The Bible' there are many references to the word 'lap'. It is on the lap of Abraham that just experience their heavenly bliss. It is the resort of their life in Heaven. When

Lazar dies angels take him to the lap of Abraham and he enjoys being there. Prophet Nathan narrates the story of a poor man who had only one young goat. He loved it and made it grow up. It slept on his lap. He treated it as his daughter (2 Sam 12/14). Lap is the seat given to the dearest person. The baby always likes its mother's lap. "I made myself quiet like a baby that slept on its mother's lap" (PS 131/2). "He will place you on his lap and comfort you as a mother who fondles the baby on her lap" (Is 66/12-13). The word 'lap' indicates deep love-relationship and friendship. Jesus liked his Father's lap more than any other place. It was from this lap he came down to the earth. Saint Chavara always longed to be Jesus on the lap of His Father. Let us also have the blissful experience of being with Jesus on the lap of our heavenly Father.

45. A memory to be Cherished



Saint Chavara was a man of memories. He remembered the house where he was born and brought up. He remembered the need to think of the brethren of

the house of vision by all the members of it. He remembered that he had left out spaces in *The Chronicle* in order to fill them up with the names of the benefactors he had then forgotten. He took care to keep the matters of all, whether they were friends or enemies, in his memory. He asked his spiritual children to do the same in their lives. Now he asks us to lead a life of memories.

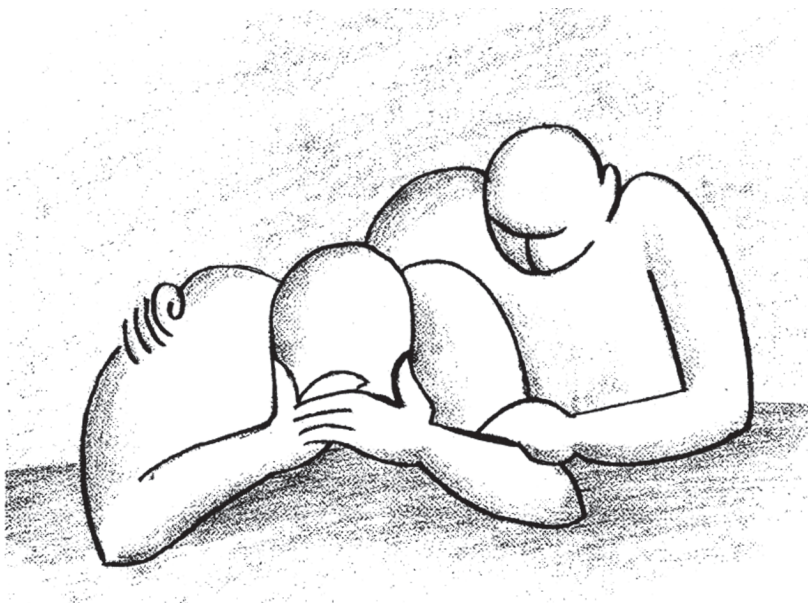
46. Wear Royal dresses and Ornaments



*T*he city of Jerusalem rejected and looked down upon Jesus. The people of Jerusalem asked, "Who is he?", when He made His royal entry. According to Jesus

she is the one who throws stones at prophets and kills them. "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate." He said, "You will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23/38-39). Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem which made him cry. He told his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Matt 24/2). Saint Chavara sees Christ who cries in front of the elegant Jerusalem Temple. He describes it in his *Dyanasallapam* 42. He prayed that Christ who wept looking at Jerusalem Temple must not have a chance to weep looking at his heart. Therefore, he said, "Take off all decorations and ornaments from your houses and decorate my heart, the poor house." Saint Chavara regrets at the lack of interest and preparation the people of Jerusalem showed while receiving Jesus. At the same time he prays that it should not happen in his life. By "decorations" and "ornaments" he means the purity or sanctity of the heart and not the transitory fame and elegance. He asks himself "What he will do if these decorations of sanctity are not found in his heart. Will Jesus who wept looking at Jerusalem cry again looking at him?" He had this thought always.

