

Report on Thanksgiving Mass held on March 15, 2015 in Oakland, California
for the Canonization of St. Joseph Vaz

From the Joseph Naik Vaz Institute
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How does one bring to a close a lifelong campaign that has been run mostly here in the San Francisco Bay area, for a canonization of an Indian-Sri Lankan Saint? The Joseph Naik Vaz Institute that has worked steadfastly for the canonization of St. Joseph Vaz since 1978 recently celebrated the final step of his sainthood.

We celebrated the canonization of St. Joseph Vaz that took place on January 14, 2015 in a ceremony in Colombo, Sri Lanka, by Pope Francis declaring him a universal Saint of the Church. Fittingly, the celebration was held at the Cathedral of Christ the Light, an ultra-modern \$175 million glass cathedral set on the shore of Oakland's Lake Merritt, which is the cathedral of our Diocese of Oakland.

The presiding Bishop was Jesuit Bishop Michael Barber, S.J. who generously offered his Bishop's Stational Mass on Sunday March 15th so that the entire Diocese of Oakland could be part of the celebration.

The concelebrants were Rev. Thomas Massaro, S.J., the Dean of the Jesuit School of Theology at the Graduate Theological Union of Berkeley, Rev. Jay Matthews, first African American Rector of the Cathedral, and six Jesuits from India and Madagascar studying there. Two Goans, Fr. Al Furtado CSSP and Deacon Rudi Fernandes also assisted Bishop Barber. Deacon Witold Chichon of the Polish Pastoral Center of the diocese was especially invited because this Cause of Canonization, the third one for St. Joseph Vaz and the one that finally succeeded, was proposed by the Polish Apostolic Nuncio to India, Mons. Zalesky, in 1896.

In order to emphasize that the new St. Joseph Vaz came out of the Indian as well as the Latin Catholic spiritual traditions, and gained the protection of the Buddhist King of Kandy, the Joseph Naik Vaz Institute organized an Inter-Religious music Prelude. The theme was Divine Light, Wisdom, and inter-religious Peace which reflected the life and mission of St. Joseph Vaz.

In her introductory remarks, Filomena Saraswati Giese, President of the Institute, said that it reflected Pope Francis' recent call to "culture of encounter" and "culture of accompaniment of the poor and marginalized" which St. Joseph Vaz did in fact engage in to the fullest extent. She said that the Prelude reflected his legacy of using native cultures and languages in prayers and in the founding of a native para-liturgy and Catholic literature, as well as his service to the persecuted, abandoned and poor.

The Inter-religious Prelude began with the singing of a "Diwali" composition by the Hindustani Choir of Smt. Rita Sahai, a renowned Bay area North Indian classical singer, composer, and teacher. As Dr. Subita Sudershan who is from the Hindu tradition noted, this was an Invocation to bring in the Divine Light which dispels ignorance and evil in the

world. The second classical composition that the choir sang was a Prayer for Wisdom in Raga Bhimpalasi in an intricate rhythmic cycle of seven beats. The 18-voice Hindustani choir, dressed in Indian saris and curtas, was accompanied on harmonium by Smt. Sahai and tabla player, Shripad Torvi.

American Buddhist, Carol Fields, of the Dzogchen tradition of Tibet, spoke movingly of the respect of the Buddhist King of Kandy for the Indian Catholic Saint. She said that as a good practicing Buddhist, this King gave him protection and freedom to preach and build his church in the Buddhist kingdom. The Hindustani Choir chanted the Three Refugees in Pali in honor of King Wimaladharma Surya II for his action of Buddhist compassion toward St. Joseph Vaz and Catholic refugees.

This was followed by the Multicultural Choir of St. John the Baptist Church, El Cerrito, singing a new composition "The Beatitudes in Raga Pahadi." Bay area composer, John Giese, wrote the setting of the Beatitudes in an Indian raga for choir and organ especially for this Thanksgiving Mass for an Indian Saint. Cathedral music director, Rudy de Vos, accompanied the choir on the beautiful organ.

The final Hymn to St. Joseph Vaz was sung in Konkani, the native language of St. Joseph Vaz. During the Mass that followed, the Readings were in Sinhala and Tamil (JeyaBuvana Jeya Raj), the two main languages of Sri Lanka and in Konkani (Acaria Almeida), the main language of Goa and Mangalore.

In his homily, Bishop Barber outlined the history of the founding of the branch of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri by St. Joseph Vaz as the first native religious Congregation in modern times and its subsequent work in Sri Lanka under Dutch persecution. He pointed out that the Catholics of Sri Lanka were persecuted not by local religions but by another European colonial, anti-Catholic power, the Dutch. They were in fact protected by the Buddhist King of Kandy. Bishop Barber highlighted the role of two of the many miracles that St. Joseph Vaz has worked. In his lifetime, the miracle of praying for rain impressed the Buddhist King that here was a true Saint. Centuries later, a miracle of the saving of a fetus during a medically difficult pregnancy and birth, was used for his Beatification, thereby moving his Cause toward the Canonization.

Prayers of the Faithful were in Konkani (Mari Furtado), Malayalam (Sr. Dr. Beena Jose)), English (Tony Moniz), and Indonesian (Natasha Tiono) and Malagasy (Suzy Ralibera). The latter two languages of Indonesia and Madagascar represented the missions that the Goan Oratorians of St. Joseph Vaz founded subsequently in those countries.

It should be noted that a total of ten languages were used in the singing during the Prelude and in these Readings and Prayers, symbolizing the multicultural reach of the legacy of St. Joseph Vaz who embraced the languages and cultures of his native Goa and of Sri Lanka in his mission work.

In thanking Bishop Barber, the concelebrants and participants, and the congregation, Vice President George Pinto pointed out that St. Joseph Vaz was a refugee who gave much to the Church and to humanity by his self sacrificing love and service to the poor and the abandoned victims of religious persecution, as well as those abandoned during a smallpox epidemic in Kandy.