

# MADHU



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historical and devotional  
development of the Sanctuary  
of Our Lady of Madhu.*



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*Imprimatur*

+ B. DEOGUPILLAI,  
Bishop of Jaffna,  
Madhu.

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OUR LADY OF MADHU PRAY FOR US

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“Lift up thine eyes round about thee and see; all these are gathered together; they are come to thee; thy sons shall come from afar and thy daughters shall rise up at thy side”. In these words the prophet Isaias describes the vision splendid of the Universal Church. These words suggest themselves too to our minds when we see the immense concourse of people gathered annually from the four corners of Sri Lanka at the feet of Our Lady of Madhu. They come in their thousands and tens of thousands to this sacred spot, because it has long been the centre of Marian devotion in the Island and because it has been the nursery of our faith in times of persecution. The following pages give a short account of the origin and development of Our Lady’s sanctuary.

# I

## A HISTORICAL SURVEY

### The original home of Our Lady of Madhu

Those who brought Christianity to our shores planted also in our midst the devotion to the Mother of God. The Kingdom of Jaffna in the 16th century consisted of the northern peninsula (called Yalpanam in Tamil and in Sinhalese Yalpane) along with the neighbouring islets, a portion of the adjacent mainland and the sea coast up to the island of Mannar. The first news the people of this Kingdom had of Christianity was from the new converts of the Fishery Coast of India. About the year 1544 the fame of the preaching and the miracles of St. Francis Xavier induced the Mannarites to send a deputation to the saint to come to them. As he was busy in Travancore at the time, he sent them a priest who bore his name, to instruct and baptise them. Over 600 men, women and children embraced the faith and most of them sealed with their blood their belief in Jesus Christ. The massacre of the new converts was carried out on the orders of Sankily the king of Jaffna.

The new religion that was planted in Mannar and its neighbourhood did not die. In 1583 the number of Christians is said to have been about 43,000 with 26 churches. One of these churches was situated in Mantai, a village on the mainland and about six miles from Mannar. This church was the original home of the statue of Our Lady of Madhu, which at that time was called Our Lady of Good Health.

### Our Lady of Mantai comes to Madhu

The conquest of the Island by the Dutch opened an era of cruel persecution against the Catholics and the



faithful of Mantai were forced to consider seriously the desirability of removing the statue of Our Lady of Mantai to a haven of safety. There were no priests to give them any spiritual support or strength. With the consent of the people twenty devoted families, in the year 1670, migrated with the statue of Our Lady of Mantai into the Kandyan territory, where they hoped to save the statue from profanation and them selves from persecution, Under the protection of the Heavenly Mother the little company wandered hither and thither in the thick forest of the Wanni in constant fear of the enemy. Guided by Divine Providence, they reached a hamlet by the side of an ancient tank on the royal Rameswaram-Kandy route, where there was a customs house belonging to the Kandyan king. The hamlet was called Maruthamadhu; and there the Mantai Catholics for the first time planted the seed of Catholicism. In the calm and serene atmosphere of Maruthamadhu the seed grew under Our Lady's protection, while persecution raged throughout Jaffna Pattanam.

About the same time there was another movement towards Madhu from the Jaffna Peninsula. To avoid the Dutch persecution about 700 Catholics crossed over to Poonaryn and sought refuge in the Wanni. Having wandered for days in anxiety and fear, they too, as if by a miracle, were led to Maruthamadhu. What a happy meeting amongst sylvan surroundings! Among the newly arrived Catholics from Jaffna was a daughter of a Portuguese Captain named Helena whose fervent piety and edifying life won for her the title of "Santa Lena" i. e. St. Helena. In the course of time she married the officer who was in charge of the customs house at Madhu and the first little church dedicated to Our Lady of Madhu was built by this pious lady. For this



good act the Christians have immortalised her memory by calling the place "Silena-Marutha-Madhu" which to the present day continues to be one of the names of the holy sanctuary. From her sylvan shrine Our Lady of Madhu dispensed liberally her favours spiritual and temporal to her children. She became especially famous as a protectress against the sting of venomous serpents that abounded in the jungle. At first their sting had no effect within the church lands. Then people began to take the Madhu earth to various parts of Sri Lanka as a medicine and found that it had the same healing power.

