

FINDING AND SERVING GOD IN ALL PERSONS AND IN ALL THINGS

**Speech on the occasion of the 125th Year of Ramakrishna Mission
at Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara, West Bengal on 8th November, 2022
by Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, SJ, Principal, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata**

On the occasion of the 125th Year of Ramakrishna Mission, with joy and gratitude we remember that in 1897, Swamiji had formulated the ideal of 'At-mano mokh-sar-tham jagad-dhi-taya ca' which means - for one's liberation and for the welfare of the world - which is the embodiment of the ideal which captures succinctly the teachings of Sri Sri Ramakrishna शिव ज्ञाने जीव सेव (Sivo Gya-nae Jivo Seva). This as we know is the source and inspiration and sustenance for all the activities of Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math all over the world for all these 125 years.

As we celebrate today the pious event of the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission by Swamiji along with the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna on 1st May, 1897, we look at the emblem of the Mission which inspired the foundation of the Mission and which is full of meaning for each of us today and I pray that this emblem inspires our life and our works.

We all know the meaning of the emblem of Ramakrishna Mission created by Swamiji which in his own words is this. "The wavy waters are symbolic of Karma, the lotus of Bhakti, and the rising-sun of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and awakened Kundalini Shakti, while the swan in the picture stands for Paramatman." This gives us the deeper meaning, motive and inspiration of the Mission and its unique work and contribution to the world. This meaning no doubt inspires each of us who come in contact with the Mission for our service to God and to all beings.

The Mission was founded with a two-fold purpose: to spread the teachings of Vedanta as embodied in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and to improve the social conditions of the Indian people. That is why the celebration today is meaningful and deeper because with these purpose the Mission and Math all over the world have transformed the lives and ideals of millions of people. So many have come forward to embrace and live these ideals and as a result are loving and serving their brothers and sisters and all other beings who are in need of love and care. At the same time, it has attracted many young people to renounce the worldly life and its pleasures and commit as monks of the Mission to live and lead these ideals of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji.

Thus the monks and the lay disciples are leading total transformation in the lives of people and all beings in all places all over the world.

Sure we all know of the various works of the Mission today. Still it is good to have a look at these to make us conscious of so much contribution of the Mission and Math in so many ways in our everyday life.

We all very well know that the Mission involves itself in many spiritual and inter-faith activities, Vedanta Centres. It has its own hospitals, charitable dispensaries, mobile dispensaries, maternity clinics, tuberculosis clinics. It maintains training centres for nurses. Orphanages and homes for the elderly are included in the mission's activities, along with rural and tribal welfare work. We also see the Mission very active during natural disasters. The great work as we know is the role of the educational institutions run by the Mission and thus the influence created by these on young people and the future citizens of the world.

These service, achievements and contributions, are these not very wonderful and unique in the service of God and of all beings? Certainly in all these, we see the embodiment of the ideal of Sri Sri Ramakrishna

All these services and work in Kolkata, India and all over the world are fruits of the Inspiration of Sri Ramakrishna, embodied by Swamiji and being fulfilled by the present monks and lay disciples in these wonderful ways, going back to that great moment in 1897 when the seed was planted.

In this context it is good to remember the inspiring words of Swamiji that charged the youth of his time and continues to do so in our time.

His evergreen mantra for the youth which we all know is: "Until you can trust yourself, you cannot trust Allah or God." If we are not able to see God in other humans and ourselves, then where can we go to find divinity?

His other mantra is Arise, awake, and stop not, till the goal is reached.

It will be very much in place to look at the life of Sri Ramakrishna when he had a direct Jesus-experience. This is described by Swami Saradananda in "Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga".

The following extract is from the English translation by Swami Chetana-nanda - 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play.'

Swami Sarada-nanda, the first General Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, was a student of St. Xavier's. We shall briefly look at his life later.

A year after the worship of Ma Soroshi, the Master's mind was eager to see the Divine Mother by means of another religious path. At that time he was acquainted with Shambhu Charan Mallick, who would read the Bible to him. Thus, he became aware of the pure life of Jesus and of the Christian faith. As soon as the desire to practice Christianity arose in his mind, the Divine Mother fulfilled it in a miraculous way; he did not have to make any special effort. The event took place as follows.

Jadu Mallick's garden-house is situated at the south side of the Dakshineswar Kali temple. The Master occasionally went there for a walk. Jadulal and his mother loved and respected the Master greatly. If they were away, the caretakers would open the parlour for him and ask him to rest a while. There were some magnificent pictures hanging on the walls of that room, and one of them depicted the child Jesus on his mother's lap. The Master said that one day he sat in that room and intently studied that image, thinking of the wonderful life of Jesus. Just then he saw the picture become animated and luminous. Rays of light emanated from the bodies of Mother Mary and the child Jesus, entering the Master's heart and revolutionizing his mental attitudes. When he observed that his inborn Hindu impressions were vanishing from his mind and that different ones were arising, he tried to control himself by resisting them in various ways. He entreated the Divine Mother, saying, "Mother, what are You doing to me?" But the onslaught continued. The waves of those impressions rose forcefully and completely submerged the Hindu bent of his mind. The Master's love and devotion for Hindu gods and goddesses disappeared and his heart was filled with faith in and reverence for Jesus and his religion.

