

പ്രായശ്ചിത്ത സ്മരണിയ

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A RETROSPECT OF

Late Rt. Rev. Mgr. Mathew Kooplicat

(Rev. Fr. Philip Kamicherry)

When those concerned suggested to me to contribute an article on late Mgr. Mathew Kooplicat to be published in the Jubilee Souvenir of his Lordship The Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Tharayil, Bishop of Kottayam, I readily consented to do it on the score of my intimate connection with him for several years after my Sacerdotal Ordination.

THE LIFE OF MGR. KOPLICAT IN A NUTSHELL

Mgr. Kooplicat was born on 22nd May 1859. After his primary education in Kannankara and Kumarakom, he learnt Syriac under late Rev. Fr. Joseph Vattakalam (Malppan) of Kumarakom. Thereafter, he joined the Mangalapuzha Seminary for his ecclesiastical studies where he remained for 7 years. In 1884 he went to Mylapore Seminary to learn more of English and Portuguese. He spent 3½ years there.

In 1887 when Bishop Lavingue S. J. became the Vicar Apostolic of Kottayam (including Changanacherry), Rev. Mathew Kooplicat returned from Mylapore in 1888. He was raised to the sublime Priesthood by the Bishop

on 8th December 1889 at the Brammangalam Seminary. On 14th January 1890 he said his First Mass there. After 8 months, he was appointed Vicar of Brammangalam church and as tutor of English in the Seminary there.

On 31st July 1891 he was appointed Chaplain at Mulla-Periyar.

On 18th May 1893 he was appointed Vicar of Kannankara church. On 6th December 1893 he was appointed as one of the counsellors of the Episcopal Curia during the time of Bishop Lavingue.

With the death of Mgr. Joseph Tharayil, who was the Vicar General of Changanacherry during the time of Bishop Makil, Mgr. Kooplicat was appointed as the second Vicar General of Changanacherry on 8th December 1908 which office he continued to hold during the time of Bishop Chulaparambil also.

Mgr. Kooplicat was the Administrator of the Kottayam Diocese more than three times:- i. e. after the demise of Bishop Makil, when his successor Bishop Chulaparambil went to Rome in 1922 and 1932 and when he went to Australia in 1928.

Mgr Kooplicat was raised to the dignity of 'Domestic Prelate' on 11th August 1911 by the Holy See.

Again, in 1939 he was raised to great dignity of 'Protonotary Apostolic', a very high rank given only to a very few in the Catholic Church. He went to his eternal reward on 26th November 1945.

This much being said very succinctly in general about the life of Mgr. Kooplicat, let me now say something more in detail about his sterling qualities and other things connected with his life

After my return from the Kandy Seminary at the end of 1920 I was posted at Kannankara church as Assistant to Mgr. Kooplicat who was then officially the Vicar there. As I was quite a raw recruit then, I had to learn many things under him. During my stay with him, I came to know of the worth and mettle of my boss:

He had a noble and dignified mien. He was 6 feet tall with a very fine physique. Any one who meets him for the first time would hesitate to approach him on account of his noble and dignified look. But, as a matter of fact, he was a person with the milk of human kindness, though externally the impression would be otherwise. Only those who know him closely can understand him properly. Others who may shake in their shoes, when they see him for the first time.

He had certain principles which he would closely adhere to. For instance, before Mass he would not talk to anybody nor will he look at anybody. He goes straight to the church from his room mentally recollected and with biretta on. His solemn march to the

church would be quite enough to make others also keep silence both within and without the church.

Again, during the time he recites his breviary, no one under the sun could approach him for anything. He will not stir from his chair until he finishes the official prayer of the Church.

Those who go to him on some business should say what they have come for right at the beginning itself without beating about bush. If they say according to our country way 'simply come', he will immediately stop his conversation and attend his business.

In spite of all this, he had a heart to love and to sympathize. Besides, he had a sense of humour too. He has helped poor students to prosecute their English education. Many of the poor fishermen in Kannankara side were helped by him financially for making nets and other things connected with fishery. As a token of their gratitude towards him, they never failed to supply him with 'king fishes' of the Vembanad Lake - such as, Narimeen, Poomeen, Kalanchi etc.