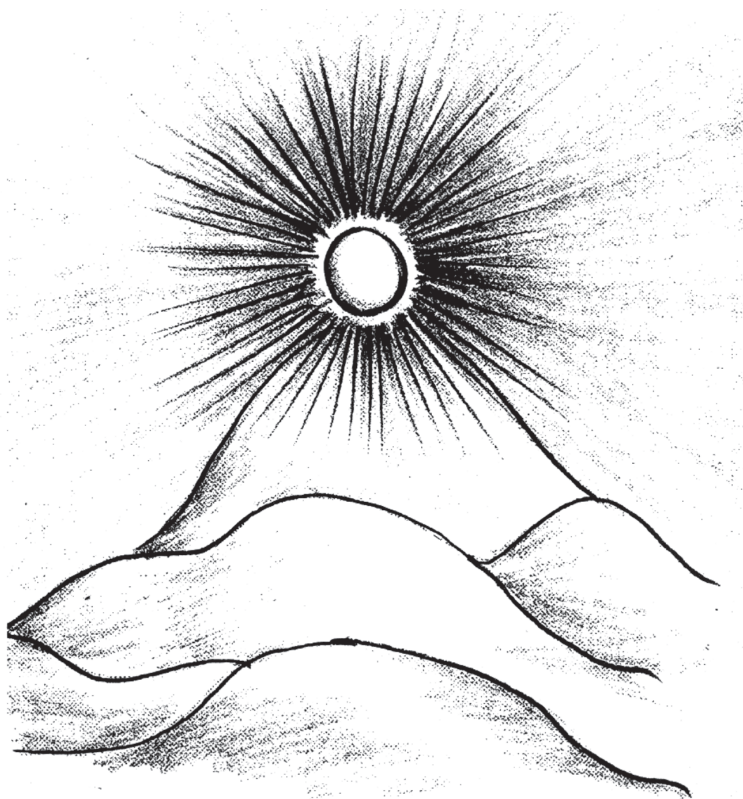
47. When mercy overflows



*T*hose who received Jesus must fill themselves up with His mercy and shower this mercy on others. Only then will our life be a proclamation of His mercy. "And His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation" (Lk 1/50).

Saint Chavara received the mercy of Christ abundantly and became his mercy itself. That was his remarkable personality. He made this mercy overflow in his apostolic activities. He worked hard to engulf the whole Catholic Church and the Church of Kerala with His mercy by sacrificing his comfort, health conveniences, status and position. In order to build the charity home he took the initiative and approached the people of his area for alms. He started schools on church compounds to educate the children of the low caste. He also started different spiritual renewal programmes to make the people closer to God. His sermons, forty-hour adoration, reformed liturgical services etc, were also aimed at the same. Let us pray for God's grace so that we may realize God's abundant mercy that engulfs us every day and to share it with others as Saint Chavara did in his life.

48. God's will be done and His will be executed

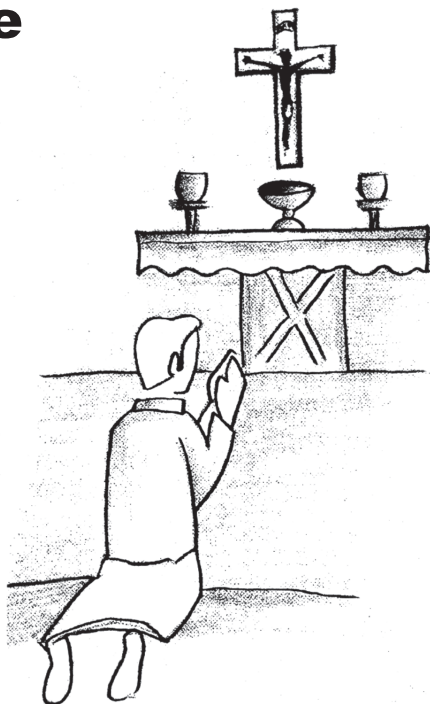


Saint Chavara has made his own interpretation of the Wedding Feast. It is really original and appealing to the mind. He asked, "Why was the beggar who came and sat at the dinner table without the wedding garment thrown

to darkness after tying his hands and legs together? "Did he after all have a wedding dress? Had he previously thought of it? Had he told the Master that he did not possess the wedding clothes? If he had told, the master would have shown the willingness to give it, wouldn't he? This is enough. Nothing bothers me. Who knows?" These thoughts led him to the pitch of darkness. Even though Saint Chavara describes himself as the beggar without his wedding garments he asks and receives the blessings of the dress from God before he enters the hall. He said, "God who led you upto now will give you the grace." He is aware of the fact that he hasn't got the wedding dress. But at the same time he has the presence of mind to get it from the one who called him.

