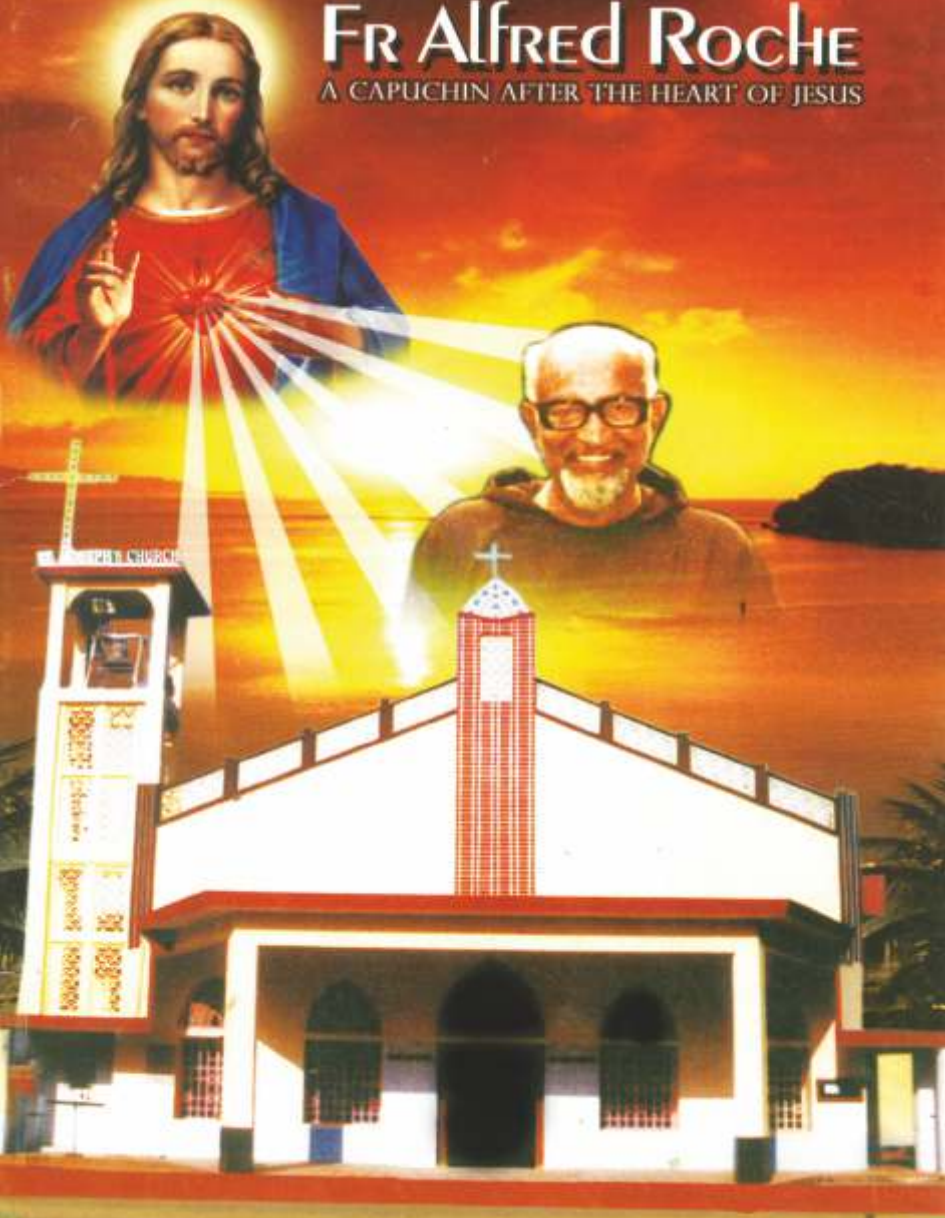


# FR ALFRED ROCHE

A CAPUCHIN AFTER THE HEART OF JESUS



*-Fr. Santa Lopes*

**Fr. Alfred Roche:  
A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus**

**Fr. Santa Lopes**

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## Foreword

In this work Fr. Santa Lopes, a Capuchin of the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka, hailing from St. Joseph's Church, Lower Kasarkod, has made an effort to put down his personal experience with Fr. Alfred Roche, a Capuchin, who was his parish priest for twelve years. He explicitly mentions in the introductory words that he has tried to put down in black and white only what he knows from his personal experience with Fr. Alfred Roche.

