

## **125 Years Mission of Love of SCJM in Sri Lanka.**

The 24<sup>th</sup> November is an unforgettable day for the SCJM in Sri Lanka and should be written in golden letters in the history of the Province of Sri Lanka. It is the day when the great missionary Sisters of Charity from Belgium set foot on the sand of Galle in Sri Lanka at the request of the late Mgr. Van Reeth of Belgium, who was the Bishop of Galle at that time. Mgr. Van Reeth had a Sister in the SCJM family in Belgium, who was the then Mother General and through her contact and negotiation the arrival of the Sisters of Charity became a reality in Sri Lanka. May the great souls who labored and planted the seed for the tree of SCJM in Sri Lanka now enjoying the bliss of God intercede for us to grow and spread its branches.

The commemoration of this great event, namely the completion of 125 years of existence of SCJM in Sri Lanka will be celebrated on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021, in Sacred Heart Convent Galle, Chapel where the first house was founded. Actually the Convent was blessed and opened on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1896 by Mgr. Van Reeth. To commemorate this great and historical event and to thank God for the many blessings showered on the Province of Sri Lanka, a thanksgiving Mass will be celebrated in Sacred Heart Convent Chapel, Galle, at 11.00 am. His Excellency Most Revd. Dr. Brian Udaigwe, the Apostolic Nuncio in Sri Lanka will be the Chief Celebrant at the thanksgiving Eucharist.

This would be a memorable day of Thanksgiving in the Province for the many mercies that God showered upon the Province. Many are the wonders the Lord has done for us. Today the Charism of our Founder Rev. Fr. Peter Joseph Triest '**God is Love**' has spread all over Sri Lanka reaching out to the North, East, South and West of the beautiful Island of Sri Lanka, the Pearl of the Indian Ocean. Let us all join in the celebration with heart felt gratitude to God for the growth and mission of the Congregation in Sri Lanka. Let us also remember all our Pioneer Sisters who sowed the seed in the year 1896 in the Province and the first missionaries who braved all the hardship in order to enable this tree to grow and spread all over the Island.

### **Beginning of the foundation in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) :**

On 4<sup>th</sup> November 1896 the first five Sisters for Sri Lanka left for Brussels, from Ghent where they had gathered, and left the next day for Paris. At the station they met up with the Jesuit Fathers and together they took the first train to Marseille. The Sisters lodged there with the Franciscan Sisters to await the sailing. The Ville de Ciotat set sail on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 1896. On the ship there 10 more female religious and 22 priests all of them missionaries. This made the sisters happy because it helped to have 2 to 3 Masses daily and receive Holy Communion. The Ville Ciotat was the biggest ship and it sailed directly to Colombo and on 23<sup>rd</sup> November they landed in Colombo.

### **Arrival in Galle.**

On 24<sup>th</sup> November 1896 the first Sisters of Charity arrived in Galle. Mother Amelia gave her impression. "Mgr Van Reeth met us at the station and we received his blessing. After the ceremony at the Cathedral we were taken to our convent next to the Cathedral. Above the entrance gate we found a triumphal arch decorated with coconut leaves and a welcome and on the top was placed a Belgium Flag. Mgr. showed us

our convent and after a few moments the Mgr and the priests took their leave. The people stayed in front of our house for a long time. In the dining room we had a very tasty meal prepared". This would be the only foundation on the Island for 12 years.

At the beginning of December 1896 hardly a week after her arrival in Galle, Mother Amelia wrote a letter to Ghent. "Our house contains a parlour, a dining room which is also used as a work room, two bed rooms and a smaller room serving as a kitchen. Our yard is very small but we can walk around the adjacent school where the air is very fresh and the view of the nearby ocean is marvelous". In June 1897 a second adjacent house was put at the disposal of the sisters. Due to lack of space there was no Chapel at the Convent and this caused great sadness to the sisters. For the Eucharistic celebration the sisters had to go to the Cathedral situated higher up on Mount Calvary.

On the arrival of the first Sisters only a small percentage of the population was Catholic. In the entire Diocese of Galle there were about 4600 faithful out of a total population of about 900,000 people. There were only 13 Churches and 17 Chapels in the Diocese and some were even neglected and abandoned. The situation was sad as regards education in 1895 there were 10 Catholic Schools with 700 pupils (boys and girls) The Sisters arrived in this predominantly Buddhist region with a Catholic network that was very weak. There was a lot to be done. (Agenda 2003 Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>)

This is a short history of the humble beginning of the SCJM in Sri Lanka and today the tree has its branches all over Sri Lanka and the Sisters are engaged in the mission of education, nursing, pastoral apostolate, social ministry including frontier mission, working for justice and the rights of the oppressed, the marginalized, the children and the differently abled.

Let us continue to pray that the Charism of Love may be lived by each Sister and ignite all those who come in contact with us. Let us walk towards a deep interior renewal so that the Message of God given to Rev. Mother Hostia to reveal a special radiance of God's love may become a reality.

God bless you.

Sr. Nichola Emmanuel