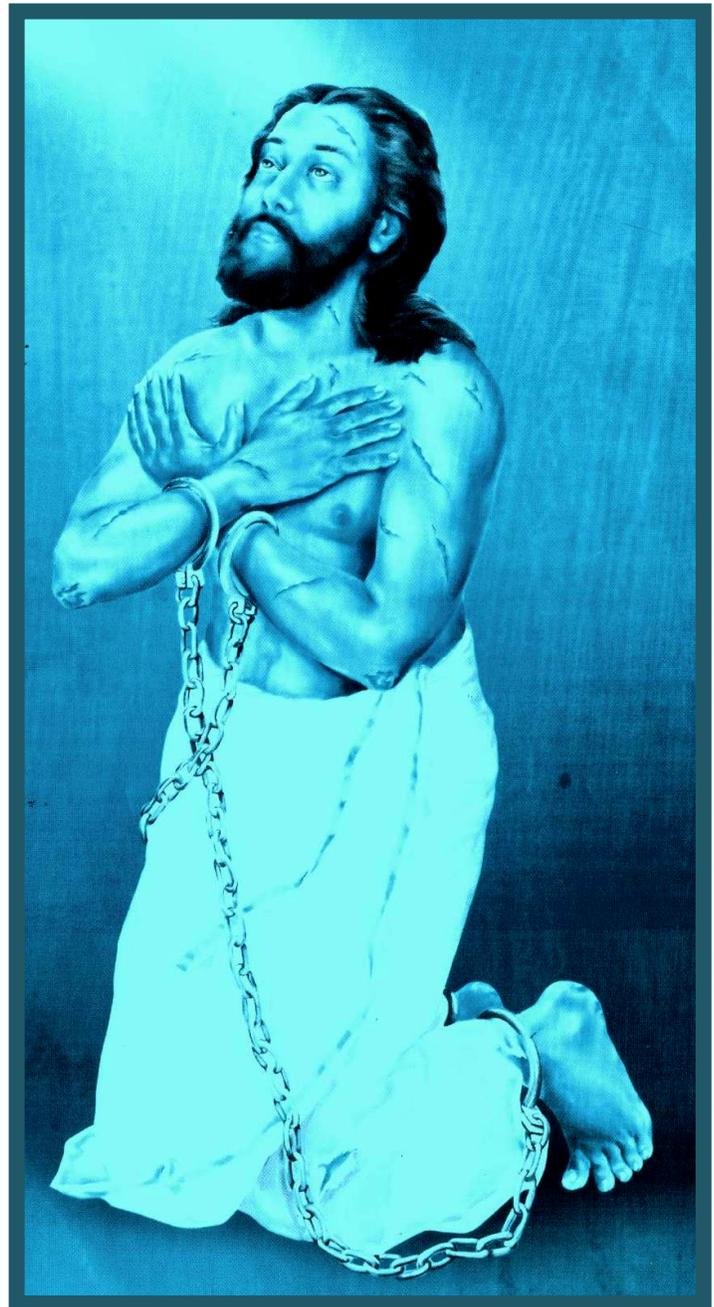


**JUNE 2013**

# BL. DEVASAHAYAM PILLAI

**HISTORY:** Devasahayam Pillai (1712-1752) born into a feudal Nair family, was an official in the service of King *Marthanda Varma*, the most powerful ruler of *Travancore* which encompassed southern Kerala and parts of Tamil Nadu. After the *Kulachal* war, he came under the spell of Dutch captain *Eustacheus Benedictus De Lenoy*, who, being caught a war prisoner, later joined *Marthanda Varma's* forces. *De Lenoy* was believed to be instrumental in converting Pillai to Christianity and he was christened as *Lazar*, but later came to be known as *Devasahayam* locally. Pillai's conversion was taken as an affront by the feudal lords of the day and they repeatedly persuaded him to give up his new faith. As Pillai stood firm, he was arrested and tortured for three years and finally taken to a remote place and shot dead on **14 January, 1752**. The Historical commission and the Theological commission in Rome approved that the "*Servant of God*" suffered death for his faith and Pope Benedict XIV authorized the Pontifical Commission to promulgate a decree declaring Devasahayam Pillai a 'beatified'. On **2 December, 2012**, a ceremony of beatification and declaration of martyrdom was held in Nagercoil. Devasahayam Pillai is the first lay person to be elevated to the rank of "Blessed" in India.