He met Fr. Alfred, for the first time, when he was a little boy of eight years and he lived in close contact with him till he joined the Capuchin Order. During the course of his elementary and high school studies, he spent much of his time in the parish premises as his house was close to the church. Like many other children and youth of the parish, he was in the parish house for the tuitions organized by the parish priest on different subjects: to learn vocal and instrumental music, to learn catechism, to help out in the sacristy and the church, and to visit sick and the suffering with Fr. Alfred, the kind and compassionate parish priest. Thus, being with and moving with Fr. Alfred, little Santa could see with his own eyes the simple and self-sacrificing lifestyle of Fr. Roche and he could constantly listen to his loving and compassionate words.

In this booklet, Fr. Santa emphasizes two aspects of Fr. Alfred: his life-pattern and his mission. Speaking of the lifestyle of Fr. Alfred, he says that he was very much impressed by his prayerful, poor, and humble way of life, being satisfied with the minimum. He saw his parish priest without a personal vehicle and travelling with the ordinary means of communication. He was touched by the spirit of peace and joy in the life of Fr. Alfred in spite of the minimum comfort that he had. Fr. Santa, as a teen-

ager, drew inspiration from the lifestyle of Fr. Alfred and gradually sought guidance from him in becoming a Capuchin.

Referring to Fr. Alfred's mission/apostolate, he says the prime motto in his life was: *in giving we receive*, a phrase from the peace prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. As a good shepherd his supreme concern was the well-being and well-doing of the flock entrusted to his care. He paid special attention to the faith-formation of the people through his experience-bound sermons, catechetical lessons and liturgical music. He made special efforts to educate every child, irrespective of caste and creed, by encouraging the parents and supporting them economically through his friends and benefactors. Besides, he was with them in their joys and sorrows: He ate with them; he drank with them; he sang with them; and he celebrated with them as a family member. He not only visited the sick, but also spent hours together with the ailing and tried to give them the best of treatment, sending them even to distant hospitals where the patients were treated with great love and care because of the personal contact that he had with the hospital authorities, doctors and nurses. Further, with his peaceful and graceful approach he could bring about peace and harmony in every family. Thus, the parishioners considered him as a family member who loved and labored for them.

I believe that this sharing of the life-experience of Fr. Santa Lopes can be a beautiful source of inspiration and enlightenment to every reader who may not have had such an opportunity of being with and learning from the teaching and life-pattern of Fr. Alfred. Therefore, I congratulate Fr. Santa for the pains he has taken in sharing his personal experience of Fr. Alfred in this booklet.

March 28, 2010  
Bangalore – 10

**Fr. Vincent G. Furtado OFM Cap**  
*Provincial Minister*

**Fr. Alfred Roche:**  
**A Capuchin after the Heart of Jesus.**

**Fr. Santa Lopes.**

**Introduction:**

Fr. Alfred Roche came to our parish, dedicated to St. Joseph, at Lower Kasarkod, in the diocese of Karwar, as the pastor in the year 1975. I was eight years old, when I saw him first. I saw him with admiration. His Capuchin humility and gentleness was attractive. His life of holiness still continues to inspire me. Today I am proud to be a capuchin friar and I am glad to narrate my beautiful experiences lived with this man of God as a parishioner.

Though I have heard quite a few things about him i.e., where he was born, when he joined the Capuchin Order, when he was ordained, and which were the places where he had rendered his precious pastoral service prior to his coming to our parish, I do not venture to touch upon these areas of his life and mission. These historical data you can easily get from other sources. The only reason why I do not want to touch upon these areas of his life and mission is that I do not have a first-hand experience about them. Therefore, what I am going to share with you in the following pages, to put in the words of the beloved disciple, is: What I have seen with my eyes; what I have heard with my ears and what I have touched with my hands (cf. 1Jn. 1.1-3). For, like the beloved disciple, I had the privilege of living with him, moving with him, listening to him, working with him, and learning from his life-pattern and teaching from the age eight. Being with him and learning from him gradually enriched me and empowered me. He was a father whom I loved dearly; he was a guru whom

I tried to follow closely; he was a lover of the poor whom I admired immensely; he was a consoler of the afflicted whom I tried to imitate zealously.

