



“God’s will . . . that alone . . . and that in full”

Servant of God Fr. Canisius Thekkekara CMS

Dear Rev. Fathers and Brothers,

Prayerful greetings from CMI Prior General’s House, Chavara Hills!

The canonization of our beloved founder, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, has given CMI family a new impetus to take up the causes of our saintly members for the process of canonization. The holy lives of our beloved members will inspire us to deepen our religious commitment and to be ever faithful to our call and mission in this challenging time. Provincial of St. Joseph’s Province, Kottayam has recently submitted a request to the Syro Malabar Bishops’ Synod to grant us permission to initiate the process of canonization of Rev. Fr. Bruno Kaniarakath.

By God’s grace, the canonization process of Servant of God Fr. Canisius Thekkekara is steadily progressing at the diocesan level. Let us be united in prayer to speed up the process. It is also a time to make a deep study of the life and teaching of Servant of God Fr. Canisius and to imbibe the core traits of his spirituality.

1. A Brief Life Sketch

Servant of God Fr. Canisius was born on 12 May 1914 at Anandapuram, and was baptized on June 6, 1914. In 1931 he joined CMI family as an aspirant in St. Thomas Monastery, Pavaratty. After fervent novitiate life and discernment, he made his First Vows on November 24, 1935. He was ordained a priest on December 21, 1942 at Mangalore. He was the first Indian and the second Asian to have a doctorate in Sacred Scripture and he had his studies at Pontifical Institute, Rome. During 1957-1959 this unique biblical scholar served as Professor and spiritual father in Dharmaram College, Bangalore. He served as the Rector of Dharmaram College from 1960 to 1966. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the General Synaxis of 1966 elected him the Prior General of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. After his service as the Prior General, he was elected as the Provincial of Devamatha Province, Thrissur. During 1978-1981 Fr. Canisius served as the Vicar General of the Congregation and in 1981 he resigned from this elected post and chose to spend the rest of his life in total prayer. He was instrumental in evolving the life and growth of CSR, Pariyaram. He joined CSR community and spent his days in prayer, as well as in giving spiritual direction and spiritual retreats, hearing confessions of thousands of priests, religious and the people of God. As his health deteriorated, he was transferred to Ambazhakad Monastery, where he was called to eternal reward on 29 January 1998 and was buried. Rev. Fr. Canisius was canonically declared as the Servant of God on 29 March 2014.

2. Some Traits of His Spirituality

Fr. Canisius, one may say, lived his life in the divine milieu. He was endowed with a profound spiritual vision that was rooted in Christ’s own ideas and ideals. I would thus encapsulate some of its salient features: Thy Will My Will, *Maran Atta* Perspective, Prayer as Rest, Praising Dynamics, Rejoicing in the Spirit, Ideology of the Suffering Servant, Religious Call to Become a Loving Fellowship, Administration a Spiritual Charism, Christian Family as a Tiny Heaven. In this Circular I deal with only two traits.

2.1. *Thy Will My Will*

“The will of God/Christ, all of it, and that alone” – this was the motto of the saintly Fr. Canisius. It had a longer version: “Lord, your will, all of it, and that alone! This is my enthusiasm [*jwaram*], my delight [*santhosham*], my bliss [*samtrupthy*]”. This ideal he inherited from his parents. In *My Life Experience* he thus avows this fact: “The most important grace that the Lord had bestowed on me is my father and my mother. Their law of life was this: The will of God, all of it and that alone.” In his final years Fr. Canisius thus wrote in *My Life Experiences*: “Briefly speaking this was my firm decision - to be only there, where the Lord demands me to be; to do fully whatever He asks me to do, without any further worries. I have tried my best to firmly persevere in that determination, without caring what the flesh and blood were saying. This was also my attitude towards accepting responsibilities and their execution.”

