

His Excellency Bishop Williamson

The coming of a bishop in India is a rare event for the Society's mission here, but this year we were gratified with two visits, one of His Excellency Bishop Tissier de Mallerais in late December 2006 and more recently of His Excellency Bishop Williamson this last September.

Bishop Williamson arrived into Bombay International airport Friday afternoon on September 15th after a tiring flight from Europe. Fr. Francois Chazal and Fr. Summers were anxiously waiting to meet him at the terminal since both priests had been under the bishop when he was Rector at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Winona, USA. Thanks to the generosity of some of the faithful, His Excellency was provided with a car for the three days he would spend in the sprawling metropolis. The first task was to find a good local restaurant to give the bishop a sample of the tasty Indian fare. Fr. Chazal knew of a good "Gujarati" diner which provided a unique and delectable lunch. After the spices and sauces had been sampled, the bishop and two escorting priests decided to see some of the interesting sights of the locality. Fr. Chazal guided them into the labyrinth mazes of the Dadar train station market. To the great amusement of Bishop Williamson, Fr. Chazal forged ahead into the small lanes teeming with buyers and sellers of all possible descriptions. The sights, sounds and smells of the Dadar market finished, the trio made their way to the suburb of Malaad where an apartment was furnished for the hosting of the bishop. The next day (Saturday) would be confirmations in the morning in a rented hall in the suburb of Bandra and it was necessary that His Excellency obtain his much needed rest.

The rented hall was packed with nearly 130 people who came from all parts of Bombay to attend the ceremony of Confirmations and the Sung Mass. On a small table in front of all those present the bishop first consecrated a new chalice for the mission station so that all could see this ceremony which is almost unknown to the faithful. The singing of the "*Veni Creator Spiritus*" began the ritual for the sacrament of Confirmation. One by one, more than 40 parishioners of all ages came forward to receive the graces and indelible mark of this powerful sacrament.

In his sermon, the Bishop asked the faithful to avoid the evil influence of the corrupted West and to give to the Church Catholic families with the amount of children God wants them to have. His Excellency also said they should live without all the electronic gadgets that bring insanity and disruption, and to have a clear definition of the respective role of the father, mother and children. The bishop used very strong words against the destructive influence of television in the Catholic families and urged the Indian woman to remain the example of femininity that she still is in most parts of India.

Similar to Bishop Tissier de Mallerais on his visit seven months before, the patience of Bishop Williamson was



Above: Bishop Williamson performs the consecration of a chalice for the circuit chapel of Bandra (Bombay). His Excellency was happy to explain this ceremony to the faithful and give them the rare opportunity to witness the transformation of a material object into a sacred thing used only for the worship of God.

quite impressive, always finding time to speak to people, to spend time for the photographs, to wait and keep smiling in the heat.

After the socializing and photographs were finished, the two priests and the bishop climbed into their car and headed north for a visit to Vasai. Specifically, they were going to visit a fishing village and old Portuguese fort where the traditional Mass is still said on occasion by Fr. Chazal. There all three visited the orphanage of a friend, the remains of the fort which was filled with churches and convents in ruins, and finally the fishing village nearby. He was most impressed by the seriousness of the work of the Portuguese there and the history of the place. In the local fishing village he was able to see for himself that there are still places where men and women can live in a natural and normal circumstances even though the rest of the world is spiraling ever downwards in a technological dreamworld.

Mid-morning on Sunday, the bishop and Fr Summers left by plane for the city of Chennai. Here Bishop Williamson was to give a sung Mass to the hardy people of this capital city of Tamil Nadu. After a light lunch nearby the airport, some good parishioners escorted the bishop and Father Summers to see the holy places in and around Chennai. First they visited and prayed at St. Thomas Mount, the place of the martyrdom of the Apostle St. Thomas. On this mount is the rock which was stained by the blood of St. Thomas when he was speared by the enemies of the faith. Next to be seen was the famous St. Thomas Cathedral which was built over the burial place of the great Apostle. There are still some remnants of his body there, but the greater part were taken to Europe many years ago. Ever mindful of the time, Fr. Summers got the group moving to the location for Mass.

Visits India After More Than 20 Years

Thanks to the kindness of the correspondent of St. Anthony's school, an entire floor of the school was prepared for the Mass of the Bishop. However, only a short walking distance down the street was the famous cave of St. Thomas. In this cave there is a miraculous water well which has always provided drinking water, even when all other wells fail. This cave was the intermittent home of St. Thomas when he was being persecuted by the local ruler. Almost 1500 years later the great Apostle of the Indies, St Francis Xavier spent time in the local area and was known to pray throughout the night in this cave. Bishop Williamson was very edified by these pilgrimage places which were almost unknown to him before his visit.

During the Holy Mass, Bishop Williamson thundered against the corruption and immorality which was being imported into the once conservative land of the Tamils. After Mass the group proceeded to a meal which would prove to have some unwelcome effects. The next morning the two priests were ready to escort the bishop by plane down to the priory to perform confirmations there for the Orphanage. However, exhausted by the flights and miscellaneous travel His Excellency was immobilized that night and the next day by a stomach flu. His flight was cancelled and the ceremony in Palayamkottai was rescheduled 36 hours later to give him time to rest and recover. Tuesday morning saw the bishop recovering and ready to make the short flight down to the priory and to give Confirmation to 37 people. Unfortunately the confirmations circuit called for him to continue on to the Philippines the evening of the next day and therefore his visit to the priory was a short but pleasant one.

Right:

Fr. Francois Chazal enjoys a cup of tea with His Excellency. The fathers and the bishop visited a very conservative fishing village north of Bombay and met with the chief to discuss the local Portuguese churches. There are a good number of historic churches built by the Portuguese missionaries and one was even commissioned by St. Francis Xavier himself. The village was a restful finish to a day of sightseeing. The bishop was happy to see that there was little or no technology prevalent in the village to disrupt the normal and natural flow of their lives centered around their families and fishing and not around machines.



Above: Bishop Williamson poses with the largest family in Tradition in India. His Excellency made clear that God rewards those parents of generous wills who allow God to work in their marriage.

His Excellency was always eager to know more about the country and customs of India, once the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. The British Raj certainly left its marks (for good and for evil) all across India and these buildings, railways, roads, and administration were pointed out to the bishop. Certainly the arrival of this "Britisher" into his former colony was not for the advancement of the English empire, but solely for the advancement of another kingdom, not of this world.

