

Reflections

International Catholic Family Newsletter

Volume 55

March 2020

Invite Someone To Church

Great Churches of India...History & Faith

St. Philomena, Patroness and Protectress of the Living Rosary

Blessings to All:

By: Richard Pickard

Peace be with you.

I was recently visiting patients at a local hospital when I met a woman patient who had recently returned to church. She had been a church attendee in the past, but little by little she just stopped going. *Then something happened.* She started going back to church. What happened? The reason she gave, was that a friend of hers ask her to go to church with her. She didn't go at first, but the invitation was always there in her mind. Her friend didn't harp on her, just left it to the Lord. One day, she had a feeling that she should go and see the church her friend was attending. So, she went with her friend, just to see what it was all about. She said, she felt God's spirit and felt a joy inside of her.

Although she was in the hospital, she had a radiant smile on her face and a spirit of peace, which was evident during our conversation. She is hopeful to be able to go to church again soon. She has reconnected to Jesus and all because of a friend who invited her to church.

You never know, how your actions and invitations to meet Jesus will turn out. But don't feel bad if your efforts seem to fall on deaf ears. The Lord has ways to open a person's heart. Just keep praying for friends or family members who have dropped out of church. They may have had good reasons for doing so. The abuse of priests on young people and other scandals against God's children may have driven them away. But prayers can heal this wound in time. So, keep praying and don't badger them too much by telling them they must go back to church. Jesus knows what's in their heart. Wounds heal in time, but prayers are the balm that the church and all of us need.

Let Jesus help you. Pray, Pray, Pray. God listens.



Prayers for the Family

Many of you reading this newsletter have taught your children to pray each night before going to bed. It was a custom in our family and probably in yours. No matter what the child prayed, it was a delight to the parents' hearts. And also, to God's heart. He loves hearing from His children, no matter how old they are!



I have noticed from time to time people praying before meals at restaurants. Others in the restaurant see them praying. It serves as an example to them and perhaps an 'invitation' to pray.

We never know how God will use our actions to plant seeds in others for the good of their souls and to build up their faith.

There was a story in magazine some years ago about how a little girl's faith, renewed her mother's faith. It was the practice of the mother to have her little girl pray at bedtime. And without any guidance from the mother, the child was free to pray for whatever she wanted.

A Child Prayers to See A Frog

The family was having a difficult time financially and the father had worked all day on his job and now he was at the church as a volunteer in Second Language classes for refugees. Here is the true story as reported:



"It had been a long day as I read a final story to my daughter at bedtime. I'd spent hours trying to figure out how to pay all our bills, knowing my husband was working a job he hated. But it was better than no job at all, which was where we'd been not long ago. We'd prayed and prayed for him to get back into teaching and out of the paper-buying business he'd been stuck in the past few years. Then my little girl closed her eyes and said "Please let me see a frog **tonight**, in Jesus' name, amen."

I hugged my four-year-old daughter good-night and tucked her into bed. **A frog?** Her prayer was simple and cute.

"Well, Michelle, I haven't seen any frogs yet this year; we'll just have to wait and see." I felt bad that she would be disappointed. *"God can do anything," she announced. "Just like Daddy."*

A lump filled my throat. She trusted in her father and her heavenly Father. *Difficult times had made me doubt God's love for me and my family.*

I wanted to give her my own reassurance that God loves her even if she doesn't see a frog. But somehow it wasn't easy to give her the hope I wasn't feeling.

I turned off the light and went to the kitchen to do the dishes. With hands sunk in hot, soapy water, I closed my eyes. *"I know it's a silly request, God. But, there's something about the way she truly believes You'll answer her prayer. Do You hear her? Do You hear me?"*



My husband returned home late from his volunteer work at church with the English as a Second Language classes for refugees. Michelle had been asleep an hour. "Oops, laundry," I said, jumping up to move the wet clothes from the washer to the dryer. I turned on the garage light, startled by movement near the open door that led to the backyard.