### **Madhu under the Oratorians**

Owing to the expulsion of the Catholic priests from the Dutch territory, there was no ministry in Sri Lanka for thirty years 1656-1686. The advent of Father Joseph Vaz, followed by other Oratorian priests, brought about a Catholic revival, and gradually steps were taken to open mission centres. In the Mantote district, Silena Marutha Madhu is mentioned as a mission centre already in 1706, and Father Pedro Ferrao, a holy and austere Oratorian, was in charge at the time; but his association with the place seems to hark back almost to 1695, the year of his arrival in Sri Lanka (Life of Fr. Vaz X 158., Orat. Mis. XII51). The second church at Madhu was built by him and enlarged by another Oratorian, Fr. Antonio De Tavora (Orat. Mis. 211).

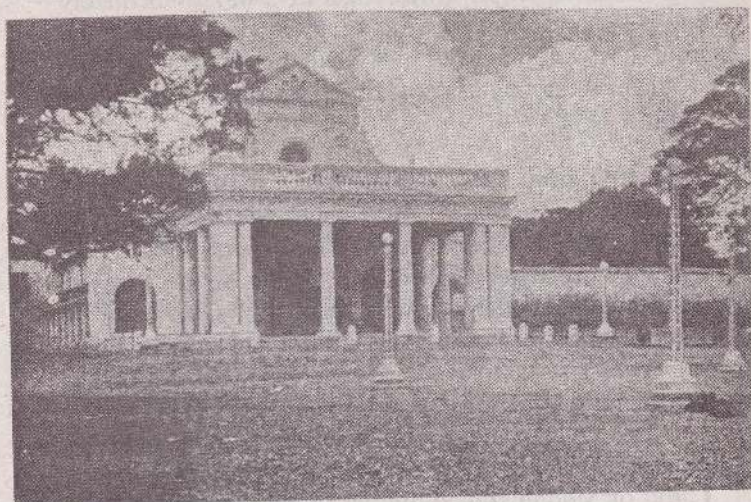
With the coming of the British to Sri Lanka religious persecution ceased and a bright era dawned for the Catholics. Already during the time of the Goanese Oratorians the Catholics of Mannar and the suburbs appear to have visited Madhu on pilgrimage. Lack

of space in the church prompted a pious Burgher gentleman, Mr. Moyce, who was secretary of the Mannar courts, to erect in the year 1823 a small mud hut chapel for the use of the faithful. This chapel consisted of three unfinished dilapidated walls eight feet high, in the shape of a horse shoe, in the middle of which was a little table serving as an altar. Behind the chapel was a small room for the visiting priests. The church at Madhu was progressing in the hands of the Goanese priests, but a sudden set back was experienced when their Congregation was suppressed in 1834

