

**ST. PHILIP & ST. TERESA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
IN OCCIDENTAL AND BODEGA, CALIFORNIA**

**Special Farewell Bulletin on the Occasion of
Rev. Fr. Balaswamy Govindu's Retirement &
in Honor of our Heavenly Mother**



August 15th, 2024

The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

JESUS AND MOTHER MARY HAVE A TALK AFTER HER ASSUMPTION INTO HEAVEN

In Matthew 20:23, Jesus tells James and John, the sons of Zebedee: "...to sit at my right or left (in the Kingdom of Heaven) is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." -- Ever wonder how he felt about not being allowed to choose who he'd share his eternal throne room with?! Maybe he would have liked John, "the beloved disciple" next to him.

But the day came when his Blessed Mother, the spouse of the Holy Spirit, was ready to leave this earth. On orders of the Father, the angels brought her straight to Jesus to be crowned "Queen over all things." (Catechism #966). She was not only to sit at his right hand forever but even to share his throne with him. As Revelation 3:21 says: "I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne."



12th century Mosaic in Santa Maria in Trastevere, and 13th century mosaic in S. M. Maggiore, both Rome

What may Jesus' reaction have been? Possibly some mixed emotions? They must have exchanged a few words. Maybe something like this?

Jesus: Mama! How good to see you here with me in this transfigured state! Thank you, Mom, for all you did for my Church from its infancy. You nursed it with your prayers just like you nursed me! And I watched with adoration how you kept the memory of my passion alive by building the first stations of the cross at your home in Ephesus. You've been doing so much to help me redeem the world! How was your journey up here?

In his book "The Holy Virgin's House: The True Story of Its Discovery" Father Eugene Poulin describes how in 1891, here-discovered the house in Ephesus where the Virgin Mary lived with John and Mary Magdalene after the resurrection of Christ. He was guided by the visions of the 18th/19th century

Mary: Oh my Son, how blessed I am!! No need to thank me. Since it was your dying wish that I should be your disciples' mother, I have been happy to play that role with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength.

My journey up here? What a relief to be lifted up from the earth, that valley of tears, by a retinue of glorious, singing angels! As soon as they touched me, I felt my old body transform into this glorious, radiant body of light. The sensation of being raised higher and higher, through ever more sublime levels of heaven is beyond all telling. The light, the love, the sense of finally being home, the bliss!

I know this glorified body will take me all around the universe in the blink of an intention. Like you, I will be able to appear to our children, unhindered by walls or distances.




Our Lady of Good Health,
an apparition in Vailankanni, India

And I will be able to look however they need me to look. I will be able to don the appearance of an Aztec princess in Mexico and of a beautiful Caucasian maiden in Europe.

I will appear as a beautiful Black woman in Africa and as an Asian woman in Asia. Wherever I am needed, I will go. And at the same time, I will be right here at your side, pleading with you to forgive even the most horrendous deeds of those who have even a sliver of faith in you and me.

Jesus: That's wonderful, but Mom, are you going to tell me what to do in eternity? Like you did at the wedding feast in Cana (John 21) when you outed me before I was ready to be known as a miracle worker and made me turn water into wine even when I had said no?

GERMAN, BED RIDDEN MYSTIC, ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH. HE FOUND THE REMAINS OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS, BUILT, ACCORDING TO BLESSED ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH BY THE VIRGIN HERSELF.
PAUL TALKS ABOUT SOMEONE BEING "CAUGHT UP TO THE THIRD HEAVEN". 2 CORINTHIANS 12:2



When I was 12 and you found me in the temple where I had stayed behind, I went home and “lived obediently with you” (Luke 2:51), even though I had the full right to live in the temple. I’m a little hesitant at the prospect of continuing in obedience to you forever! I mean, I don’t want to complain, and I admit that I “advanced in wisdom” (Luke 2:52) under your guidance, but even when I moved out, you still tried to tell me when and what to eat! Remember when you all thought I “was out of my mind” (Mark 3:21) because I deemed healing the sick and casting out demons more important than eating like a normal human being, which you know I never was?! Please don’t treat me like your baby forever!

Mary: Sorry my Son (In her apparitions she always calls him ‘my son’.), please forgive my overstepping your boundaries back then. You see, we had heard that you were acting irrationally due to your hunger. You had cursed an innocent fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season (Mark 11:12-14) and the same day, flew into a zealous rage in the temple. As a good Jewish mother, it had been my duty for 30 years to keep you well fed. It was so hard to stop that habit and watch you go slowly but surely to your death!