Our dog followed us into the garage and then ran and barked at the corner, stopping to sniff at something I couldn't see. He whined and wagged his tail and began to growl. *"Stop it, Tippy!"* I shouted, worried he'd wake up Michelle. I took a careful step forward, *ready to run if one of our giant, fast-moving water bugs should suddenly head my way.*



shutterstock.com • 142468312

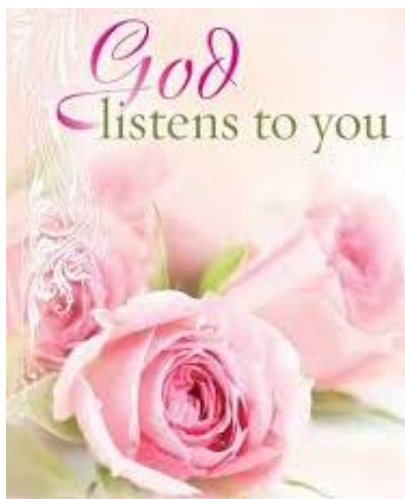
It wasn't a water bug. Near the back door sat a large bug-eyed brown frog. *"Outside,"* I ordered the dog.

"Quick," I shouted to my husband, *"wake up Michelle!"*

My surprised husband stared at me as I quickly explained about our daughter's prayer. I didn't tell him I hadn't believed it would be answered or that a froggy prayer was tied to my own fear that God might not care about us. I just told him it was important that she see the frog that night. *"Michelle, wake up. Look what I have," I said, holding the frog close to her. "God really answered your prayer."*

My heart beat faster as I expected her to leap out of bed with excitement. She held the frog and petted it, more sleepy than interested and not the least bit surprised her prayer had been answered. **"I knew He would,"** she said as she fell back onto her pillow and closed her eyes. But I was overwhelmed at the quick response to her simple prayer. What a loving Father, to see how important such a small child's request was, a chance for her to see the power of an earnest prayer.

I carefully took the frog out into the front yard and put him into the bushes. He hopped away and I grinned, wondering if he was off to answer someone else's prayer. *My faith took a leap that night as I watched the frog go. Sometimes my daughter teaches me more than I teach her.* And sometimes a frog is more than just a frog. This time, it was a small way for God to show me in a huge way how much He loves our family. *He is listening."*



Jesus said... "For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So, do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!"

Matthew 10:29-31

The Great Churches of India... A Bit of History

There are over 19.9 million Catholics in India, which represents around 1.55% of the total population and the Catholic church is the largest Christian church within India. There are 174 dioceses in India organized into 30 provinces. Of these, 132 are Roman Catholic Church, 31 Syro-Malabar Church, and 11 Malankara Syrian Catholic Church dioceses. Despite the small percentage, India has the second largest Catholic population in Asia after the Philippines, due to India's huge population.

All the bishops in India, both Western and Eastern, form the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, which was founded in 1944.[3] The Holy See's representative to the government of India and to the Church in India is the Apostolic Nuncio to India. The diplomatic mission was established as the Apostolic Delegation to the East Indies in 1881. It was raised to an Internunciature by Pope Pius XII in 1948 and to a full Apostolic Nunciature by Pope Paul VI in 1967.

The history of Christianity and Churches date back to 52 AD in India. It is believed that St. Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus visited the country and thus introduced a new faith in South India. St. Thomas himself established one or two Church in Kerala but he inspired many to construct these Christian places of worship across the country. Colonization was a significant era of building churches as the Dutch, Portuguese, French and British people brought with them new styles of architecture, which resulted in delivering India with exquisite churches that are a must see in India.

Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa



Basilica of Bom Jesus is amongst the most famous churches in India. The church is around 300 years old and holds the remains of St. Francis Xavier. It is one of the finest examples of Portuguese influence as the edifice is done in signature Baroque style. The flooring has been done in marble, inlaid with precious stones, the altar is elaborate with gilded gold work, the murals and the artistic rendition are also worth the appreciation. The church has been declared as the world heritage site and also boasts of a museum. A large number of believers gather at the church when the preserved body of Saint Francis Xavier is put on display.

Se Cathedral Church, Goa



Reckoned as one of the largest churches in India, Se Cathedral is dedicated to Catherine of Alexandria. This church was built in order to revel the victory of Portuguese under a Muslim army, which led to the capture of the city of Goa. Since this triumph coincidentally happened on the feast of St. Catherine, the cathedral was dedicated to her. The construction of the church began in 1562 and was completed in 1619. The church measures 250m in height and 181 in breadth. On the main Altar, there are a few old paintings that are dedicated to Catherine of Alexandria

The Se Cathedral holds a large bell called as **Golden Bell**. This bell is famous for its strong tone. It is said to be one of the best bells in the world and the largest in Goa. The main altar of the church stands as a dedication of Catherine of Alexandria. You can find numerous paintings on the sides of the altar. Just right

to the altar, you could find the Chapel of Cross of Miracles. It is said that, at this very location, a vision of Christ appeared in the middle of the cross in 17th century.