Throughout his life Fr. Canisius sought God’s will. He was never tired of speaking, writing and teaching of it. According to him “every member of the religious community has accepted the divine will, all of it, and that alone as the only enthusiasm of his life” [*Notes on Religious Obedience*]. In a Christmas greeting he wrote thus on December 19, 1983: “His birth in a manger and life in a cottage filled with fragrance, the lifestyle hidden and simple, always concerned with the one thing necessary, performance of the will of God.” These words wonderfully articulate the inner core of the mystery of Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Spirit. It shows that the venerable Father had penetrated into the depths of religious obedience. He thus writes about the essence of obedience: “To do the will of the Father is my food – such a strong faith is the essence of the religious obedience.” According to him the Constitution of the Congregation is the documentary form of a life of obedience. The venerable Father could thus console all who approached him with their problems: “It is Jesus, and not we who do everything. Let this thought be imprinted in your mind. Then we could enjoy peace, and everything will become positive.” He thus spoke about confession: “The account which I present about the state of my soul to the visible representative of the heavenly Father.” In his last days Fr. Canisius continuously raised and lowered his right hand in obedience to the doctor’s instruction, by saying, “the will of Jesus, only that, and all of it.” On October 30, 1991 he wrote to a family about his sickness: “Whatever the heavenly Father gives, is a gift of his paternal love.” On 3-5-1996 he informed a religious sister: “My pain and all other ills remain as usual. Let the divine will be fully accomplished.” In the composition *Three-dimensional Rosary* he penetrates into the inner being of the Blessed Virgin: “At all the moments of suffering your heartbeats, ‘behold, the handmaid of the Lord’ reached the presence of the Father as a gentle wave.” He thus advised a family on 28-12-1991: “Father, all for you! If it is so, the only thing which we have to do on earth is to perform the desire of the Father, only that, and all of it. This is what is written in the Letter to the Hebrews, ‘Here I am – I have come to do your will, O God’ [10:7]. Let us help each other through prayer to accept and realize this as our life task.”

Fr. Canisius, like Jesus and Mary was a living paradigm of the listening person and a listening being. To do the divine will was his food and drink. This ideal religious could say thus during the last days on earth: “When I look back, I believe that I had done only the will of God”. Seeing his terrible sufferings some of his friends wanted to pray for his recovery. Disagreeing with them he said: “It is the will of God that I should suffer. You are going to pray that God should take away the chalice of suffering from me. I cannot agree with it. If you pray, God may though unwillingly relent. However, it is not the divine plan concerning my sanctification. I want that the divine will be fully accomplished”. He thus wrote to a spiritual lay son: “Let us help each other with prayer for the grace to give the utmost importance to the determination, ‘the Lord’s will, and it all at once’” [Letter dated 22-01-1990]. In one of his letters Fr. Canisius thus confessed: “By the eternal mercy of God I had used every charism at its maximum possibility [77 years]. Now at this moment he tells me, ‘it is enough’; Yes. The *fiat* of our Mother.”

2.2. *Prayer is My Rest*

Fr. Canisius, as all acclaim, was a man of prayer. Even while he was admitted in Amala hospital, he was found as being absorbed in prayer. This man of God was happy to spend time in prayer with

some Holy Family sisters, who used to visit him in the hospital. As they thought he was very tired, they advised him to take rest. Then he replied: "Prayer is my rest". This utterance sums up in a solemn and celestial way the biblical vision concerning the call of a human being. At CSR, Pariyaram Fr. Canisius faithfully stuck to the following daily programme:

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| A.M | 6.30-7.30 | Learning prayer - Alone with the Father |
| | 8.30-9.30 | Intercessory prayer for missionaries |
| | 11.30-12.30 | Intercessory prayer for leaders of the Church and State |
| P.M | 3.00-4.00 | Intercessory prayer for religious and lay apostles |
| | 6.30-7.30 | Listening prayer alone with Jesus |
| | 7.45-8.10 | Family prayer |
| | 9.00-9.30 | Night prayer |

The Servant of God had prepared and delivered a detailed paper on the *Governing Ministry and Prayer Life*, in which he stressed the need for the superiors to become guides and models of prayer life for the community. He summarizes the main elements of prayer life: Spousal Prayer, Professional Prayer, and Occupational Prayer. In prayer life the superiors have to give emphasis to mission orientation, intercession orientation and Carmel orientation. In his memoir entitled *My Life Experiences* he writes about his particular charism: "There used to arise in me boundless sympathy and solicitude for the suffering brethren. Immediately by offering them to the Lord I used to *pray* insistently for them: "Help, please"... "It is not my presence that is essential to them, but the presence of the divine Master. Therefore I will compel him to bless them by his helping presence... I am convinced that it is my vocation to engender in them the needed insight, hope and courage by *prayer* and penance, of which nobody may be aware".