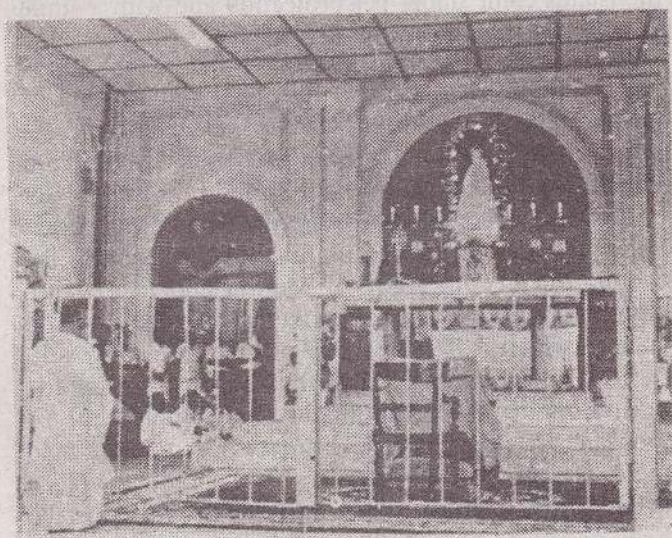
### **Madhu under the Oblates**

On the suppression of the Oratorian Congregation, fresh arrangements were made by the authorities at Rome. The Northern Vicariate was formed in 1846 with Mgr. Bettachini as Vicar Apostolic who called in the oblates to help him. Bishop Semeria, who succeeded Mgr. Bettachini, was not able to undertake any substantial improvements to the shrine. Bishop Bonjean succeeded Dr. Semeria in 1868. In the year 1870 the new Bishop arranged an annual festival to be celebrated on the 2nd of July and according to Fr. Gnanapragasar, "it has ever since attracted thousands and tens of thousands of worshippers year after year". Bishop Bonjean paid his first visit to Madhu in 1872 and found things in a deplorable condition. The sight of the mud chapel grieved his heart and he is reported to have uttered the following words: "What sadness assailed my soul when I saw for the first time this celebrated and miserable sanctuary. I then and there declared that it should not be said that an Oblate Bishop left the house of his Immaculate Mother in such a shameful state. I am resolved to build in the wild jungle a beautiful church to the





THE CHURCH



THE PORTICO



Most Blessed Virgin" (Messenger 21-3-48). Immediately the Bishop blessed the first stone of a new church the church we know so well today-and thus the corner stone of the present magnificent edifice was laid on the 8th of August 1872.

The building of the Madhu church started by Bishop Bonjean was continued under bishop Melizan and completed under Bishop Joulain. The superb facade, the spacious presbytery, the restful chapel of the Blessed Sacrament and the inspiring grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, each rose in turn to add beauty and meet a pressing need. The extensive tank which supplies the necessary bathing water to thousands of pilgrims was deepened and strengthened and several wells were sunk to increase the supply of drinking water. Bishop Joulain saw Our Lady of Madhu spread out her mantle, as many more thousands came under her protection and with a smile he sang his "Nunc Dimittis".

Bishop Brault obtained the papal recognition of the shrine of Our Lady of Madhu and made elaborate preparations to have status crowned by a Papal Legate, but he died all too soon. It fell to the happy lot of his successor, Bishop Guyomar, another great lover of Mary, to inaugurate his episcopate with the coronation of Our Lady of Madhu and to expand, embellish and organise the Sanctuary into the splendid state in which it is today. One of his first acts was to build the Majestic portico that adorns the facade and commands the esplanade from where tens of thousands of pilgrims follow the services that are held there. The statue of the Pilgrim's Mother at the entrance to the hallowed ground and the Calvary Group, Christ the King and Our Lady of Fatima at the cross roads in the

camp are not only landmarks and beauty spots, but also quite reminders of an atmosphere of prayer.

After 25 years of arduous and fruitful labour Bishop Guyomar handed over the government of the Diocese of Jaffna and the guardianship of the Sanctuary of Madhu to Bishop Emilianus Pillai, who made Our Lady of Madhu still better known and better loved throughout the island and Madhu became the spiritual power-house of Sri Lanka. In January 1973 Bishop B. Deogupillai assumed duties as Bishop of Jaffna responsible for the shrine of Our Lady of Madhu.

## II

### LANDMARKS IN THE SPIRITUAL FIELD

#### Mary crowned Queen of Madhu

In 1924, a hundred years after the statue of Our Lady had been given a permanent habitation at Madhu, it was solemnly and officially crowned by a Papal Legate who came in the name of the Sovereign Pontiff. "We have witnessed the grandest sight and experienced the greatest joy we can hope to see or feel this side of heaven", wrote an eye witness

