

## 'She sang with me, cut vegetables: that's my Alphonsamma'

Sister Mary is 91 but clearly remembers the days when 'Alphonsamma', annointed a saint by the Pope Sunday, would join the youngsters in mowing the lawn and cutting vegetables in the kitchen at a convent.

Sister Mary is the only nun alive in the Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC) who had spent time with Sister Alphonsa. She never tires of recounting to eager listeners her days as a young nun in a convent at Bharananganam in Kottayam district, the hometown of Alphonsa

Sister Alphonsa was seven years older than her, says Sister Mary, who now stays at the FCC convent in Kodancherry, 40 km from here.

Recounting her first meeting with Sister Alphonsa, she says: 'When I decided to become a nun, sisters at the convent at Bharananganam asked me to go there and meet them. When I reached, senior nuns welcomed me and asked me to sing a song. I was shy and hesitant. Then Alphonsamma (Mother Alphonsa) came forward and told me she would join me if I selected a piece that she also knew. She stood closely beside me and we sang together.'

Sister Alphonsa had a pretty and innocent face, says Mary.

'She used to join us in all our chores, removing grass on the convent's courtyard and cutting vegetables in the kitchen.'

Mary treasures in her prayer book two pictures - a picture card of Jesus Christ and the other a rare photograph of Sister Alphonsa's body in the coffin. The picture of Jesus is not any ordinary one. 'Alphonsamma gave me this Jesus' card as a gift when I went away on transfer to another convent,' she says with a gleam in her eyes.

'In those days, photographs of funerals were not common. But when the coffin of Sister Alphonsa reached the church, the vicar said that a photograph was in order. We all lined up behind the coffin for the photo.'

Mary still vividly remembers the last day of Sister Alphonsa.

'It was a Sunday. She then used to have visits of mystic ecstasy regularly and told the vicar the day before that 'he' (ecstasy) would visit her next day. On Sunday, she had the experience while in the chapel. Later, when we went to her room she was lying on her cot in cold perspiration. Soon after she died in our presence.'

As per customs, the body of a nun is carried to church by her relatives, but Sister Mary too lent a hand.

'The relatives could not reach on time as travel was not easy in those days. The funeral was held the next day and it was us who carried the coffin. Ten of us stood on each side of the coffin; we even stamped on each others toes,' she said.

Sister Alphonsa became Saint Alphonsa after she was canonised by Pope Benedict XVI at a

ceremony at St. Peter's Square in the Vatican Sunday. The ceremony was attended by around 25,000 people of Indian origin as well as a large delegation from India.

*Jeevan Mathew Kurian* ( © IANS / India eNews)