

Mission in the Jesuits' Twin Jubilees

Since 1540, the 474-year-old Ancient Company is still run by God's plan. Although it was founded by **St. Ignatius**, it was God Himself, who gave its affirmation to him "*I will that you serve us.*" This *La Storta Vision* was the source and foundation of the Company. That is why, St. Ignatius, in the face of hardships, strove hard to name the Company, "**The Society of Jesus**" or "**Companions of Jesus**," since he believed the enterprise was *entirely God's*. The year **2013-14** is very important for the Society as well as for the Madurai Province. In this year, we universally commemorate **the 200th year of the Restoration of the Society of Jesus since 1814**; and in our Province, we gratefully celebrate the **175th anniversary of the New Madurai Mission since 1838**. Here is a deep connection between the life of Jesus and the Society of Jesus. By God's plan Jesus was incarnated into the world; the Society too began to exist because of God's enterprise. Secondly, the passion and death of the Society cannot be compared to that of Jesus, yet by witnessing to God in their passion and persecution and even in death, the Society resembles Jesus. Finally, in Jesus' resurrection we find same similarity in its Restoration. *We are all therefore resurrected people*. This close association and integration should lead us today to commit ourselves to His Mission.

Mission from Vision: Our universal mission is derived from St. Ignatius' vision at La Storta. Like him, we ask the father '**to place us with His son.**' This deep experience is a climax in the personal life of St. Ignatius. It is his journey's end. In a way, it is a starting point of the Society. When they reached Rome, the Pope sent them on mission *as Jesus sent his apostles*. As a result, the Society was born to defend the faith and to promote Christian life and its principles in all over the world. The 4th week experience of '**Finding God in all things and all things in God**' in the Spiritual Exercises inspired them to carry out His labors. Thus together with Christ, risen and glorified, we carry out His mission *under the banner of the Cross*, as His servants.

Mission in the Restoration of the Society of Jesus: Our vocation is a mystery of divine grace, leading us to *be missionaries*. That is why our forefathers were sent *to preach Christ in poverty*. They also went beyond the boundaries of Christendom, for the greater glory of God and salvation of souls. In addition, they underwent expeditions, went in for inculturation, bore climate change, and learnt languages and cultures in order to incorporate God's values. Their tremendous missionary spirit fulfilled not only people's spiritual need but also their social needs such as education, teaching moral values to children, empowering the youth.

Suppression and Restoration in Brief: In spreading out its branches into *four known continents*, the Society became a vibrant order. The European countries aimed to destroy the Catholic Church. Since the Jesuits were called '*The arm of the Church*', they turned to the Society. Therefore, the Jesuits were wrongly accused of revolting against Portugal and Spain in the Reduction of Paraguay. They were accused of defaming the King abroad, and of being against both the Church and the State, and of teaching suicide, homicide, robbery, impurity and cruelty. However none of these accusations were ever proved, as a result the Society was suppressed in **1773 by Pope Clement XIV, in his Brief "Dominus ac Redemptor."** Very many Jesuits were exiled, tortured and put to death. More than 2900 Jesuits faced destitution, so many of them left the Society but some still remained faithful with the hope of rising again.

The School Masters: St. Ignatius initially did not want Jesuits to assist in education. Later he accepted for the *good of the people*. Through this mission, Jesuits served people socially and taught them good moral principles. That is why they were called as "**The School Masters of Europe.**" Because of this identity, King Frederick of Prussia and Empress Catherine the Great of White Russia welcomed the exiled Jesuits to uplift their empire through education. Once King Fredrick said, "**They are better able to do this (teaching) than anyone else.**" Empress Catherine too was glad about the Jesuits' teaching innovation in her empire.

Witnessing Christ: There were a number of inspiring Jesuits and events. The reasons for the Society's Suppression were not genuine. Yet, the General *Lorenzo Ricci* asked his companions and prisoners to neither justify themselves nor blame the opponents but to hope in God. They radically lived out *Mt 5:11-12*: '*Blessed are you when people revile you...*' Marquis de Pombal was jealous of the Jesuits' influence in Portugal. He fiercely tortured Fr. Gabriele and other Jesuits because of his imprudent interpretation on the natural disaster.

