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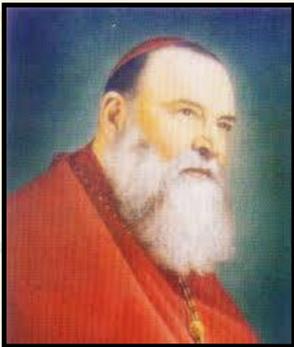
Dear Confreres, members of the Salesian Family and friends,

I take this occasion to wish you all a very **Happy Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady** (15th August) and **Happy Feast Day on the occasion of the birthday of St. John Bosco** (16th August). This month is special to each one of us as we remember the 56th Death Anniversary of Archbishop Louis Mathias today the 03rd August 2021. He went to his heavenly adobe in 1965. I therefore, would like to take this opportunity to share with you all a few thoughts about him.

LIFE AND MISSION OF ARCHBISHOP LOUIS MATHIAS (1887 – 1965)

Early Life

When Louis Mathias was twelve years old, he lost his beloved parents. It was a loss that deprived him and his younger sister, Georgette, of a loving family atmosphere and brought them into that of boarding-schools. This was the root from which sprung his life-long love for the poor and the unfortunate and his special tenderness towards orphaned and neglected children



Louis Mathias was born on 20th July 1887 in Paris to Mr. George Louis his father and Mrs. Marie Staehly his mother. Both are from Alsace but were working in Paris. He was baptized on 12th August 1889. Georgette, his younger sister was born in 1892. Financial problems have been very acute, so the family shifted from Paris to Tunisia in 1895. In the meantime, his father got a new job in *Souk-el-Arba* and the whole family was moved over there.

George Louis his father worked very hard and was ready to do any work to support the family and to bring up his two kids. He worked only three years in this place and at the age of 36 he passed away at *Souk-el-Arba*. The young widow and the two kids returned to Tunisia. But in the following year on 05th December 1899 the beloved mother of Louis and Georgette passed away in a French hospital. The two kids were left orphans. Thanks to the assistance of the chaplain of the hospital that Louis Mathias was accepted by the Salesians in Tunisia and Georgette his sister was accepted by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Tunisia.

The Salesians had established themselves in Tunisia in 1894. Louis Mathias was a member of the group called 'Sons of Mary' and was given free education. Louis Mathias possessed a very keen intellect, a great love for books, and signs of an ecclesiastical vocation. He was therefore, sent to the *Perret institute* in La Marsa, fifteen kilometers from Tunisia where the Salesians had opened a school. It was small and poor and had only one story; it was for orphaned boys and charitable donations kept it in existence. "Poor orphans were educated here without any distinction of nationality: black children were in the majority." (The *Bollettino Salesiano* 1900, p.223.)



Growing with Don Bosco

Louis Mathias studied for a few years. When he was sixteen years, he asked to be admitted into the Salesian Congregation. He was accepted and sent to France for his novitiate, but since there was a persecution of Religious Orders he was sent to Sicily, Italy. He began his novitiate on 04th January 1904 at St. Gregory's, Catania.

As a novice and a young Salesian, Brother Louis did not have an easy life. He had always been a vivacious youth. His dossier contained reports which were not at all objective enough. His novice master wrote: "He is in the best of health and can adapt to circumstances. He is alone in this world except for a sister in a boarding-school in Tunisia. His character is not too manly and he tends to form friendships easily, but he does make strong efforts to improve. At heart he is good, although somewhat inconstant and changeable. During these last few months, he has behaved much better than at the beginning." "He is sufficiently intelligent," add the Superiors on the consulting panel, "but does not always do his best."

The final outcome of the novitiate was in the balance as far as Louis Mathias was concerned: two votes for, two votes against! However, in a meeting held on 08th April 1905 the Provincial Council of Sicily allowed him to go ahead to his Religious Profession. Undoubtedly, the Provincial, Fr. Francis Piccollo SDB, cast the deciding vote.

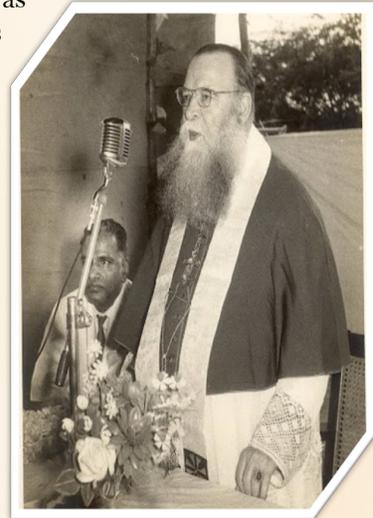
Louis Mathias was a very good student, as all agreed, but he was also a 'live-wire' as narrated by one of his fellow-students: "Louis Mathias was a lively fellow and a bit of a meddler, but he was always cheerful and witty. In the early years of his Salesian life, he showed so much vivacity that the Rector appointed one of the more serious students to stay near him to act as a sort of brake and calming influence on him".

