

Thani Nayagam

The Power and the Glory

Priesthood

13/9

— A pupil's sermon at the pedagogue's Silver Jubilee

(Sermon preached by the late Rev. Fr. X. S. Thani Nayagam on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the late Rev. Fr. F. M. F. Long, former Rector, St. Patrick's College, Jaffna, on 25 June 1945)

**DEDICATED TO THE
MEMORY**

OF

Rev. Fr. X. S. Thani Nayagam

(1913-08-02 — 1980-09-01)

Fondly remembered by his kinsmen

Of his fullness we have all received.—*John 1, 16.*

My Lord, Very Revd. Fr. Jubilarian, Brother Patricians,

From heights, great and small, from mountain springs, and streams, and rolling rivers, the water rushes down into the catchment area, into the reservoir of the giant dam. Mighty walls of concrete stem the rising flood. For months the water climbs higher and higher on the shoulders of the dam, till at last it is full, and of its abundant supply a cascading river glides over the spillway. A symbolic river, an eloquent evidence of over-flowing and superabundant fullness.

How many hidden forces are gathered and stored in these heaped-up waters of a dam? They turn engines that give strength and power to the wheels and motors of industry; they produce a million spears of light to the hearths and homes of the people; they irrigate parched acres turning them into smiling fields.....

We may think in like manner of the accumulated riches of the Catholic Priest. Like Christ in whom "dwelleth all fullness bodily," the Catholic Priest is a reservoir wherein are stored the waters of grace. Of that fullness of Christ we have all received through his sacred minister. From Christ's representative do flow rivers of living water. If any man thirst let him come to him and drink.

From this storage of "living waters" comes the power that moves the wheels of supernatural energy in society; from these cascading falls originate the lights that illumine the paths to heaven; from this dam proceed the anicuts that water the fields of God, the souls of men.

There was a certain fullness in the Pagan priesthood. The pontiff and the flamen offered sacrifice; gave advice in matters of state; were courted leaders in society; were welcome in the halls and groves of learning. There was a much greater fullness in the Jewish priesthood, but even that fullness is but a shadow and a figure before the fullness of the priesthood of Christ, before the Order of Melchisedech.....

Father Roper, Editor of the "Examiner" was once passing through one of the busy thoroughfares of Bombay. A Hindu gentleman obviously wealthy, ran up to him and left him as rapidly

as he had approached him saying, "You are sacred, aren't you? I wanted to have the privilege of touching such a sacred object" Non-Catholics do see in the Priest, an object worthy of respect and reverence, but to the eyes of faith, *the Priest is Christ himself*.

Christ is present in the Eucharist; but the Catholic Priest is the complement of the Eucharist, completes his presence in the world. Christ is silent on our altars; He does not speak, He does not teach, He does not rule; all this is done for Him by the God-Man's double—the Catholic Priest.

Like Christ Himself, his chief work is prayer; prayer in the prayer of all prayers, the Holy Mass; prayer in the official prayer of the Church—the Breviary. If a Priest but performed these two duties, he would have more than merited the gratitude of the whole world, Catholic and Non-Catholic. But is he satisfied? No, he is the healer of souls and of bodies of broken hearts and sore minds; he is the lamp of learning, the consoler of the sick and the afflicted, so that even the most bitter anticlerical cannot but recognise his refining and civilising influence in the world, though neither refinement nor civilisation is the direct and immediate scope of the Priesthood. Like His Master he goes about doing good.

Twenty-five years ago in Ireland, Ireland of Missionary saints and scholars; Ireland of Monasteries and Churches; Ireland of Amargh and Clonard, Lismore and Bangor; Ireland of Columba and Columbanus, and Fridolin, Cuthbert and Killian. Twenty-five years ago in Belmont, in the Chapel of the Oblate Scholasticate, from which came to us the Conways and the Dowlings, the Murphys and the Dunnes, of whom we have heard our fathers speak with so much gratitude and love. A tall young levite, in the flower and bloom of youth, lies prostrate before the Altar, while the Choir invokes the saints, that he might be holy, his mission successful, his vocation permanent. All ye Monks and hermits.....All Confessors.....All ye Saints, Pray for us..... rises the plaintive chant. At that time we must believe that St. Patrick and the many missionary Saints of Erin obtained for him the grace to keep burning in this corner of the earth the twin torches of faith and learning.....

