



MISSIONARIES OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

SOUTH-WEST INDIA PROVINCE (SWIP)

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SWIP Circular BK/53

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...The Heart of a Great Missionary has Stopped Beating
...The Soul of a Great Visionary has Ascended to Heaven
...As Heavens Open the Doors of Unending Jubilations
...I say Adieu to this "Mahatma" in Heart Rending Pain



**Rev. Fr Antony Mookenthottam MSFS
1931-2020**

My dear Confreres,

With the sincere awareness that I can never contain in words the greatness of the one about whom I am going to write these few lines, I communicate to you the strangulating news that **Rev. Fr Antony Mookenthottam** is no more. As I thank God that I was permitted to encounter in my lifetime a flawless legend whose inspirational life has touched thousands of people, including Priests, Religious and Laity, I am deeply pained in my human fabric to withstand the incessant tweak of pain that transpires out of the sheer feeling of loss and helplessness. Hundreds of calls and messages that are flowing into my WhatsApp and Mail other than from MSFS Confreres, expose vividly the grade of nobility and the range of impact this nonchalant personality has aroused in the hearts of those who had the privilege to encounter him. **Fr Antony Mookenthottam** *has touched the humanity by being Human-like St Francis de Sales his role model.*

“Spirituality is not be learned by flight from the world, or by running away from things, or by turning solitary and going apart from the world. Rather, we must learn an inner solitude wherever or with whomsoever we may be. We must learn to penetrate things and find God there.” These words of **Meister Eckhard** aptly fit well into the life of Fr Antony Mookenthottam. Fr Antony held firm in a graceful manner the art of living that befits the life-style of a follower of St Francis de Sales. His ability to see God in “smaller things of the world”, especially in the weak and fragile endeared him to be a friend of the poor. Beyond the limits of age, his adaptability to be a child with the children, a youth with the young, a grown-up with the middle-aged and an elderly to his contemporaries and to enjoy those palpable moments with substantial impact was colossal. **My dear Confreres, the death of Fr Antony Mookenthottam is equally a death warrant for us: Until today You and I enjoyed the physical presence of a ROLE MODEL for our Religious Life, particularly for our FRANSALIAN WAY OF LIFE.** It is time that we own up the responsibility to live his message truly in our personal life.

Fr Mookenthottam was growing old gracefully. Thanks to his disciplined lifestyle, strict food habits, balanced method of relaxation and recreation and constant prayer life Fr Antony maintained exceptional and appealing physical, mental and spiritual agility. Except for the age-based sicknesses he never complained of any serious physical illness. Of course, his life-long struggle with back pain and the heart attack in the year 2001 were matters of concern. Since a few years, the hearing capacity of Fr Antony was rather impeded. Still, he continued with the normal course of life, by guiding seminarians and religious through spiritual direction, classes, timely talks and so on. Perhaps the beginning of his serious struggle with health began with a fall in his room, which also culminated in a minor heart attack. From then onwards he was rather restricted to his room, the chapel and the refectory. His movements were slow and our Brothers in Suvidya College constantly accompanied him. From then on he appeared comparatively weak. In the past couple of weeks, he was also detected with Pneumonia and Bronchitis and he was treated for the same. As he was not fully recuperating well he was admitted to the hospital and there it was also detected that the functioning of his kidneys was slowed down. As a result, he was moved on to ventilator but unfortunately, his body was too weak to respond to the treatment. **On the 3rd**

January 2020 at 10.15 pm Fr Antony Mookenthottam breathed his last.

Fr Antony Mookenthottam MSFS was born on February 28, 1931 to Mr Thomas Mookenthottam and Mary, at Narianganam, Pala, Kerala. He completed his schooling at St Mary Magdalene's Primary School and St Mary's High School. He joined the minor seminary at Mission Home, Kanjikuzhi, Kottayam in June 1947. He completed philosophy studies at Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamalle, Chennai from July 1949 to April 1952. He completed his novitiate at Margao, Goa from 1952 to 1953 and made his first profession on May 27, 1953. He completed theological studies at Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamalle, from 1953 to 1957. He made his perpetual profession on May 27, 1956. He was ordained a priest on April 27, 1957.

Appointments:

- Salur Mission, from 1957 to 1958
- Assistant Parish Priest, Gnanapuram, 1959
- Parish Priest, Gnanapuram, from 1959 to 1963
- Assistant Parish Priest St Anne's cathedral, 1963
- Correspondent, St Antony's H. S. Visakhapatnam, from 1964 to 1965
- General Councillor of the MSFS Congregation from 1965 to 1974
- Doctorate in Theology from Fribourg, Switzerland, 1972-1978
- Staff in Ishvani Kendra, Pune, from 1979 to 1980
- Rector, Vinayalaya, from 1980 to 1982
- Professor at St Peter's Pontifical Institute Since 1980-1997
- Provincial, Visakhapatnam Province, from 1982 to 1985
- Parish Priest, Hebbagodi, from 1991 to 1993
- Director, Indian Institute of Spirituality, from 2003 to 2005
- Editor of Indian Journal of Spirituality, from 2003 to 2005
- Provincial Councilor in-charge of Formation, 2003 to 2006
- Professor of Suvidya College from 1984-2019
- Member of the Staff and Spiritual Guide in Suvidya College from 1987-2019
- Professor and Spiritual Guide in IIS from 1990-2019

My dear Confreres, the above mentioned Curriculum Vitae of Fr Antony Mookenthottam does not fully expose the dynamic of his person. The versatility that makes him different from others was his unique convictions and constant desire to attain perfection.

