

St. Ann's Provincialate,  
Melamiyur,  
15<sup>th</sup> November, 2018



***“The Lord reached down from on high; He took me, drew me out of mighty waters and rewarded me according to my righteousness”.***

(Psalm 18/16,20)

Dearest Sisters,

On 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2018, at 3.40 pm the hand of the Lord reached out to a soul that was longing and yearning for the house of the Lord. Our dearest Sr. Teofila Sebastine, who was ready and waiting for this invitation, surrendered her soul into the hands of her Creator, gently and silently as she breathed her last.

The prolonged illness that Sister had been suffering since 2008, had caused much damage to her vital organs, obstructing their normal functioning and causing the gradual decline of her health over the years. The usual symptoms of fever and vomiting each time would alert the Sisters who would shift her immediately to the hospital at Chengalpattu, where she would be administered the usual treatment and recover. But on 9<sup>th</sup> November, the symptoms were unusual and the Sisters referred her to the doctor who prescribed the usual injection and tablets, but she did not recover as before. Her condition grew worse in the night, going beyond any medical aid. The Sisters of Madonna Villa spent the night at her bedside, interceding to our Blessed Mother to grant her comfort and strength. In the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> November, Sister appeared calm and serene, giving hope of recovery. But after a short while her pulse began to decline very fast and she remained unresponsive to all gestures and promptings. She was given the anointing of the sick and holy Communion and the Sisters kept praying the Divine Mercy Rosary. Just an hour after receiving the Sacraments, cleansed by the holy oil and strengthened by the Body of Christ, Sr. Teofila departed to the heavenly home, to be re-united with her Master Creator. Sister was well prepared for this inevitable end as she had been repeatedly saying, “I am going home, get me ready for my travel”. So peaceful was the end, that the Sisters, who stood around her bed could not perceive her passing away until they noted the tear drop from the eye.

Sr. Teofila was naturally endowed with a strong physic even from her childhood and enjoyed good health until 2008, the year of her Golden Jubilee. After the joyful celebration of the Golden Jubilee held at Eluru, Sister went to her home town in Kerala for holidays. It was at this time, she noticed a lump in the breast and went for a medical check-up. The biopsy revealed it to be a malign tumour and Sister was referred to the cancer hospital, Adyar, where she underwent various tests, confirmed of ductal carcinoma and had to undergo mastectomy operation. It was a hard fact to accept. But finally resigned herself to the fate as she said, “This is the Golden Jubilee gift from the Lord, and He will help me to carry this cross.” She carried it in fidelity and perseverance till the Diamond Jubilee year (2018) and received the reward of a happy death, the ultimate desire of every soul. Sister underwent the surgery in 2009, and stayed at Jeevadhanam Adyar for the completion of treatment, then shifted to Mangadu for a period of rest. In 2011, Sister was brought to Madonna Villa, Melamiyur, the final halt, before reaching the Eternal terminus.

Sr. Teofila Sebastine (K.D. Mary) was born in Thirusur, Kerala on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1931, to the pious couple Mr. Sebastine and Mrs. Kunjamma. In 1955, while Mary was working as a teacher in a Higher Elementary Parochial School, she received the call to be a teacher in the

vineyard of the Lord. Ms. Mary readily accepted the call, sought guidance from the Parish Priest, Fr. John Sequeria, a good friend of the Sisters of St. Ann, who brought her to the Sisters at Nileshtar. Mary was admitted to the Novitiate at Secunderabad in 1958 made her first profession in 1959 assuming the name Sister Mary Teofila and was perpetually professed in 1965.

Being a trained teacher with few years of teaching experience, Sr. Teofila was inserted in to the teaching field soon after her profession. The following is a sketch of her missionary journey that she traversed during the 60 years of her religious life.