Thus, it was his willpower that made him a great believer of God's divine will.

49. Towards the everlasting life



*A*ccording to Saint Chavara inaction is not the life-style of good and honorable people. On the other hand it is the life-style of the people who have no homes and children (*Testament 14*). Those who try to escape from hard work are the lazy people who have no goals in life. One who labours hard makes his life meaningful. This

philosophy of his life is derived from his meditations and reflections on '*The Bible*.' Hard work is like the elixir of life. The sweat of hard work is a leap into the prosperity of humanity. If God wants His children to rest on the Sabbath Day, He wants to see His children working very hard on the remaining six days of the week. Through labour the Creator makes us partake in His creative work. The greatness of a hard worker is appreciated by man as well. There was a man who was able to lead a happy life with a plot of land that he possessed. Those who were jealous of him thought that he had hidden a treasure in his land and so filed a case against him in the court of their king. The king then ordered him to submit the account of his income. The poor farmer met the king and told him that he had only a small plot of land which he had changed into gold with the sweat of his hard work. After that with a sense of self respect he returned home (*Testament 14*). This story indicates that God as well as man respects and accepts the one who makes his livelihood with his sweat. Saint Chavara who glorifies hard work advises the lazy. He says that laziness is the mother of all evils. It is also one of the causes of alcoholism and alcoholism is very harmful in the eyes of the world. The merciful glances of Jesus who made his victory over death and entered into the eternal life is on those who labour hard. "Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11/28). This view of Saint Chavara is very much enlightening in today's world of hard work.

50. Why should we become avaricious



*T*here is a Biblical passage that disturbs the mind of anyone who comes to a church for adoration. This passage consists of sentences 21 to 26 in "St. Mathew's

Gospel." This passage throws light on the desired nature of any believer who comes to worship God. He should not be profit-minded and he should not encourage others to look for profit. Jesus puts forward this as a necessary condition to make our prayers fruitful (Matt 2/23). If we are profit-minded how can we pray sincerely and give peace to others? It is this tangle of selfishness and materialism that weakens the strength of our prayers. The praying community has the responsibility of bringing reconciliation and putting an end to selfish transactions. Only such communities are worthy to worship God, says Jesus (Matt 5/25). Otherwise they will be locked up in the prison of their profit dream and will have to meet loss of money, says Saint Chavara in his *Testament 2*. He adds that if our small groups of the faithful have to remain in love we must always take efforts to find out solutions for the problems they face. Saint Chavara was aware of the inefficiency of the courts in bringing the people together and the efficiency of these courts in keeping the hearts of these broken communities divided always. Therefore, he says that the family quarrels of the court destroy families (*Testament 2*). These remarks must break the hearts of the new generation. It will be a helpful legal service to us. Let us dream of a generation that is devoid of materialism and avariciousness.

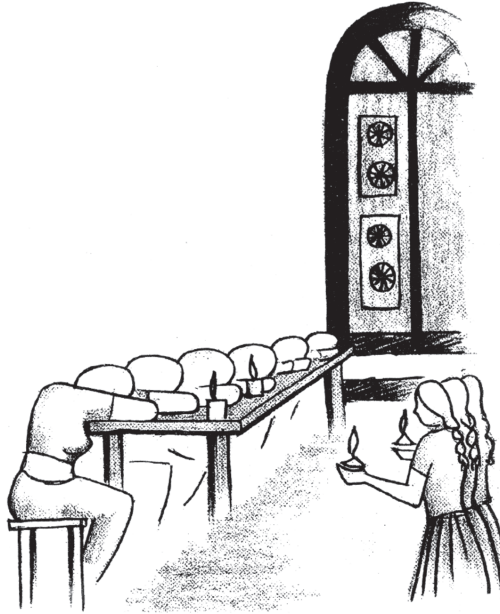
51. Like a Psalm



*T*he Psalmist praises God who created birds of the sky, fish of the sea, and made man as their master. The sky proclaims the glory of God and the horizon his handicrafts (Ps 19/1). He could have God-realization through the soft and melodious heartbeats of nature. If we come to know God the creator through our association

