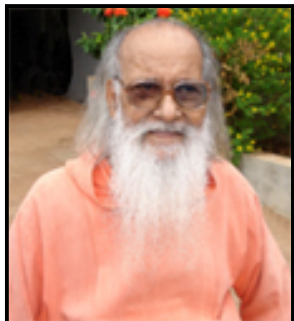


Obituary

CENTINARIAN CAPUCHIN

FR. APOLINARIS PINTO

(1911 – 2011)



“None of us lives for himself, nor dies for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord” (Rom 14:7-9). Fr. Apolinaris Pinto may well be said to have lived his life, a long life of nearly 101 years in the spirit of these words of St. Paul. The older he got he added more ‘life’ to his years –he did it in nearly 78 years of consecrated life as a Capuchin Franciscan and 70 years of priestly life after the heart and mind of Christ himself!

Called to life on 22nd May, 1911 at Valencia, in Milagres parish, he received the name John Joseph; but when called to Capuchin religious life and entered the novitiate at Monte Mariano, Farangipet on 11th April 1934 he was named Apolinaris, and made his first commitment on 12th April 1935. After his study of philosophy he made his perpetual profession on 27th July 1938 and after that of theology and called to priesthood, he was ordained on 20th April, 1941; finally after 70 years of priestly ministry he was called to eternal life on 12th October, 2011.

As a priest, he first served at Monte de Guirim, Goa, albeit for a short period and then was transferred to Monte Mariano to render his services as the confessor to the novices, plus teach English language, Gregorian chant and western music. It may be said that it is during these years that he understood his life-vocation, namely that he was ‘Sent to preach the good news to the poor and set the captives free’. This enlightened from the Lord was to be his guiding light in his entire future ministry – a ministry he loved and cherished, till the end of his life. It was literally an ‘option for the poor’, begun at Pavor Uliya, an island in Nethravati river, about five kilometers from Monte Mariano. In the words of the people of the island, “he made us live like human beings”!

When the parish of Brahmavar, along with the two substations, Pethre and Nilavar, was entrusted to the Capuchins in 1956 by the Bishop of Mangalore, Fr. Apolinaris was transferred to the Holy Family Friary, to be the companion to the parish priest, Fr. Alfred Roche. While being there he went in search of the economically and socially backward people. The people of Pethre were the poorest in more senses than one, and to meet their needs, first spiritual, he started to build a church, relying utterly on the Providence of God, his only ‘Funding Agency’. The project was begun solely with the blessing of the late Monsignor William Lewis, Vicar general of the diocese, and with a meager amount of Rs 500/-. Begun so to say with ‘the widow’s mite’, it was indeed completed and it has turned out to be one of the flourishing parishes, ‘a standing memorial of his sweat and blood’ as confirmed by the same Monsignor. The faithful who could never forget him came along with their Parish priest, a full bus-load of them, to attend the Mass and the funeral service.

His next transfer was in 1972 to Kodani Parish on the bank of river Sharavati in Karwar Diocese to look after another set of poor people, fisher folk and illegal distillers. It was patience and planning that were needed most to deal with these poor and both were not ready to come by in his case. He had to simultaneously see to sending children to the school, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and he had absolutely no means. Providence was again his sole ‘funding agency’ and indeed with the help of some generous persons and good priest-friends he did succeed in changing the very face of Kodani once and for all. Hardly was this mission completed, ‘Providence’

brought him in 1975 to Molkod, a neighbouring parish but again poor in every sense of the word. Along with the pastoral service, he had often to contend with some natural calamities, especially the

recurring floods in the area. Forgetting himself and going out of the way, he did save many a precious life.

Inside of Fr. Apolinaris was shone the compassionate heart of Jesus. He had a special love for children and the young people. He would do anything for them in order to help and encourage them to study; he would walk or travel any distance to meet some generous friend if he could help young persons to get a job or settle in life. He would all this in the true Gospel spirit of 'what the right hand does, the left hand should not know' and 'the heavenly Father who sees in secret, will reward you in secret'. This is perhaps Fr. Apolinaris, the unknown! Known nevertheless, although only to a few!

Reading the account of his activities, one might get an impression that Fr. Apolinaris was an activist. No doubt he was that but not merely. He was also a man of deep prayer and austere penance. In his personal life he practiced utter poverty, simplicity and humility. He was a person of wit and humour, which came readily to his rescue in times problems and difficulties. All these basic traits of the Capuchin charism marked his life all along so much so when in his eighties as he thought of retiring he was more than prepared for a quiet life. First at Banakal (1981), and thereafter at Dayalbagh (1984) for over 25 years, he spent his time in contemplative prayer. He was most faithful to his personal spiritual exercises such as Eucharistic celebration, sacramental confession, monthly recollection and spiritual reading.

He loved his Capuchin Franciscan vocation and encouraged young men to join the Order. The first and solid vocation that he brought to the order was the late Very Rev. Fr. Vincent Lobo, his own classmate at St. Aloysius College. His spiritual quest had as well a streak of Indianization. He wished to be a typical Indian Capuchin. For he appreciated the Indian values, like *dhyana* and *mauna*. In the latter part of his life he was found practically wearing '*kavi*' dress, walking barefoot, respecting the elders, leading an 'Ashram-type' of life. He was a swamiji and very fond of visiting '*Krista Sharana* ashram at Birur to spend some time in quiet prayer and contemplation!

The last moments: even after the centenary celebration of his birthday, he looked rather fit to live still a decade more in spite of age and health related problems. For almost five years now, he had been welcoming death and saying that it is the door to heaven. However about a month ago he took a sudden turn for the worse and was very ill-disposed. He knew for certain that his end was near and hence he fortified himself by receiving the sacraments of holy anointing, the confession and the viaticum. On 12th, at midnight, knowing that he is leaving us for good, Fr. Henry, the guardian of the house, gathering the community members, commended him to God through a prayer service. With tears we sang some of the hymns, which he loved to sing, viz, Have Thine own way Lord, Blessed Assurance, the Psalm 141 which St. Francis sang while dying, the hymn *In manus tuas Domine etc.* Precisely while singing the hymn 'Nearer my God to Thee' he closed his eyes to this world and we knew that they were opened to eternity.

Our beloved bishop Aloysius P. D'Souza who officiated at the funeral Mass said in the introduction that Fr. Apolinaris who walked in the footsteps of St Francis, was a true son of St. Francis in India and is an inspiration and model to the Capuchins to practice the Franciscan ideals in India.

20th November 2011
Friars of Holy Trinity Province
Karnataka