### **The Secrets of his Holiness as I Witnessed:**

First of all, my memories go back to the situation when people of Lower Kasarkod lovingly called him with due respect “*Roche Bap*”, here ‘*Bap*’ in Konkani language means father. Yes he was first and foremost a loving father to all without distinction – whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated etc. His life resembled very much that of his patron Holy Father Francis. As a result, his rays of holiness penetrated not only the parishioners where he was working but also the people around. He reacted to each according to his age and stage. For example, for the poor, he was a loving father, for many he was a spiritual father; and for all he was a humble pastor. Besides, for the sick and suffering, he was a compassionate pastor who spent his time and energy in coming to their rescue. But for me personally, he was a holy person of three dimensions: a humble pastor, a person for ‘others’, and a man of God. These three characteristics envelop the personality and holiness of Fr. Roche.

#### **1. A Humble Pastor:**

He radiated divine qualities of simplicity, purity and sincerity. He was an earnest man – earnest in his words and deeds. There was a perfect harmony in what he did and what he said or what he preached and what he practiced. He was a well-integrated man.

Fr. Roche was a sincere person. He expressed his thoughts freely and openly. He took courage to tell openly the mistakes or faults of others without any fear or favor. He did it but with

simplicity of heart, without hurting anybody. He was doing what perhaps St. Augustine said long ago “Love and do what you want”. Fr. Roche was a person who loved and did everything in truth and justice. He readily dispensed pardon of God to others. His loving advice was: “If you keep silence, keep silence out of love, if you correct, correct out of love, if you forgive, forgive out of love”. He allowed the love of God work silently within and then shared his love with others spontaneously.

Jesus was a man of genuine emotions. We hear in the Gospel of St. John that he wept for Lazarus. Jesus came to dispense the compassion of the Father. In like manner, Fr. Roche was authentic in giving expression to his emotions. The scene of his departure (transfer) from Lower Kasarkod struck me very much. Though he was fully convinced that as a Capuchin he was a pilgrim and stranger, it was really a trying moment for him. One saw him weeping bitterly at the time of his departure, not because he was so much attached and did not want to depart. It is all because he loved the people and the people also loved him. He accepted his transfer in good spirit and bade farewell to his people.

In his letter to the Romans: 12.15 Paul gives a panacea for all ills: “rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep...”. Fr. Roche always had a sweet and graceful smile. To cite Simone Weil “The beauty of the world is Christ’s tender smile for us.” Fr. Roche transmitted this tender smile of Christ to all. Added to this he was gifted with humor with which he kept everyone happy and glad.

In his beatitudes Jesus says that meekness is not weakness! Fr. Roche was meek and humble of heart. His humility made him to give first place to others. To cite one example, the inauguration



of the newly built church of Lower Kasarkod dedicated to the patronage of St. Joseph the worker. It was a day of great joy and felicitation. It was a day of celebration and jubilation. There were bishops and pastors, priests and religious, men and women, young and old, coming from far and near. The mass was celebrated in its splendor and festivity; a melodious choir added color to the solemnity. It was the time of felicitation, all the honored guests appreciated Fr. Roche and the multitude applauded as loud as possible, with the rhythm of Gloria-Jyothi Band, Brahmavar. Now it was his time to deliver the vote of thanks. He proceeded to the microphone. He stood straight as a happy priest and an able architect of the newly constructed church. He looked straight at the whole assembly. He found it very difficult to speak but he spoke! The first sentence which he uttered was “My dear people, you all say that I built this church, but my dear people, I say boldly, it is not I who built the church, it is you who built it”. There was pin drop silence. He looked at his parishners and they looked at him. Once again he whispered the same phrase “it’s you who built the church”. To cite Emmanuel Lévinas “Humility lies when ‘I’ allow ‘others’ to pass before me”. This virtue was vibrant within him in that he allowed others to increase and himself to decrease.

