

**Address of Mar Sebastian Vaniyapurackal, Curia Bishop of the Syro-Malabar
Archiepiscopal Church, during the Inauguration of the 150th Death Anniversary
Celebrations of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara at Mannanam on 3 January 2020**

Your Excellency Shri Arif Mohammed Khan, the Honourable Governor of Kerala, Your Grace Mar Joseph Perumthottam, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Changanacherry, Shri Thomas Chazhikadan MP, Shri Suresh Kurup MLA, Very Rev. Fr Paul Achandy, the Prior General of CMI, Rev. Mother Sibi, Superior General of CMC, my dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

We are here today on the 3rd day of the month of January, on this serene hillock, Mannanam, to mark the beginning of the sesquicentennial jubilee celebration of the demise of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a great visionary who is the **pride of not just the Church** but the entire state of Kerala. It was on 3rd January 1871, 150 years ago, that St Chavara Kuriakose Elias died at Koonammavu at the age of 66 and now his mortal remains are here in the tomb at Mannanam, the place where he lived most of his life.

Let me share with you something deeply edifying. Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, was a young Italian Carmelite priest who knew St Chavara intimately and personally. He was his confessor and it was to him that St Chavara made his last confession. This is what he wrote about this great Saint in his diary note on the very day he died: "I loved him as myself" and I prayed to him "O holy and beautiful soul, pray for me". Fr Beccaro who also wrote the biography of St Chavara concludes it with the following words: "Let us all, who desire to be blessed with a happy death like that of Chavara, lead a virtuous life as he did".

There is a Greek proverb which says, "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in". A society becomes great when people become responsible and unselfish. When a man plants a tree he always expects to gain something from the tree in the form of fruits and shade. But when an old man plants a tree he knows well that he will not live to see the plant grow up to bear fruits, or enjoy its shade, still he does it so that his future generations will reap the harvest and allied benefits. This altruism-selflessness- is the sign of the greatness of any society. Anyone who has even the slightest acquaintance with this Saint will know that this is the legacy and challenge he left for us.

Even though St Chavara died 150 years ago he continues to live on through the Carmelite priests and sisters who are the fruits of this big tree. We read in the Holy Bible that 'each tree is known by its own fruit'. I really admire the tremendous service offered by the CMI priests and CMC Sisters, the two religious congregations founded by St. Chavara. Apart from all the material service that they do for the uplift of the society, I have deep regard for the spiritual life that they live and the spiritual activities they perform. About 2000 priests and over 6000 sisters of these Congregations exercise their ministries in various parts of the globe. Through the educational institutions and

the hospitals they run and through many other charitable and social activities they are doing remarkable service both in India and abroad.

Regarding his succession, what he said at his death bed, sounds like a prophecy: "Don't be sad about my dying. God will provide you with a new Prior who will be a source of blessing for the Congregation as well as for you. All the members of the congregation, especially elders must be charitable to one another. If you do so, God will be glorified and the congregation will flourish day by day. Your charity will bring salvation to souls". The history of this Congregation until now bears testimony to this prophecy fulfilled. You have had very holy and efficient leaders to guide you and equally holy and committed members to work hard in the mission fields. Let us offer thanks and praise to God Almighty for this great blessing.

I conclude with the words of God the Father to Abraham, the Father of Faith. "I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing". This is my wish and prayer for you too, dear siblings in Christ. May God walk with you all every step. May you be a blessing to each one you meet; thus glorifying God and making the earth a better place! God bless you all.

+Sebastian Vaniyapurackal
Curia Bishop
Syro-Malabar Archiepiscopal Church