

Report on the September 23rd Mass in Rome

Celebrating the 329th Anniversary of the founding of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri
in Goa by Bl. Joseph Vaz

Pictures by Muditha Fernando and Filomena Saraswati Giese

Earlier this year, there was much anticipation in Goa and Sri Lanka that the efforts of many generations of people and church leaders in Goa and Sri Lanka for the canonization of Blessed Joseph Vaz would soon succeed.

As our 35 year old campaign to get Blessed Joseph Vaz recognized and canonized as a Saint appeared to be drawing to a successful end, our California based Joseph Naik Vaz Institute decided that the Anniversary of the founding of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Goa by Blessed Joseph Vaz on September 25, 1685, should be celebrated in a special way in Rome.

We hoped that a Solemn High Mass in Rome, the decision-making seat of the Catholic Church, would remind all of his admirers, be they in Goa, Sri Lanka, Mangalore, Rome, and in the diaspora, of one of his major achievements that qualifies him for sainthood, namely his founding of the first native religious congregation in modern times.

The Oratorian Procurator General, Rev. Mario Avilés, C.O. readily agreed to our suggestion that we celebrate a Mass for this Anniversary at Chiesa Nuova, the famous Oratorian Church founded by St. Philip Neri in Rome in 1575 .

With the assistance of the Oratorians and some Goan and Sri Lankan priests in Rome, we set a plan in motion to get as much participation as possible from our respective communities in Rome.

It was decided that the Mass would be said in Italian which was familiar to all the students, priests, visitors, and immigrants who would attend.

Readings and prayers and hymns in Sinhala, Tamil, and Konkani were organized. Oratorian Seminarians at Chiesa Nuova helped greatly and served at the Mass.

Pope's announcement on September 17:

To add to the significance of the occasion, the Pope's announcement that he would approve the canonization of Blessed Joseph Vaz came on September 17, just days before the September 23rd Mass!

Presentation on Blessed Joseph Vaz:

Before the Mass, Filomena made a powerpoint presentation on the early life and work of Bl. Joseph Vaz in Goa and Mangalore and his missionary life under Dutch rule in Sri Lanka and under the protection of the Buddhist King of Kandy.

A message from the Sri Lankan Embassy in Rome

Mr. Jinadasa, Commerce minister at the Sri Lankan Embassy in Rome attended on behalf of the Sri Lankan Ambassador and spoke about the significance of the life of Blessed Joseph Vaz in Sri Lankan history.

His personal message to us was:

“I am deeply privileged and honored to have participated in today’s event which reminds us of the value of co-existence.”

Presiding Bishop and Main Concelebrants

The presiding Bishop was Oratorian Bishop Robert Byrne, C.O., Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham where Cardinal John Henry Newman founded his Oratory.

Bishop Byrne, C.O., founded the Oxford Oratory in 1993 and was appointed Secretary of the Bishops’ Conference Department of Dialogue and Unity in 2012.

He gave an enlightening homily on the life of sacrifice under persecution of Blessed Joseph Vaz and the founding of the Goa Oratory as a missionary Oratory rather than one which is for education, the main work of the Oratorians.

The other main celebrants were:

Rev. Mario Avilés, C.O., Procurator General of the Oratorians who gave a warm, welcoming address to all those attending this commemoration of the founding of the Oratory in Goa by Bl. Joseph Vaz

Rev. Louis Lougen, O.M.I., Superiore Generale of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate

Rev. Thomas Klosterkamp, O.M.I., Postulatore Generale of the Oblates and Postulator of the Cause of Bl. Joseph Vaz, who had just recently submitted a new *Positio Historica* to the Pope and consistory of Cardinals

Rev. Fr. Indunil Kodithuwakka who represented Cardinal Tauran, head of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in Rome (PDIC), read a Message about the role of Blessed Joseph Vaz for mutual inter-religious respect and peace in his day (see www.josephnaikvaz.org).

The Postulator and the new *Positio Historica*

The presence of the Postulator was especially significant for the Joseph Naik Vaz Institute. He had just written and submitted a historical document, a new *Positio Historica*, to complete the documentation required before the canonization could be approved. The work of our Institute to spread devotion to Blessed Joseph Vaz and our

Petitions are included in this new *Positio*.

Other Celebrants

We were honored to have 22 other priests, diocesan as well as Jesuits, Oblates, Salesians, and Oratorians, who concelebrated. We were especially honored to have Fr. Melwin Pinto S.J. from Vatican Radio (English desk) and Fr. Samuel Alloggia, an Oratorian from Jamaica among them.

The Choir, Sisters, and Laity

Many Sisters from various religious communities in Rome attended and participated in the Mass. The Sri Lankan choir with organ accompaniment sang the Italian responses and hymns in Sinhala and Tamil very beautifully and movingly. (Picture #11. Sri Lankan Choir)

With everyone's help and cooperation, the Solemn High Mass turned out to be a resounding celebration of the Pope's historic announcement of Goa and Sri Lanka's first Saint.

2015 Plans for Thanksgiving Masses for the Canonization

The Joseph Naik Vaz Institute is organizing Masses in San Francisco and Los Angeles in late January to celebrate the Bl. Joseph Vaz canonization and is working with other diaspora groups wishing to organize a similar Mass.

October 11th, 2014. Berkeley, California

Please visit our website josephnaikvaz.org to read Messages received from H.E. Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Sri Lanka, H.E. Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, Archbishop Felipe Neri of Goa, Archbishop Henry D'Souza, Archbishop Emeritus of Calcutta, Archbishop Evarist Pinto, Archbishop Emeritus of Karachi, His Excellency, Mr. D.W. Jinadasa, Minister (commerce) of the Sri Lanka Embassy in Rome, and Rev. Indunil Kodithuwakku, Under Secretary for the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Rome.