He knew the art of combining humility with simplicity! He lived a simple life. He did not multiply his needs but voluntarily reduced them. He utilized the popular mode of transport. He encountered God’s providence whenever he traveled from place to place. As a religious he was faithful to his life of poverty and that was the secret of his happiness.

He was an honest and trustworthy person. Honest persons speak truth and create trust in the minds of others. To quote

Wolfgang “What is uttered from heart will win the hearts of others to your own”. Fr. Roche spoke truth and he spoke it from his heart. People flocked from far and wide to take his advice and guidance.

Honesty is the best policy! He was transparent in all his dealings. Purity of thought and action was his strength. This virtue helped him to see God in everything. “Blessed are pure in heart, for they will see God”: Mt.5.8. He loved this virtue very much. He even wrote a book entitled “Niskalpon’(chastity) in Konkani language . The central message of this book is: Life of chastity is a life of total consecration to God. Yes, this book is a rare treasure wherein one can taste the depth of his thoughts. His life is a rare model for all the priests and religious.

Showing affection was his strength and therefore he was effective. He was not solely given over to reason and rationalism. He thought twice before acting. As a result, he had an effective language to capture the hearts and minds of the people. To cite René Descartes “the language is an exterior sign of the soul”. Yes, his language was really a sign of his soul, which sprouted from the depth of his being.

In Fr. Roche there was a good blending of both human and divine qualities. He was a man of love. It was all embracing and unconditional love, a self-gift which liberates one from the shackles of selfishness and self-interest: “For, God so loved the world that he gave himself for us in the person of Jesus Christ”: Jn.3.16. I witnessed this divine quality of unconditional love in the person of Fr. Roche. This love he expressed through his life of renouncement and sacrifice. He renounced everything willingly in order to embrace Jesus Christ in his life. Fr. Roche expressed

his love by becoming one among us. He spoke our language. He ate with us. He thought like us. He worked like us. He suffered with us. He fully adapted himself to our life-style. We could see perfect lucidity in his renounced life. He lived every instant for love of God and love of others.

This love was also manifested through his divine quality of forgiveness. He was a man who readily forgave. He forgave everyone from the depth of his being. As Simone Weil says “The gift in the form of forgiveness is also a form of highest gift. It exceeds the logic of justice, the law, the pure reciprocity, or of exchange”. Yes, forgiveness was the gift he shared with others. Forgiveness sprang from the interior of his being. He was not angry nor did he treasure hurt feelings!

## **2. A Man for Others:**

Today our world has become a global village. With rapid transport facilities and communication media the world moves like an ‘easy jet’. But Fr. Roche opted to work in the Diocese of Karwar and in parishes far flung from each other without any means of transport.

As a pastor I saw in him a **man for others** all-inclusive - friends and enemies, neighbors and strangers, rich and poor. I saw him hour-by-hour, day-by-day, year-by-year mingling with one and all more and more freely and lovingly.

His serene voice and adorable character reminds me of St Francis of Assisi who was like ‘a mother to her children’. Fr. Roche was a true follower of St. Francis of Assisi. Lovingly he addressed the youngsters as ‘*PUTA*’ (child). In his approach he was a mother to all!

Man for others is a man of communication. He had an extraordinary talent to unite people. I still cherish the memory of our parish: It was like a beautiful family, a united family, a joyful family, a sharing family, an ideal family. There was true communion and fellowship among us. Our parish was like a single family. We called our parish as “*amche kutam*” (our family). There was a deep sense of belongingness. In this beautiful family we always sang: “Oh how good and wonderful it is to live like brothers in unity”. Fr. Roche had a great conviction that a united parish can soar higher and higher and achieve its objectives. The construction of the church of St Joseph, Lower Kasarkod, would be a beautiful example for this. It was the hard labour of all the parishioners under the guidance of the shepherd, Fr. Roche. Young and old, men and women, short and tall, thin and thick, rich and poor all felt that they were part of this church. Fr. Roche united us all into a large family. In this family we experienced the kingdom of God. One can recall the words of Jesus “the kingdom of God is among you, nay it is within you”! To live in unity is the biggest challenge our parishes face today!

