

Cardinal Charles Bo Concludes Week-long Visit to Northeast India



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Guwahati: Salesian Cardinal Charles Maung Bo concluded his weeklong visit to the Northeast India on Wednesday, November 13, 2019, after a concluding concelebrated Mass in Salesian Provincial House, Guwahati. Cardinal Bo, the President of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) and Archbishop of Yangon, made his first ever visit to the region, known as the cradle of the Salesian missions in India.

Cardinal Bo was the main celebrant of the Eucharist and annual Eucharistic procession which was attended by some 2,00,000 people from the region. The Cardinal won the hearts of the faithful of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills with the Eucharistic celebration and exhortation in faultless Khasi language. Many of the faithful were struck by his ability to communicate to them in their own language, though this was his first visit to the Northeast and to Shillong, considered the mother Church of the region.

The Cardinal began his pastoral journey with a visit to the well-known Salesian College, Sonada and a visit to the Bishop of Darjeeling. In Sonada, he spoke to the staff and students of the College and recalled the long association the Salesians of Myanmar had with the college in the past. The present-day Myanmar Salesian Province was part of the Kolkata province till a decade ago and many Salesians from Myanmar had their formation in Salesian College, Sonada.

The Cardinal then flew to Guwahati and travelled by road to Shillong to be at the Eucharistic Procession in fulfillment of an invitation he had received from the late Salesian Archbishop Dominic Jala of Shillong. But Archbishop Jala died in a car accident in USA, and the visit of the Cardinal happened to be exactly a month after his tragic demise, bringing great comfort and solace for the family members, clergy, religious and faithful of Shilling archdiocese.

The Cardinal not only recalled the warm and cordial relationship he had with his fellow Salesian and Archbishop of Shillong, but also recalled the great loss his sudden death has caused for the universal Church and the Church in India and the region where he had made distinct contribution as an able pastor and erudite leader.

The faithful were moved to tears when the Cardinal played the audio recording of the last words of Archbishop Jala in Khasi when they had met in Rome a few days before his death. The recording was made by Archbishop Jala at the request of Cardinal Bo, and was meant to be a farewell message of the Cardinal before he would leave Shillong, but in fact became the farewell of Archbishop Jala himself.

The Cardinal presided over the Eucharist in the Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, an institution that has formed hundreds of priests for the region and the Church. He also paid tribute to Salesian patriarch Fr Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh, at his tomb near the Sacred Heart Shrine. He visited many important institutions and formation centres in Shillong and met fellow Salesians, priests and religious and those in formation. He presided over the Eucharist in the regional Major Seminary, Oriens Theological College near Mawlai, where he exhorted the students to study theology with their mind and heart. He urged the future priests to emulate the pastoral leadership and qualities of Pope Francis in their ministry.

Earlier the Cardinal dedicated an amphitheatre at Siloam- a centre for wholeness and transformational leadership at Umiam, near Shillong, to late Archbishop Dominic Jala. He also offered floral tributes and blessed the tomb of Archbishop Jala in the presence of his family members and the church leaders of the Archdiocese. He visited the home of Archbishop Jala and comforted the family members.

In Shillong and Guwahati he addressed the Salesian Family where he spoke of his country, Myammar which had gone through decades of military rule. He explained the struggle the country continues to face even as civilian rule is gradually emerging. Speaking of the Church in the country, he highlighted the role being played by the Catholic Church in building peace among the many religious and ethnic communities through inter-religious dialogue.

Before he left Guwahati for Kolkata en route to Yangon, the Cardinal expressed his gratitude to God and to the people of the region for the warmth, hospitality and spiritual fervor he had witnessed.

CM Paul

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