In those days, Salesian clerical students used to have several tasks to do other than their studies. It was a system, as Don Bosco saw it, that also assisted their formation, although it was not quite in keeping with the practice of seminaries. True, such works take the student away from his books for a time, but Don Bosco was convinced that extra-curricular activities, in reasonable doses, helped the student in his studies by helping him to profit from every available minute.

"Don Bosco", one of his students said to the saint one day, "our studies are so many and so serious that other jobs act like a drag." "Well," replied Don Bosco with a smile, "don't let them be a drag!" In other words, studies were not an end in themselves but a help to obtain the spirit of work.

Louis Mathias was capable to handle music, French, mathematic, history and geography to teach the youth of Catania. He was always among the young, because he was cheerful and a good companion. He joked a lot with them and could tease without giving any offence.

Two years later, he was assigned to the Salesian school at Bova Marina in Calabria where he taught French, music, and mathematic in the secondary classes. He was always a bit of a thorn in the Superior's side. On 06th October 1911, the Religious Profession were to take place, but not all the House Council were in favour of letting Louis Mathias go ahead. Then they voted him "admitted" but they added this report in his dossier: "Louis Mathias is not always humble enough and respectful towards his Superiors."



All in all, there was nothing scandalous in his unorthodox manners. Wild he might have been, but he was serious and understanding when it was a question of his vocation and his apostolic desires towards the pupils, the poor and working-class people. He prepared his catechism lessons so well that the boys of the school and the Oratory were willing to attend them. Louis Mathias was full of life and good humour, just as Don Bosco wanted his Salesians to be. He was the soul of the boisterous games which the boys played in the small playgrounds. He kept the recreations alive in those days before the advent of television and soccer. He was also a very good musician and knew some conjuring tricks too. He later used these talents in India to help the young missionaries to keep up their spirits, lest they be depressed by nostalgia for their distant homelands.

Louis Mathias finished his philosophy course at Bova, then began on his first steps in Theology. It was decided, however, that better opportunities should be given to this young man with the brilliant mind, so in 1911 he was sent to the Salesian theological studentate at Foglizzo, near Turin. He obtained his degree in theology and was ordained a priest on 20th July 1913, on his 26th birthday.

A young Priest

Yet another mile stone was achieved on his 48th Birthday. On 20th July 1935, when as the new archbishop of Madras he would take over his diocese and begin what turned out to be an apostolate of leadership for the Catholic Church in India. The theology years had certainly brought balance in his life, as the House Council of Foglizzo testified in their report for admitting him to the sub-diaconate: "Very good in all things." His fellow-students recalled him as "being held in high esteem by both professors and companions alike, his witty conversation and cheerfulness contributed a lot to unity and fraternity, he was outstanding for his goodness and braininess."

His greatest impressions however were received from the Rector Major, Fr. Paul Albera, whom he met several times. Whenever he recalled those meetings Archbishop Louis Mathias used to remark: "It was from him that I had many a spiritual and religious advice which did me in good stead throughout my late life."

Fr. Louis Mathias was assigned to St. Gregory's school, Catania, as a teacher of philosophy and singing. He was also asked to lend a helping hand to the Oratory. He was also a teacher in the studentate and the novitiate among his pupils. Fr. Aloysius Ricceri, the future Rector Major, was the Rector of the community. He said about Fr. Louis: "The young priest had a charming character, as well as being intelligent, cheerful, energetic, and a great favourite with us all."

Fr. Louis Mathias was in the military camp from 1916 to 1918. The military venture of Fr. Louis Mathias came to an end when on 30th July 1918 he was taken prisoner somewhere between Rheims and Chateau-Thierry. His sister, Georgette had become a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. She received a letter from Fr. Louis dated 07th August and was the first news of her brother after a long and agonizing silence. On 27th January 1919 from Strotzheim Fr. Louis wrote to Fr. Gusmano, the secretary of the Superior Council of our Society, that he wants to spend a few days with his sister. He then returned to Sicily, his own Province.