with the creation we must adore God as the Creator, fixing our eyes on all creatures. This is the sum and substance of *Psalm 104*. "*Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honour and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment, who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent*" (PS 104/1-2). India the country of sages, achieves God-realization through nature. The world famous poet Tagore's flute in '*The Gitanjali*' is a very good example of it. If we have to see God who comes like the rain drops on the grass and the dew drops on earth we must approach Him through nature that overflows with humility and tenderness. Only nature in which God's beauty is manifested can make the glory of god everlasting, says the Psalmist (Ps 8/1) who realized the presence of God in the heart of nature. Like the Psalmist, Saint Chavara also makes an earnest and energetic attempt to reach God through nature. This is very much evident in his '*Letters*.' He advises us to direct the movements of our nerves, winking of the eyes, breathing as well as the chirping of birds to God as our prayers ('*Letters*' 110). The Psalmist's precept through the creation to the Creator is very much expressed in Saint Chavara's words.

52. To Enter the Bridal Chamber

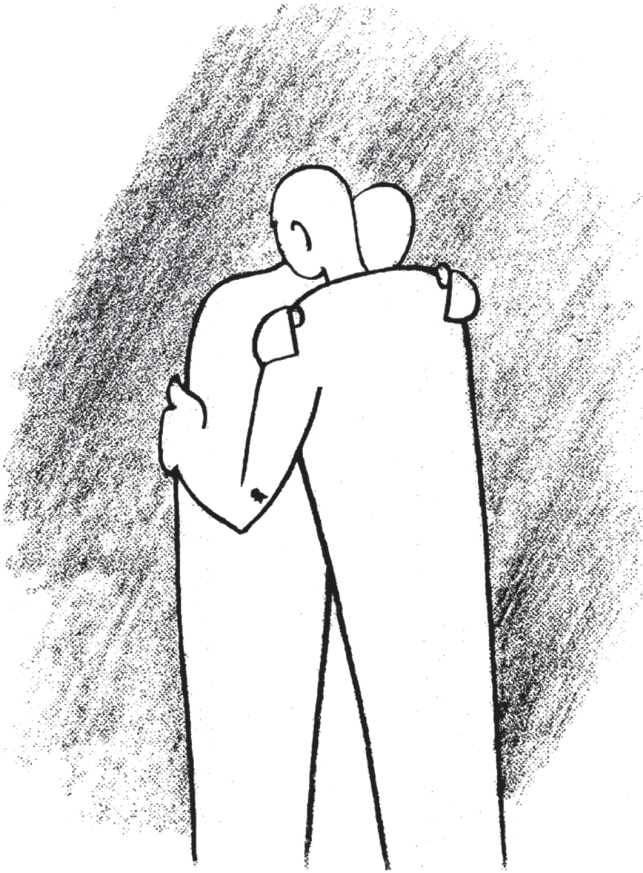


*W*edding was considered as one of the grand celebrations in the villages of Palestine. Maids of the bride would wait for the arrival of the bridegroom. It was the responsibility of these maids to receive the bridegroom and to accompany him to the bride. Then they would take the bridal chamber. Maids used to carry lamps in the wedding processions as a decoration. There used to be no specific information regarding the time of the bridegroom's arrival. When he was late the maids slept. In the midnight they heard the noise of the crowd who awaited the bridegroom's arrival because he had reached

there. There was rejoicing everywhere as everyone was in a hurry to receive him. The maids then woke up from their sleep and took the lamps in their hands. The lamps of five maids were flickering as there was no oil in them. Those five maids who were not prudent enough to keep oil in store approached the wise maids to borrow some oil for their lamps. They refused to give and said that they could go to the sellers and collect it because if they shared it wouldn't be enough for them as well as the other five. When they had gone out to buy oil the bridegroom came and he was escorted by the wise virgins who had lamps with them. They entered the hall for the wedding feast (meal). When the foolish virgins arrived they were pushed out. In the creation, liberation and redemption there is separation of the good from the evil, the humble from the wicked and the wise from the foolish. Saint Chavara's poem of goodness, '*The Martyrdom of Anasthasia*,' is a small copy of this differentiation or separation."

Her bridegroom was great. He was not like the bridegrooms of the world. Her *bhajana* or worship was done looking at the beautiful and happy face of her bridegroom that was inscribed in her own heart. To be like her bridegroom she went on practising virtues. Like her great and affectionate husband she became great. She was wise and she stored the oil of love in her heart so that her lamp of life wouldn't fade out. Therefore, she was among the five virgins who entered the bridal chamber with the bridegroom.