“Let little children come to me”, the Lord said, “theirs is the kingdom of God”. Fr. Roche had a great love for children. He expressed this love by teaching catechism, hymns, songs, accompanying them for picnics, giving them sweets, eating with them, etc. One thing, which I observed very much, was that he called children by various names, like doctor, engineer, musician, violinist, lawyer, judge, secretary and others. Though one did not have a violin or did not see a violin, he named him a violinist. To be frank, though I did not have an office or files in my hands, and though I found it difficult to pronounce the word ‘secretary’, he called me his secretary. Oh! I was very proud of my title,

whenever he called me secretary before others. Thank you Fr. Roche for that title! Though you called me your secretary I did not do much at that time, because I was small. This is how Fr. Roche was instilling in us a genuine interest and ambition to become somebody in life. He taught us how to dream of becoming doctors, engineers, priests, violinist, pianist, philosophers, theologians etc. This is what we see today getting realized in our parish context.

The thing which impressed me very much was that whatever delicious dishes or sweets the families prepared, to honour their parish priest, he first distributed them to the band of children who followed him, secondly to all the family members and finally he served himself. He always treated little children with fatherly/motherly love and care. He always said that little children are the treasures of the families; they are pearls of the society.

As an enthusiast of the poor and suffering, Fr. Roche walked and talked with them and suffered with them with a compassionate heart. He visited them in their homes and hospitals. He shared their burdens and pains. In his love for the poor he did not count the cost, nor did he seek a reward! The good words and deeds of Fr. Roche are etched in our memories. He continues to live in our hearts.

Fr. Roche took great interest to educate the people of his Parish. He rehabilitated the students who discontinued their studies, because of poverty, or lack of interest, laziness or lack of guidance. He instilled in them an ardent love for studies and tried to find the necessary means to pursue their studies.

Fr. Roche was a great peace lover. He spread the message of peace everywhere. For achieving the objectives of peace in

our parish he formed a “Shanti Dal” (an army of peace). With the help of this group he was able to settle every dispute in the family context and every misunderstanding and quarrel in the parish milieu.

Another strength of Fr. Roche was his preferential love and option for the sick and the aged. He had a great care and concern for them. Besides visiting them in the hospitals, he used to help them financially. In times of grave illness he made arrangements to shift them even to distant hospitals. He gave them moral courage and strength to endure their suffering patiently. For major illnesses he sent a letter of recommendation to Sr. Lucy in Father Muller’s Hospital (the then Matron) who did the needful with great care and attention. His love for the aged was immense! He visited them in their homes. He spent time with them. He conducted communion services to them. Above all he prepared them to die a peaceful death.

### **3. A Man of God:**

The third main factor of his life is that he was **a man of God** or a man with God-experience. Fr. Roche expressed it or shared it in varied ways. As the saying goes “actions speaks louder than the words”, his life itself was an open book of God-experience. I witnessed it, I experienced it and I tasted it. One cannot measure it; one cannot evaluate it; nor can one express it. For, our language is insufficient to express the lived experiences, because the experiences transcend human language.

The Constitutions of the Friars Minor Capuchin chapter 3 highlights the life of prayer and appeals each one to build his abode in God. Fr Roche was a man of prayer and a person faithful to the constitutions. Prayer was the key for him to open

the day and lock the night. He built his abode on the rock-foundation of prayer. He conversed with God. When I was a small boy I asked him “father what is that thick book you are carrying every day to the chapel?” With a broad smile Fr. Roche replied, “It’s not a thick book but a book of prayer for a priest to be constantly in touch with God”.

