

## GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

### Celebrating Fr Joseph Rathnaraj, a humble Vicar of Christ

*By Amanda Murthy*

*Photos by Matthew Lau*



The Maida Vale parish was packed with hundreds of parishioners and peers of Maida Vale Parish Priest Fr Joseph Rathnaraj, who gathered to give thanks for the gift he has been to the Catholic community, during his 50 years of priestly ministry.

The occasion was marked with a 10am Mass on Friday, 18 December at Saint Francis of Assisi Church, followed by a grand feast provided by the parish community.

The jubilarian was joined by celebrant, Archdiocese of Perth Episcopal Vicar for Clergy the Very Rev Father Brian McKenna, a host of Archdiocesan priests concelebrating, including Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Chaplain Fr Sebastian Fernando and Fr Alfonsas Savickis (also celebrating their 50-year anniversaries to the priesthood).



Fr Rembert Fernando, who was baptized by Fr Rathnaraj, travelled from Canberra especially for the occasion.



Deacon Trevor Lyra, a long-time peer, assisted at Mass. Before the start of Mass, Deacon Lyra took the time to narrate the life and priesthood journey of Fr Rathnaraj. "I'm sure all of us would like to join Fr Joseph in praising a glorifying God, not only for the past 50 years of receiving his dedicated service, but to thank the Almighty for the blessings bestowed on others through Fr Joseph. Despite having travelled to almost every part of the world and owning such a colourful career in dedicated service to the church, Fr Joseph has remained the humblest man that I have met. "He signs off his name in the parish bulletin every week as, 'your parish servant, always.' "May God bless you always, Father, and on behalf of everyone here, we are grateful for having the privilege of celebrating this milestone with you," he added.

In his homily, Fr McKenna reflected on the image of "Jesus coming as the light of the world," which is proclaimed in one of the readings close to Christmas. "Jesus is that life who reveals the presence of God among us. How we are to interconnect with each other, how we are to relate to each other, how we are to accept that life of Jesus to ourselves, then share it with one another," he cited. "The priests are one of the people who inspires us to do this – by the Word and by the way he lived and lives, Fr Joseph has done exactly that in his time with us. We have to appreciate his willingness to leave his beautiful homeland, to serve the people of Australia for the past 20 years and counting, to share the light and love that is Jesus," Fr McKenna concluded "We celebrate and thank God for the gift of Joseph to us."

At the conclusion of Mass, Fr Rathnaraj, reverted to one of his favourite psalms, inviting those present to sing along. He thanked the congregation present for their love and support throughout his ministry, then shared some of his life highlights in images. “What thanks can I render you, for the gifts you have showered on me. Everyday, I will sing and praise your glory. Alleluia” – Psalm 116:12,” Fr Rathnaraj acclaimed.



Fr Rembert then presented Fr Rathnaraj with a customary (in Indian tradition) golden shawl, which represented a blessing from family and peers who could not attend the celebration in person. A representative from the parish council also presented Fr Rathnaraj with a memento, and thanked the priest for his endless support and dedication.

As he processed out of the church, Fr Rathnaraj was greeted by a surprise visitor, Emeritus Archbishop Barry Hickey, who was there to congratulate him in person.

Upon his completion of pre-university studies, Father Rathnaraj answered his call to the priesthood. Studying Latin for two years, and seven years of philosophy and theology at St Peter's Pontifical College in Bangalore, which was run by the Paris Foreign Missionaries (MEP).

He was ordained a priest on 18 December 1970, serving the Diocese of Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, India, in an area where Saint Francis Xavier is said to have spent much of his missionary life. There, Fr Rathnaraj served in more than nine diocesan parishes as assistant and parish priests. During this time, he obtained a Diploma in Communications, which came in handy with his involvement in the Communications Ministry as Director of the Tuticorin Pastoral Centre, as well as in his roles at the Diocesan Laity Centre (for formation of laity) and Marriage Counselling Centre.

Fr Rathnaraj had many opportunities to travel abroad – Rome, European countries, America. But it was a five-year mission in the Pilbara region, under the Diocese of Geraldton in 1990 that he would cite as a ‘dream come true’, thanks to Emeritus Hickey.

After this mission, Fr Rathnaraj returned to India, with the task of administering the Diocese of Tuticorin for a year in 2004 in the absence of a Bishop in the Diocese. Two years later, he was back serving the people of Western Australia, in the parishes of Moora, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Embleton and now Maida Vale, where he has served for the past two years.



*Maida Vale Parish Priest Fr Rathnaraj stands with his fellow religious brothers and sisters including Perth Emeritus Archbishop Barry Hickey, at his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the priesthood, celebrated on 18 December 2020, at the Maida Vale Parish. Photo: Matthew Lau.*



*The Perth Catholic community celebrated the gift of Maida Vale Parish Parish Priest Father Joseph Rathnaraj, on his 50 years of priesthood, held on 18 December. Photos: Matthew Lau.*



*Jubilarian Father Rathnaraj receiving a golden shawl from visiting priest Fr Rembert Fernando at his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the priesthood, celebrated on 18 December 2020, at the Maida Vale Parish. Photo: Matthew Lau.*



*Fr Alfonsas Savickis congratulating Fr Joseph*





FR JOSEPH'S CELEBRATING GOLDEN JUBILEE







PARISHIONERS  
CELEBRATING  
GOLDEN JUBILEE

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