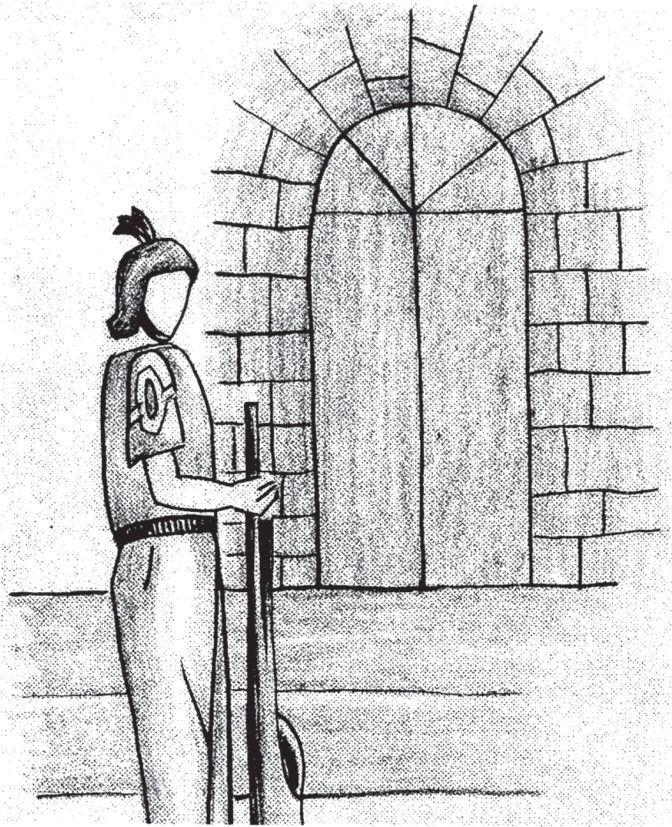
53. The Depth of Reconciliation



*M*ercy is better than sacrifice. When brothers cannot love each other how can they love God and make an offertory to him? Therefore, before they offer mass they must be reconciled with their brother (Mt 5/24-26).

The heart must be free of hatred. The hymn of repentance that we sing before the Holy Communion is a petition to make our mind and soul holy. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples before he instituted the Eucharist. Judas who betrayed Christ also was among them. He did it in order to have reconciliation with him. He was the great prophet who lived what He taught. It is man's dharma or duty to be reconciled to his enemy. In other words, reconciliation is the watchword of Christians. Saint Chavara knew the deep sense of this word. His last words to the people of his village indicate this point. He narrates a story to highlight the need for mutual love in the members of a family. To throw light on this point he tells the story of the old woman who destroyed the peace of her family. One day the devil appeared to her and presented a bag of gold and said, "You could do in three days what I could not do in three years. So, you're worthy to be my councillor." Then he took her to hell. Even though this story was Saint Chavara's own composition it is very much meaningful. He who understood the deep meaning of reconciliation was a synonym of oneness and of peace. So, he could bring the members of the Church of his days together.

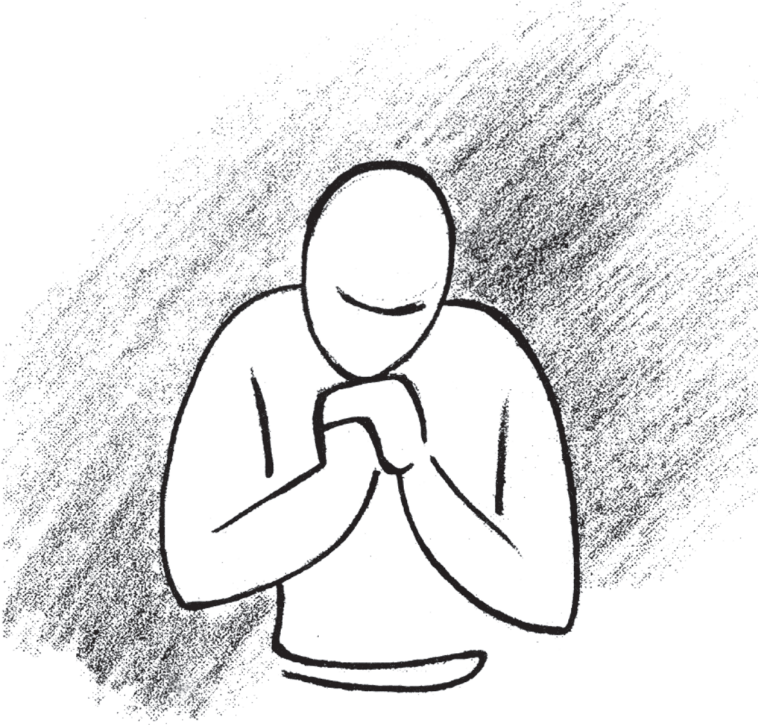
54. Upasana



*T*here were many watchmen in Israel who were very much awake in the night to safeguard their country from the unalarmed attack of their enemies. Only with the sunrise they could go to sleep. Till then they had to be very alert. Otherwise the enemies would conquer their country. When they spent sleepless nights the dawn