Jesus: Believe me, I understand how hard it is to obey our Father sometimes. I too begged him in the Garden Gethsemane to let that bitter cup pass by me. (Matthew 26: 36–56). I will obey him in eternity. Let’s call on him to share what his plan for us is!

So they sink into prayer together, calling God their Father into their presence. In a flash, he is there, and they all spend a good while enjoying their union in and with the Spirit. Finally, I Am speaks.

God Father: My dearly beloved children, how wonderful to be united with you on this level! Welcome to heaven Mary, full of grace! I have blessed you among women and “exult you as Queen over all things.”(Catechism #966) My son was God and became human so that humans could become gods, completely one with us, divinized. (Catechism #460+p.797) You are the first and foremost to show that it can be done! You complete the movement of the divine into humanity and the human into divinity. We need both of you to keep that movement going. Your work is inseparable. In a few days (i.e. almost 18 centuries later in human time) we will show humanity a symbol, the “Miraculous Medal” that will exhort them never to separate Mother and Son. Of course, they will argue about you Mary being the co-redemptrix for quite a while. Man, are they dense and difficult! Humanity won’t even notice your assumption for a couple of hundred years and then they will argue about that too for another 17 centuries in human time!

The fact is, both of you are needed on this throne, Jesus for shaking souls awake and redeeming them, and Mary for drawing them through love and consolation to heaven.

But you know, you are not glued to this throne. It is just a statement about how “fully conformed” (Catechism #966) and one you, Mother and Son are. Move about freely! Enjoy yourselves! After all that’s what Heaven is all about: bliss, love, light! Come on, let’s enjoy a beautiful concert by the angels and dance around heaven for a bit! The sound is exquisite up here, but I look forward to Thomas bringing our Way to India. That will add a whole other tune and the most beautiful singers! I’m particularly looking forward to one priest, who will be known as “Singing Baby Jesus (or Balaswamy in his language)”.

Mary and Jesus: We love you Papa! Let’s go!

Ella Rozett

MESSAGE FROM FATHER BALA



Photo taken Christmas 2023

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ in our parish and beyond, I write this message with a heart full of gratitude and mixed emotions. I would like to share with you and all my well-wishers some significant news.

After much contemplation and prayer, I have decided to retire from my active priestly duties from August 19th. Thanks be to God who called me to be a priest in 1977 and blessed me in many ways with my almost 47 years of priestly ministry both in India and the USA! The decision to retire was not easy, as my time serving both the San Francisco and Santa Rosa dioceses for the last 22 years has been incredibly fulfilling and deeply meaningful. The friendships and bonds I've formed have been a cornerstone of my ministry and personal growth.

I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for your unwavering support and encouragement throughout the past five years. Your steadfast faith and generosity have been instrumental in the success of our various ministries. Together, we have been able to make a tangible difference in many lives. Your kindness and dedication have been a source of inspiration, and I am confident that the seeds we have sown will continue to bear fruit long into the future.

I am grateful to God for all His guidance and strength in my ministry. His presence and Mother Mary's protection have been my constant source of comfort and direction, enabling me to serve faithfully and effectively.

I will be returning to India soon after my retirement for some medical treatment. I do not know yet where I will retire. But wherever I will be, I will continue to give pastoral care to the people and also spend time in writing hymns and liturgical music in my native language to the best of my God-given talent.

I hope and pray that the bond we share remains strong. Please know that you will always hold a special place in my heart and prayers.

I will always be happy to hear from you by email: www.govindu77@gmail.com.

GOD BLESS US ALL! MAY MARY OUR HEAVENLY MOTHER PROTECT US!

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF FATHER BALA'S PRIESTLY JOURNEY

- The Birth of a Holy Priest
- Introduction to Father Bala and his name's significance.

When I asked our previous priest, Father Fergal McGuinness, what this incoming Father Bala is like he said: "He is a holy priest." That holiness was laid in his cradle. In his native Telugulanguage of Andhra Pradesh, India, Bala means baby and swamy Lord, so he is basically called Baby Jesus! He wasn't exactly born in a manger, but in a village called Mutluru, near Guntur.



A FAMILY OF DEEP FAITH

- Background on Father Bala's parents and their devotion to God.