1965 – Community at Nileshtar, Kerala, teacher in the Aided Primary School

1969 – Community at Duldula Madhya Pradesh, teacher in Primary School

1974 – Community of Nileshtar re-instated in the aided post

1986 - Retired from teaching at Nileshtar

1987 – St. Convent, Eluru, to supervise the farm and field

1989 – Community of Ayoor – Sister-in-charge

1993 – St. Ann’s Convent, Mallappur, in-charge of the farm

1995 – St. Ann’s Convent, Kanhangad, in-charge of Kindergarten

2000 – St. Ann’s Convent, Nileshtar, to teach Catechism and for Pastoral work

2002 – St. Ann’s Convent, Ayoor, to teach Catechism and for Pastoral work

2009 – St. Ann’s Juniorate, Mangadu, for treatment and rest

2011 – 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2018 Madonna Villa, Melamiyur

The road map of Sr. Teofila’s religious life indicates her generosity, availability, sense of belongingness, obedience and respect towards the authority. Hers was a life of giving without counting the cost. She was a hard worker, who contributed the maximum of her physical and spiritual gifts in service. Keen on religious observances, even during the days of her illness, she was always seen with the breviary at her bed side and the rosary entwined to her hand. Everyone who came to her was welcomed with a cheery smile and entertained by her puns and jokes. Sr. Theo, as she was affectionately called, was known for her humour, outspoken nature, simplicity and freedom of expression that attracted young and old alike to her side. Her conversation usually would be a re-mix of events of the past, present and the future, repeated over and over again, to the amusement of the listeners, and one would leave her company only when tired of laughing. It was good to have some one with whom we could spend light moments, when burdened with tension and stress. Her concern for the needs of others was also praise worthy. Anyone who went to see her would repeatedly hear “Did you have something to eat or drink?”, “Please have something and go ma” etc., Born and brought up in a family of 14 children, Sr. Teofila, nurtured the qualities of “share and care”, “forgive and forget” which added value to her committed life. This also helped her to accept transfers in good spirit and adjust to different languages, culture and temperaments.

Rev. Fr. Bhagya Regis, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Chengalpattu, who officiated at the funeral Mass, remarked, “Going through her bio-data, I understand that, Sr. Teofila, lived her religious life, performing simple things with great attention. In order to be a good religious and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need to great things. It is enough to have the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic. Sr. Teofila expended her life in humble duties like tending the farms, forming the faith of the little children and ordinary people, and extending motherly care to the children of Kindergarten Schools. A noble soul indeed, whom we could look up to for encouragement.”

Sr. Mary Dhasnas, who had been rendering nurses’ care to Sister during the past few months, spoke thus at the introduction to the funeral Mass, “Sr. Teofila stood tall as a beacon light and

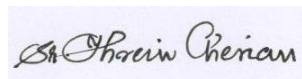
source of inspiration to many through her faith, hope and charity. Though she suffered much physically due to her prolonged illness, there was never a word of complaint, about her aches and pains, but always had the response, who enquired of her “I am alright ma.” Sr. Teofila will always remain in our thoughts and prayers.”

The funeral Mass was held on 10<sup>th</sup> November at 4.00 pm which was con-celebrated by six priests of the Diocese of Chengalpattu. There were large number of Sisters from various communities and Provinces, and also the laity. Sr. Teofila’s brothers, Mr. Johny, Baby, Shaju, two religious Sisters, Sr. Francina and Sr. Leema, nieces and nephews were among the relatives present at the funeral. As a co-incident, the 35 Sisters who had come to attend the Post re-organization Seminar and the Provincial team had the opportunity to attend the funeral service.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to Sr. Fatima Philip, Sister-in-charge, Madonna Villa, Sr. Mary Dhasnas and the young Sisters at Madonna Villa, who rendered their untiring service, generously spending many sleepless nights near Sr. Teofila during her illness and taking care of her when she was confined to bed. I also acknowledge with thankfulness, the services of Sister nurses like Sr. Sheela, Sr. Sasikala, and Sr. Lizzy P who looked after her since 2011 in the Home of Madonna Villa. My heartfelt thanks to the Sisters of the neighbouring communities, whose support and co-operation I consider very valuable during these moments of grief. Sr. Teofila was purified by suffering and sanctified by prayer. May she be glorified by the compassion of God and be led into the joy of life eternal in the Kingdom of God. After the holy Mass her mortal remains were taken in procession to the cemetery at Thimmavaram and laid to rest.

As our faith in life eternal prompts us, let us be generous in offering prayers and supplications for her dear soul, so that nothing may deter her entrance to Heaven.

Yours Lovingly,



Sr. Theresa Cherian

Provincial Superior