Dr. Coudert, Archbishop of Colombo, who was appointed Legate by His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, arrived on the evening of the 1st July, 1924 and was met at a distance from the church by the clergy and a vast concourse of people. The Legate seated on an imitation Sedia Gestatoria (because the people wanted to honour in his person the pope himself) proceeded to the church with all the pomp and musical honours we are accustomed to in the East. Before the main altar of the

church the Legate blessed two golden crowns studded with jewels of fine workmanship and destined to deck the brow of Mary and the head of the Infant Jesus. After the High Mass, celebrated by Bishop Guyomar of Jaffna at which Bishop Roche of Tuticorin preached an eloquent sermon, His Grace, the Papal Legate, explained the significance of the great function to the assembled multitude and proceeded to the solemn ceremony of the coronation. There was a hum of prayer among the vast crowd, followed by the stillness of expectation. Then with the four Bishops assisting surrounded by fifty priests from all the dioceses of Sri Lanka, before a vast concourse of 150,000 people of various races and even creeds drawn from every part of the Island, the Papal Legate with the prescribed rites and prayers, solemnly crowned the Holy Image of Our Lady of Madhu in the name of His Holiness, Pius XI. The bells rang out, the cannons boomed, a salute of guns was fired and the heart of Catholic Sri Lanka burst forth in a nameless and spontaneous demonstration of faith love, praise, thanksgiving and unbounded joy.

### **The Consecration of the Church**

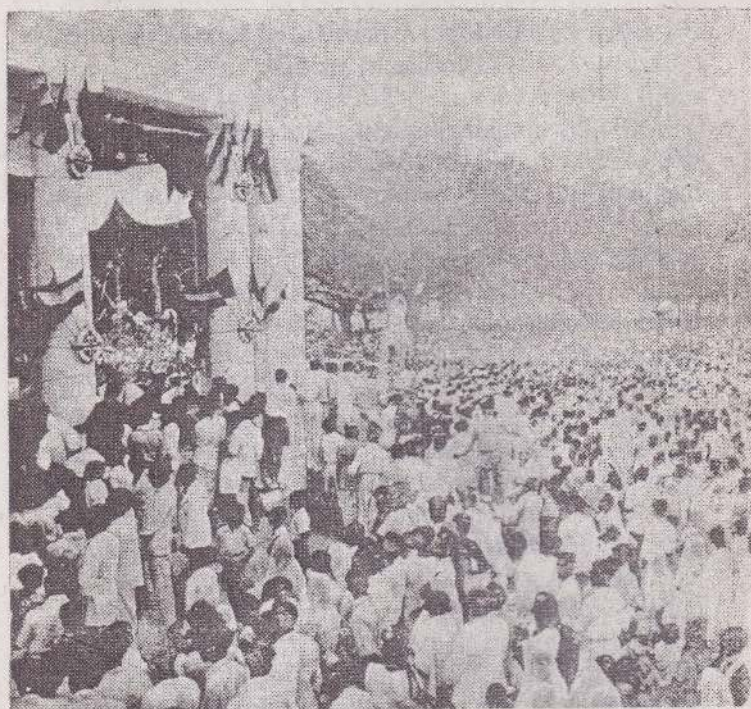
The consecration of the Church of Our Lady of Madhu in 1944, though done during the Great War, took place with great solemnity and grandeur. In preparation for it a marble altar replaces the old wooden one and the whole sanctuary was covered with white and blue marble. In spite of restrictions on travel and the difficulties of finding conveyance, more than 30,000 people came to the jungle shrine to honour their Divine Mother and to take part in the ceremony that dedicated to God for ever her holy abode. On the 25th June Bishop Guyomar, assisted by 30 priests and in the pre



sence of a vast throng of people, consecrated the altar and the Church from where Our Lady continues to pour forth in even greater abundance the choice favours on her devout children from all parts of the Island.