At the end of July 1921, Fr. Louis Mathias was then the Rector of St. Joseph School in Pedara, Sicily. He received a letter from Fr. Gusmano whether he has a desire to go to India as a missionary. 'To become a missionary! To go to India!' Here were the dreams of my boyhood! he said. It is also the will of God in the desires of my Superiors. Fr. Gusmano on behalf of Fr. Paul Albera, the then Rector Major, wrote to Fr. Louis Mathias on 06th August 1921 about his choice to be in the mission. On 09th September 1921, Fr. Paul Albera appointed Fr. Louis Mathias as the leader of the missionary group for Assam.



A Leader to North East India

No one was surprised when the twice decorated soldier and Military chaplain of World War I, Fr. Louis Mathias, who had already distinguished himself in the Salesian Houses of Sicily, was chosen in 1921 to lead the first group of 11 missionaries (6 Priests and 5 Brothers) to work in the newly accepted Assam Mission. After landing in Mumbai on 06th January 1922, the group of eleven reached Shillong on 13th January only to find to their joy in the Church a statue of Mary Help of Christians which, the Jesuits said, represented the 'Queen of the Missions'. It was through this group of eleven valiant men that the Spirit began the missionary miracle of Assam.



A year later, at the age 35, on 12th December 1922, Fr. Louis Mathias was nominated Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Manipur and Bhutan which comprised the vast region of North East India. Armed with his legendary motto "Dare and Hope" and with timely foresight, Mgr. Mathias immediately started the first Novitiate in India in January 1924 with well-known Salesians like Mgr. Marengo, Joseph Sandanam, Fr. Joseph Bacchiarello, Savarimuthu as novices. Contrary to the prevailing practice of sending only priests to the missions, Fr. Mathias got novices from Europe to have the entire gamut of their training here in the mission field along with their India counterparts, which proved to be mutually beneficial. Then in quick succession the Studentates of philosophy and theology were established. This initiative of Fr. Mathias explains the marvelous development of the Assam Mission and of the Salesian work in India, in general.

Besides being Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Mgr. Mathias was appointed, around the middle of 1923, first the Delegate of all the Salesians in India and later the Provincial (1926-1934) of the Province of India, an area extending from the northeast of India to Thanjavur, a distance of 4,000 km, with headquarters at Shillong. Endowed with rare administrative capacity, indefatigable energy and genius for organizing, he gave priority to education and established a network of schools, agricultural and technical institutes and a printing press, and in a few years' time he was able to lead the Prefecture and the Salesian Congregation in India to phenomenal growth.

In 1934, the Holy See elevated the Prefecture Apostolic into a diocese and Mgr. Mathias was nominated as the first bishop of Shillong on 09th July 1934. Affirming the vital contribution, he had made, Fr. Scuderi, the provincial, wrote to Fr. Peter Berruti, the Prefect General of the Congregation, that Mgr. Mathias "has been the soul of every movement and of every success in the past thirteen years, both in Assam and in the whole Province."

Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore

As the inscrutable ways of Providence would have it, a few months after he became Bishop of Assam, on 12th December 1934, Mgr. Mederlet, the Salesian Archbishop of Madras, died suddenly. Through the Bull of appointment dated 25th March 1935, the Holy Father promoted Mgr. Mathias to the archiepiscopal See of Madras. In a letter to Fr. Ricaldone on 03rd April, Mgr. Mathias wrote: "My ambition is to make Don Bosco known and loved. I would like to flood India with Don Bosco. This filial and ardent desire which almost devours me, makes me daring, strong and courageous, even though I am no longer so strong as I was once."



Major Achievements

One of the founders of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, he soon became a well-known and respected leader among the Hierarchy of India and the Indian Church in general. During the period of his reign from 1925 to 1965, from among his many achievements, the following deserve special mention:

- The merger of the archdiocese of Madras and the Padroado diocese of Mylapore, Mgr. Mathias becoming the first Archbishop of Madras Mylapore.
- The major seminary at Poonamallee (1936).
- The National Eucharistic Congress of India, Burma and Ceylon (1937).
- The Votive Shrine of the Immaculate Heart at Kilpauk.
- The Catholic Centre, Madras (1950-1951).
- All the spade work for St. John's Medical College, Bangalore.
- The theological review "Clergy Monthly" (later renamed, "Vidyajyoti").
- Fearless championing of the Catholic cause in India: the campaign for the educational rights of the Church in Kerala, and the struggle with the Madras Government in 1948 - 1950 over the question of compulsory endowments for secondary schools.
- The phenomenal growth of Catholic parishes and institutions and of the number of the Catholic population, diocesan and religious priests, religious women, students and orphans educated, new churches and presbyteries built.
- The promotion of Lay Apostolate through many new organizations such as the Catholic Social Guild, the Catholic Workers' Association, the Catholic Nurses' Guild, etc.
- The furthering of evangelization work and education of Catholic boys and girls.
- The establishment of orphanages, technical schools, institutions for the physically challenged, homes for foundlings and 500 small houses for the needy.

