

MESSENGER OF GOD

Fr. Mathew Manjakunnel was indeed a Messenger of God to the Srampical family. This particular incident occurred way back in 1968.

Our Srampical family hails from a small village in Shertallay taluk. A strip of land from the Arabian sea to the West, back waters to the East, an estuary called Andhakaran azhy to the South and the border of Cochin to the North. The primary mode of transport used to be canoes (Vallam) for many years. My paternal Grandfather, Dr. Dennis was a student of Calcutta Medical college in 1895. In those days travelling to Calcutta was a mammoth task. He had to change between canoes, bullock carts and trains to reach his destination in Calcutta. Being a well-educated man it was his deep desire to send his younger sister to CMS School in Kottayam for her education. His plan was fervently opposed by the Catholic Bishop and priests since it was a Protestant School. They warned him of facing the consequences of excommunication from the Catholic church if he sent his sister to CMS School. But my Grandfather, a Godfearing man was also someone who placed great importance on a good education. He tried reasoning in vain with the church leaders. Hence against their opposition he sent his sister to Kottayam and later to CMC Ludhiana for Medicine. But after this incident he did not go to church for over 60 years. Many a priest tried to win him back to church but of no avail. He would argue with them quoting the scriptures. Though he never attended church he lived an honourable life as a doctor and a good human being. As he grew old his children were concerned as they dreaded his death and his burial outside the Catholic church. My grandfather often talked about a cremation in his barnyard which was not acceptable to his children.

It was at this time that the young Redemptorist Fr. Mathew Manjakunnel, like the God sent appeared. He came to give a retreat to our parishioners. My mother Mrs. Kunjamma Thomas who was teaching in the parish school approached Father Mathew and explained to him the problem faced by the family and Father agreed to visit Dr. Dennis at our home. As a child I have watched many priests trying to convince him of returning to the church and in turn grandfather's persistent and evasive arguments with them. But here was Fr. Manjakunnel's turn. His unique approach and the gentle persuasive manner in which he conversed with my grandfather impressed him greatly and he whole heartedly agreed to participate in the

retreat. That day is so vivid in my memory. My grandfather who was well respected in the village, but whom people had never seen in the church - sitting on a chair amidst the parishioners in the church compound, very attentively listening to the word of God proclaimed by Fr.Mathew Manjakunnel and later folding both his hands and receiving the Holy communion from him during the Holy Mass. My dad, mum and myself shed tears watching this. It was a great moment of joy and relief for us. A terrible burden taken away from our hearts ! A day when the Lord showered blessings on us through Fr.Manjakunnel ! God performed this amazing miracle in our lives through His chosen one - Fr. Manjakunnel ! We thank our Lord for the life of Father and remember him with great gratitude. May the dearsoul rest in peace....!

-Sheila Doss.