

Last But Not the Least

The Amātus: “A Little Better Always” The Theology of Becoming in the Life of Fr. Amatus Kallarackal

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Introduction

In the opening of the Gospel according to Mark, at the baptism of Jesus, the heavens were torn apart and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon Jesus and a voice came from the heavens, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mk: 1:11). The Vulgate renders this profound affirmation with the words *Filius meus dilectus* ‘my beloved Son.’ *Dilectus* carries connotations of being chosen and esteemed. The name Amatus, though similarly rooted in the language of love, derives from a different etymological source and is equally profound in its theological implications. *Amātus* derives from the Latin verb *Amāre*, meaning ‘to love,’ and the perfect passive participle, literally ‘the one who has been loved’ or, more colloquially, ‘The Beloved.’

It is within this etymological and theological understanding that the life of Fr. Amatus Kallarackal CMI (1926–2008) reveals its deepest meaning of how his very name became prophetic for his spiritual journey, embodying a lifelong vocation to become ever more fully what he was called to be. To understand Fr. Amatus is to understand a man whose entire existence was predicated upon a singular recognition that “The experience of God’s love, received and lived, becomes the

foundation of our love for others." From this discernment flows all authentic mission and transformation.

Fr. Amatus' Legacy of Contemplative Action

Those who knew Fr. Amatus personally, lived with him in community, accompanied him in his ministry, and listened to the accounts of those who experienced his life closely, consistently testify that Fr. Amatus authentically and fully lived the founding charism of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI Constitution and Directory 2021, § 3) the integration of contemplative prayer with active ministerial engagement, 'contemplative mysticism'. Unlike activism, which masks spiritual shallowness, and contemplation, which becomes escapist withdrawal, Fr. Amatus demonstrated that authentic spirituality demands both: the silent depths of interior prayer nourishing the prophetic clarity of external witness. Most significantly, he was never attached to any external monuments and institutional structures; he constructed no grand buildings bearing his name, erected no memorials to his achievements, and pursued no recognition of personal accomplishment. Instead, his legacy was the 'Kingdom of love', invisible, countless memories built in the hearts of those he touched, and the transformation of many human souls. This orientation reveals a man whose fundamental theological conviction was that the Kingdom of God is not set in stone, but in the heart of the man created in the image and likeness of God.

The Crucified Embrace: From Contemplation to Incarnate Witness

The central theological conviction that animated Fr. Amatus' spiritual life was his profound contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation. In Jesus Christ, God himself entered human history, assumed human nature, and freely humbled himself by embracing the human condition. For him, the Incarnation was not an abstract theological doctrine or merely an object of intellectual reflection; it was a lived and embraced salvific reality that shaped his relationship with Christ, his spirituality, and his manner of life. He contemplated the mystery of the God who became human with profound reverence, allowing the Incarnation to become the foundation of his own response of love, self-gift, and participation in Christ's redemptive mission.

Fr. Amatus understood that Christ's incarnation was fundamentally an act of love, God's definitive answer to the human longing for authentic communion. In becoming human, Christ revealed that human existence

itself can receive the divine presence and that the material world is not fundamentally evil but is destined for transfiguration. That love, not in its sentimental form but in its sacrificial reality, constitutes the very heartbeat of creation. The liturgical and sacramental tradition of the Church, particularly as understood in Carmelite spirituality, became a source of theology for Fr. Amatus life and prayer. This commitment to contemplating Christ's incarnate love became the foundation of Fr. Amatus's lived spirituality and led to a profound inner revelation. Many of us have witnessed that during common prayer and prolonged periods of contemplation, Fr. Amatus was moved to extend his hands for long hours in the posture of Christ upon the Cross, thereby entering into contemplation of the mystery of Christ's vicarious suffering and self-offering.

The Johannine Spirituality of the Beloved

The Johannine tradition of the 'Beloved Disciple' serves as a biblical model for understanding Fr. Amatus' spirituality. In the Gospel according to John, a figure appears described as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', a designation that emphasises not merely a personal affection but a constitutive identity rooted in being loved by Christ himself. This beloved disciple becomes the type of authentic Christian discipleship: one whose entire existence is oriented toward receiving Christ's love and allowing that reception to transform all other relationships. The integration of contemplative mysticism and active ministry is not merely reflected in, but fundamentally constitutive of, Fr. Amatus' spiritual identity. To be named 'Amatus' (the beloved) was for him an invitation to live as the beloved disciple lived: in intimate communion with Christ, attentive to his word, willing to lay one's head upon His chest (as the beloved disciple does at the Last Supper), drinking in the mysteries of divine love. This intimacy with Christ became the source from which all his ministerial activity flowed. As 1 John 4:11 proclaims: 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.' The logic is inevitable; reception of love generates the capacity and obligation to love.