Among the kneeling, praying congregation, are many relatives and parents of the deacon who is being ordained; parents who in course of time shall have offered all their children to God. The father, now no more with us, but witness of our celebrations from the realms above, the mother who would feign be here now to see the glory of her son, watch with thankful eyes the anointing of their first-born. Among those present are also the two younger brothers Fred and Dan, and a younger sister, Emma, all three of whom will soon consecrate themselves to God following the footsteps of their elder brother, Timothy.

What an example of Faith and Love of God does not the family of the Longs of Limerick give everyone of us here present? The Longs had four children, all of them they dedicated to the service of God. Their family ends as far as this world is concerned, but ends like a river proud to lose itself in the immensity of the ocean, ends in the Eternal Priesthood of Christ, ends in the virgin choruses of heaven. If you were surprised at this, the Jubilarian will give you the same reply as Charles Eugene de Mazenod, the founder of the Congregation of which he is a member. Charles was questioned by his Grand uncle. "Is it true you are going to become a priest? How can you think of such a step? Don't you know you are the last of our family? Is our name to die out?" Charles then replied, "What greater privilege can our family have than to end in the Eternal Priesthood of Christ?"

These four, by the sacrifice they have made, have merited to rear very large families to God. When in Ireland, I remarked the singular fact that all four of them have found their vocation in the Church as educators. Dr. Frederick Long as Dean in Maynooth the Ecclesiastical College that trains the flower of the Irish Secular Clergy; Fr. Daniel Long as Professor of Moral Theology in the Oblate Scholasticate, Pillton; Sister Mary Mechtilde on the Staff of the Ladies' Training College, Kerrysford; and Father Timothy Long as teacher and Rector of the institution that has nursed us. Is it a wonder then, that coming as he does of a family of Catholic Educationists, the Jubilarian has always striven to give us an integral Catholic formation, and led a splendid fight for our schools?

Of the Jubilarian's years in Jaffna, of what he has accomplished during these 25 years, I am by no means competent to

judge. For the sapling that grows under its shade knows not the mighty proportions of the parent oak. It was not so very long ago that I was his altar boy; it was not so very long ago that I sat in his classrooms. Yet I am thankful to this graceful tribute of an invitation extended to the pupil to preach at the Silver Jubilee of the pedagogue.

At the various functions which form part of this programme of celebrations, mention will be made of the jubilarian's great contribution to the welfare of the College as teacher and Rector, to the welfare of the town and of the Island, of his social and philanthropic activities. Mention will be made of the many outsiders who have received of his fullness. But short as this sermon must be, I must needs mention his great apostolate as a Catholic priest.

I have always noted and admired and striven to follow the deep interior life of the jubilarian—his sense of the supernatural, his ardent faith. The grace that is in him by the imposition of hands, he has always stirred up and increased by a remarkable fidelity to his vocation, to his life of contemplation, to his vows as a religious. And this interior life he has always fed and nursed amid the most distracting occupations of his office, amid continuous journeys and long drawn duties. His zeal has been like the irrigating waters of benediction. He has preached, lectured, instructed wherever he has gone; he has tried in season and out of season to create a like interior life in the boys and in those with whom he comes into contact. Monthly and terminal retreats for teachers and boys; the Legion of Mary, the new life infused into the Confraternities, the devotion to the Blessed Virgin—all speak of the supernatural sense, the *sensus Christi*, of this Man of God.

And what shall I say of his great fund of sympathy for the sufferer, his warm Irish affection? What shall I say of his apostolate among boys, his apostolate among the circles in which he moves; his apostolate among the Englishmen and Irishmen scattered over the Island, his ministry to the men in the services for whom he has devoted all his spare time, his legitimate rest at the sacrifice of his health, celebrating as many as three Masses a day at places from one another far away in the malarial jungle.

In all this he has fulfilled the admonitions given by St. Paul his patron "Work like a good soldier of Christ." "Be thou vigilant labour in all things, do the work of an evangelist."