Moreover, the Holy Eucharist was the center of his life. He tried to inculcate a true devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the hearts of his parishners. He admonished the children and the elders to come for the daily mass. He prepared himself well for the celebration of the Eucharist and preached fitting and thought-provoking homilies. His sermons, though simple were clear and distinct. His amazing voice resounded in the church, a rare and exceptional voice which still rings in my mind. But I cannot make a critical analysis of his sermons, because I was then a little boy, I could not understand all that he said but what I still remember is that the people who listened to him remarked “what a lovely sermon!” He preached what he lived, he proclaimed what he practiced, and he announced what he performed. Every Thursday he kept an hour of holy Adoration. This devotion kindled in us a taste to be in union with Jesus, to make Jesus our friend. He taught us short and beautiful hymns to adore Jesus in the holy Eucharist. During each holy hour he gave a brief reflection on the Word of God, which was a special nourishment for our souls. During the time of adoration, he prayed specially for the vocations for priesthood and religious life. Thus an hour of prayer became an hour of power in our lives.

He also instilled in us the devotion of Rosary. To promulgate this devotion he also distributed the rosaries, holy medals, holy pictures etc. I know that there are a few persons who still treasure

those rosaries and medals as a remembrance of their beloved and holy person of Fr. Roche.

The experience of God he expressed through music. He was a man of music. Music was the melody of his heart. He had a great love for music. Not only he sang but he also composed some beautiful hymns. The words of St Augustine “He who sings prays twice” was always on his lips. He adorned his liturgy with a beautiful choir. This lovely choir created an interest and love for the Eucharist. Each one participated in the mass and the choir actively and devoutly. He prepared the choir group well in advance. Sometimes he animated the choir and taught us how to sing with unction and dedication. Not only did he teach us liturgical hymns but also some Konkani as well as English songs. Though our English pronunciation sounded bizarre but still he always accepted and appreciated us. One of his favorite songs was: *Ha kitlo boro amcho bapui, ha kitli bori amchi avoi...* “oh! How good is our father, how good is our mother...” In heaven there is God our father, and on the earth He has given us our father and mother. A beautiful song that expressed the significance of one’s parents and at the same time glorified God our heavenly Father. Through this song he instilled in us love and respect towards our parents. He taught us that our parents are the resemblance of God our father in heaven. If we obey our parents we obey God our heavenly Father. Yes, this might look simple for some. But, we know that wisdom lies in small things.

He experienced God in beautiful things. “Big is Beautiful” was his philosophy of life. This sense of beauty and goodness he expressed in various ways. He was a person who wanted everything to look big, beautiful, clean, impressive and capturing. For example, one can witness the beautiful art and architecture



of the Church of St Joseph, Lower Kasarkod. This splendid and wonderful edifice radiates the aesthetic sense and a rare creation of the fair person of Fr. Roche. It has a sublime beauty. It has a mixture of simplicity and magnificence. He did this work for the Glory of God. At the entrance of the church stands the caption: “Come let us adore him”. Yes, that was the objective of his efforts; that was the purpose of building a huge house of God – for prayer and celebration! The Sunday Liturgy, well prepared, attracted the faithful and the church was full to its capacity.

Beauty and bounty come from God. Fr. Roche had a long desire to have a mighty belfry with a gigantic bell for the new church, so that all could see it, all could hear it and rejoice. With the help of a generous benefactress from Switzerland, Miss Elisabeth Maier, he succeeded in getting a gigantic bell, produced at Padova, Italy. The day when it arrived at Lower Kasarkod his joy was immense. He literally danced with joy and happiness. He invited all his parishners to have a first glance of it, which was followed by a grand celebration.

“Beauty is the participation of God’s love” says Simone Weil. In beautiful things Fr. Roche saw the beauty of God’s creation. He wanted to have two more statues in the newly constructed church - one of St. Joseph and the other of Mother Mary. Thanks to Simon and Co. Mangalore, this desire of his was fulfilled.

The holy person of Fr. Roche was a symbol of generosity. To cite Hegel “The beauty is the symbol of the generosity of the being”. He was a very generous person. Though he did not have much, nevertheless he shared with others whatever he had. He never sent away empty handed those who knocked at his door.

He gave whatever he had. When he did not have anything he knocked at the door of generous friends, relatives or benefactors. What he gave to others he gave it in secret. According to the evangelical teaching: when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly, he never waited for appreciation nor did he proclaim his charity from the pulpit. He did everything for the love of God.