seemed to be dragging. When they saw the sunrise there was no limit for their joy and satisfaction. As these watchers looked forward to the sunrise, King David longed to see God. "My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning," says David in Ps. 130/6. When he was in the desert of Judaea as a stranger he wrote the following lines with grief. "O God thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is" (Ps 63/1). He who could realize that human life was transient like a shadow (Ps 39/6), tender grass (Ps 62/9) and smoke (Ps 62/9) wanted to take refuge in God. He asked, "How can you say to me, Flee like a bird to the mountain" (Ps 11/1). He was thirsting for God's everlasting and limitless love as a deer longed for water (Ps 42/1). He could see the hand of God in the sky, the land of the dead (Ps 139/86), and even in the boundary of the sea. In these verses we find the Poet Psalmist who wanted to be one with God, the eternal lover. In Saint Chavara also we find one who sought and experienced the spiritual love step by step. Saint Chavara wanted to sit with the Lord and very much close to him. We can become his devotees only through real devotion.

55. Love is bowing of your head with respect



*T*he Sanskrit word 'namaskar' means 'not me' but 'thou' and 'you' 'I have come to do thy will, O God' (Heb 10/9). 'Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me' (Jn. 14/11). In this sense Jesus made his life a 'namaskar' in front of God and man. Here we are able to

see the picture of Jesus who stands with folded hands and a bowed head, showing his readiness to do the will of God before God as well as man. We make the response 'Yes' when we are faithful to God, man, our activities and prayer life. It is then that the folding of hands becomes a reality. "And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed" (Mk 1/35). "And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray" (Mk 6/46). "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray and all night he continued in prayer to God" (Lk 6/11). Living in the Divine presence He came down to the needs and problems of human beings as patience, forgiveness, mercy and compassion. The folded hands symbolised Jesus who gave full freedom to His heavenly Father to do whatever He wanted with His Son. When we stand with folded hands we are telling, "I'm yours and not mine." Saint Chavara prayed throughout his life. He spent many hours a day, in front of the Blessed Sacrament, praying and meditating. In those moments of prayer, when his selfishness and ego melted and disappeared, the Lord showed him the mysterious ways He had chosen for His people. Therefore, we can say that Saint Chavara, the man of prayer and action, was just like the folded hands before God and man.

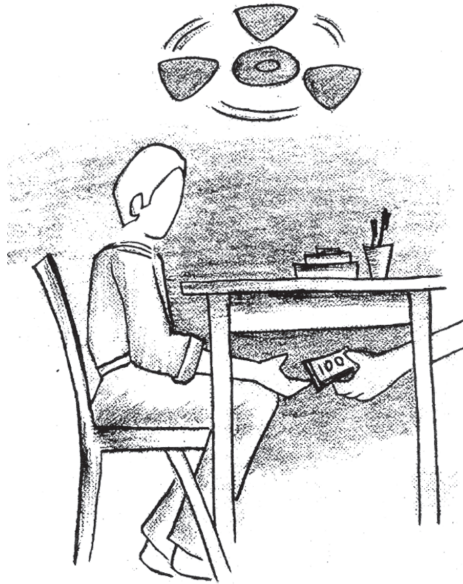
56. **Forgive me oh Bad Stories!**



*I*t is always dangerous to keep fire in a haystack. If we do that, it will flicker, burn and destroy the whole thing. Good books are like good friends. If you tell me the title of the book which you are reading I can say what and who