The church has six panels with scenes of Saint Catherine's life carved on them. You can also find that large baptismal of 16th century used by Saint Francis Xavier to baptize numerous Goans who were converted into Christianity.

The main entrance of the cathedral has Latin inscriptions of Corinthian columns. Out of the eight chapels, two have ornamented perforated wooden screens. This filigree carving gives a royal look to the place. The Chapel of Blessed Sacrament is famous for decorated wall and ceiling painting. The arches of the altars are decorated with old paintings. You can also find many small statues, wooden figures and others.

Near the altar, you can find 18th century's organ, which is still in use. You can find an ebony stand, which is carved. It is the part of the old church over which the new cathedral was built. There is a convent closer to the cathedral, which is converted into Archeological Museum. It is open to tourists.

Velankanni Church, Nagapattinam



Velankanni Church is probably one of the most visited churches in India. Velankanni town is located on the coast of Bay of Bengal and is famous for its Basilica which is dedicated to 'Lady of Health' and is called Our Lady of Good Health or Our Lady of Velankanni. It has been proved for centuries that Velankanni is known as the "Lourdes of the East" and it is said that when worshipers offer candles to the Mother, their illness is cured. This Christian shrine is a great symbol of multiculture and international and religious harmony.

Christ Church, Shimla



Christ Church, which is situated in the centre of the town of Shimla is believed to be the second oldest church in North India. This sacred church is the prominent landmark of Shimla that reflects the beauty of British era architecture. Built in the Neo-Gothic style in 1857, the church contains five fine stained-glass windows and each window represents different Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, Charity, Fortitude, Patience and Humility. The pipe-organ in the church is the biggest in the Indian subcontinent and was installed in September 1899

Santhome Church, Chennai



Santhome Church is a historically and architecturally a very important church in India. Located in the city of Chennai in Tamil Nadu, the church sports a classic Neo-Gothic style of architecture. It is also the place where the remains of St. Thomas are said to have been kept. The church boasts arched windows, white washed spires, wooden roofs and domes that are worth being captured in the lens. There is also a museum in the premises of the church that has put remnants from the older church built here.

St. Paul Cathedral, Kolkata



One of the finest looking churches in India, the St. Paul Cathedral is definitely a must see in Kolkata. Located on what is known 'the island of attractions', the church is done in Gothic Revival Style and has gorgeous arched windows with stained glass which makes quite a sight to see when the sun rays touch them. The frescoes inside the church are also noteworthy, one of the best times to visit the church is during the midnight mass on Christmas Eve when the church is lit up and proves to be the most amazing thing you can feast your eyes on.

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, Palayoor



St Thomas is an important Christian pilgrimage site in Kerala. The church is named after St. Thomas, the apostle who is believed to have spread the teachings of Christianity in South India. ***It is among the old churches in India and dates back to 52 AD.*** It is also believed that church was built by St. Thomas himself, thus it has been declared as an ***international pilgrimage***

spot by the Vatican. Since it is on the hilltop, climbing the hill, it offers a great experience to the worshipers to get to the church and pray.

St. Thomas traveled from Muziris (Kodungallur) and landed at Palayur by boat through the backwaters. At that time, Palayur was a stronghold of the Brahmins and also of Jews. He came to visit the Jewish merchants at Palayur at "Judankunnu" (meaning the hill of Jews) and to preach the Christian gospel. The place has since become a dry land but its historicity as a boat jetty called locally as 'Bottukulam' has been preserved as a monument to St. Thomas (see picture).[4][5]

Of the seven churches originally established by St. Thomas, only three namely, Palayoor in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Archdiocese of Thrissur, Kottakkavu in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Major Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly, and Niranam in the Malankara Orthodox Diocese of Niranam could claim continuity, while the remaining four churches have undergone several changes in their locations.

Parumala Church, Parumala



Named after the great Saint, Saint Gregorious Geevarghese, Parumala is a parish church of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in Thiruvalla district of Kerala. It is also known as the tomb of Saint Gregorious Geevarghese. The church can accommodate about 2000 people at a time. It is in a circular church with a diameter of 39 meters.