In 1951 Mgr. Mathias was called to Rome to undertake a very special mission. He was asked to go to the Exarchate of Asmara in Ethiopia and to the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria in Egypt as Apostolic Visitor 'to restore peace and harmony' in that region. The archbishop spent over a month there trying to settle various disputes. Reports tell us that his negotiating spirit was marked by a 'human touch'. After he had successfully accomplished his assignment, Cardinal Tisserant, Prefect of the Congregation for Oriental Rites, said of him, "He would make an excellent Prefect of the Propaganda Fide."

The Vicar Apostolic of Eritrea wrote to him to say: "The work you have done here for us, although it was not easy and often times distasteful, has been beneficial in this that our confidence has soared and you have left us with many delightful memories."

Death of a Warrior

Although he was 78 years old, Archbishop Mathias was on his way to Europe in 1965, to solicit help for his many apostolic projects and to take part in the last session of the Second Vatican Council. But God called His faithful servant for the reward he so richly deserved. On 03rd August 1965, he died at Legnano (Italy) of a massive heart attack and his body was flown to Madras.

From Bombay, Valerian Cardinal Gracias accompanied the mortal remains of his beloved friend and performed the final rites in Madras of 07th August 1965. Speaking at his funeral, Cardinal Gracias eulogized: "A noble son of his country, a genuine lover of India, an outstanding member of his religious Society and an ornament to the Hierarchy of India; one who, during his long and distinguished episcopate, combined in himself the qualities of an able administrator, a dynamic leader, an efficient organizer, a noted educator and a social worker..."



In a sense, with the death of Archbishop Mathias it is the end of an era in the history of the Church in India. For by his personality and achievements he did set a definite stamp on the long period in which he lived, worked and died... 'Dare and hope' was his motto. Indeed, he had astonishing courage, intrepid faith and an unconquerable hope – else he would never have been able to achieve all that he accomplished”.

Architect of Salesian India

Louis Mathias was a man of great enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that came from deep convictions and expressed itself in controlled, but constant and vigorous activity. He was of a strong and energetic character, a formidable worker who demanded from others a similar output of work. He used to tell his Salesians... “Better to die of over-work than of laziness.”

He knew how to use his own enthusiasm to inspire others. Undoubtedly, the mission of Assam was such that of itself it inspired missionaries to be enthusiastic over it, but it also presented them with a variety of difficulties which, unless there had been a capable and understanding leader at the helm, would have disheartened even the best of them.

Fr. Ziggotti, Rector Major, who visited India in 1953 wrote to Mathias: “Your Grace has passed on to the Salesians, an enterprising spirit that is full of courageous zeal, a totally Salesian spirit of cheerfulness and at the same time a spirit of piety that underlies their life and activities.”

He was a great believer in cheerfulness and friendliness. He constantly kept his co-workers in touch with the events in other parts of the region through the informal talks and conferences. Wherever he went, he would speak about the great and the small things happening in the far-flung mission stations. Added to all this was his own example of hard work, cheerfulness and zeal. His words and his advice were always well received.

Mgr. Mathias could well be hailed as the greatest Salesian of the 20th century in India. According to Father Carreño: “It was his foresight, leadership, prestige and experience that gave great encouragement to all the Salesian activities.” A dreamer, a planner and a builder with consummate tact, a man of piety and of exemplary religious observance, Mgr. Mathias loved Don Bosco with all his heart.

Shortly before his death, he gave to the Press his memoirs, *Quarant'anni* in India, which bears testimony to a life spent entirely in the service of the Indian Church and the Salesian Congregation in India. His leadership, vision, commitment and dedication will always be remembered. Akin to his fiery motto “Dare and Hope,” his achievements were truly monumental and posterity will always remember Mgr. Louis Mathias as the 20th century stalwart of the Indian Hierarchy and the principal architect of Salesian India



WELCOME

We are very happy to welcome Fr. Chiharme Kharsi Alayee Pius SDB to the Salesian Province of Shillong. He has been assigned with the ministry of Professor, Counsellor and Incharge of Sunday Oratory at Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong. We thank him for his valuable service and his availability to take up this responsibility. As he takes up this task, we implore the Lord's abundant blessings on him and his ministry.