After he returned to the Dakshineswar temple garden, the Master remained uninterruptedly absorbed in meditation on those experiences pertaining to Jesus. He completely forgot to visit the Divine Mother in the temple. The waves of Christian faith that swayed him lasted for three days. When the Master was walking in the Panchavati at the end of the third day, he saw a beautiful but unfamiliar godman with a fair complexion advancing towards him, gazing at him steadily. The Master immediately realized that he was a foreigner, and that he belonged to a different race.

He saw that his eyes were large and beautiful, and though his nose was a little flat at the tip, it in no way marred the handsomeness of his face. The Master was charmed by the unique divine expression on his serene face and wondered who he could be. Very soon after that the figure drew near, and a voice from within told him, "This is Jesus Christ, the great yogi, the loving Son of God who is one with his Father, who shed his heart's blood and suffered torture for the salvation of humanity." Then the godman Jesus embraced the Master and merged into him. In ecstasy, the Master lost external consciousness and his mind remained united with Saguna Brahman for some time. With this vision, the Master became convinced that Jesus was truly a divine incarnation.

As we know, Sri Ramakrishna had undergone multitude of spiritual experiences. In each case, he had taken refuge to a specific Guru, followed meticulously all the instructions given by this Guru and rigorously practised all the prescribed rites and rituals of that Sadhana. But his Jesus Experience was fundamentally different from all the other spiritual practices. No Guru (in human form) came to initiate him into 'Christo-sadhana' but Jesus Christ himself.

Swami Saradananda had commented "As soon as the desire to practise Christianity arose in his mind, the Divine Mother fulfilled it in a miraculous way, he did not have to make any special effort". It implies that Jesus Himself on his own came as Guru and unlike all other types of Sadhana, No spiritual exercises were practiced this time. And this was after he had all spiritual experiences and 'sadhanas' in his life. Jesus came to visit him the same way we go to visit our near and dear ones.

But what made Jesus reach out to Sri Ramakrishna?

In all probability, Jesus could foresee that this simple man will be the bedrock on which a new religious order would be built, the monks and the household devotees of this order will serve God by selflessly serving His creation. And for this movement, the 'mission statement' framed by Sri Ramakrishna will be '*Jeev-ae Doya Noy Shivo Gya-ne Jee-vo Seva* (Not mercy to living beings but serving God knowing that He is present in all living beings).

Hinduism says that there are many different paths leading to God. The path of experiencing the Divine through meditation, contemplation and theological knowledge is called *Gyana-yoga, Union through Wisdom*. Knowing with certainty that God is present in all things and in all beings is Gyana-yoga indeed!

The path of experiencing the Divine through selfless work in service of all living beings is called Karma-yoga.

What Jesus prescribes is a synthesis of Gyana and Karma. He tells us that it is God whom we serve, when we serve His creation and all beings without any motive of personal gain.

That is why Jesus emphatically says – 'Whatsoever you do to the least of your brothers and sisters, you do it unto Me. When I was hungry and you gave me to eat I was thirsty and you gave me to drink'

Sri Ramakrishna also emphasized that we should see God in those whom we serve, that is, in all beings.

Going back to Swami Sarada-nandaji Maharj, who wrote about this Jesus experience of Sri Ramakrishna, it is good to note, that our St Xavier's College is connected with the Ramakrishna Order in a unique way – through the persons of this very Swami Sarada-nanda and his friend Swami Vigyana-nanda. Both were students of our St Xavier's College and came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna while studying in the college.

Swami Vigyana-nanda, known by his pre-monastic name of Hari-prasanna, became the 4th President of the Mission.

Swami Sarada-nada, popularly known by his pre-monastic name of Sharat, passed the Entrance exam and joined St Xavier's in 1883. The scientist priest Fr Lafont was the Principal of the college. Sharat was taken up by the dedicated life of this Jesuit priest Fr Lafont, who for him was, 'A Walking Saint.'

Fr Lafont had made a makeshift observatory on the roof of the college. He recorded daily meteorological observations which allowed him to anticipate with much accuracy the arrival of a devastating cyclone in Nov 1867. He informed the government authorities who took immediate measures that prevented the loss of many lives. From that day forward, meteorological forecasts by Fr Lafont were regularly published in the major weekly newspaper of Calcutta, the *Indo-European Correspondence*.)

