

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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Dear Co-missioners,

In the Catholic world of today about eighty percent of all shrines are dedicated to Mary. Annually the vast majority of pilgrimages are destined for Marian shrines. I personally have organized 4 such pilgrimages in the past, the memory of which will last forever. The Marian apparitions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at Paris, Lourdes, La Salette, Knock, Fatima, Mexico City and other places created noted centers of prayer and renewal. Pilgrims came to find healing and spiritual courage, to experience for themselves the miraculous event which had occurred, and this devotion revitalized the spirit of pilgrimage in the Church. Shrines have a special vocation in salvation history. Just as God calls each of his creatures to a specific mission in this life, so does he designate shrines through his Church for a particular purpose.

Hospitality extended today to migrants and to all pilgrims at Marian shrines is an expression of the Virgin Mary's welcoming of God's word. Her example reminds all people that we come together in the great pilgrimage of life on this earth to everlasting life in our permanent home with God.



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I am **Fr. Joby Muttathil MS**, and I was born on January 6, 1978 as the fifth boy of seven children to my parents. One of my sisters is a religious nun. My parents had a very hard time in bringing all their children up in life, due to their financial struggles. But their hard works in farming and their spiritual life helped us to grow deeper and together in love and faith. The influence of my parish priest among the people as a *Leader*, was the inspiring factor behind my attraction toward priesthood. I had joyful school days and supportive and positive energy filled my family life. “Before I was born, God chose me and called me by His marvelous grace.” (Gal 1:15)



According to Thomas Merton, “all vocations are intended by God, to manifest his love in the world”. I made my first profession of vows in 2002, and I was ordained to the priesthood on November 25, 2006. Grace filled 11 years of priesthood accompanied me in my journey. As a young priest I preached Marian retreats for 7 years based on the charism of Our Lady of La Salette. God made me an instrument in turning the La Salette Renewal Center in the north of Kerala into a full time Charismatic Marian Retreat Center. In 2012, responding to the request of the Provincial Superior of La Salette Matha India, I was able to gather 80 lay people and that marked the official beginning of the La Salette Lay Associates gathering in India. Youth Ministry became a reality at the retreat center, including 150 young people coming together every month for workshops, prayer, and social. ‘Kinginikoottam’ (kids of Jesus), was a new term invented for the special gathering of kids, conducted during holidays. A monthly convention for the widows was also started.

“Rosary prayer group” had a humble beginning 6 years ago with just 4 people coming together to pray the rosary. But soon God added more members to the group that gathered on Tuesdays to pray rosaries, and to praise and worship Him. In one year the group developed into a larger group averaging 250 people attending the Holy Mass, adoration and healing services. Production of two musical CDs and writing two books on Our Lady of La Salette are my major contributions in the extra curricular field. I obtained a master’s degree in mass communication and journalism. I served the community as a Provincial Councilor from 2013 to 2016.

Finally, serving in the minor seminary as the rector of the students, was a great time to love and support the young boys and to assist in their journey of vocation to priesthood and religious life. I learned a lot from the seminarians while serving in formation. Kindness toward others and a smile on my face are the two things I tried to maintain during my priestly life. My message to the world is this; “If you have a will, you have a place to work wonders and miracles.”

I am **Fr. Anil Kochuthazhath, MS**, a La Salette missionary from Kerala, India. My father died when I was five years old. My mother is alive and her life inspired me to choose religious life. I have an older brother. He is married and settled. My family members are farmers by profession. We produce crops like rice, coffee, pepper, ginger etc. Since our property is situated near a forest, we also have to fight with wild animals to safeguard our crops and property. So I have grown up seeing many of the wild animals like elephants, tigers, deer, wild boars, monkeys, tree dogs etc without buying a ticket to the zoo.



After my high school studies, in June of 2001, I joined La Salette and was ordained to priesthood in January of 2013. Soon after, I was assigned to our mission in the state of Andhra Pradesh nearly 1000 miles away from my hometown. Here we have a mission parish with seven sub stations and a school. I felt very much at home once I was able to learn their language called Telugu. The Indian society is divided by a caste system and many people have very little education where I serve. Everything including profession, education and the future depends on the caste into which you are born. All my parishioners belong to a lower caste and do not own any land. They go out to work in the farmlands owned by the landlords of higher caste and only earn a couple of dollars a day. The parish of St. Joseph has 350 families. Besides we have 7 village chapels under our care. Sunday mass takes nearly two hours and the homily will last for more than half an hour since it is used for catechism and as a teaching moment. At mass, people line up during the offertory to make their special offerings such as rice, vegetables, fruits or money. At the end of the mass, the priest stands in front of the altar and people fall in line to greet the priest and get his blessing. Some even touch the feet of the priest in reverence. At least twice a year we visit their homes for blessing. They like very much priests visiting their homes.

Our La Salette Vidyanilayam School which we started with 25 students now has 350 students and is growing in number. Even the people belonging to other denominations and religions are sending their kids to our school. We are in the process of expanding our facilities with new classrooms so that we can accommodate more students. There are four religious sisters that belong to the order of Basilian Sisters helping us in the school ministry. Our children are mainly from poor families and they cannot afford to pay the tuition, so we are trying to give them free education. Both our mission at St. Joseph Parish and La Salette Vidyanilayam School are in their infancy stage. We are so grateful for the help we receive from the North American La Salette Province through its Mission Center and benefactors for the generous contributions to fund various mission projects. We assure you of our prayers and will always be grateful for your love and support of our missions.

Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, Kayakkunnu, Kerala, India

Shrines play an unusually big role in Catholic life in southern India. Since its foundation about 28 years ago, it was a great dream of the La Salette Missionaries in India to build a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of La Salette. That dream was fulfilled at the consecration and dedication of the newly built shrine in Kayakkunnu, Kerala on the 20th of May 2017 by Most Rev. Joseph Porunnedam, the bishop of the diocese of Mananthavady. In 1866, twenty years after the apparition of our Blessed Mother at LaSalette, the first and the only shrine named after Our Lady of La Salette in India was constructed by the French missionaries in Kodaikkanal, in the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu. It is now operated by diocesan priests.

The new shrine became a reality through the help and support of many benefactors and by the prayers and hard work of people in that locality. Fr. Jenson Chendrappinny, who is the first rector of this beautiful Shrine recalls the words of St. John Paul II on the apparition of La Salette, who said, “La Salette is a message of hope, a hope sustained by the intercession of her who is the Mother of all peoples. Our alienations are not irreparable. The night of sin surrenders to the light of divine mercy. Human suffering properly accepted can contribute to purification and salvation. The arm of the Son of Mary will not weigh upon, not condemn, the people who humbly walk in the pathway of the Lord. Christ will take the outstretched hand into his own, and lead to new life the sinner reconciled by the grace of the Cross.” Fr Roy Parayil, the current Provincial Superior for the La Salette Province of India, hopes that this Shrine will be a center for reconciliation and God’s grace and consolation for all people as it has already drawn thousands of pilgrims since its opening to the public. Frs. Joby and Anil stayed with me at the Mission Center in St. Louis to help out with mission preaching during the summer months. Since Fr Joby served in Kayakkunnu for several years and Fr. Anil had just returned to become the assistant rector of the Shrine, I asked both to write something about themselves and their ministry in India, which I am glad to present it to you.



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