INS PRINCIPALS' MEET

We would like to thank Fr. Babu Stephen, Delegate for Education and Culture, for the well-organized, animated and fruitful online google meeting for all the principals of Shillong province. The first half of the meeting was conducted Region-wise and then the second half was a general meeting of all the principals. It was well participated by all the Heads of Schools in the Province. We are grateful to the four coordinators of the seven regions who animated the meetings in their regions.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR SCHOOLS

I extend my hearty congratulations and prayerful wishes to all the Salesian Schools in the INS Province for the good results. In the name of the Provincial Council and all the confreres I would like to thank the Principals, SDBs, members of the school management, teachers, parents and especially the students for the hard work, commitment and dedication. May God continue to bless you all.

BIRTHDAY WISHES

I take this occasion to wish all the confreres who celebrate their birthday this month, a very **Happy Birthday**. May God bless you and your ministry. Assure you of my prayers.

Dates	Names	Dates	Names
01	Fr. Denis Lalfela	20	Fr. John Zosiama
	Cl. Rangdabiang Lyngdoh	21	Fr. Angel Fernandez Artime
02	Fr. Gedwin Warbah	22	Fr. Babu S Pallithottam
	Cl. Reynold Biangkupar Kurbah		Cl. Michael Mawñiuh
08	Cl. Ershal Thyrniang	23	Cl. Pyndappura Nongdhar
09	Br. Fernandez Dianetious	24	Cl. Protasius Syngkli
	Fr. Mani Kochupura		Br. Anthony Sumer
10	Br. Barnabas Khriam	25	Cl. Shemphang Dkhar
	Fr. Zepherinus Baxla	26	Fr. Bernard G Pala
12	Fr. Isaac Mattappillil (MA)		Cl. Fivestar Savio Kurbah
	15	Fr. Kenny Pakma	27
Cl. Reuben Lyngdoh		29	Fr. Alistair Marweñ
18	Fr. Joachim Ekka		Fr. Thomas Puliparambil (PA)
19	Br. John Colombi		

IN LOVING MEMORY

We express our heartfelt condolences to the Provincials, confreres and family members who lost their beloved ones. Let us pray for the repose of the departed souls:

- † Fr. Dominic Savio Jyrwa SDB
- † Mrs. Elizabeth, the beloved mother of Fr. Jose Kuruvachira, the Provincial of Dimapur.
- † Mr. Manuel Tirkey, the beloved father of Fr. Mukt Tirkey and Fr. Cyril Tirkey.
- † Fr. Vincent Durairaj SDB (INM)
- † Fr. George Nadackal SDB (INN)



CONCLUSION

When I was younger, my parents would always tell me to say the three Hail Marys and to ask Mother Mary to cradle me in her loving arms, and put me to sleep. The best way to calm my thoughts was to turn to Mary and recite her prayer. Even though it seems simple, saying the Hail Mary makes me feel her holy presence, and now I find myself falling asleep feeling safe and loved by my holy mother every night.

When we think of Mary, many of us tend to dwell on her sorrows and sacrifices. We think about how much Mary gave up when she accepted her role as Mother of God. Instead, we should imagine Mary being filled with joy when she realizes God's love for her. This light and happiness carried Mary through all of her sorrows. She never fails to be a perfect example of how to bring love and joy into the darkest places. That is why in our struggles, we, like Mary, must find the light of Christ in order to persevere through those struggles. Mary received her title as Queen of Heaven and Earth and was crowned in the glory of her Son's life and love. This was a well-deserved, momentous occasion for the woman who brought *The Way, The Truth, and The Life* into the world.

Mary experienced many sorrows throughout her life, but still, she brings joy to her children as our earthly mothers often do. Mary wants nothing more for God's creation than for us to be united with her Son. Mary is the perfect messenger who carries the Good News to us. She, like her Son, constantly entrusts us to spread this news to the ends of the earth. Just as Mary radiated her Son's light and love, each of us are called to emulate her and bring that joy to our family, community and the world and thus shine with the fire of Christ's love. We need to imitate our Eleven Salesian Pioneers who reached Shillong on 13th January 1922 and found a statue of Mary Help of Christians exclaimed "Our Mother Mary Queen of the Missions" arrived before us and welcomed us. This is the True Miracle of North East India.

Yours in Don Bosco,



Fr. Paul Olphindro Lyngkot SDB
Provincial