Yet, when he died of leprosy in 1781, no one cared to bury him because of persecuting those innocent Jesuits. It was Jesuits who celebrated the funeral Mass and buried his body after 32 years. This is the best example for 'Love your enemies' Mt 5:24. St. Joseph Pignatelli was from well-to-do family. Yet, he left everything for Christ's sake and joined the Society. When his relatives sent him help to escape exile. He refused them saying 'I will never leave the Society; rather am I ready to lay down my life 100 times.' Because of his indefatigable zeal, courage and love for Christ he is hailed as 'The apostle of the ruins of the Society.'

Mission in the New Madurai Mission: The era of the New Madurai Mission began in **1838** after the Society's Restoration by the four French Missionaries. They started mission with Trichirapalli and Tirunelveli as their centers. Earlier the old Madurai mission was limited to their Pastoral field. With deeper understanding of evangelization, the New Mission reached out to the voiceless poor and needy, fighting for justice, educating children and women, building up churches, colleges, boarding schools, orphanages, also a printing press. They were also involved in the Apostleship of Prayer, spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and giving retreats. Their basic ideology was 'Christ is the liberating initiative of God, made manifest in human history.' Through these endowments, they brought both spiritual and social change into Tamilnadu.

Literacy Drive: Fr. Bertrand, the Superior, envisaged to start a college to attract the youth. Moreover, his conviction was that "The College is a light-house which remains undoubtedly the great means of apostolate among the ruling classes." Hence, the first college was started in Nagapattinam, namely St. Joseph's College. Then it was shifted to Trichirapalli in 1883. Realizing the social need in Tamilnadu, later the Jesuits started colleges and boarding in Palayamkottai (1923), Madras (1925), and Karumathur (1973) and recently in Vettavalam (2009). Through these, the poor were benefited and grew up socially and intellectually.

The Fight for the Rights of the Poor: To this cause came Fr. J. B. Trincal, Fr. A. Caussanel, 'The Dragon of the South' and other Jesuits. They fearlessly fought against the domination of the Landlords, casteism, polygamy, child's marriage, and temple prostitution. Once, Fr. Trincal, fighting for justice, petitioned the collector to resolve the issue justly. Impressed by his sincerity the collector granted him his requests. Besides these, Fr. Isidore Prince, 'The prince of Kallars', Fr. Munuch, Municipal Councilor at Kodaikkanal, and other Jesuits always stood by the voiceless poor and oppressed. There was a great trial indeed in the mission, yet the Jesuits' love for God and zeal for souls pushed them to propagate the faith through justice.

Ah! These Jesuits! The New Madurai Mission also had *the Co-adjutor Brothers'* generous service. Many Brothers were excellent in various ways; in administration, architecture, care of the sick, cultivation in fields, farms and estates, education, social action likewise. Still their service was noteworthy in Kodaikkanal. It was a Jesuit Brother, who structured the lake there. Bros. M. Arokiam, A. Gnanapragasam took part in founding the Sacred Heart College at Shembaganur, where we still live in tranquil surroundings and in peace of mind and body. Very recently, our hardworking Estate Managers were given "The first grade quality coffee" award. Being grateful to these Managers, we should also remember our first brothers, who laid the foundation; and share this privilege with them in spirit. Once the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore, taken up by one of our Brothers' sincerity, told him, 'Brother, I say Mass daily for half an hour; you offer it all 24 hours of the day. Please pray for me.' Really, the sincerity and unfailing devotion to duty of the Brothers inspire us to aspire for the same spirit that they had. Overall, in our province and in their long well filled lives, the Brothers were, 'Ad Omnia' 'All things to all.'

Conclusion: 'With charity for all and malice towards none' this quote is applicable to the Jesuits' history. Intimacy with Christ, fire in their zeal, sincerity in their duty, sensitivity towards the needy was *the backbone* of their Mission in the Society. Deriving the inspirations and spirit from our elder Fathers and Brothers, how do we live them out for our effective Mission? Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, the General asks of us in the celebration not to be *triumphalistic and proud*. Nevertheless, even in *simple, modest ways*, we make efforts to commemorate this anniversary in a manner that is memorable as well as personally and communally significant. To celebrate the anniversary from January 3 to September 27 in a meaningful way, we will *reflect* upon the past glorious history and *renew* our fervor and zeal in Christ, so that we will be able to *react* in Christ's Mission for His greater glory.

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