

St. Ann's Provincialate,
Gollapudi P.O
Krishna District
Andhra Pradesh - 521 225
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8th September 2018

Nativity of our Blessed Virgin Mary

" I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be on my lips." (Ps 34 : 1)

Dearest Sisters,

Within a short span of just four months, the Lord of the Harvest has once again visited the vineyard of the Province of Immaculate Conception, Eastern India and in particular the state of Chattisgarh, at the early dawn of August 22nd and plucked for himself a beautiful flower in the person of our dearest Sr. Crescentia Bara. It is no coincident that she, who loved Mother Mary very dearly was transported by Mary to the bosom of the Father on the beautiful feast of her Queenship. In fact when death visited the Community of Ghargoda and took our dear Sr. Clara Tirkey to her heavenly reward, Sr. Crescentia who was then in that Community, had told the Sisters she would be the next to wing her flight to her eternal home.

Sr. Crescentia Bara (Felicitas Bara) one of the two children of the devout and God fearing couple, Benjamin and Anna Theresa, was born on 1st June 1933 at Dighia, Ranchi. Her father was the Catechist of the Dighia Parish. She and her sister were studying at the Ursuline Girls High School, Gumla, when they lost their dear mother at a very tender age.

Seeing their father struggling to bring up these children, Rev. Fr. Joseph Surin's sister, a nun belonging to the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Ann, requested her priest brother and his brother who were quite well to do, to bring these kids into their family, which they gladly did. Thus little Felicitas was looked after with much love, care and affection during her childhood and youth.

Since Fr. Joseph Surin S.J. whom Sr. Crescentia affectionately called "Baba" (uncle) , was the Parish Priest of Duldula for many years, she would often go to spend her holidays with him and here it was that she got in touch with our Sisters and her vocation to Religious life blossomed leading her to join our Congregation.

She entered the Postulancy on 21st June, 1963, was clothed on 1st January 1964, made her First Profession on 3rd January 1966 and pronounced her Perpetual Vows on 2nd January 1973..

Soon after her First Profession in 1966, Sr. Crescentia was transferred to St. Ann's Convent, Bolarum where she remained till 1973. With the exception of her years of service as Animator of the Community of Tamnar June 1991 to June, 1997, of the Community of Milak Khanam June 1998 to 2001 and once again of the Community of Tamnar, 2001 to 2004, being a trained teacher, most of the years of her Religious life, she devoted to the teaching and evangelising ministry. She carried out her apostolate with joy, diligence and dedication in the Communities of Duldula, Ghargoda, Mohanlalganj, Milak Khanam and Isanagar. For a period of three years, 2004 to 2007, she worked as Hostel Warden in the Diocesan Hostel of Adampur in Bihar.

My association with dear Sr. Crescentia dates back to the early seventies when I joined St. Ann's School, Bolarum as a resident teacher. She was then entrusted with the duty of the Sacristy and having much free time at my disposal I would often help her to arrange the flower vases, change the altar linen, polish the brass vases etc. During this time I learnt a lot from her. She was a simple, cheerful, holy and humble soul, always so loving and caring. She had a special gift of net-working relationships in the Parish Community regardless of the age barriers. She was loved by the youth who joyfully came forward to help her decorate the Church, during Christmas and Easter time. Even to this day when I chance to meet some of the senior parishioners at Bolarum, they never fail to enquire about her and tell of her good deeds. Such a noble soul though no more, will continue to live on in hearts she touched.

Sr. Crescentia was a very prayerful person with a deep faith and childlike trust that always helped her to see God at work in her life come what may. Being a lover of nature and persons, she was able to admire and appreciate the goodness and greatness of God made manifest in creation and in His creatures. Hard working, generous and ever available for any task, she was always sensitive to the needs of others and went out of her way to be of help to those in need. Her punctuality, readiness and zeal for her mission was remarkable. Her leadership qualities were brought to the fore when she rendered her services as Animator of the Community and as Hostel Warden with firmness coupled with kindness.