St Francis de Sales wrote: Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly and in a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset. Fr Antony never lost his inner peace even when the waters were turbulent around him, even when storms raged. He held

on to his Lord, whom he knew to be the surest guide and holder of his destiny. All who came to him experienced him as an epitome of the little virtues of St Francis de Sales, such as, Gentleness, Humility, Patience and Simplicity.

His readiness to be at the service of the MSFS Congregation had led him to the remote missions of Visakhapatnam and the citadels of power and authority in the Congregation. He was a Missionary, a Parish Priest, Professor, Provincial and General Councilor of the MSFS Congregation. He opted to go as a Missionary to the Chad-Cameroon Mission in Africa when the South West India Province took up this mission. He had a vision and dreams for the MSFS Congregation and he accomplished it by becoming the change he wished to see in the Congregation.

Fr Antony was a Priest for Others: Being imbued with the spirit and spirituality of St Francis de Sales Fr Antony became another Francis de Sales for our times. He radiated serenity in his appearance, gentleness in approach and equanimity of mind. **Fr Antony was immensely patient with his Spiritual Directees.** His spiritual acumen and his deep-seated convictions had rippling effects in the lives of all those contacted him. Many Religious Congregations invited him to be their spiritual guide and confessor, to preach retreat or to help them in the formation of their future members. He helped many fledgling Congregations to write their Constitutions and gave guidance and directions to them. He helped them to set their vision and mission in clear perspectives.

Fr Antony Mookenthottam was an authentic Catholic Theologian and Spiritual Guide and at the same time a genuine Indian Seeker and Guru. His unflinching loyalty to the Catholic Doctrine and teaching was harmoniously blended with his desire to be rooted in the Indian spiritual search and experience for God. **The blend comes because of the profound experiential acknowledgment of Jesus as the Truth, the Way and the Life.** Grounded and rooted in this experience, he could see the limits and limitations of cultures and cultural expressions through which the action of Spirit of God is manifested. He could also detect the historical factors that can easily cage the authentic Catholic, Ecclesial teachings and Spirituality. Therefore, both a Westerner as well as an Indian can find Fr Antony a reliable and trustworthy companion in their philosophical or theological journey to God.

Reading, writing, learning, teaching, guiding and experiencing made Fr Antony very profound and compassionately human. But that depth of life was expressed in simplicity of lifestyle as well as of writing. He did not yield to the temptations to verbosity and rests in simplicity and clarity of expression. He was not interested in making impressions but in conveying directly a message he wants to give. In social company his discreet, caring and attentive presence communicated and influenced more than words could. The number of books and articles that he has written are vivid examples of a person who oriented his search to praxis, distinct from a mere armchair theologian. His exceptional intensity in studying St Francis de Sales led to the translation of **the Spiritual Classics of St Francis de Sales from**

French into English. Yet one of the most popular books he has written is the innovative writing of the Book **The Formative Biography of St Francis de Sales**. It is a great example of a writer who writes a biography of this great Saint not only for the admiration of but also for imitation by the readers, so that they too may be other St Francis de Sales.

Yes, **My dear Confreres**, a great era of the MSFS Congregation has come to standstill. The vacuum is being felt. The young, middle-aged and the old among us are well aware that the absence of Fr Antony will have a telling impact in our lives hereafter. **But are we here to give up? How are we going to hold high the values of this MAHATMA?** We know that we cannot fill in the shoe that Fr Antony is leaving behind... but still, our commitment to the little virtues he practiced, our sincerity to our Priesthood as he lived it, our intensity to study St Francis de Sales and to live Salesian life-style and our willingness to be TRUE MISSIONARIES who are at the service of the Church with integrity and honesty will be small but great steps to do justice to the saintly persona of Rev. Fr Antony Mookenthottam.

Our Beloved Fr Antony,

- **You were a universal person who embodied the Eastern and Western Perception of life**
- **You were a wise man with both human and divine wisdom**
- **You were a man of prayer, who looked for God both in heaven and on earth**
- **You were a Spiritual Giant who guided many Priests and Religious to the stability of their vocation**
- **You showed us in actuality the greatness of our Patron Francis de Sales**

Fr Antony, we would miss you eternally... Adieu dear Father... until we meet in heaven.

My dear Confreres, the mortal remains of Fr. Antony Mookenthottam will be brought to Suvidya College around 6 pm on 6th January 2020. Thereafter a mass will be celebrated in his honour by the community of Suvidya College. Those of you who wish to join it can surely do so. On the 7th January at 2.30 pm the Funeral Mass and Ceremony will begin in the Suvidya College Chapel. **It will be officiated by the Archbishop of Bangalore Rt. Rev. Peter Machado.** It will be followed by the funeral in the newly constructed cemetery in the Suvidya Campus. I request all of you to come in large numbers to pay homage to our great Missionary **Rev. Fr Antony Mookenthottam MSFS.**

SALESIAN THOUGHT

“Let us die to ourselves and to all that depends on us. We ought to live only for God.”

Fraternally,



Fr Benny Koottanal MSFS
Provincial