

Significance of having two women saints – St. Alphonsa and St. Euphrasia in India

What does it speak?

Among the two women saints Sr.Alphonsa is senior to Sr.Euphrasia. Alphonsa was born on 19th August 1910, of parents Joseph and Mary, Kudamaloor, Palai. Sr.Euphrasia was born on 17th October 1877, of parents Antony and Kunjethi in Kattur, Edathiruthi, Thrissur. Alphonsa joined the Clarist Congregation and Euphrasia joined the Carmelite Congregation. Alphonsa died at the age of 36 on 28th July 1946; Euphrasia died at the age of 75 on 29th August 1952. Alphonsa became a saint 62 years after her death. Similarly Euphrasia also became a saint 62 years after her death.

Now among the men-folk there is only one saint, St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias, the founder of the CMI and CMC Congregations. Both Chavara and Alphonsa became “Blessed” together. But to become a saint Chavara had to wait again. And he is becoming a saint along with St.Euphrasia, in the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel, he himself founded. In short, India has two women saints and one male saint. This is something worth studying - the predominance of women saints in India, rather the significance of two women saints in India.

What is the significance? What does it show? Let us go into it.

India is a country which honours women from its beginning. Women were queens and leaders like Razia Sultan and Chand Beebi, Olympian P.T. Usha, Karna Malleswari, Kalpana Chawla and others.

Even if India has the patriarchal system in prevalence, women have a special reverence in India. Women of India have an inner inspiration to do good and to be holy. If women are good and holy, their children also will follow them. They have an inner vision to make them good, holy and great. As Ralph Waldo Emerson has said, ‘show me the women of a country, then I will tell you the greatness of a nation’.

Women have a great inner thirst to see God and pray. As Tennyson has said, more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. A country, a state, a place will be sanctified by women, is an unquestionable truth. They have also perseverance and strength of mind.

Woman, it has been said, is the lamp of the house, it is easy to make a family, group or community grow through women. She will be able to give light to others. Women show that there is meaning in the pains and sufferings of daily life. God gifts saints according to the needs of the times; and specially women are capable to overcome the problems and trials of life.

Women have a desire and an inner prompting to do great things in their own way. Saint Alphonsa was actually a sick person. She knew even if she could not do much physical work, she could contribute to the people the worth and value of suffering by her suffering with joy and offering it to God along with the sufferings of Jesus. Likewise by her silent suffering, she was able to convince and help numberless people.

St. Euphrasia who has spent her life inside the Carmelite cloister was a praying mother. She lived in great intimacy with the Lord. She was mostly seen praying in the sacramental presence of Lord Jesus and praying for others and for the whole world. Hers was a dedicated life to be spent for God and others, specially through her unceasing prayers. Great things have happened through her prayers.

Sainthood is not an unreachable height. With aim, determination and disciplined practice it can be achieved and that is what these saints tell us. Actually these saints did not do great things; they did simple things with extraordinary love of God. It is also clear that women could achieve sainthood. In this way we find that from a good family, a family that is strong in faith, prayer and virtuous services there will be Vocations. Both Alphonsa and Euphrasia are from good families where they have heard the call of the Lord.

Another important thing is the submission to one's spiritual director who gives guidance. Spiritual direction played an important role in their lives. Obedience to their spiritual father has contributed much in their spiritual lives.

Usually it is the mothers who influence the spiritual growth of children and this is more important in the life of girl children. That is what happened in the life of Alphonsa, through the prayers of her own mother and her second mother. Similarly in the life of St. Euphrasia, her

mother played a very important role in her life. These saints knew that by a counter culture, the good people who desire to please God can become holy. Thus the saints become prophets, inspiration and model to those who desire to follow their example. This is a challenge to the culture of destroying girl children by abortion. It also points to the cry of the girls who are sexually abused by the fathers, uncles, masters and other young men. Jesus has said: No one can follow me unless you leave your father, mother and relatives. They have taken up that challenge and lived their lives before God. Thus the theology of love, loving God above all things was practised by these saints. This world considers religious life is a loss. Now God himself has raised such religious women to show that those who follow the steps of Jesus Christ will never go unrewarded. God has lifted them up to heaven so that all can see and follow the holy path to God.

The great power of women to love is fully utilized here when a person loves God and lives for others as Jesus did. They became saints. Thus we understand that women are strong enough to do what God wants them to; it is also clear that women are no less than men. In other words women are called by God to do great things in the world, to be example and model. We thank God that God has given us two women saints to be our inspiration, model and resource power!

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