you are. This type of reflections are made by the philosophers of this age. Today, when we live among the heaps of wasted papers and printed matters we cannot forget the efforts he took to make a printing press in the middle of the 19th century, a time when there were only a few presses in the country. The world today is a world of publications. It is a world of cheap and vulgar story books and magazines. We have come to know from news papers, radio and T.V. about the harmful impact the yellow magazines have on the youth. They have stirred them. Their blind admiration or emotional attraction to the heroes and heroines of these stories has led them even to the railway tracks, to commit suicide. These events are evergreen in the memories of all Malyalees. With the purpose of overcoming these bad influences of the book on people, Saint Chavara dreamt of making a printing press and publishing a few books. The press, which he insepcted at Mannanam, was the cradle of different changes that took place in the country. This press which was made of wood attracts the whole world even today by contributing good friends like *Jnanapiyusam* and others to the society. His reflections on the collection of books are mentioned in his *Testament*. He says that we must go on collecting or buying good books because they are the valuable treasures of true devotion and philosophy which we can store for our children.

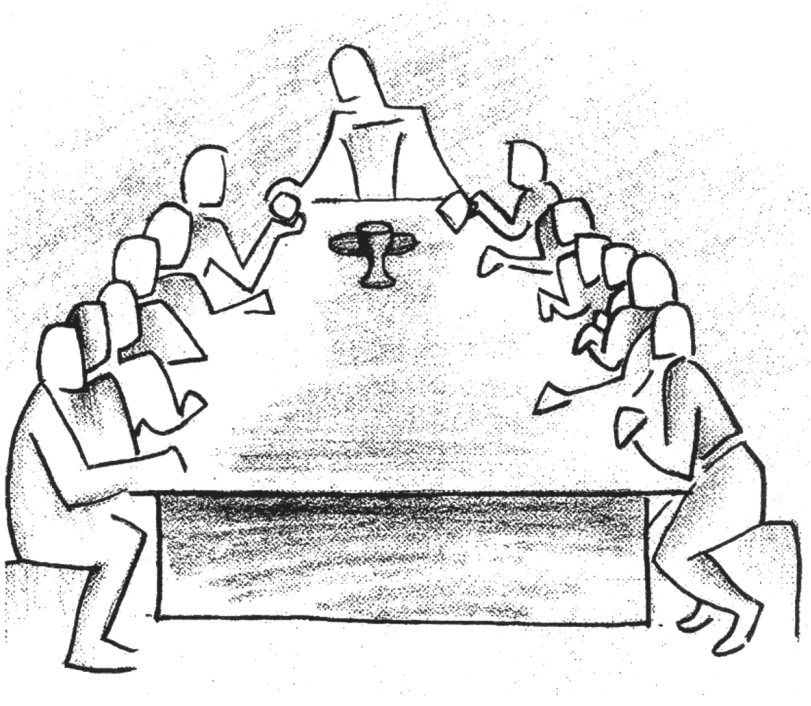
57. The stolen things will be turned into ashes



*T*oday we find the number of thefts and robberies increasing. We are living in the midst robberies and deceptions of different kinds varying from cases of breaking the houses, entering and taking things by force to political deception like the Havala. There are lobbies and chains, which encourage these. If the chief officer is earning too much money without working sincerely the subordinates remain idle. They pretend to be great officers keeping their drawers open. There are Government

officers and servants who share the money they have received by way of bribes before they leave the office in the evening. In some other offices many collect money unlawfully and secretly like the cat that drinks milk, closing its eyes. Some do not give wages, which the servants deserve. This type of injustice is highlighted in '*The Book of Proverbs*' (Prov 10/3-5, 21/6, 22/16). Some make money by cheating others. There are new ways of stealing today. They are many in number. It is in this context that Saint Chavara's words are very much relevant. In his last sentences addressed to the people of Kainakary he says, "*The stolen things will be turned into ashes.*" To substantiate this he describes an incident. He says that there was a man who robbed properties in order to become a rich man. When he fell sick and was about to die he called a will-writer in order to prepare the will before dividing his properties. He asked the writer to write the following: "I give my soul to the devil." When his children heard this they thought that their father had lost his reasoning power. Knowing their thought he said, "My dear children! I'm very much conscious of what I am asking him to write. Let him write as I direct him. I give my soul and the soul of my wife, who encouraged me to steal, to the devil. I stole money and properties for your sake." Then he breathed his last breath. Here Saint Chavara lays stress on the disaster brought to the souls by their deeds of stealing either as individuals or as groups. Let no one close his eyes to its relevance today.

