

# Fr. George Tither: God is Rich!

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Fr. David Januarius Tither C.Ss.R. was born on August 20, 1920, at Edendale, Southland, New Zealand. His father, William Tither was from County Kerry, Ireland. His mother was Frances Snodgrass, the first European child born in Te Anau, at the time a backwater. Though he was officially David Januarius, he was widely known as “George”, a name bestowed on him by his contemporaries in the Redemptorist juvenate.[1]

Fr. George always dreamed of becoming a priest. He was introduced to the Redemptorists by a teaching brother in his parish, who told him that by becoming a missionary he could do more good, and save more souls.

He was professed as a Redemptorist on February 2, 1940, and ordained priest on September 9, 1945. He was appointed to the Philippines in 1948. He was to minister there, apart from brief home visits, for the next sixty years.

Because of his beard and chubby frame, people would call him Fidel Castro. But the kids loved to call him Santa Clause. He loved to gather the kids around him and would sit the kids one by one over his legs and let them touch his beard. Then he would teach the kids the song, “Ang mga ibon ...” The kids loved him and would always follow him wherever he goes.

He preferred speaking in Tagalog than in his native English, and he was very fluent at it. He was a fast talker just as he was a fast doer. He is known for great energy and drive. The word “No” seems to be not part of his vocabulary. He had unbounded energy and zeal in mission and vocation. He was a zealous promoter of vocation having recruited a number of Filipino Redemptorists. Many of today’s Filipino Redemptorists and even those who have left the Redemptorists have testified that he was a decisive influence in their lives.

He had a knack for connecting with the young especially those who attended his Vocation search-in and “Night with the Lord.” In his correspondence to them, he would always sign his letters with words like *utol* George (brother George) or *ang iyong ka chokaran* (your buddy). Whenever any of his recruits would hesitate to enter the seminary especially because of financial problems, he would always tell them, don’t worry, *mayaman ang Diyos* (God is rich!). Because of George’s magnanimity in giving his time, assistance and resources to anyone, people saw in George that, indeed, God is rich!

In mission, he was a hard worker and innovator. He especially inspired the explosion of the pioneering *Kilusang Ilaw* (Light Movement) mission. In 1968, George challenged his confreres to give a mission in the entire fourth district of Manila and in the process he was able to secure the approval of the archbishop and the support of the parish priests. The mission was conducted simultaneously in the parishes of Paco, Pandacan, Peñafrancia, San Andres, Sta. Ana and Pius X. The mission was called *Kilusang Ilaw* and ran from 4 January to 29 March 1969.

Apart from being a missionary, he was famous for being a water diviner. He can pinpoint streams of water underground in lands that were bone-dry using nothing but a Y- or an L-shaped twig. Sometimes he would just use a rod or a pendulum. Those sceptical of his ability to divine water were silenced when a well drilled in the spot indicated by him provided a copious flow. His reputation at this mystical craft had apparently spread far and wide that even the Philippines’ biggest landowning families were sending for him to search for water in their vast haciendas and farmlands. It was far cheaper to get him than consign the job to a group of earth-digging geologists from the state university.

George’s commitment to the confessional was exceptional. Even in advanced old age he devoted many hours each week to this ministry. One penitent who had known him for years had this to say after sharing with him last year a very personal problem. “As I looked into George’s tear-filled eyes and listened to his soft, trembling voice, I realized more clearly than I ever did before, that I was truly in the presence of a holy man, hallowed by living, loving, and compassionately walking with the poor and the suffering. “[2]

In 1990, after serving in various capacities at the Redemptorist community in Baclaran, Manila, he was assigned to the community in Legazpi City, and never really left the place, except for a few periods. He was a popular confessor and spiritual director for many of Legazpi’s faithful – clergy, religious and laity alike. He had long suffered the debilitating effects of Parkinson’s disease before finally succumbing to severe pneumonia.

Fr. Tither was deeply committed to his religious community. In his final illness, when it was realized that he had only a short time still to live, he was brought back from hospital so that he could end his life among his brethren. As one who was present put it, “After he was wheeled into the living room of the community, George’s face lit up immediately. He had come home.”<sup>[3]</sup> On January 31, 2008 Father David “George” Tither, passed on to eternal life at the age of 87.

His death left many people grateful and inspired to seek the richness of God through the goodness and utmost holiness in their own lives. In 2015, the Chapter the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Manila approved the initial process of investigating the worthiness of his life for canonization purposes.

Joey Echano, CSsR

(This article is an excerpt from the book *National Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help: Tips, Trivia and Tribute* by John Maguire, Joey Echano, et. al., soon to be published)

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[1] Humphrey O’Leary, CSsR, Tribute to George Tither.

[2] Humphrey O’Leary, CSsR, Tribute to George Tither.

[3] Humphrey O’Leary, CSsR, Tribute to George Tither.

