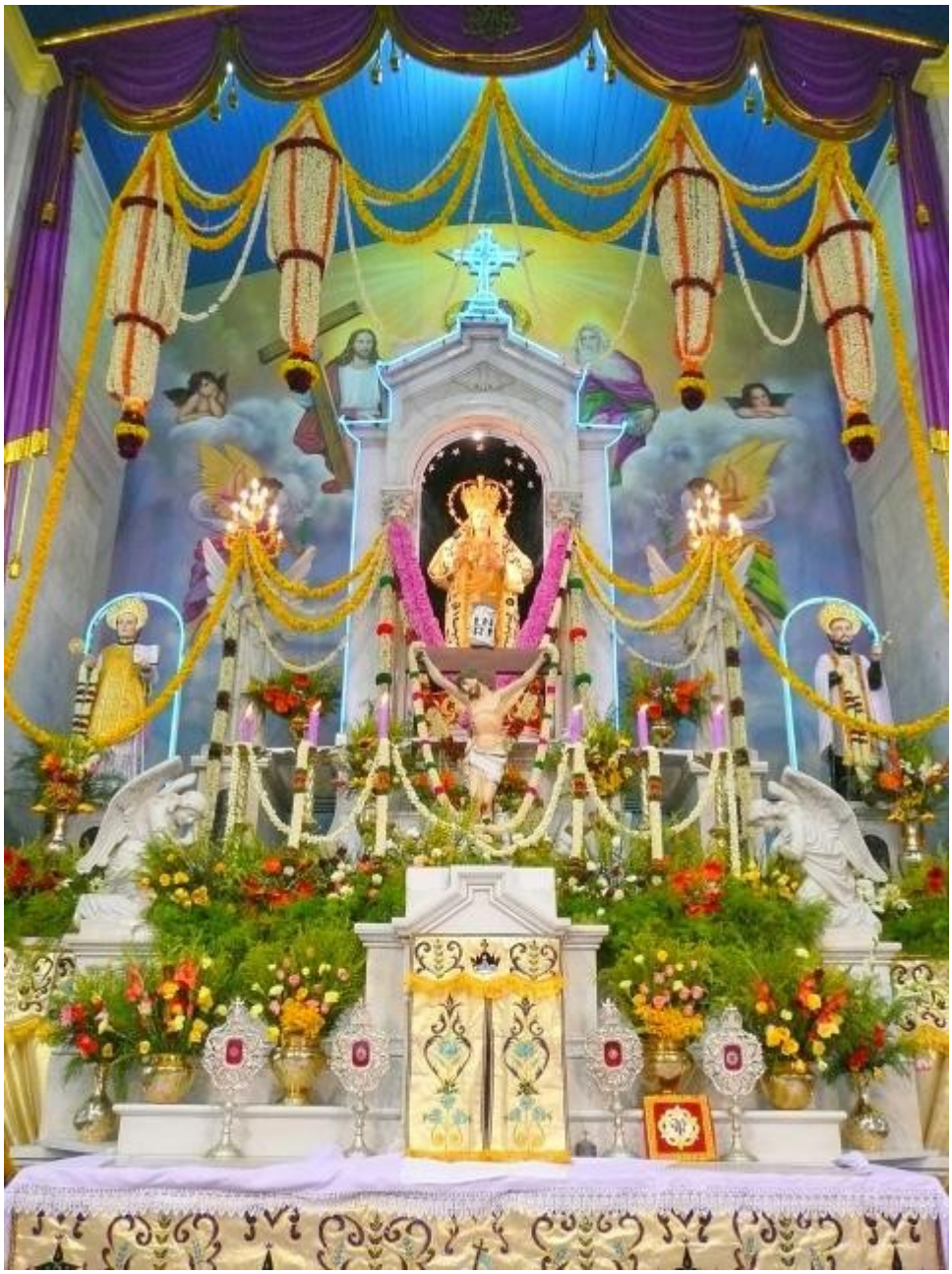
Our Lady of Snows, Tuticorin



The high altar of the Basilica of Our Lady of Snows on her feast day (5th August). The Basilca was built in 1713

The 5th August is a holiday in Tuticorin where 50% of the population are Catholic..

A holy throng of faithful come to pray to Our Lady of the Snows on her feast.

ST. FRANCIS IN TUTICORIN

Tuticorin is one of the oldest seaports in the world and was the scene of some of St. Francis Xavier's most felicitous work. When he arrived in 1542 it was under the control of the Hindu prince Vettum Perumâl, but the machinations of the Portuguese colonial profiteers were also very much evident (they almost drove St. Francis to despair). There was already a large Catholic population in the town as eight years before 30,000 Paravars (the caste of Pearl Fishers who lived along the south-east coast down to the tip of India) had converted from Hinduism to Christianity.

St. Francis stayed for two years to catechise these recent converts. He took many pains to learn the *Credo, Pater*, *Ave*, *Gloria, Salve* and *Confiteor* in Tamil (a herculean endeavour)….

….and, taking a bell, I went ringing it right through the town to collect as many children and adults as I could. Having gathered my audience, I held forth to them, twice each day until, at the end of the month, they had learned the prayers. I then arranged for the children to teach their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers and neighbours, the lessons which they had acquired in my school.

St. Francis repeated this exercise in the villages north and south of Tuticorin.

During my stay I was besieged by crowds of people who wanted me to come to their huts and pray for their sick.; So numerous were their requests…but I had not the heart to deny any of their requests ….I told the children who had memorised the Christian Doctrine to betake themselves to the homes of the sick, there to collect as many of the family and neighbours as possible, and to say the Creed with them several times …[and] owing to their faith, God has shown great mercy to their sick, healing them in both body and soul.

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THE STATUE

The beautiful wooden statue of Our Lady of Snows in the Basilica was originally kept in a chapel in a Convent of the Augustinian Sisters in Manila, Philippines. St. Francis Xavier had to spend a few days in Manila on his way to China (1552) and was very much attracted by the beauty of the statue.

In his heart of hearts, he desired it for the newly converted Paravars of Pearl Fishery Coast as his gift, for he had noticed their great attachment towards Hindu goddesses such as Madurai Meenakshi and Kanyakumari Bhagavathi Amman and thought this beautiful statue of Our Lady of Snows would be the best means of leading them away from these false gods.

But when he expressed his wish to the sisters, they turned down his request—they loved the statue too. Later, however, when they came to know of the death of St. Francis Xavier on Sancian Island in the same year, they remembered his request and immediately sent the statue to Thoothukudi by a ship named SANTALENA (St. Helena). The ship arrived on 9th June 1555.

The beautiful statue of Our Lady of the Snows is almost 500 years old and is still the object of great veneration. It is wonderful to think that St. Francis prayed before this statue to which many miracles have also been attributed .

OUR MASS CENTRE

The Mass Centre of Tuticorin was the first Mass Centre to be established in India (1986). It still resides on the property of Miss Josephine Caleb. The chapel is now too small for the congregation and there have been a number of ingenious attempts to acquire a new site on which to construct a chapel, but all without success. The greatest obstacles are the usual ones: shortage of priests and money. Two novices of the Consoling Sisters, Srs. Maria Celina and Maria Theresa, were members of this Mass Centre.

The pious congregation of St. Francis Xavier's Chapel at Miss Caleb's house in Tuticorin on 5th August. In the centre is Rev. Fr. Xavier –Ignatius, our long-serving collaborator.