

“ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race; from now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy; 4/7).



Dearest Sisters,

Reminiscing the life of our dearest Sr. Cecilia, one could truly affirm that the above words of St. Paul could aptly be applied to her life. The fiery zeal, indomitable spirit and the deep commitment to the cause which kept her active and enthusiastic all through her life, testify to the fact that Sr. Cecilia had a purpose, a mission in life and possessed the will to fulfill it. She was a person fully human and fully alive. She would often say “ I am a born teacher. The day I stop teaching I shall die” . She was passionately dedicated to her teaching mission and inserted herself into the Educative Mission of our Institute.

Just as everything in this world is bound to have an end, so too, her burning zeal for teaching had to end, when in May, 2016, during an evening walk, she slipped and fell causing multiple fracture on her thigh bone which had to be settled through surgery. Being deeply religious and conventionally pious, Sr. Cecilia, had a premonition that this fall would mark the end of her active life. From then on, she kept repeatedly saying “ the time has come for me to go home”. She was admitted in the hospital at Chengalpattu. When the Doctor asked her whether she is afraid of the operation, she casually said “I had been to the operation theatre, 13 times before. This is the 14th operation and I am at ease”. After the successful surgery, and three months of bed rest, given due care and attention, Sr. Cecilia recovered and was able to move around with the support of the walker. On 18th February 2017, as she got up from her bed in haste to wish Sr. Theophila on her birthday, she lost her balance and fell to the ground, causing another fracture on her hip bone. Sister was again taken to the hospital. The doctor after examining her said that another operation would be highly risky because of her weak heart and advanced age. Therefore Sr. Cecilia had to remain in bed for the rest of her life, a reality which was difficult for her to accept. The intense psychological trauma that she suffered began to weaken her physical system and her health began to deteriorate. Gradually she began to develop an aversion for food and had to be sustained only through liquid diet. Yet most of the time, she was able to recognize persons and would entertain them through interesting stories and songs. As she needed constant care, a lay woman was appointed to stay with her in the night, while our Sister Nurses, Sr. Sasikala, Sr. Lissy and Sr. Ramya attended to her during the day.

On the early hours of 3rd April, at 4.00 a.m. Sr. Lissy went to her bedside and greeted her as usual, but Sr. Cecilia just kept looking at her, unable to speak. Dr. Sr. Augustina who was in the next room was immediately called, who checked the pulse and said that Sr. Cecilia has suffered a silent cardiac arrest and has gone to her long awaited home.

Sr. Cecilia Berchy, was born in Nagpur, on 30th December, 1928, to late Mr. Patrick Frances and Innocenza Berchy. She was the 6th of 11 children and was brought up in Secunderabad. In her personal diary, Sr. Cecilia records the fond memories of two Sisters, Sr. Patricia (Italian Sister) and Sr. Ignatius who have inspired and nurtured her vocation through their holy lives. The prayers of her parents coupled with the inspiring lives of the Sisters led her to follow the religious life. She entered the postulancy in 1946 and made her first profession in 1949. Gifted with an extra ordinary skill for teaching, Sr. Cecilia dedicated the major portion of her life to this noble cause. Beginning with the Railway School at Lallaguda (1949-51) her teaching mission was extended to Atkinson High School,

Vijayawada(1952-56 as teacher, 1976-82 as Head Mistress), St. Ann's High School, Secunderabad (1957-62 and 67-72), St. Ann's High School, Moradabad(1962-67), St. Theresa's High School, Eluru(1983-90), where she was conferred the " Best Teacher Award " by the State Government and retired from service on March 30th , 1990. From 1991 – 2002, Sister was placed at St. Antony's Convent, Gollapudi, to take charge of the farm and the help age Centre. Even here, she continued to teach English and Office Management to the students of the technical School. In 2003, was transferred to St. Ann's convent Eluru where she rendered commendable service to the slum children , besides teaching value education to the College students and English to the PIME seminarians as well as to the aspirants. Her passion for teaching did not deter her from reaching out to other frontline ministries. Sr. Cecilia made a mark in the field of social work with her undaunted service to the flood victims when coastal Andhra was severely hit by the cyclone in 1977. With the help of few benefactors, she was able to raise funds and build houses for the cyclone victims in the adopted villages.

Whether in School, college, village, town, farm or field, Sr. Cecilia would make her presence felt, working with total dedication . In 2012, due to age and exertion, her health began to deteriorate. During this time, Sister Cecilia suffered from Tachycardia, due to mild heart attack, twice. In 2013 she was transferred to the Community at Adayar for rest and treatment and later was shifted to Madonna villa, where the elderly sisters are looked after. Even here she insisted on continuing her teaching or else she would die. Her preference was to teach the boys and so she was given the 9th class boys for special coaching in English ,daily one hour in the evenings which she carried on with remarkable punctuality, till the day of her fatal fall that carried her home on 3rd April.

The funeral mass was held on 4th April, in the Chapel of Animation Centre, Melamaiyur, at 10.30 a.m. which was officiated by Rev. Fr. John Bosco, the Parish Priest of St. Joseph's Cathedral,Chengalpattu and concelebrated by few priests of the neighboring parishes. Sr. Cecilia's younger Sister Vinu, her Nieces and few relatives were present for the funeral.Fr. John Bosco in his sermon highlighted the beauty of living religious life and the splendor of dying as religious.

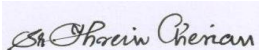
Sr. Nirmala Joris in her introductory words spoke thus, "Sr. Cecilia is a shining star in our Congregation. She had been walking in the footsteps of her Master and savior, in the company of the Sisters of St. Ann for nearly seven decades, in humble obedience to seven superior Generals and seven Provincials, fulfilling God's mission." Sr. Fatima Philip, the Superior of Madona Villa, wrote about Sr. Cecilia, " a woman of prayer, lover of the poor, an epitome of punctuality, her hall mark was preciseness. She was full of wisdom and wit, a good entertainer, she remained young in spirit and vibrant till the end".

After the holy mass, her mortal remains was laid to rest in the Diocesan cemetery at Chengalpattu.

We thank the Berchy family, for the precious gift of Sr. Cecilia, a dynamic and lively person, whose many qualities are worthy of emulation.

My sincere thanks to Sr. Fatima Philip and the Sisters of Madonna Villa, who took care of Sister Cecilia, during the operation and later when she had to remain in bed. I also thank all our sisters, for the support of their prayers in this moment of sorrow. My special thanks to the Sisters of the neighboring communities, for their timely help and expressions of solidarity. Let us generously offer our prayers and suffrages for the departed soul of Sr. Cecilia, that the Lord may hasten her entry in to His eternal Kingdom and crown her with His glory.

Yours prayerfully,



Sr. Theresa Cherman
Provincial Superior