This is what Sr. Julia Victor, the First Councillor and Vicar General has to share about her lived experiences with the dear departed soul *"When I received the news of the passing away of dearest Sr. Crescentia, I felt I had lost someone special in my life. I had first met Sr. Crescentia in Bolarum when as a Postulant together with my companions I used to assist her in the Chapel duty. She made us enjoy the work with words of concern, joy and love. The image I have of her is standing at the door of the sacristy welcoming us with a warm smile! She inspired me!"*

She always kept in touch with me irrespective of my poor responses to her letters. Particularly, she showed much interest in the life and service done at Vardan Ashram, Ramnagar. She would not only visit it herself but also encourage the others, including lay people to go and pray in Vardan. Whenever she came to Vardan, people simply loved her and she, apart from spending time in prayer, would teach little children catechism, English etc. She was so friendly and approachable that people came freely to speak to her and find comfort and consolation.

She was an embodiment of compassion that her concern for the poor and needy compelled her to do acts of kindness, often unseen by the others. Whatever she received she passed on to someone in need. She would even gently remind or ask her Superior to send grains or other things to Vardan. She was of a positive disposition, full of gratitude to God and contented. Often after meeting her I went away inspired by the goodness and magnanimity of her heart. She would talk to me about persons always in a positive and edifying way.

Dearest Sr. Crescentia, you are missed a lot! Thank you for leaving such beautiful memories behind. May the good Lord for whom and His little ones you lived here on earth, now reward you with joy without end!

Sr. Crescentia Bara, aged eighty-five, was blessed with normally good health and did not suffer from any major health complications except a few old-age related aches and pains. After a stay of ten years at Isanagar, she joined the Community of Ghargoda on 16th June 2017 enjoying her well deserved rest and taking part in all the Community exercises actively and cheerfully. During the course of the year her health began to deteriorate and the medication not proving very helpful, she expressed her desire to prolong her home holiday so as to try some country medicines and massage treatment which she hoped would cure

her. Contrary to her expectations, she became worse and after a month on June 6th returned to Ghargoda barely able to stand on her feet and bear the weight of her body.

Sr. Crescentia had a great desire to spend the sunset years of her life in Duldula, the mission land of her beloved missionary "Baba" Fr. Joseph Surin, towards whom she had nurtured great admiration and affection. Respecting her wishes, Sr. Rosily Paul the Provincial Superior transferred her to Duldula and she joined this Community on 24th June, 2018. The Sisters of the Community though shocked at seeing her helpless state, welcomed her warmly and cared for her tenderly. She could no more join the Community for its various activities but remained confined to her room, alternating between bed and armchair always assisted for these movements. To all those who visited her she was an example of patient endurance.

Even in such trying moments, Sr. Crescentia continued to radiate that joy and serenity that comes from a soul abandoned to God. It was providential that I was at Duldula on my Canonical Visit during the last few days of her earthly sojourn. I arrived very late on 17th night so I got to meet her only on 18th morning after breakfast. She was so very happy to meet me and began narrating incidents of the past with nostalgia. Seated on her chair she showed me her hands and feet that were swollen and expressed her regret that being heavy bodied she could not turn or sit on her own and had to seek the assistance of the Sisters. I told her not to worry about that and that they were happy to be of any help to her and with that we parted after a little chit-chat.

On 19th morning even before I could go to her, she sent word for me through the girl who was helping her. I would never guess the reason why. There she was with arms outstretched ready to hug me and offered me a beautiful bed-sheet as gift. I was deeply touched. I could not stay long with her as I had to go to meet the school staff and children. Unmindful of her pain and discomfort, during those few moments, she was sharing with me some of her care and concerns about the declining missionary zeal to proclaim the Word and also to work for Vocations etc.