Our Lady of Dolours Church, Trichur Basilia



Our Lady of Dolours is recognized as the third tallest church in Asia and the largest church in India. Done in Gothic style of architecture, the church boasts spectacular interior decorations that includes fine specimens of scenes from the scriptures, specimens of murals and images of saints.

It was a center for the St. Thomas Christians in the area (now the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church) for decades. In 1874, the Chaldean Catholic bishop Elias Mellus arrived in India by the request of the Syro-Malabar Christians and convinced a large part of the Christian community to accept him as their bishop. The group that followed Mellus was based at this church, and eventually separated from the Catholic hierarchy, forming what is now known as the Chaldean Syrian Church.[1] In response the Syro-Malabar Catholics constructed a new building in 1929. The original church was renamed the Mart

Mariam Big Church, and is now the cathedral of the Chaldean Syrian Church. The current building is known as Puthanpally (New Church) for this reason.

The construction of this biggest church in India was done in different phases, starting from the year 1929. The two front towers are of 146 feet (45 m) height each and the central tower of 260 feet (79 m) height makes this church as 3rd tallest in Asia. Completion of the towers were an architectural challenge. A few experts from Tamil Nadu were brought over. The architect who completed the church was Ambrose Gounder.

St. Philomena's Church, Mysore



St. Philomena's is a Roman Catholic Church that was built in AD 1840. Earlier known as St. Joseph Chaver, the church has twin towers that stands majestically at 175 feet. Done in the Gothic Style of architecture, the church resembles the St. Patrick's cathedral at New York and a church at Cologne. It is believed that then king of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV laid the foundation for construction of the church in 1933 and it has been designed a French Architect. The church has a celler where there is a statue of St. Philomena who was a saint during the 3rd century in Greece. A piece of her bone and cloths are also said to have been preserved in this church.

St. Philomena, Patroness and Protectress of the Living Rosary

Credited with countless miracles and intercessions since discovery of her tomb in the most ancient catacombs of St. Priscilla in Rome in 1802, St. Philomena is known as a Intercessor of Prays by people of diverse ages, culture and social standing around the world. *The young virgin who was martyred at age 13*, willingly traded her earthly life for heavenly salvation and continues her work today promoting the virtues of purity and sanctity among the world's youth and bringing the faithful closer to our Blessed Mother and Jesus Christ. It would seem she was held in quiet reserve by God for nearly seventeen centuries and summoned at a time when so much uncertainty and absence of faith abound.



The Story of St. Philomena

Philomena – which means “daughter of light” – was a Greek princess who lived on the Island of Corfu during the fourth century. When Philomena was about 13 years old, her parents (who were of Greek royalty) were called to Rome because of a dispute with the Roman Emperor Diocletian. Having seen Philomena’s beauty and having been impressed with her manners, Diocletian asked for her hand in marriage as a sort of peace treaty. Her parents accepted the offer, but because Philomena had vowed her virginity to God, she refused the marriage proposal. As a result, Diocletian put her in jail and ordered her to be executed. While in jail, she had a vision of the Virgin Mary, who warned her about her fate, but promised heavenly glory and protection when she endured tortures.



From that point on, there is very little documented about Philomena's life. What is known about her has been passed down through the centuries by word of mouth. Apparently, after nearly 40 days in prison, Philomena was tied to a post, flogged, and left to die in her jail cell. But angels appeared from heaven and healed her wounds with a miraculous balm. So, the Emperor then ordered to have her drowned with an anchor tied to her neck. That attempt to kill her was also unsuccessful – angels returned her back to dry land completely unharmed. Later, she was ordered to be killed by archers. But, as she was shot, the arrows returned upon the bowmen and

killed them instead. Accused of witchcraft, Philomena was finally decapitated and killed in Rome, Italy on August 10.

Philomena – which means “daughter of light” – was a Greek princess who lived on the Island of Corfu during the fourth century. When Philomena was about 13 years old, her parents (who were of Greek royalty) were called to Rome because of a dispute with the Roman Emperor Diocletian. Having seen Philomena's beauty and having been impressed with her manners, Diocletian asked for her hand in marriage as a sort of peace treaty. Her parents accepted the offer, but because Philomena had vowed her virginity to God, she refused the marriage proposal. As a result, Diocletian put her in jail and ordered her to be executed. While in jail, she had a vision of the Virgin Mary, who warned her about her fate, but promised heavenly glory and protection when she endured tortures.

