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Rev Fr Rosario Rocha (1952-2021): The Person and the Message

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Abstract: This article reflects on the life and message of Rev Fr Rosario Rocha, a professor of Theology, Jnana Deepa, Pune, Provincial of Goa Province of the Society of Jesus and Spiritual Guide at Papal Seminary, Pune.

Keywords: Rosario Rocha, Goan Jesuit, Papal Seminary.

The Person

I guess that God engages the experienced and expert services of His faithful, who have returned to Him after completing their pilgrimage on earth, in building “the Kingdom of God on Earth as it is Heaven”. Otherwise, what would God do with such seasoned, experienced, skilled and qualified missionaries in Heaven? Building the Kingdom of God on earth as it is heaven is an Eschatological responsibility – reflection of participative and collaborative mission. Thus, the missionaries on earth and the missionaries in heaven are in constant communion and communication through their prayers and intercessions.

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On October 18, 2021, at 5.15 pm, Fr. Rocha Rosario perhaps had a deep spiritual conversation with his Heavenly Father — A conversation best known to only the two of them; and upon God’s invitation, Fr. Rocha Rosario returned to his heavenly abode. On his return to his heavenly abode, Fr. Rocha joined the Intercessory Mission of God in Heaven. The ‘Preface for Christian Death’ reads: “Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended ... When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.” So, after death, our missionary life in heaven begins in full swing, as we return to God with empirical experiences of working and guiding His mission on earth.

Fr. Rocha, born on 9th March 1952, the only child of Mr. Alleluia Rocha and Mrs. Anjelina Rocha, entered the Society of Jesus on 20th June 1970. We are deeply grateful to the late parents of Fr. Rocha for their sacrifice. Only parents who know the mission of God can sacrifice their only child for God’s mission. After completing his priestly studies in Pune, he was ordained as a priest on 1st May 1985, the feast St. Joseph’s Patron of workers. Together with his priestly studies, he did Bachelors in Arts, then Masters in Pali and Sanskrit, then M Phil and Ph D with focus on Buddhist studies. In 1991, he began his teaching in JD, residing at DNC.

The Message

He served JD and DNC in various capacities. Upon his appointment as Provincial of Goa Jesuit Province, he returned to Goa sometime in October 2011. He served the Goa Jesuit Province for 6 years. Recently, in June 2021, Fr. Rocha was appointed as a spiritual director in Papal Seminary. On September 1st, 2021 he joined the Papal Seminary Community. Prior to his coming to Papal Seminary, he had become a victim of coronavirus. Post period of coronavirus, he was falling sick on and off, he suffered from sodium deficiency and diarrhea.

With these sufferings and pains, yesterday he surrendered himself into God's loving embrace.

Dear Fr. Rocha, as you have the mission of God from heaven, please do a favor for us, please pray for us and share with the Lord the concerns and challenges of our world today.

As a formator in DNC, JD & PS, intercede for us that we, as Formators and Formees, may receive the grace for a fruitful and concrete formation.

As a Scholar in Buddhist studies – please share with God and His saints the importance of Interreligious Dialogue and the urgent need for harmony among different religions and people from different faith and walks of life.

As a Provincial companion and a Provincial of Goa – you have seen the struggles, pains and sufferings of the people, especially the migrants, the poor, the needy. Please plead their case before God.

Dear Fr. Rocha, as you fell sick, you know the suffering and pain of various illnesses, please ask God to heal the sick and give power to those who care for others.

I am sure, you will not mind sharing the concerns and challenges of the world our heavenly Father. Tell God, with our strengths and limitations, that we are making sincere efforts to establish God's Reign. What we need from God is only blessings and the assurance of journeying with God's Spirit. Thank you, Fr. Rocha, for all that you have been to us! We will remember you for your sincere and silent work. A big thank you, dear Fr. Rocha!

A Man of Incarnational Spirituality and Inner Freedom

Roland Coelho, SJ

Provincial, Goa Province of the Society of Jesus

We have gathered here this afternoon in the Chapel of Papal Seminary to bid farewell to our brother Rosario Rocha. Our brother has crossed the bridge and gone home to God, a God in whom he loved and gave his life for. He was not afraid of death, no, it is but a transition to be with Christ forever. I would like to share with you how Rocha was with God in this life and God was with him. Not details, which many of you already know, but the way I knew Rocha.

