

Fr. Dunston: A Carmelite Who Made Holiness Attractive



'Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.' These were the famous words of Albert Einstein on Mahatma Gandhi, father of the nation. When I reflect upon Fr. Dunston, the same sentence comes to my mind with a sense of great respect and admiration.

Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, No. 9). The Lord wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, No. 1). Even years before Pope Francis uttered this great revelation, Fr. Dunston realized it and practised it by walking before the Lord blameless (Gen 17:1) and waking up the CMI community for a life in fullness and holiness. Walk before me, and be blameless!

Fr. Dunston was our prior in St. Pius X Minor Seminary, Varandarappilly, where he taught us Christian Doctrine. More than his sessions in the classroom, he inspired us through his life: in the prayer room, in the garden, in the community gatherings and all the more through his witnessing life of deep interiority, contemplative serenity and religious simplicity. Being a true Carmelite, he could say along with St. Teresa of Avila, "God alone suffices." Nothing disturbed him; nothing frightened him. He realized: "All things are passing; God never changes." For those who live in eternity, time does not matter. The religious are expected to arouse the people around a sense of eternity and heaven. Though we live in the world, we are not of the world and we communicate something eternal than transitory. Being a person totally immersed in God, Fr. Dunston was indeed mad after God and it made him forget ordinary events of the day. During the time of the classes, we used to find him in the garden and in the chapel or in any other engagement with people. Later,

he would rush to the class with humility and at the same time with a smile on his face. We just loved him, the Sattvic Sannyasin, who treasured higher things in life when ordinary human beings were so worried about the material things.

"Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses," St. Paul VI wrote in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. While we were in the novitiate at Ampazhakkad in 1981, Fr. Dunston was our novitiate team member. He was a textbook for religious life and he was the mirror to identify the distance we need to travel to be a religious. He challenged us with his inspiring life. He was an excellent confessor and spiritual director. He was quite radical in his insights and all the more in his life of living the Gospel in its purity. He accompanied the young novices like a father, mother and an elder brother. Despite his age, he had no difficulty to connect with us in our own ways. He was available 24/7 for us and without any formality, we could be with him. His austere life and bare minimum facilities in the room are always a question mark while we aspire for comforts and better facilities in life. Though I have not grown to his life and lifestyle, he ever remains a challenge and a model to be emulated to live the true spirit of religious life.

Youngsters need to be challenged, not merely by revolutionary ideas and ideals, but by the authentic role models like Fr. Dunston. May the Lord raise him to the altar so that he will ever remain an icon of holiness for the religious to follow Christ radically and prophetically!

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