"A Little Better Always": A Theology of Becoming

Fr. Amatus's life motto, "A Little Better Always", encapsulates a spirituality of gradual, humble transformation, resisting both complacency and the grandiose pretensions of sudden spiritual attainment. This simple phrase opens into a complex spiritual pedagogy that tracks his entire journey through four interconnected

stages: Formation, Ongoing Formation, Transformation, and Transfiguration.

Formation: In this initial stage, Fr. Amatus was established in the foundational disciplines of religious life. Through the structures of Initial formation, novitiate, and early vowed life, and later through disciplined routines and the gradual acquisition of virtues, he developed the spiritual capacity necessary to encounter divine truth. This was not mere rule-keeping but rather the patient construction of a soul prepared to receive grace. The struggles of this period, the ascetical practices, and the renunciations were not ends in themselves for him, rather preparations for deeper communion with Christ to be formed in him.

Ongoing Formation: As Fr. Amatus advanced in his religious life, he recognised that spiritual growth is never static. For him, ongoing formation meant continual openness to the work of the Holy Spirit in him, persistent conversion, and deepening in prayers and sacrificial life; thus, he humbled himself to become an authentic witness of Christ. As he progressed in his ongoing formation, Fr. Amatus became more and more humble and emptied himself as if 'Being in the world and not of the world.' This stage reflects the Pauline injunction to 'Be transformed by the renewal of your mind' (Romans 12:2). Fr. Amatus discovered not merely who he was, but increasingly, who he was called to become, a progressive unveiling of his vocation's deeper discernment.

Transformation: Through ongoing fidelity to the grace of the Holy Spirit, Fr. Amatus underwent a profound interior transformation, which he understood as becoming 'Alter Christus.' This is the Pauline mystery of transfiguration articulated in Galatians 2:20: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' For Fr. Amatus, this mystery was a progressive emptying of personal will into Christ's salvation mystery, which he gradually attained and lived through in his deeper prayer life. The transformation was actualised in Fr. Amatus through what he discerned as 'Little Better Always', small acts of fidelity, incremental gestures of love, humble service to his brethren, mindfulness to every moment. Here lies a profound theological insight: the Kingdom of Heaven is not attained through one dramatic gesture but through the patient accumulation of small fidelities. Each act of kindness, each moment of deeper prayer, each choice to love when indifference would be easier.

Transfiguration: We believe Fr. Amatus was truly called by Heaven and Earth (CCC 325), not merely as a person destined for salvation, but as one through whom the reconciliation between human and divine, between spirit and matter, between Heaven and Earth. In the icon of the Transfiguration of Christ upon Mount Tabor, the disciples catch a glimpse of Christ's true identity, the manifestation of the divinity of the Beloved. According to St. Maximus the Confessor, "Transfiguration represents the ultimate human destiny: union with God through grace while remaining fully human." Similarly, we understand and reflect on Fr. Amatus, noting that his glorified life is inspiring and that he intercedes for us in heaven. We strongly believe he has already been called "The Amatus of a Little Better Always" by the heavenly Father.

Conclusion

Fr. Amatus's life and spirituality offer a powerful example of how patience, humility, and faithfulness endure in a religious culture often drawn to instant results and institutional prestige. His theology of becoming "A Little Better Always" offers to the contemporary Church a counter-cultural invitation to resist both spiritual complacency and the grandiose pretensions of sudden enlightenment. Moreover, his life and example are an inspiration to embrace the gradual work of grace that sanctifies through incremental acts of love, fidelity, and self-emptying service. By rooting his entire spiritual journey in the mystery of Incarnation, Fr. Amatus revealed that matter is not the enemy of spirit, that the material world is destined for transfiguration, and that love, in its sacrificial, vulnerable reality, constitutes the very heartbeat of creation itself. His entire life through the four stages of spiritual maturation, from formation through transfiguration, provides a map for contemporary disciples, a path to authentic transformation. His life challenges us to interrogate our own spiritual priorities, to ask whether our religious commitments serve the advancement of institutional power or the transfiguration of human hearts into vessels of divine love. Through this process of reflection, we encounter an invitation rather than condemnation. We are called to join the communion of saints in the steady, humble work of growing in God's love and grace. By letting ourselves be loved, we become more capable of loving others. Ultimately, this path leads us to the eternal feast, where all who have loved truly will discover they have been loved infinitely.