These are a few landmarks of his apostolate. But he is great in our eyes also for what we do not know about him. We know not of his many hours of prayer, his colloquies with God, his vigils, his fasts, his victories and his triumphs in the realm of souls, his crosses—yes, his crosses and his sufferings, for since he has been singularly blessed in his ministry, we must perforce believe that he has brought to the Altar much suffering in union with the Sacred Victim. Alas for the blindness of men, that they see but appearances. They see but the glamour and not the tedium; and sometimes read a life of ease and comfort into the most crowded years of a priest's self-sacrificing zeal. If the Pharisees and Saducees and Scribes could hurl the most opprobrious and unfounded attacks on our Lord is it a wonder that we, poor priests, are the victims of slandering and inconsiderate tongues. If St. Paul, the great apostle, could be derided and spurned by the very Corinthians to whom he had given supernatural life is it a surprise that we receive most ingratitude of those from whom we may least expect it.

But, my dear boys, learn to admire. If today in considering the life of your eminent Rector you feel called to dedicate your life too in a like service in the priesthood of Christ, do not close your ears to the voice that is calling; for in no walk of life can your youth find that fruition and crowning which it will have in the Catholic priesthood. And if today you, parents, feel called to imitate in some measure the sacrifice of the Longs and acquire their glory, let not considerations of a worldly nature prevent you from consenting to the greatest privilege you can ever have....

Today is a day of thanksgiving. For you boys the best thanks you can offer is the living up to the spiritual ideals the Rector has taught you. You garlanded him yesterday; but remember the loveliest flowers around his neck today and on the day of judgement are your own selves.....

The mother of a Patrician family, the Gracchi, was visited by some lady friends who showed her their jewels, and, since she had

no jewels, wanted to know where they were. She went to the adjoining room and brought in her children saying, "These are my jewels." Similarly we are the brightest ornaments of our Rector.....

We thank God for the many fruitful years God has deigned to bestow on the jubilarian. We thank the jubilarian for his wholehearted and undivided service to us. We thank his country, his parents, and his congregation, for having given him to us. We thank God for the spirit of loyalty and devotion that binds us Patricians to our Alma Mater. We pray for the success of the Jubilarian's mission; that he return to us restored and rejuvenated for another quarter century of labour among us.

These our thanks and our prayers we offer in union with the Eucharistic Sacrifice which is essentially a thanksgiving, a gratiarum actio. Our thanks, our prayers and our hopes we gather up in the beautiful collect of the liturgy of thanksgiving.

Deus cuus misericordia non est numerus.....Amen.



"Every country is my country
Every man is my kinsman."

"I shall pass through this world but once. If
therefore, there be any good thing I can do, or
any kindness I can show to any fellow creature
let me do it now. Let me not defer it, nor
neglect it, for I shall never pass this way
again."

"From quiet homes and first beginning
Out to the undiscovered ends'
There's nothing worth the wear of winning
But laughter and the love of friends."

To forgive enemies is culture, but to forgive friends is a higher culture. To return good to those who have been bad to you is culture. To be accessible and friendly with the lowly is culture. Culture includes the learning which considers itself inadequate, the service which expects no reward, the greatness which ever is humble, the largeness which forgives, the gentlemanliness which never inflicts pain, the purity of intention and the spotlessness of mind which are born of truth and justice, and the expansiveness which comes of not harbouring petty thoughts resulting in the shrivelling of personality. Culture is fostered by learning, by the critical search for knowledge in books, by association with the learned, by the art of conversation which includes as well the art of listening, by the eloquence which should be able to express lucidly one's subtlest thoughts, and by friendships which provide the opportunity to give and to receive. Culture includes the humanism which enjoys humour and laughter. "To those who are unable to laugh it is pitch dark even amidst the blaze of noon." Culture is fed on ideals—the man without ideals is a corpse. Culture, cannot be an ideal which "only a Hellenocentric world possess,"

—"*From Indian Thought and Roman Stoicism*", Inaugural Lecture by X. S. Thani Nayagam at the University of Malaya.