He was generous not only in material things but also in spiritual guidance. He embraced with joy everyone who came to him for spiritual comfort. There was neither strict time nor any prior appointment. He spoke to them; he guided them to resolve their problems. He embraced them with tenderness and love. He was both a father and a mother to them. At times he was like a father very authoritative and demanding and at the same time he was like a mother gentle, kind, compassionate, caring, tender. At this juncture I must admit that my mother is a great admirer of Fr. Roche. She always liked him and always appreciated him, and still today she says, "Fr. Roche was a living saint". Yes, he was a man who lived a holy life.

A man of God will certainly act according to the will of God. This was not only at the time of good health but also in times of sickness. St. Francis called sickness as sister sickness and embraced it with joy. As a true follower of St Francis, Fr. Roche had very similar attitude. He was a person who stood at the foot of the cross of Jesus. His attitude towards sickness was very amazing. He always faced his sickness with courage as part of his life, with a smiling face. When he was ill, he was more worried about others than about his own health. Whenever we visited

him in the hospital, he first enquired about our health and our family members and parishioners. He had a loving relationship with the doctors and nurses who treated him and also others who served him. He bore everything with joyful patience.

As a man of God he had a passion for God. This was a source of inspiration for me. Today I am a Capuchin thanks to the holy life of Fr. Roche. When I expressed my desire to be a Capuchin Fr. Roche was very happy. But immediately he put me an important question: “Why do you want to become a Capuchin”? My response was: “I want to wear a Capuchin habit”. He gave a simple smile and said “You must think a little more”. This gave me enough time to reflect. According to St. Jean-Marie Vianney: “Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus”. Fr. Roche was a priest of the love of the heart of Jesus. Thus, the God-centered personality of Fr. Roche embellished with the Franciscan Capuchin Spirit of fraternity and simplicity attracted me to be a Capuchin.

## **Conclusion:**

In this short presentation I have tried to put in black and white a few random thoughts that inspired me and my life through the exemplary life of Fr. Alfred Roche. As mentioned above what I have put down here is what I have seen with my eyes, what I have heard with my ears, and what I have experienced in my life by being with him, moving with him, and learning from him, a man of short stature but of a large heart. He was a man of vision with clear ideas about his apostolate. This God-centered pastor could read the signs of the time and take adequate decisions in

any situation, of course, with a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized

Today we are living in a world of multiple crises: Crisis in the family, crisis in the society, crisis in the church, crisis in the world at large. Why is this? There is a collapse of spiritual values. People have time for everything except for God and for prayer. A good number of priests and religious too belong to this category. As a result, they live a distracted and dissipated life! In such a situation I believe that the Eucharist-centered life and spirituality of Fr. Roche can very well be an inspiration to the laity, religious and priests of our times.

Living in the modern world, the philosophy of life of very many members of the Church is very much influenced by the oft repeated slogans in radio, TV and other means of mass media. The words like sacrifice, self-denial, and option for the poor are hardly heard in our ordinary conversations as well as in our dailies. There is a strong tendency towards individualism and self-centeredness. In such a situation is not the **other-centered life and ministry of Fr. Roche** a ‘spiritual therapy’ (cf.VC.87) for our countrymen, including the priests and religious?

Tensions, conflicts and quarrels are common features in family circles, religious communities, and parish contexts. Parents don’t understand the children; community members fail in loving and forgiving one another; time and again we hear about the tensions and conflicts between the pastor and the faithful. In such a situation of broken relationships I firmly believe that the peaceful personality and graceful spirituality of Fr. Roche, an apostle of peace and unity, would be an extraordinary help in bringing about peace, joy and harmony.

## **PRAYER**

All-loving and all-compassionate Father I firmly believe that Fr. Alfred Roche is with you in the assembly of the saints. He was truly imbued with the spirit of St. Francis, the poverello of Assisi. Many drew inspiration from his humble and simple lifestyle. People, irrespective of caste and creed, age and stage, approached him in their physical needs, psychological distress and spiritual poverty, and through his fatherly love and care received help in their physical needs, comfort in their psychological distress and enrichment in their spiritual poverty. Grant us the grace to have him as our mediator so that through his intercession we may grow in our filial love and devotion towards You and our fraternal love and service towards our brothers and sisters.

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