

Happiness of Mother's Death

Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

Death is always sad and painful. When one, who lived with us till now, passes away from this perishable world then, there is grief in our hearts. A mother is a personification of love and affection. When she leaves us, it is natural that the eyes of her daughters and sons shed tears. Still, when I tell you that I am happy at the passing away of my mother, you may wonder about my feelings.

My mother at 100 years went to meet her merciful Creator on 9 June 2017. That day my brother Vincent gave me the news in a very sad tone. "Elder brother, our mother is no more. She passed away just two minutes ago!" Immediately I send a whatsApp message to my friends, "I am happy to give you a good news that my mother has gone to her Creator to receive the eternal peace and everlasting bliss which the merciful God has prepared for her." Such was her life and loving relationship with God and with her fellow human beings that by the grace of the loving and merciful God she, passing through death, has reached eternal life. This is my faith. This is the promise of Jesus. (see John 3: 15). I have unshakable faith in the words of Jesus Christ. Hence I feel happy and describe my mother's death as "good news".

My mother was born on 30 October 1917 in a middle class family of a land owning farmer. She was the eldest in a family of four sons and two daughters with very loving parents. She grew up experiencing much love from her parents and siblings. In her childhood she learned to read, write and basic maths in the house of a master in her village. But she did not go to the parish school walking a few kilometers like her brothers and the youngest sister. But what she learnt from the master was useful to her all her life as she had developed a reading habit.

My Mother was at home for 16 years and learned cooking and house keeping with her mother. So she became a good cook and an expert in things pertaining to running a house as well as in dealing with servants and laborers. She got married at 16 and came to a bigger joint family with parents-in-law and six sisters-in-law. In fact the sisters-in-law close to her age were her best friends.

Cooking for the large family was done in firewood oven. The women in the family needed to gather firewood from the large farm land, collect vegetable from the farm. Once my mother and a sister-in-law were collecting cashew nuts. Then both of them drank stomach full of cashew fruit juice, plugging them from the low branches. When the mother called they ran home. Mother told me once that both of them could hear the noise of juice in their stomach! They had all types of works from morning to night, day in and day out.

When serving the food for all in the house 3 times a day the last to be served were she and grandmother. Whatever left of the food was divided between them.

Once mother's dad (my maternal grandfather) came to her house to meet her. Mother was busy preparing tiffin boxes for school going sisters-in-law and a brother-in-law. So it took a little while to meet her dad and spend time with him. On returning home grandfather told

grandmother: "We have given a servant girl to Chollamadam family!"

As a middle class farmer's family we have a lot of rice fields and vegetable cultivations. So the house was never short of rice and vegetables. Then there were the cultivation of coconuts, aricanuts, pepper, ginger and similar other farm products like tapioca and a variety of plantains. So there was no difficulty in running the house. But still I reached to high school there was no electricity at home. There was no machine to separate rice and husks. So women in the house daily pounded paddy for the use of a large joint family. It was back breaking job for the women in the house.

My mother and father formed a perfect couple who could never be separated. They shared great intimate relationship and understanding. Strengthened by this relationship they fostered very good rapport with their relatives and friends. They also maintained very cordial relationship with their servants and laborers in the field and the family.

When I was very small, our grandfather built a new house. My father and mother and we children went to stay in the new house. Even then mother after finishing all her works went to grandparents' house to help grandmother and aunts in their household works. After a few years my uncle, a teacher, got married and so aunt was there to help grandmother and the unmarried aunts in the household works.

Still, when grandmother was ill and bed ridden my mother went every day to help grandmother giving bath, washing clothes, etc. in spite of being in a separate house of her own. Whenever grandfather or grandmother was sick my mother always spared time to look after them. So I am very happy that, when my mother herself was bed-ridden for nearly a year my sister-in-law Annie looked after her with great care and with much warmth. My mother had cordial relationship with her three daughters-in-law and other relatives. She received in her old age much loving care from her daughters-in-law and one granddaughter-in-law Deepa who lived less than a kilo meter away from the family house.

Mother had maintained cordial relationship with her servants and laborers in the field. The poor people who approached her for help found a kind and loving heart in her. Similarly relatives who visited home enjoyed her hospitality. We children like relatives coming home as they brought sweets for us and mother prepared special dishes and sweets, which we all enjoyed much. Mother enjoyed feeding us and the relatives with much interest.

Mother's love and care were much appreciated by relatives and other visitors. Here I would like to mention one letter from Fr. Alex Thannipara who wrote to me when he received the news of mother's death. "Dear very loving father Varghese, I remember your mother and I dare to say one thing. I had visited your home first time in May 1972. Then I felt that I have been received as one more son in her house. Fr. Varghese, you and your brothers-sisters are specially blessed to be born as her children!"

Now I believe you will understand my happiness expressed at my mother going away to her Creator, loving, kind God the Father for her eternal peace and everlasting bliss.

God gifted my mother long life of 99 years, 7 months and 11 days. This blessings of God for her continued even after her death. She died at home very peacefully. At 11 A.M my sister-in-law Annie felt that she was on her verge of death. She called my brother Vincent. Vincent reached home in 10-11 minutes' time and he phoned me immediately in a chocking voice Chetta," mother is no more. She passed away two minutes back."

On next two days Saturday and Sunday the biggest two Malayalam dailies carried the news of my mother's death with her colorful, postcard size photo. Relatives, friends, neighbors poured in to pay their homage and pray for her. The present Bishop George Madathikandathil and the retired Bishop George Punnakottil came to know about her death presumably from my uncle Msgr (Father) Mathew Vellankal. Bishop George Punnakottil came home before the body was taken to church. He led the prayers and in his message he appreciated the inspiring life as a pious Christian and a loving mother with 9 children, five of them in religious life.

My mother was buried in the family tomb on 11 June 2017 after Bishop George Madthikandathil led the funeral prayers and gave an appropriate message appreciating my mother's life of love and service to the people who filled the church. After the burial I said Mass in the church together with my brother Fr. Mathew and nephew Fr. Shaiju for the people who could not attend the Mass earlier.

In spite of the rainy season the funeral could be conducted without much obstruction of the rain and people could participate well in the funeral prayer services. (Words 1405)

Changed On: 01-01-2018
Next Change: 16-01-2018
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