From that point on, there is very little documented about Philomena's life. What is known about her has been passed down through the centuries by word of mouth. Apparently, after nearly 40 days in prison, Philomena was tied to a post, flogged, and left to die in her jail cell. But angels appeared from heaven and healed her wounds with a miraculous balm. So, the Emperor then ordered to have her drowned with an anchor tied to her neck. That attempt to kill her was also unsuccessful – angels returned her back to dry land completely unharmed. Later, she was ordered to be killed by archers. But, as she was shot, the arrows returned upon the bowmen and killed them instead. Accused of witchcraft, Philomena was finally decapitated and killed in Rome, Italy on August 10.



On May 24, 1802, the remains of a teenage girl was discovered in the Catacombs of Saint Priscilla at the Via Salaria in Rome. An inscription containing the Latin words "pax tecum filumena" (transcribed as "peace be with you, Philomena") was on the tomb. Also cut on the tomb were emblems of a lily and palm (to indicate virginity and martyrdom); an anchor; scourge; and three arrows pointing in opposite directions (one with a curved line, signifying fire). Combined with the inscription, these symbols were thought to have symbolized the life of Philomena and the different tortures she endured in testimony of her faith and love of Jesus Christ.



It is said that Saint Philomena revealed Her story to three people who did not know one another and who resided in different parts of the world. These private revelations unveiled the story of Saint Philomena's life in great detail and were amazingly identical accounts. One of the most well-known recipients of this revelation was the Foundress of the Oblates of Our Lady of Sorrows, Mother Maria Luisa di Gesù, a Dominican Tertiary.



On August 3, 1833, after having received the Eucharist, the nun Maria was praying before Saint Philomena's statue and at that moment felt a strong desire to know the true date of the Saint's martyrdom. August 10 was the day St. Philomena's relics had arrived in Mugnano, Italy. This date was significant to the people of Mugnano, but not to those who lived elsewhere. As Maria contemplated this, she closed her eyes and suddenly a gracious and gentle voice came from the direction of the statue, saying:

"Dear Sister, August the tenth was the day of my rest, my triumph, my birth into Heaven, my entering into the possession of such eternal goods as the

human mind cannot possibly imagine. That is why my Heavenly Spouse disposed, by His most high decrees that my coming to Mugnano should be on the day which had seen my coming to Heaven! He prepared so many circumstances which should make my arrival at Mugnano glorious and triumphant; giving joy to all the people, even though the priest who brought me had absolutely decided that my translation should take place on the fifth of the month very quietly in his own house. My omnipotent Spouse impeded him with so many obstacles that the priest, although he did all he could to carry out his plan, could not do so. And so it came about that the said translation was made on the tenth, the day of my feast in Heaven."

St. Philomena is a powerful intercessor in Heaven, a great saint to whom one could have a devotion. St. John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests, had a special devotion to St. Philomena. He enthusiastically encouraged others to ask for her help and often spoke of the profound effects of such prayers.

Prayer to St. Philomena

O faithful virgin and glorious martyr, St. Philomena, who works so many miracles on behalf of the poor and sorrowing, have pity on me. Thou knowest the multitude and diversity of my needs. Behold me at thy feet, full of misery, but full of hope. I entreat thy charity, O great saint! Graciously hear me and obtain from God a favorable answer to the request which I now humbly lay before thee ... *(Here mention your petition.)* I am firmly convinced that through thy merits, through the scorn, the sufferings and the death thou didst endure, united to the merits of the Passion and death of Jesus, thy Spouse, I shall obtain what I ask of thee, and in the joy of my heart I will bless God, who is admirable in His saints. Amen.

St. Philomena, powerful with God, pray for us.

When troubles overtake you or a family member, remember to ask Jesus for help.



Come to Me, All those who are weary and burdened

Do a work of charity, that has been on your mind.

**The International Catholic Family Newsletter
Is Published Monthly**

Our mission statement is to motivate people to pray and to be Christian examples in their work, home and with others, for those needing the Light in a world of Darkness.

<https://www.catholicfamilynewsletter.com>



**Pray the Rosary Daily
to Save Souls.**