58. Do this in memory of me...



*T*he word 'Sabbath' has its root in the Hebrew word 'shabet'. This word means, 'to rest', 'to put an end to', and 'to stop'. The concept of Sabbath is found in the creation narrative itself (Gen 2/1-3). God rested on the seventh day after the six days of creation. He also blessed that

day and made it holy. So Sabbath is the day sanctified by God. This day must be a day of purification for the humans. It reminds us of the degree of respect and importance we have to give to God. When we do abide by the regulations and norms of Sabbath we fail to give the paramount importance and homage to God. Instead we consecrate other persons and things in His place. In this context let us try to understand Saint Chavara's conception of Sabbath (*Testament 10/11*). Saint Chavara says that we should not be satisfied only by our participation in the Holy Mass which is the greatest expression of our gratitude. He could really understand the inner meaning of Jesus, words, "Do it in memory of me." According to him each Sabbath Day observance and each Holy Mass should inspire us to do a thousand deeds of love and kindness.

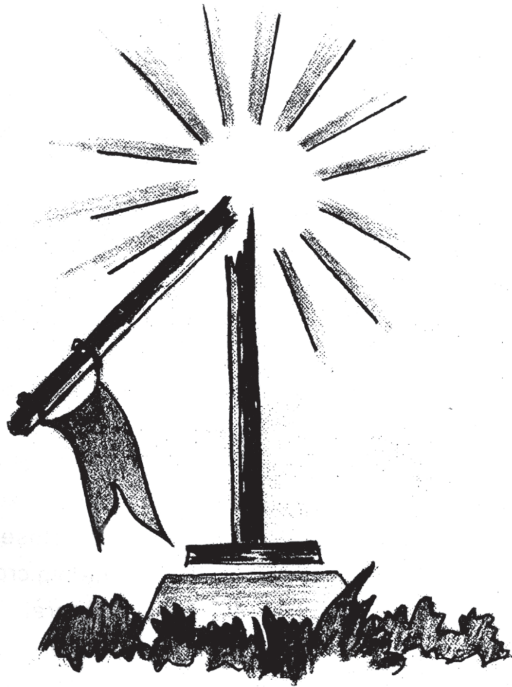
59. I'm the Clay



I was just a ball of clay. The Lord mixed it, pressed it, poured the water of His grace and made it pliable and put it in the turning wheel of the world. He baked it in the fire of prayer. He made pots of different kinds and size and used me (Rom 9/20). I was happy and grateful when He made me his useful instrument. I was a fool and in front of others an idiot. Let me ask you, "Wasn't he who took the efforts to construct a monastery, a church and a

seminary at Mannanam when there wasn't even a time - wheel? He was also an inefficient man who couldn't buy a house and make three rooms in it. Wasn't it mere foolishness to think that he would start a convent for women religious and build a house for them? How could a man who didn't have the money required to buy a jar of ink make a press at Mannanam and publish the book Jnanapeyusam? When he took courage to give education along with meal to the children of low class he was much criticised. There were many oppositions. But he thought that it was something unavoidable. He was just a bowl of clay in front of God who made him that he was in those days.

60. The flag of Malayalam has fallen down



*T*he news of the Prior's death spread like wild fire. The church bells chimed and mourned. As soon as the people came to know about his death they reached Koonammavu. His dead body was dressed well and placed on a special platform of the Church. The people who

crowded there paid their homage to him with their broken hearts and weeping eyes. Some kissed his hands and feet with great respect and devotion. Some others recited the rosary and prayed. All those who heard about his death prayed in different ways to grant eternal peace to his soul. People were informed that his funeral would be before the midnoon of 4th Wednesday, 1871.

People came in large numbers to Koonammavu from different parts of the state. All the necessary holy articles were brought from the parish church and the funeral procession was started before noon as it was announced. Rev Fr Ouseph celebrated the High Mass (Rasa). The main celebrants of the funeral ceremony were Rev Fr Elisha and Fr Ouseph Chavara.

All were surprised to see the great respect and love shown to the dead body of Fr Kuriakose Elias by the people of Kerala. Many could not come closer to the church of Koonammavu because of the big crowd of people who had come there for the funeral. The sermon was preached by Rev Fr Mathai Mariam. In the conclusion he said, "Today the flag of Malayalam has fallen down. His body which was made of clay is now buried in the soil to be a part of it." All went back to their respective places, thinking of the verse "Man! dust you are and to dust you will return," and keeping the memories in their hearts to cherish them later.