**LIFESTYLE FOOTED IN WORD OF GOD, FAITH AND EVANGELIZATION:** De Lannoy exposed him to the Word of God by narrating to him the story of Job. This paved the way towards his conversion to Christian faith and inspired him during the years of torture, “instructing” him on martyrdom. The word of God which “*shall not return empty*” carried out the purpose for which the Lord sent it in his life. He received the Dharma of Jesus (the Word of God) just as a shell receives the pearl and conserved it (in his heart) by prayer and penance.

The conversion, life and heroic death of martyr Devasahayam Pillai is a great example and lesson on evangelization. *He was an evangelizer before, during and after the martyrdom.* The future martyr never let a day pass without thanking God from the bottom of his soul for the grace of his conversion. The Christian joy in him was so immense that he experienced within himself a great desire to share it with others. **Devasahayam not only became a passionate follower of the Christian faith, but he also went about his work as a great missionary, evangelizing others.** From the day of Baptism, Devasahayam was an apostle in his family - he converted his wife despite opposition from his friends and relations. The tortures of Devasahayam Pillai continued for three years and the torturers thought that time would change his mind. But he utilized these years not only for advancement in his personal spiritual life, but also for continuing in every way, the task of evangelization. The radiance of *Lazarus* (Baptismal name of Devasahayam Pillai) enlightened so much the minds of the non-Christians, that they conceived a high opinion both of our holy faith and of Lazarus himself. Two characteristics of his personality helped him further in putting into practice his missionary zeal. Firstly, he was by nature an extrovert, looking out to other people, to the needs and joys of others. Therefore he intended that “*all should receive the good he had discovered.*”

Secondly, his eagerness to meet priests and to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and even the Anointing of the Sick as a last anointing, are surely great witnesses not only of his Catholic faith but also clear marks of his spiritual and mental balance which were in place even in the thick of persecution and suffering. **There was in this *Travancore Martyr*, an unwavering faith in Jesus as the only Redeemer.** This comes up again and again in the arguments and discussions with the persecutors. He refused to compromise on this and that brought him into confrontation with the enemies of Christian faith. **Throughout the tortures this faith in Jesus came out constantly in his spontaneous prayer- “*Jesus save me*”.** This unqualified proclamation and public acceptance of Jesus as the Redeemer and the Son of God attains relevance in the increasing violence against Christians in some parts of the world and in India in particular. A clear stand against superstition is another aspect of the witness of martyrdom of Devasahayam Pillai. This stand is the result both of his deep faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour and of his conviction of compatibility of Christian faith with human reason. In this era of science and technology, one of the things lacking in the so-called “educated” is the right knowledge of religion and that has resulted in a return of many superstitious beliefs connected to *astrology, numerology, black magic, devil worship and vastu.* Devasahayam Pillai lived his life in faith for a mere 3 years. But he lived with his new found life well- “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in*





*all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).* In this year of Faith, let Devasahayam inspire each individual and the movement to have uncompromising faith in Christ and to have a renewal in their existing faith to reach out to the new dimensions of *living with God.*

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Week 1

Prayer:

*Lord, tell me how I must suffer for You. Keep me safe in the light of Your Wisdom. Prepare the way for those who do not know anything about You nor desire to know anything about You to know You. Give us all Your peace. Amen*

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Week 2

Prayer:

*O loving God! I own nothing; yet You chose me. You led me into the Christian life. You brought me up in the ways of a heavenly child. I need Your love alone. Amen*

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Week 3

Prayer:

*You offered yourself as a sacrifice to remove the sufferings of the world. O Merciful One, you wait in tears everyday for whole world to come to heaven. Lord, pray to the Father that all who move towards their destruction by their wicked ways might be saved. Come and help me that I may not cause pain to any Christian who is being saved. Amen*

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Week 4

Prayer:

*Jesus, You who enjoyed the tender caresses of Mother Mary, full of grace, I can smile only if You come into my heart and mind. I now suffer intense pain in body and mind. I pray that you fill me with Your peace now and at the hour of my death. Amen*

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