

**ARCHDIOCESE
OF
GOA AND DAMAN**

PATRIARCHATE OF THE EAST INDIES

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M E S S A G E

It is heartening to know that the Joseph Naik Vaz Institute, Berkeley, California, is organizing, on the 23rd of this month, a Solemn Mass to commemorate the anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Goa, India by Blessed Joseph Vaz, Oratorian Apostle of Kanara and Sri Lanka and Patron of our Archdiocese. The main Eucharistic Celebration, I am told, will take place in the Chiesa Nuova (Santa Maria in Vallicella) in Rome, and will be presided over by the Procurator General of the Confederation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri.

Blessed Joseph Vaz (1651-1711), a saintly priest from Goa, fired by an unflagging zeal for souls and by an insatiable desire to make Christ better known and loved by as many people as possible, understood that the most effective way of pursuing his dream would be to establish a congregation of missionaries which would ensure that the dream would outlast the dreamer and the fire would keep burning for generations to come. As if in answer to his prayers, he found a group of five diocesan priests who had just begun the experiment of a life in common, with an elementary Rule of Life approved by the then Archbishop of Goa. They were overjoyed to welcome young Joseph Vaz as a member. The year was 1685 and the fame of his sanctity and of his heroic missionary work in Kanara had already preceded him. Very soon he was elected the Superior of the nascent association of apostolic life, the first of its kind in the East, and, under his orientation, they formed themselves into the first Goan Oratory of St. Philip Neri.

If Joseph Vaz is unanimously hailed as the Apostle of Sri Lanka for the unbelievably great missionary work that he carried out in that island -- first single-handedly for ten years, most of them in an extremely hostile environment, and then, for the rest of his fecund apostolate of thirteen years, helped by priests from his Oratory in Goa -- it was the Oratorians he helped found who kept the light of Christ burning bright in Sri Lanka for nearly 140 years, till they were suppressed, along with the other religious orders, in 1835. By that time, the Church in Sri Lanka, which had been dying when Joseph Vaz set foot on that island, had become a sturdy community of faithful, rooted in

the strong foundations laid by the Apostle and by his successors. It was virtually a new Church, built on the impassioned labours of an extraordinary Apostle --- humble, poor and totally spent in the service of the Gospel. Joseph Vaz thus won thousands to the Church and wrote an unforgettable page in the history of the Church in Asia.

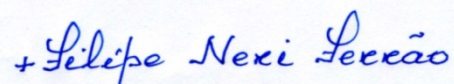
Today, the Catholics in Goa (India) and in Sri Lanka remain somewhat restless until the Church recognizes the outstanding merits of this Apostle and grants their long-standing desire to see him declared a Saint. For the long years that the Process of his Beatification had been going on, the people in Goa sang “Why, o God of infinite mercy, are you waiting to grant to our saint the honours of the altar?” Their desire was partially fulfilled when Joseph Vaz was beatified by Saint John Paul II in the year 1995. But they, along with Sri Lankan Catholics, will not rest until his powerful intercession is invoked by the faithful all over the world, until ‘their’ saint becomes everyone’s saint.

It is hoped that the initiative taken by the Joseph Naik Vaz Institute of Berkeley on the occasion of the Oratorian anniversary will go a long way to make Joseph Vaz and the Oratorians of Goa better known and will help speed up the Canonization Process of their Founder.

I would like to take this opportunity to relate, on this occasion, that the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman is about to complete an ambitious project of restoration of the spacious Convent of the Oratorians atop the *Monte de Boa Vista* (the Hill of Good View) in the former capital of Goa, known today as Old Goa. The monastery, which had been gradually falling to ruin since 1835, will now have a new identity as a Spiritual Renewal Centre, where retreats and other faith formation programmes will be conducted for the faithful round the year. We hope to honour thus the memory of the unsung and unwept heroes who lived inside those walls and dedicated their lives to the spiritual formation of those who, in their time, stood in the need of “*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*” (2 Cor 13:14). Needless to say, projects like this need a constant flow of financial resources if they are to continue to serve the Church in her various apostolic needs. We trust that the support and the generosity of the countless people who came forward to help in the reconstruction of the monument will inspire others to go on supporting, in whatever way possible, the all-important mission that the new Spiritual Renewal Centre will soon embrace.

On everyone who reads these lines I invoke choicest blessings from Heaven!

Archbishop’s House, Panjim, Goa, September 9, 2014.



(+ Filipe Neri Ferrão)
Archbishop of Goa and Daman