Finally on 20th was her turn for her personal interview. She was happy and relaxed and spoke at length of her relatives showing me some photographs, explaining all about her joint pains and medicines and also telling me about the reasons why she requested to come to Duldula etc. When she began expressing about her feelings of solitude and loneliness etc I told her that it was always like that in an apostolic community and that she would enjoy more attention and company in a home where we have our elderly Sisters. When I offered her the possibility of going to Gollapudi she preferred Talegaon as she knew most of the Sisters there and said she would abide by whatever is decided as the will of God for her. Without any definite conclusion we dropped the matter there.

My last encounter with her was on 21st morning before we could leave for Ghargoda at 7.30 am. In fact that whole night she was restless and groaning with body pain but throughout only kept praising and thanking God for his many graces and blessings and in between in Hindi asking "Jesus where are you Come and take me" . For the first half of the night Sr. Benedicta Almeida kept her company and later Sr. Bertha Toppo the Superior of the Community took over. When she saw me, she told me that she hadn't slept whole night and was sorry she had disturbed the Sisters who had to travel to Ghargoda. I told her to go to bed soon after breakfast and sleep well. She then asked me to pray to Jesus to come and take her. I jokingly told her "I won't pray to Jesus like that . Who am I to tell Jesus what to do for you" rather we will pray "Lord Jesus, we trust in you. You know what is best for us. Help us to accept and do your Will". At once she replied "Yes, Yes, I too will pray like that". With that I kissed her good bye, little realising I would have to return the next day to pay her my final homage. Most of the Sisters, especially her companion in religion, Sr. Terenzia felt

that she was just waiting to meet me and then bid goodbye to this world, as she would often be speaking to them about me, after I was nominated Provincial Superior.

On that same evening, August 21st, while her Superior Sr. Bertha, Sr. Benedicta and Sr. Anastasia were on their return journey from Ghargoda, they got news that Sr. Crescentia had taken bad. The colour of her lips and finger nails etc were getting darker. The doctor advised immediate hospitalisation. So Sr. Hemalata Dhanson, the Provincial Councillor was advised to call for an ambulance. In the meantime the Assistant Parish Priest, Fr. Tobias Ekka was called to give her the last Sacrament of Anointing. While Fr. Tobias was praying she was fully conscious praying and praising the Lord, surrounded by the Sisters of her Community who joined her in prayer.

At 8.30 pm she was taken to Holy Cross Hospital Kunkuri. Sr. Crescentia was well prepared and ready for death. Sr. Hemalata Dhanson and Sr. Shanta Grace Minj, the youngest Sisters of the Community who were with her, testify that all through the night she kept praising and glorifying the Lord, thanking Him for all his gifts and graces naming them one by one and crying out for His mercy. She who was eagerly waiting for the bridegroom with lamp alight, bid goodbye to the world and surrendered her beautiful soul to the Lord of her life at 5 am with an Alleluia ! Praise you Jesus on her lips.

The funeral Mass was concelebrated at 3.30 pm at the Parish Church Duldula, by the three Parish Clergy of Duldula, Fr. Walter, Fr. Tobias and Fr. Kalyan, Fr. Amritlal Minj, the Parish Priest of Ghargoda, Fr. Arvind, the nephew of Sr. Aurelia and attended by few of her nephews and nieces, the Sisters, Staff and Boarders of Duldula, the Sisters of the neighbouring Communities of Ghargoda and Tamnar and a few Parishioners. During the Homily, the qualities of such an exemplary life were highlighted. Her mortal remains were laid to rest in the Convent cemetery next to four of our other Sisters as she earnestly desired to be buried in Duldula.

Dearest Sisters, I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Sr. Bertha Toppo and every Sister of the Duldula Community for your care and concern extended to dearest Sr. Crescentia and I also express my sincere condolences to the bereaved members of her family. While we thank God the giver of life for gifting our Congregation with such a beautiful person and for making her a blessing to so many people let us offer up our suffrages for her asking her to intercede for the many needs of our Congregation especially for the fruitfulness of the forthcoming General Consultative Assembly and for the gift of many good and genuine vocations.

Yours affectionately,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sr. Ernestine Fernandes". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Sr. Ernestine Fernandes