

# ‘Depart In Peace, Holy Father’

*(On Saturday, February 24, 1934, as the body of Malankara Metropolitan Dionysius VI Vattasseril lay in state, HH Catholicos Baselius Geevarghese II delivered a funeral oration in the midst of the Holy Qurbano at the Old Seminary Chapel, Kottayam, recalling the life and times of his guru, mentor, and spiritual father. Never before or after in the annals of little Kerala has any public personality's life and legacy been so truthfully summed up for posterity through the spoken word as the Catholicos, who couldn't boast of much formal education, did that day in his brief speech. Even today, no faithful member of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church can read through that speech without watching his or her eyes go moist.*

*I am here for the first time attempting an English translation of that speech in the hope that it may inspire faithful members of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church to remain steadfast and rooted to their moorings. Surely, he sacrificed his tomorrows for our todays so that we, his spiritual children, can live with dignity and honour. May his memory and prayers be our fortress and refuge.)*

## ‘Depart In Peace, Holy Father’

Funeral Oration By HH Catholicos Baselius Geevarghese II At The Wake Of Malankara Metropolitan Dionysius VI Vattasseril

**Blessed in the Lord,**

Since you've come to attend and receive blessings from the funeral ceremony of this departed Holy Father, it wouldn't be out of turn to dwell at some length about him.

We are sure that all of you will agree that he was an extraordinary

human being in the eyes of the world. This is a truth vouched for by all who've either seen or heard about him. He was a bright star, a learned savant, a brave warrior, and a person gifted with nerves of steel. He successfully led the Holy Church during an extraordinarily difficult period. He fought bravely and snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. Was there anybody his equal in our midst? He was truly a lion cub while alive. As you can sense, now even his lifeless body is radiating that grandeur and grace which was truly his own.

### ‘He Had Had No Occasion to Worry About Wants’

Even a lion cub can find itself in dire straits. Not so for him. He had had no occasion to worry about wants. We know that the righteous who seeks the Lord shall not have any wants. Yea, though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death+, there was no dearth of material or public support for him. He didn't face any wants while being bedridden either. He received the best treatment and care during the eight days he was bedridden. His doctors were experts in the field. He was in possession of his faculties until the very end. Most of those whom he wanted to see, and those who wanted to see him, called upon him. We bishops and priests were always in attendance. During the sacrament of extreme unction, he remained attentive and alert throughout. When he had to draw the sign of the cross, he did so on his own. Not only that, at the end of the ceremony, he gave the benediction to all those around him without nary a reminder. Has he faced any wants even after death? The wise Solomon has taught us that however great a life a man has led, if he does not receive a proper burial, his life is comparable to that of an aborted foetus\*. Therefore, a dignified burial is no trivial matter. Even that fortune is at hand for Our Holy Father. We do not know if so many priests, deacons and laymen have ever attended any funeral ceremony before. Manifold are the logistics and arrangements behind it. This too has been achieved in a manner befitting a *rajarshi*.

## ‘Spiritually Too He Was A Towering Edifice’

The world saw greatness in him. He never despaired in defeat and always fought back to exult in triumph. He never faced any wants. It's our view that spiritually too he was a towering edifice without any blemish or failings. This was not apparent to many since he did not wear his spirituality on his sleeves. In him, there was not even a shadow of the pretentiousness that was abhorrent to Our Lord. It's a truism that the most intimate secrets of people are made apparent to those who live in close proximity with them. We have had the good fortune to know him and work closely with him since our very early days. In his spiritual life, we have witnessed nothing but conduct pleasing before the eyes of Our Lord. We are witness to the order and discipline with which he conducted his spiritual affairs. Daily readings of the Bible, strict adherence to the canonical hours, including the midnight office, and observance of lent were all practised unwaveringly until last Friday morning. Even after he was bedridden and lost his voice, he used to pray and draw the sign of the cross during the canonical hours. Just as he was unmatched in the sheer breadth of his knowledge about the doctrines of the Holy Church, he was equally rigorous in observing them. Who could match wits against him in his memory and mastery of Syriac, canon, and church history?

He was a great *malpano*. This weak Catholicos is his disciple.

## ‘The Miracles Signal He Was A Saint Of God’

It's a miracle that his funeral is taking place today. In the very first Saturday of the Great Lent, yes on the day of remembrance of Saint Ephraim, the tallest of all *malpanos*, the great *malpano* of Malankara has left us. On the day of remembrance of Mor Theodoros sehdo, our Metropolitan, though not a martyr but certainly a confessor (*maudyano\*\**) in view of the many tribulations he underwent for the Holy Church, is being interred. Also, the Holy Church allows celebration of the Eucharist during the Great Lent only on Saturdays and Sundays. Had he actually passed away on Thursday, when rumours spread about his demise, he would have lost the good fortune to be laid to rest after the Holy Qurbano.

His was a very calm end. Without nary a grimace or a twitch, his breath ceased just as the clock's pendulum comes to a rest. As the prayer was wound up at the end of the Nicene Creed, he slept in the Lord at the stroke of noon on the same Friday and at the very hour that our messiah was crucified for the salvation of the world. Also, the church ordains that Holy Qurbano be celebrated in memory of the faithful departed on the third, ninth, and 30th days of demise. Since our Metropolitan passed away yesterday, it has now become possible to remember him in Eucharist prayers in all our churches on the above-mentioned days. Aren't all these miracles? This is how we should learn to identify the saints of God. Therefore, through his death, the church has lost a great saint. Our loss is inestimable. Our learned *malpano* has departed from our midst. Our Malankara Metropolitan has gone to his eternal abode. Our saintly father has been taken away today. O know ye that a great King has fallen this day in Israel\*\*\*. Just as for them, it's a day of mourning for us too. Until now, he gathered us and protected us under his wings. Since he is compassionate towards us, let's console ourselves that he will ceaselessly intercede on our behalf before God. We know that great is the power when the righteous prays. We have the duty to uphold the principles and covenants that he fought for. "If ye love me, keep my commandments," said our Lord Jesus in his parting message# to his disciples. May we, therefore, remind you that our love for this departed Holy Father can only be made manifest by holding steadfast to the ideals which he held dear.

### **'He Fought The Good Fight and Kept The Faith'**

We have one consolation. It lies in the realisation that the apostle Saint Paul's words##, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day", holds true for our Holy Father. He will pray for us. Let us beseech God for him. He is taking leave from us with the words "peace be unto you"^^. Let us, in turn, bid him farewell by saying, "depart in peace, Holy Father".

This lion cub will soon spring to life like a young lion. Let the merciful God enable him on the day of judgement to hear the melodious words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." ^^ Let us pray for the good fortune

to meet him on that day and together discover mercy in the Lord's presence.

**e.o.m.**

\*\*\*\*\*

Quoted in the book, *Indian Orthodox Church: History and Culture (Malayalam)*, by *Fr Dr. Joseph Cheeran*, K V Mammen and P C Mathew, pages 903-907.

Translation with the permission of publisher K V Mammen

\*\*\*\*\*

**Notes:**

+ Psalms 23: 4

\*Ecclesiastes 6:3

\*\*Maudyanos or confessors are those who made bold to confess their true faith before tyrants and heretics. As a result, many confessors became *sehdos* or martyrs too.

\*\*\*2 Samuel 3: 38

#John 14:15

## 2 Timothy 4:7-8

^John 20:19

^^Matthew 25: 21