

DECRETAL LETTER

Blessed Elias Kuriakose Chavara of Holy Family raised to the honor of sainthood

Pope Francis

For the perpetual remembrance.

“Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.” (1 Pet 1, 22-23).

It has been confirmed that with utmost fidelity and good will to the direction of the Saint Peter the Apostle, blessed Elias Kuriakose Chavara of Holy Family was led by the light of divine revelation. He continually shared the bread of the Gospel with all and taught the young people and girls of India to bear witness to Christ’s love for the poor, to serve the Church and to proclaim Gospel to the world by word and deed.

He was born on 10 February 1805 in the village of Kainakary in the territory of Kerala in India from devout parents Kuriakose and Mary. In the following 18th, he was taken to the baptismal font in the parish of Chennamkary to be reborn and was named Kuriakose. After a few months, his mother consecrated him to Mother Mary in the Marian shrine at Vechoor. From his infancy onwards he grew in piety and devotion to the Holy Family following the exemplary life of his parents. After few years of school studies in his native parish, he entered the seminary at Pallipuram and was ordained on 29 November 1829.

On 11 May 1831 together with Fathers Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, he began to build a house at Mannanam which subsequently turned to be the beginning of the first institute for religious men in India that is today’s congregation namely the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. On 8 December 1855, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, Fr. Chavara took solemn vows with the name Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. He undertook the office as the first superior of the new community and fulfilled the duty till his last day.

Through the efforts of the own Congregation he has brought a lot to the spiritual and social renewal of the Church in Kerala. He built seminaries and houses for spiritual retreats. He founded library and press for teaching catholic doctrines and spreading knowledge. He cared for the dying and destitute and was engaged in the instruction of catechumens.

With much zeal he spared no energy to increase the enthusiasm among priests, religious and lay faithful enabling them to take active and leading role in the spiritual renovation of the Church and society in India. In February 1866 along with others he founded the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites at Koonammavuthus providing an opportunity for Indian women to have access to the consecrated life. Rev. Fr. Kuriakose also had office of the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar rite and was much concerned to restore unity. His life embodies the adage “Self-sanctification and salvation of neighbours.”

He was ahead of his times and was a forerunner who instituted press for the transmission of knowledge. Along with these variety of activities he happily found time to collect liturgical books of Syro-Malabar rite, to compile the canonical prayers for priests, liturgical calendar, book of rubrics with name *Thukkasa* and prayers for the dead. His exhortations for Christian families known as ‘The testament of a Loving Father’ (commonly named in idiomatic rural language as *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*) is an outstanding resource for families even today.

Prayer, silence, seclusion and austerity of life, hearing of the Word of God along with the celebration of the Eucharist with devotion made the reverend Father Chavara a true contemplative. At the same time he was eager to help and lighten the burden of the brothers and to attend to the sorrows and the spiritual and physical needs of them. In fact in the local language he was a *Karmayogi* that is, the man who combined the divine contemplation and service of neighbor.

At the end of his life, he admitted to his companions, “My time has come. I have always enjoyed the intercession of the Holy Family and I have never lost the grace I received in baptism. And I entrust our little congregation and each one of you to the Holy Family who may reign your hearts”. After receiving the sacrament of the sick he died in the Lord on the 3rd of January in the year 1871 and his body was buried at Koonammavu. Later his remains were transferred to Mannanam in 1889 and was entombed in the Church of Saint Joseph of the Mother house of the congregation.

Due to enduring reputation of sanctity and signs, Most Rev. Mar Matthew Kavukattu, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Changanacherry, established a historical commission in 1957 and started an informative process in the eparchy in the next year. When the canonical process was completed the decree on the exercise of heroic virtues by Rev. Father Chavara was promulgated on 7 April 1984.

With regard to the beatification, there was validation of a miracle by a college of medical team of Congregation for the Causes of Saints as unexplainable by medical science of today on November 8th 1984. On 28 February 1985, an unusual meeting of theological Consultants approved the healing attributed to the intercession of the Venerable Kuriakose Elias Chavara and on 7 May of the same year, the Ordinary Session of the Cardinals and Bishops confirmed it as a miracle by God's part. The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II ordered the decree on the miracle on 8 May 1985 to be published and on 8th February 1986, during his famous visit to the town of Kottayam in Kerala during a solemn celebration he added him to the catalogue of the Blessed.

For Canonization, a new miraculous healing was presented which happened on 16 October 2007. The Eparchial Bishop His Excellency Joseph Kallarangatt initiated a diocesan inquiry in 2011. The College of Physicians of the Causes of Saints affirmed this healing to be unexplainable by current medical science on 26 September 2013. On 10 December of the same year, the special meeting of Theological consultants and on 18 March 2014 the Ordinary Session of the Cardinals and Bishops, accepted the healing as a true miracle attributed to the intercession of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of Holy family.

We ourselves gave consent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate a decree on the miracle on 3 April of the same year and decided in the consistory on 12 June that the rite of canonization to be held on 23 November 2014, on the solemn feast of Christ the King.

Today, before the papal basilica of St. Peter in Rome during the celebration of Holy Mass, we publically pronounce the formula:

In honor of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic faith, by the authority of our Lord Christ and of the blessed Peter and Paul after our due deliberation, frequent prayers for divine assistance, and having sought the counsel of many of our brother Bishops, we declare and define Blessed Giovanni Antonio Farina, Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara of Holy Family, Blessed Ludovico da

Casoria, Blessed Nicola da Longobardi, Blessed Euphrasia of Sacred Heart Blessed and Blessed Amato Ronconito be Saints and enroll them to be saints decreeing that they are to be venerated as such by the whole Church. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was an eminent leader and reformer of the Church and the society who renewed the Church of Kerala spiritually and tried his best to prevent the community of Christ's faithful from divisions acting as a true shepherd of souls. God has placed him as a light in the Church so that his sheep is fed with the word of God and he taught them by own example. Through his intercession may we be granted the grace, to keep the faith with us which he lived and taught, and to follow his example.

The things which we have decided to append to this Letter, we wish to be good and firm now and in the future, notwithstanding anything to the contrary.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's on 23 November, in 2014, the second year of our Pontificate.

I, FRANCIS
Bishop of the Catholic Church
Marcellus Rossetti, Pref. Apost