### **Mary's Mission - A penitential tour of the Diocese of Jaffna**

In 1948 to commemorate the centenary of the arrival of the Oblates in Ceylon, Bishop Guyomâr had the happy inspiration to take the statue of Our Lady of Madhu in a penitential procession to every parish in the diocese of Jaffna. It was not to be a triumphal march, but a call to a more Catholic life. And Mary was the Preacher. Every parish had first to prepare itself by a triduum of prayer and penance and her arrival itself was to be marked by a return to God and a renewal of spiritual life. Her tour lasted from the 15th of March to the 5th of May. In 50 days she travelled a thousand miles and visited 80 main churches. Every where she was met half way on the road and welcomed into the church by thousands of her children. Non-Catholics vied with Catholics in welcoming her. The fervour, filial piety and enthusiasm of the people defy description and the spiritual effect on them was marvellous beyond all expectation. Confessors and spiritual directors alone know what a flood of graces were opened by her to the souls of the wayward and negligent Catholics. Fifty one thousand and five hundred fervent souls consecrated themselves formally to their Divine Mother. Today the Processional Cross that preceded her on her tour stand by her side and the fifty one thousand hundred written forms of consecration are encased at her feet in her beloved shrine at Madhu.



**THE PROCESSION MOVES ON**

## **The Silver Jubilee of the Coronation**

In 1949 fell the 25th anniversary the coronation of Our Lady of Madhu. By a happy coincidence it was also the Episcopal Silver Jubilee year of Bishop Guyomar of Jaffna. A concourse of 150,000 people came to honour their Divine Mother and their Pastor. The Archbishop of Colombo and all the Bishops of Ceylon were present. Two Marian Nights of prayer, one in Tamil and the other in Sinhalese, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. in each of which more than 50,000 pilgrims took part were special features of the celebration. The concluding Procession of the Statue round the camp, surrounded by a teeming crowd of her praying and singing children was a veritable march of triumph of the well beloved Queenly Mother of Madhu.

## **The Golden Jubilee of the Coronation**

In order to give all the Catholics of the Jaffna Diocese the facility of sharing in the Golden Jubilee of the Coronation of Our Lady of Madhu, the Statue of Our Lady was taken for the second time to the different parishes in the Diocese before July 2, 1974. The theme for this Visit of Our Lady was the one proposed by the Holy Father for the Holy Year (1975). Viz: Renewal and Reconciliation. The emphasis was on the spirit of pilgrimage as a means of reconciliation and renewal. The period of presence of the Statue of Our Lady in each parish was one of instruction, reflection, reconciliation, Eucharistic celebration and collective prayer to Our Lady. The visit of Our Lady brought about a veritable spiritual renewal in the whole Diocese.



The Golden Jubiles Celebration at the shrine of Our Lady of Madhu on July 2, 1974 was presided over by his Eminence, Cardinal Thomas B. Cooray O.M.I. Archbishop of Colombo and President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Sri Lanka.

### III

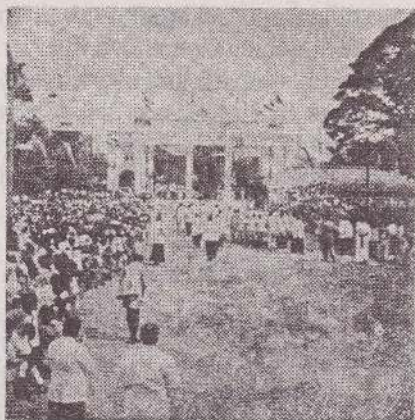
## A PERENNIAL SHOWER OF GRACES

### **Madhu, the Light of Trath seekers**

Some ecclesiastical dignitaries, who have visited Madhu, seem to be convinced that God had some special design over Madhu. They think that Our Lady of Madhu is the means chosen by God to bring the people of Sri Lanka into the true fold. A unique opportunity for the dissemination of Catholic truth among sincere truth seekers offers itself at the annual festivals of Madhu, where a large number of non-Catholics is found mingled with the Catholic pilgrims.