To prove his sense of humour, I shall narrate briefly an incident that took place during my stay with him at Kannankara. He had in stock over a dozen fine pillows of different size. When I left the place after my novitiate, so to say, I took with me two small pillows without asking his permission. I did so just for the fun of it on account of my freedom with him. After reaching Kottayam with my goods and chattles, I wrote to him a letter informing him not to look for the missing pillows anywhere else. Pat came the reply which runs as follows: "You did well to confess the

truth in time like the good thief. Otherwise, I would have published in the Dailies about the theft and the suspected thief". I hope no heirs of Mgr. Kooplicat now living would put in a claim for the two pillows in my possession.

All the important assets of the Kannankara church - 12 acres of land and a host of other things are there on account of the assiduous and laborious efforts and foresight of Mgr. Kooplicat. Besides, it is he who started the two Primary Schools and the English School there.

He built in 1918 a very big boat with all up-to-date convenience spending over Rs. 1000/-. Indeed it was a fabulous amount at that time. The name of the boat was 'Calidonia'. This was built with a view to recall to memory the voyage of Bishop Makil and party to Rome in 1911 in the steamer named 'Calidonia'. This boat has attracted the attention of many people in Kerala.

When the work of Mulla-Periyar Dam was going on in 1890 or so, Bishop Lavingue wanted to send a Chaplain there to look after the spiritual needs of the Catholic workmen employed there over 1000 souls in connection with the construction of the Dam. The Bishop asked more than two young priests in the Vicariate to take up the Chaplainship there. They then pulled a long face and showed thus their reluctance to take up the work. For, they knew very well that they had to face malaria, wild animals and many other discomforts. Their non-compliance hurt the Bishop to the quick. All the same, he did not lose courage. He approached Rev. Fr. M. Kooplicat, who was then in the heyday

of youth and in the pink of health, with this knotty problem. Fr. Kooplicat accepted the offer without showing the white feather.

He got the patent to go to Periyar on 31st July 1891; but as a matter of fact, he started to his place of destination only on 5th October 1891 owing to some epidemic there.

He set out from Kottayam in two bullock carts arranged by Shri Chandy Chelampam, an influential man in Kanjikuzhy, with all the necessary things. Besides a servant, Sri. Pothen Kambil too had accompanied him. This Pothen was generally known as 'Kaduva Pothen' (Tiger Pothen) on account of his great bravery. On the way they had to halt in more than 5 places to take rest and to prepare food. In fact, they had to pass through fire and water all along the way. After Mundakayam they could see wild elephants here and there. All the same, they went on trusting in God. During those days there was no proper road; there was only cart way.

Rev. Fr. Kooplicat and party reached Periyar only after 8 days - i. e. on 13th October. There was a shed for the chapel and a room behind the altar for him to stay in. It is beyond description the difficulties he had to undergo there. After undergoing Spartan endurance there for 1½ years, he returned to Kannankara on 26th March 1893, since the work there was nearly over.

On 18th May 1893 he was made Vicar of Kannankara church.

After the demise of Bishop Makil and during the time of Bishop Chulaparambil he was staying often at the

Bishop's House doing his work as Vicar General.

The death of Bishop Makil took place when I was in the Kandy Seminary. Soon after I got this sad news there, I went to see the Delegate Apostolic (Mgr. Zaleski), who was then residing at Kandy, in order to get more informations about the death of the Bishop.

During our conversation he asked me: "well, then, who will be your next Bishop?" I replied: 'Perhaps Fr. Mathw Vattakalam'. "Give me another name", he continued.

I replied: 'Fr. Chandy Chulaparambil'. 'Ah! he is too young', he said.

'What about Mgr Kooplicat' he asked. I then replied: "Your Excellency, he does not know Latin."

From this talk of His Excellency the Delegate Apostolic we can understand what a high appreciation he had about Mgr. Kooplicat. Yes, Mgr. Mathew Kooplicat was a great person and he should be remembered as such by the future generations.

Many more things could be said about him. But since the space in the Souvenir is very much limited, I shall not go further lest my article on this great person should become nauseous to the readers.