In 1978 he wrote: "It is my desire to continue my days in an unknown atmosphere an unbroken simple life in *prayer* and penance and in the spiritual and material service for the poor". The Lord granted this desire of his devotee in 1981. He was blessed to continue such kind of life till 1996 at the Centre for Spiritual Realization, Pariyaram. The venerable religious wrote on 20-6-1981 to the Mother General of S. H. Congregation: "I will be in our *prayer* house. There I will be engaged in *prayer* and exposition of the Word of God, which may help one to pray. If those who come there are interested, I will *pray* with them". According to the witnesses, the saintly person used to *pray* during the one hour adoration at *Sannidhi* [chapel] on his knees and with folded hands, even if he were very tired. One could notice a special brilliance reflected on his face. Others testify about his *praying* attitude in the church: "Although he was facing the tabernacle, his eyes were closed. There irradiated a splendour on his smiling face." The smile reflected the different states of inner soul such as rapture and delight of the intimate communication with the Lord.

While he was staying as a sick person at Ampazhakad, he daily spent one hour for listening to the Word of God, with keen attention, his face and eyes gleaming with heavenly joy. To many who approached Fr. Canisius requesting for prayer, he used to say, "I will pray and bless you". To those who were suffering, he used to tell "I am praying for you". Four days before his death the sisters told him, "let us pray, dear Fr. Canisius". He answered: "Yes we shall pray, daughters". The sisters prayed with him, as if it were their last prayer with the saintly person. While leaving him they said, "let us once more pray;" then they spent a few minutes more in *prayer*. As they visited him three days before his death, they found him vigilantly praying. Once more they prayed together. Prayer, in his words was the tonic for his health.

Fr. Canisius could experience in the presence of God the divine rest in the act of praying, which was the status of remaining turned to God. For him the tonic for his health or rest, both physical and spiritual, was prayer. As he prayed, there irradiated on his face as well as in his whole person the heavenly bliss. By declaring that "prayer is my rest," he, during his last days became the living witness of an authentic human being, Christian, priest and religious person. It seems that he had delved into the depths of Christ's personality and lived it, moved in it, and had his being in it

[Acts.17:28]. Like his Master this disciple turned to God with his heart and soul, strength and mind [Dt.6:5]. He turned to the Lord in his health and sickness, in his disabilities and disfigured status, in his agonies and ecstasies, in his humiliations and elevations. This existential man raised his eyes to the Bridegroom of his soul. He turned to others and offered to the merciful Lord their worries and needs, defects and difficulties, virtues and vices. Fr. Canisius spent long hours in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. He interceded for missionaries, leaders of the Church and state, for the religious and the faithful. Indeed, he became the personification of *shub* being. Like Jesus this man of God had a special kind of prayer, listening alone to God. He used to make remind the Lord to give all light, the needed enlightenment, strength and humanness as he attested in a letter dated 10-11-1990. For him prayer was not a monotonous, mechanical and tiresome act. It was his rest in the biblical sense. Like the resting God and the resting Son he lived as a being of rest [*nuah*], celebrating the creation, incarnation, redemption, resurrection, ascension and the descent of the Spirit. Indeed, this *nuah* person became a pneumatic being. His earthly body was transfigured into a heavenly body - to use the terminology of Paul in his first letter to Corinthians, 15:35-49. Let us pray for the grace to exclaim with Fr. Canisius, "Prayer is my rest".

The holy life of the Servant of God Fr. Canisius is a blessing of God to CMI family and the Universal Church. Let us thank the Lord for gifting this saintly son to CMI congregation to be a role model on our way to the Promised Land. Let us pray to the Lord for being always ready to discern and do God's will. Five proposals are given below to be followed up by CMI members and communities:

1. To make an in-depth study of the spirituality of the Servant of God, follow his model, and add anecdotes from his life in our sermons and exhortations given to the parishioners, religious and the faithful, and inspire them to follow his spirituality.
2. To conduct pilgrimages to Ambazhakad. It is praiseworthy that the members of every religious house, together with the faithful, participate in them.
3. To recite daily at the end of *Leliya* the prayer for the canonization of Fr. Canisius.
4. To foster devotion to the Servant of God among the people, by distributing to them copies of the prayer for his canonization, and his short biography.
5. It is praiseworthy to recite the three phased rosary written by Fr. Canisius, at the hour of prayer at least once a week.

The death anniversary of Servant of God Fr. Canisius will be commemorated on January 29, 2019 in St. Teresa's Monastery, Ampazhakkad. Let us be part of this commemoration service and imbibe the spirit of Servant of God Fr. Canisius to be ever faithful to God's will in its fullness.

Programme

9.30 am: Prayer Service

10.30 am: Solemn Divine Liturgy

12.30 pm: Agape

May our Lord bless us through the intercession of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Servant of God Fr. Canisius CMI.

Fr. Paul Achandy CMI
Prior General