### **Madhu, the Refuge of Sinners**

The great renown Madhu enjoys as a rallying place of the Catholics may be said to be chiefly due to the fact, that here Our Lady shows herself in a special way the "Refuge of Sinners" and the "Help of Christians" Here the pious pilgrim receives, through her powerful intercession special lights to see the true condition of his soul, and special graces to make a thorough change of his life. It is at the reception of the Sacrament of Penance that Our Lady bestows these favours on her Clients. Many a hardened sinner who has not confessed in his own parish church for years, is converted, makes a good confession and begins a virtuous life at the sanctuary of Our Lady of Madhu.



**THE RETURN OF THE PROCESSION**



**PART OF THE CROWD ON THE ESPLANADE**



To facilitate this aspect of Madhu a hall for confessions has been built, which is presided over by a beautiful statue of Jesus opening his arms wide and beckoning all sinners to come to Him. Everyday of the festival, from morning till night, the Rev. confessors are kept busy at the numerous confessionals arranged in two long rows on either side the statue.

### **Madhu, the Comfort of the Afflicted**

While the non-Catholics who receive the Light of Faith at Madhu may be counted in hundreds and the prodigals who return to the practice of their religion may be counted in thousands, the sick and the sorrowing, the orphan and the widow, the blind and the barren who go back healed and comforted may be counted in their tens of thousands. Our Lady Madhu is the "Health of the Sick" and the "Comfort of the Afflicted". For hours on end these children of sorrow are at the feet of their compassionate Mother. Some pour forth their grief in loud moving words of supplication. Some stretch their hands towards that sympathetic face and ask for the return of a straying husband or son, for the health of an invalid daughter or for the gift of a child after many years of married life. Others kneel in silence and gaze appealingly at the same motherly face, unable to utter in words the crushing burdens in their breaking hearts. The tears that run down their cheeks tell their own tale of woe. And has it ever been known that any one who fled to her protection has been left unaided? The votive offerings of thanksgiving of thousands of candles, of silver babies, eyes, ears, and tongues, of sheaves of paddy and of coconut plants are testimony to the unfailing answer of the loving Mother of Madhu to the ourstretched hands and the tearful eyes.



## **Madhu, the Power-house of Cheistian life**

This happy valley park-like in its smooth expanse and its sentinals of great leafy trees, girt in and guarded by a ring of primeval forest, harbours during the festivals a vast multitude of the sons and daughters of Sri Lanka. They came from the North and South, East and West, from Jaffna to Galle, from Trincomalee to Colombo, from the populous western seaboard and from the hills and valleys of the central provinces. They do not come on a picnic; for everywhere in the camp men and women are praying and very often with tears in their eyes. Night and day unceasing, day after day, so long as the festival lasts, the voice of prayer rises in front of Our Lady's Shrine, in the Blessed Sacrament chapel, in the church, and throughout the camp. Those well attended sermons and instructions; those morning Masses and evening Benedictions and those gatherings before the majestic portico 40 feet square in the open air which no edifice could contain; those communions received with so much devotion sometimes after waiting for hours in the thick queue they are the works of genuine pilgrims who come to ask for favours Our Lady of Madhu.

Having lived at Madhu an intense Catholic life, having breathed the pure air of prayer and drunk deep of the waters of the Sacraments, the pilgrims carry home and diffuse all around them the fervour and piety they gathered at the feet of their Heavenly Mother. Madhu is the heart of Catholic piety in Sri Lanka. It throbs with unceasing spiritual life and vivifies through its pilgrims every corner of Catholic Sri Lanka.

## IV

### A DAY AT MADHU

From early dawn till very late at night the pilgrims pour in from every side of the camp. They come by bus and train, by van, by car, by cart, on cycle and on foot. They come in trickles; they come in torrents. It is a river of heads, a deluge of devotees. Young and old in family groups, mothers with babes in their arms and cripples hobbling on crutches. They come humming paryers or singing hymns. The haunting "Ave Ave" and the Hail Mary in Tamil, Sinhalese and English fill the air. Some go to the bungalows they had booked months earlier; others occupy the sheds assigned to them; but the great majority settle down under the shady trees and make shelters around them with twigs, branches and sheets. There is hardly a square foot free in the vast camp of a hundred acres.