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## THE LIFE OF FR. DAVID

### “GEORGE“ TITHER, C.Ss.R.

David Tither was born on August 18, 1920 in the little town of Edendale in the Southland Region of New Zealand. The eldest of 10 children, he was baptized on September 19, 1920 and was given the name David

Januarius Tither. The Tither home was a happy, loving and prayerful one. The children grew up with strong faith: their mother used to read bible stories to them when they were young, they prayed the family rosary daily, and regularly attended mass no matter how harsh the weather condition was. Three of the children entered the religious life: Sr. Jannaro, SMSM (Marist Sisters), Sr. Catherine, OP (Dominican), and Fr. David, C.Ss.R., Redemptorist.

As a young lad, David manifested an interest in the priesthood. He used to play “pariparian” (priest game) with his younger siblings. At school, a Brother noticed his interest and remarked, “as a Redemptorist, if that is where the Lord is calling you, you can do more good ...than in any other way.” He entered the Redemptorist Juvenate (minor seminary) in Galong, New South Wales, Australia and continued his studies for the priesthood in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia. When he first arrived in the seminary, there was a party to welcome the new seminarians. David went up the stage to perform. While he was doing his song-and-dance repertoire, someone shouted “George Formby!” – who was at that time a famous comedian using funny facial expressions and other bodily movements. From that day on, David was given the name “George” which stayed with him all his life. In the seminary, George was known for his never-ending energy, whether for study, work, or apostolate. He was also known for his ability to give good vibes to his companions. His devotion to the Eucharist was very visible. He was always on the lookout to serve priests celebrating mass (no concelebrated masses in those days). In spite of his paralysis in the legs, he would never miss Sunday Mass. Once he had an attack of paralysis and the priest-

in-charge advised him to stay in bed, but George was not happy. He said, “I never in my life ever missed mass on Sunday, and I wouldn’t now, especially in the seminary!” David “George” Tither was ordained a priest on September 9, 1945. His deepest ambition was to be sent to the Philippine mission of the Redemptorists, and this was granted. After a long journey on a boat from Australia, he arrived at the port of Manila on May 17, 1948. He began learning the Tagalog language in Manila and worked in the Baclaran community. He served as Rector of Lipa, Baclaran and Legazpi where he spent his last

years. In his seemingly tireless way, Fr. Tither devoted himself to the work of parish mission, retreats, shrine ministry, vocation recruitment and hearing confessions in the church, in schools, and in homes as part of his ministry to the sick. Bishop Lucilo Quiambao called him “the 24-hour confessor”.

He became well-known as a “water diviner” and was in great demand from corporations and individuals looking for water source. He was often transported in planes, helicopters, and other means to different parts of the

country in search of water, a service for which he never charged a penny. In Legazpi, his last and final assignment, besides mission which is the main work of the Redemptorists, and ministry at the shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Gogon, Legazpi (especially confession), he continued retreat work in schools, vocation recruitment, taught and organized centering prayer, started a Healing Service every first Friday, a children’s mass and formed a team to go with him in their apostolate to the sick. Although there were stories of people being “healed” of various illnesses, Fr. Tither strictly instructed his team never to say that they were “healers.” Fr. Tither loved to say “Kuya Hesus” (Brother Jesus) as a term of endearment. He used to write letters to his vocation recruits in the seminary and sign himself as “Utol George.” He wanted his caregivers and others close to him to call him “Tatay George” (Father George). His life was one deep personal relationship with Jesus, especially when he celebrated Mass, and perhaps he also wanted to have a very personal relationship with people who worked closely with him in the service of others, especially the poor and the sick. After a long period of illness, (he had Parkinson’s Disease, and other illnesses), Tatay George breathed his last on January 31, 2008, in Legazpi, Albay at the age of 88 years. Many people continue to share their appreciation and love for this simple missionary who offered his life for the

Filipinos that he loved so dearly. From some of their testimonies, they thank God for the person of Fr. Tither who showed them, by what he was and how he served them, the face of a loving God. +

#### QUOTES FROM FR. TITHER

- God is rich! Mayaman ang Diyos!
- “A wise theologian told me, ‘Learn the theology behind it – trust the people, believe in people. We should hear from them before they hear from us!’”
- Jesus gives us one single holiness – humility. We have to be humble. Of all virtues and perfection, this he singled out – unquestioning humility. It’s not a matter of ‘pagpapababa sa sarili,’ or ‘kalambotan ng kalooban.’ It’s just the attitude

of imitating the attitude of Christ towards the Father.

➤ If we're holy, we're God-directed. The love of God amounts to one thing in practice: to see Christ in others. Charity is the most important virtue. There's one high road, the road of charity.

➤ Holiness is a long process. It's not instant.

➤ We have 24 hours a day to know Him better. I suggest that

we come to know God and love Him more in the sense of

being ready for service, to be absolutely generous and to be completely available. The danger of being workaholic is

there but we can correct that by period of prayer – regular periods going apart from our work and being attuned with

God – centering.

➤ Our love for Jesus will overflow in the concern of service

for others. If not, there's something fake about it.