Charmed by Sharat's deep interest in religion, the noble priest tutored him in the Bible and Christianity. Sharat also imbibed the spirituality of the Jesuit Fathers who ran the college. That was the spirituality of their Founder, St Ignatius of Loyola, which is "To find God and serve Him in all thing and all beings." Sharat was also influenced by the Motto of the College, 'Nihil Ultra – Nothing Beyond', to strive to achieve the highest!

Swami Sarada-nanda or Sharat Maharaj, was the First General Secretary of the Mission as desired by Swamiji and declined to be the First President. He remained so till 1927. In 1926 he convened the First Convention of the Ramakrishna Sangha in Belur Math and chaired most of the sessions. On the first day, that is on 1st April 1926, he delivered the keynote address – "Ramakrishna Mission: Its Past, Present and Future." Two days later on 3rd April, he spoke on "The Ideas, Ideals and Activities of the Ramakrishna Mission." These two speeches are considered the guidelines of the Ramakrishna Order till today. Later some changes took place but the basic principles coded in these continue to be the fundamental guiding principles of the Mission till now.

In 1883, Sharat visited Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. At the very first sight Sri Ramakrishna recognised this eighteen-year-old 'as his own'. He pointed out a particular book and asked Sharat to read it. It was the Bible and the passage advocated the celibate life for the Kingdom of God.

Swami Chetanananda in his "Life stories of the Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna – God lived with them" has this to say about Swami Saradananda – on 23rd December 1885 Sri Ramakrishna remarked about Shasi and Sharat, the two brothers, saying "In a vision I saw that Shasi and Sharat had been among the followers of Jesus Christ."

Like St. Peter, the foremost disciple of Jesus, who led and built up the early Church, Sharat Maharaj carried the same heavy responsibility of the young Ramakrishna Movement for over thirty years. But he was completely unaware of his future role when one day at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna sat on his lap in an ecstatic mode and later explained to the curious devotees present, "I was testing how much weight he could bear. "

In later life, Sharat Maharaj visited St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican Rome thrice in 1896 and 1898. Swami Prabha-nanda, Vice-President and acclaimed historian writes in 'Sarada-nanda Charit' that there he entered into an ecstasy, saw a great saintly person enveloped in bright light and also saw very beautiful Mother Mary with Baby Jesus in her lap!

Sri Ramakrishna in his own way trained this band of youth, for future Mission and Math. He secretly initiated them into sannyas. Swami Chetana-nanda writes that one day, the Master asked them what they would want at the culmination of spiritual life. Some said devotion, some knowledge, some liberation. Sri Ramakrishna then asked young Sharat who said, "I do not want to see any particular form of God in meditation. I do not like visions. I want to see Him in all beings. I shall strive my best until I attain it." The Master said, "That is the last word in spiritual attainment. You will attain it."

This is the spirituality of Sri Ramakrishna, this is the spirituality of the Jesuit Fathers “*Shivo Gyane Jeevo Seva*” - To find and serve God in all things and in all beings.”

Our college motto is ‘Nihil Ultra – Nothing Beyond’, which means that we are not satisfied with anything lower than the highest, be it spirituality, be it education, be it social service, or any other.

I am reminded of the mantra of Swamiji, Arise, awake, and stop not, till the goal is reached.

Finally, we must be deeply grateful to Thakur Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji and above all to God for that holy and fruitful moment of 1st May 1897 that has resulted in all these very great, massive, extensive work of the Mission and Math for one’s liberation and for the welfare of the world, serving God in all beings. For each of us that moment is a very very special, auspicious moment that has and is affecting our lives and the lives of millions positively in so many ways today and will continue to do so in the coming days.

We pray to God, to Thakur Sri Ramakrishna, to Swamiji for their continued blessings on the Mission and Math. on the President of the Mission Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj, on the General Secretary of the Mission Swami Suviranandaji Maharaj, on all the Monks and Lay devotees, so that all their work for one’s liberation and for the welfare of the world multiply and carry on smoothly fulfilling the ideal of Sri Sri Ramakrishna:

We also pray that each of us make our own the great ideal of Sri Ramakrishna and contribute in our own way towards the fulfilment of this transforming ideal through our life and our work.

Now I take this opportunity to thank the Secretary Swami Jayanandaji Maharaj for inviting me and thus including our St Xavier’s College in your celebration.

I wish all the best and pray for the welfare of the Mission and Math Centres all over the world, especially for this centre of Ramakrishna Mission Boys’ Home, Rahara.

Also I wish all the best for the Musical performance by the Blind Boys’ Academy and appreciate all that they are doing. May God bless them.

Going by our ideals and work we are one. So let us all strive to serve God in all beings and in all that we do, so as to bring smiles to our brothers and sisters and to all beings. Thus let us bring glory to our Loving and Merciful God always and everywhere. Amen.