At five in the morning the Angelus rings and a sonorous voice that is carried by loud speakers to the four ends of the camp, recites the morning prayer. The hundred thousand pilgrims stir from their beds or mats, kneel at the spot and join in the prayers.

Holy Masses begin at 5.30 a.m. and go on in unbroken continuation till 7.30 a.m. Fifty priests offer the Holy Sacrifice in six different chapels. The pilgrims fill and overflow every chapel to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion Which is distributed without intermission by several priests.

At 8 o' colock the confessions start and go on till 12; then from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. there are two big chapels where the confessions are heard. This is the most

difficult and yet the most consoling work of the pilgrimage. One almost sees the hand of Mary touching the hardest of hearts and melting them like wax. Every confessional is besieged by penitents and on the last two days the confessions go on till very late at night.

During the intervals the pilgrims bathe at the large tubs well provided with water, buy the necessary provisions at the camp stalls cook their meals, send souvenirs or receive telegrams at the camp post office, or walk along the breezy bund of the tank. But most of them go to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Madhu to tell their tales of woe, ask for those special favours for which they have come so far, under going such expense and so many hardships, make their vows, place at her their offerings or go to the Blessed Sacrament chapel to make their Holy Hour alone or in family groups. It is also then that many say the extra rosaries.

At 6.30 p.m. the bells ring for the most spectacular and impressive of the devotions at Madhu the Novena of Our Lady of Madhu. As far as the eye can see the esplanade in front of the majestic portico is covered with pious, praying pilgrims. At the mike a priest leads the recitation of the Rosary and the response rises from thirty thousand throats in a thunderous harmony. There are then two soul stirring sermons one in Tamil and one in Sinhalese calling everyone, in the name of Mary, to live a more Catholic life-urging all to frequent the Sacraments. The Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is imparted from the portico. As the officiating priest leaves the alter that heavenly hymn "Ave, Ave" is intoned and taken up by an ocean of adorers in a jubilant and harmonious outburst.



At 9.30 p.m. there is the Holy Hour and the day comes to an end with the soothing strains of the Night Prayers.

The Feast Day itself is surrounded by all the gorgeous liturgy of the Catholic Church. The Eucharistic Procession on the eve at the portico, the Pontifical High Mass at 7 a.m. and finally the Triumphant Procession of the Statue around the camp are functions unparalleled in the Island for their magnitude, their grandeur and their piety. Once seen, they can never be forgotten.

Finally comes the sad leave-taking. The pilgrims have lived with their Divine Mother for four or five days—days of heavenly peace and joy. They sat at her feet and lovingly gazed at her face; and she in turn smiled on them. It was perpetual sunshine and no cloud. But now the hour has come to leave her. They say their last prayers; make their last vows; and promise to come back. They get into their car, van or bus. They move, but they must take a last look—a last longing look. Tears well up in their eyes. “Ave, Ave” someone begins and they go, with that sweet strain lingering among the leaves and their hearts turned towards their Matha of Madhu.

## LIST OF FESTIVALS DURING THE YEAR

All the most important Feasts of Our Blessed Mother are celebrated with solemnity at Madhu preceded by Novenas.

2nd of February  
10th of March  
15th of March

Holy week retreat i.e. from Holy Thursday till Easter Sunday.

1st Sunday of May  
2nd of July  
15th of August  
8th of September  
1st Sunday of the month the Titular Feast of Madhu Church.  
8th of December  
31st of December

- N. B.-
1. The administrator resides at Madhu throughout the year.
  2. Daily Mass at 6 a.m.
  3. Sunday Mass at 6 a.m. & 7 a.m.
  4. Every day a bus leaves Madhu Road Station for Madhu Church at 5.30 p.m. and returns the following day at 6.30 a.m. from Madhu Church to Madhu Road Station.

*Address all communications to:*

**REV. FR. ADMINISTRATOR,**  
Madhu Church P.O.