Rocha lived **an incarnational spirituality** as we read from Revelations (21.3-4): “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,... for God is making everything new!”

- Yes, my sisters and brothers, God worked in and through Rocha to make all things new, to help students and listeners and readers to see things anew. About 25 years ago, Rocha helped us students of JD-Pune to reach out to the slum dwellers in Ramwadi and in the neighbouring poor areas. He helped us to see God in the slums, to meet God and experience God in the people we taught in the evening classes.
- When Rocha returned to the province every summer to spend a few days with his mother, he made it a point to visit

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Jesuits in different communities in Belgaum and Goa. In his own way, he embodied a faith that was made of flesh, not an intellectual one.

Interior Freedom

The Gospel passage from John 12 is so apt for me to briefly describe how I experienced this man, Fr Rocha. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Two decades ago, I met Fr Rocha here on this campus. This thin tall man was cutting the weeds in the DNC campus after class hours. And then we would see him on his bicycle riding to the city for his pastoral ministry. He was available for us students and in much demand as spiritual father and as study guide.

- A man without ego, simple and humble. Not interested in power, prestige, or possessions. The man of the Vipassana meditations, the Buddhist way of equanimity, calm and peaceful, soft-spoken. He died to himself to give glory to God.
- Rocha said: “What is predominant in all the religions is the search for not just ordinary meaning, but the search for a deep meaning of life and also of the divine.”

Discernment

Rocha was a polyglot – he studied Pali and Sanskrit, and spoke a number of Indian and foreign languages. Three years ago, he asked me: May I go to Pune and continue with research and publication. I desperately wanted him to stay in Goa, to bring about a deeper scholarly reflection to shape public opinion, but I knew Rocha to be a man of discernment; he had given up all for His Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

- Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who loses their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

- “Awareness is the hallmark of your personality” wrote Fr Arturo Sosa to Rocha last year as Rocha celebrated 50 years in the Society which he loved. He allowed the Spirit to lead him and to choose that which would help him serve God and God’s people to the best of his abilities.
- I met him in March this year and he said joyfully: “I am in good health and I’m not taking any medication.” Since he was in good health, I invited him to consider an urgent and important need – that of spiritual director at Papal Seminary. He discerned for a few days and then wrote back. If there is a need there, I am happy to be of service to the seminarians at Papal Seminary.

The Cross

Many people criticize Rocha for being a poor eater. Some were upset when they prepared good food and Rocha would say it was not tasty. Then covid struck him and hit him badly. Yes, he was stubborn, but he did suffer much physically. He bore his sufferings patiently and sometimes, when his sodium levels fell, he was a bit abrupt. He was a Jesuit under the banner of the Cross. He knew when he was weak and he knew God was his strength. He could apologize for his mistakes.

- The scholastics at St Britto, Mapusa, were quite embarrassed when Rocha apologized to them for his ill temper. Rocha had to carry this cross of poor health over many years, but particularly since he was afflicted with covid this past summer.
- Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be. My father will honour the one who serves me.

Conclusion: All about the Mission

Spreading the love of Christ to all. Building God’s family. In his own words, Rocha said: “How are we looking at our own

identity and how we need to learn to inter-relate. Once can go solo in many different things, but to build society today, to build communities today, one has to have a dialogical approach. A dialogical approach does not look at the negatives of others, but looks at the positives.

- He blended *cura personalis* and *cura apostolica*. Yes, Rocha was tough with many of us. He believed in certain principles and values. He desired people followed the way of the Society. He ruffled more than a few feathers.
- For the mission. Rocha –for inspiring us and for walking with us on our journey to God - thank you. We know you are now in the loving embrace of the Father. Amen.



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The Audacity of the Improbable and the Impossible

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Who has not stared at the world helplessly? Who has not worked hard to change oneself and the world around and feel lost? When everything around us seem to be so helpless and unjust, where do we draw hope?

These reflections are based entirely on an inspiring book, *Attempt the Impossible*, which is a carefully selected collection of articles by Archbishop Menampampil on the sharing of the Christian Message in the contemporary world. He acknowledges the uncertainty where the search for meaning and purposefulness is also growing intensely and look for solutions by working hard and trusting harder in the Lord.

In an increasingly secularized world where every tenet of the Faith is being questioned every day, it has become most challenging to explain our religious convictions, remaining always open to newly emerging perspectives on life. “Return to the ways of the Acts of the Apostles”, says Archbishop Thomas. It is an exciting mission to

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