

Editorial

The Vision of Chavarul

“Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born on 10 February 1805 in Kainakary, a small village of Alleppey district in the Travancore state. After his primary education he joined the Pallipuram seminary attached to Saint Mary’s Church, Cherthala. Father Thomas Palackal was his *malpan* (professor of sacred sciences). He received his subdiaconate in 1827 and diaconate in 1828. On 29 November 1829, he was ordained a priest at Saint Andrews Church, Arthunkal. From a very young age, Kuriakose was instructed to chant the name ‘Jesus’, as a result of which he eagerly wished to live a life dedicated to Jesus and the Church” (Chackalackal, 2018).

St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a great visionary and had a deep love for his fellow beings and for the environment. The *Chavarul* is the last testament (will) given by St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara to parishioners of Kainakary. “Let this be a mark of the fact that you are my successors. The countless favours God has bestowed upon you are not entirely due to your meritorious lives, but earned also by the true love and trust of your forefathers.” Even after 150 years, the *Chavarul* has been a masterpiece in healing and education. His great faith and passion for strong family values and for the ideal upbringing of the children are evident from his testament called *Chavarul*. The *Chavarul* keeps on playing a pivotal role in guiding parents towards efficient character formation in children. St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was like a light brightly shone in the darkness of 19th century Kerala society. He had a holistic vision to reform the society socially and spiritually. He was a saint with a universal vision, a leader who could renew the society. With a tenacious nature, he was courageous in the faces of a society unwilling to changes it a discriminatory and prejudiced way of living.

Pope Francis, in his homily at the synod on young people in St. Peter's Basilica on 28 October 2018 said that there are "three fundamental steps on the journey of faith: to listen, to be a neighbor, to bear witness." To elaborate on this, he used the story of Bartimaeus, the blind, beggar man from the Gospel of St. Mark (Mark 10: 46-52). In the story, when Jesus was walking on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, Bartimaeus called out to Jesus. The people around Bartimaeus rebuked him and told him to be quiet. Jesus heard his cry, stopped to call him, listened to what he had to say and gave him back his sight. The man became a disciple and walked with him and the other disciples to the holy city. Pope Francis points out that 'listening' is the first step in the journey of faith like how Jesus took the time to stop and listen to the blind man. Nowadays, a lot of children and youth are blindsided by the issues in the world, and left unheard, having to fight for meaning and light in their lives by themselves. Like Bartimaeus, many are left in the midst of large crowd calling out for help. St. Chavara also resonated this message in *Chavarul* where he advises parents to be available to their young ones.

The exemplary example of Jesus also shows how he asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" Similarly, parents, teachers and those in pastoral care need to show such considerations towards the youth in the Church and community. Lending a listening ear to the young would help them be initiated into the journey of faith. The youth needs to know that there is someone ready to accompany them and understand them in their hour of crisis. St. Chavara said that "From time to time, parents should inquire about their progress in studies and also about the type of friendships they cultivate." Neglectful families tend to bring up children who lack self-esteem and would be at high risk for emotional and behavioral problems, including alcohol and substance abuse (Grant & Ray, 2010). As it takes a village to bring up a child, the whole Christian community needs to practice the skill of being a good neighbor to the young generation.

Accompaniment cultivates a bond between the parent and the child. The symbolic representation of a mother hen holding the child under her wings (Matthew 23: 37) is represented here, and the child understands that the person accompanying them are available to guide them. Pope Francis warns the Christian community to note how Jesus took the cry of those pleading for help not as a nuisance but as a challenge and reminded us that God would always be happy to listen to his children who seek Him and He never grows tired. Pope Francis in His homily

asked the young people seated before him: “in the name of all of us adults: forgive us if often we have not listened to you, if, instead of opening our hearts, we have filled your ears.”

St. Chavara reminds parents how “Both extreme strictness and too much leniency towards children are evil” (St. Chavara, 1868, pp. 37). Permissive parenting styles are associated with negative child well-being outcomes (Grant & Ray, 2010). Authoritarian parenting styles demand absolute obedience and rigid and unloving home where the child will grow up to fear constant punishment, not allowed to make decision and lives in the humiliation of total parental domination (Pathy, Tan, & Loo, 2015). An authoritative parent would strive to strike a balance between setting reasonable limits and consequences and give unconditional love to the child. St. Chavara asks parents to speak to the child and make them understand why they are being reprimanded, and that it is likely that the child would grow up to bring their own children in the same way. The transmission of effective parenting over the generations would ensure that good Christian values are maintained and practiced for life.

St. Chavara warns that “If the parents don’t love and respect each other, their children also will not respect them.” The children need models in their lives who can show them how love and respect for one another, especially to the opposite gender, is important. They need to grow up knowing that they can respectfully listen to the other person and walk alongside them like a neighbor with peace and harmony.

The third fundamental step in the journey of faith is ‘to bear witness’ which Pope Francis draws again from the Gospel story. Pope Francis recalled how Jesus sent his disciples to the blind, beggar man, “not with a coin to shut him up, or to dispense advice,” but to tell him to “Take heart; get up, He is calling you.” Jesus “heals in spirit and body,” the Pope said, “Jesus alone calls, transforming the lives of those who follow him, helping raise up the fallen, bringing God’s light to the darkness of life.” St. Chavara in *Chavarul* also reminds us that children are a gift from God. A youth that could be transformed to bring the light of God into this world can help bring those around them out of darkness. A good Christian seeks out those they can help and not wait for them to come knocking on their doors. The liberating message of salvation must be on the minds and lips of those witnesses who wish to accompany the youth, and throw away their own ‘recipes’ and ‘labels.’

The vision of the family based on the biblical vision and affirmed by the Christian tradition is this: “A good Christian Family is the image of heaven, where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one’s proper state of life” (St. Chavara, 1868). It is amazing that almost a century before the Second Vatican Council, which marks a paradigm shift in the theology of marriage, St. Chavara presents the family as an image of heaven, a place of salvation. St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a champion of families and his last Testament to his parish community is a great treatise for effective family life.

In his address to Indian youth during the Youth synod, Pope Francis said:

“To the young people of India, a big greeting... Do not forget that youth is a richness. Make it fruitful for the benefit of all. You have the future in your hands, the present is in your hand, go ahead. Do not be discouraged.”

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