Father's parents had the deep faith that seems to be typical of the simple people in his culture in general and Indian Catholics in particular. They were always ready to sacrifice everything to God and so they offered their first-born son, Balaswamy, and daughter to God, forming the intention that they would become a priest and a nun.



It was up to them to respond to that call after high school, but they grew up in the knowledge that this was their parents' intention and prayer. Both said yes and so Father was ordained a priest 47 years ago. Sadly, both his parents passed away before his ordination.

His mother gave birth to 14 Children, of which 5 lived. When she was pregnant with her last child, the doctors told her that she may die if she carried the baby to terms. Nonetheless, being a strict Catholic, she refused to have an abortion. Both she and the baby died. His father passed away two years later, while Fr. Bala was still in seminary.

TRAGIC LOSS AND PERSEVERANCE

- The death of Father Bala's parents and his struggle to continue his path.

Now, as the oldest son, he was responsible for the whole family and wondered if he needed to leave the path to priesthood, but with God's help, he persevered and managed to fulfill both his familial and religious responsibilities.

A PASSION FOR MUSIC

- Father Bala's love for music and his contributions to Indian liturgical hymns.

After his ordination in 1977, he worked for 20 years closely with his bishop in the chancery. His greatest passion though was music. He was the first priest in the region to do a four-year course in Indian classical (Carnatic) vocal music. He composed more than 200 hymns, plus liturgical music that was very popular all over his State in the 1980's. Therefore, he was known everywhere as Singing Balaswamy.

FROM INDIA TO ROME TO SAN FRANCISCO

- Father Bala's studies in Rome and his transition to serving in the United States.

In 1999 he went to Rome to study missiology and institutional communication at the Holy Cross University run by Opus Dei for three years. From there he came pretty much straight to San Francisco. What a contrast! He had to learn not only a foreign language, but also a foreign culture and way of being Catholic. It must have taken an enormous amount of compassion, tolerance, and humility to shepherd a much more liberal and much less passionate flock.



Photo of Pontifical University of Holy Cross, Rome.

SERVING IN CALIFORNIA

- Father Bala's pastoral work in various parishes across California.

He served in San Francisco from 2002 to 2010, then in Gualala/Point Arena till 2013. He was in charge of two parishes and six missions around Arcata until 2017, of a parish in Napa until 2019, and finally of us for the last 5 years.



Looking Forward to Retirement

Now he wants to spend his retirement going back to his roots: “singing Baby Jesus”, writing down the hymns that come to him. He also wants to help here and there with Masses and the care of souls and for his next home to be a sort of daytime retreat place where people can come and join him in prayer.

A Heart for Charity



Finally, he wants to keep helping the activities of the foundation he co-founded in 2012 and whose spiritual adviser he is: <https://www.joybharathfoundationusa.org/> It does a lot of impressive work for lepers, the poor, refugees, and orphans. It also built a home, so far only for four elders, who have no one to take care of them. If you wished to help the foundation, you would spread hope and love among the needy in India.

God willing, and Father's health permitting, he will spend his 'golden years' home in India. If not, he will come back to Sonoma County.

A Prayer for the Future

Let us pray that God and Mother Mary may bless him richly for all the good work and sacrifices he has made in great faith!

Ella Rozett



Fr. Bala with Bishop Vasa

FAREWELL AND GOOD WISHES TO FATHER BALA

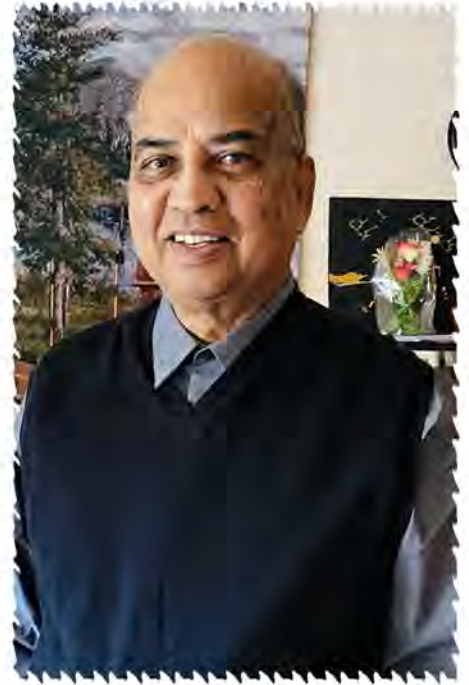
It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have been a member of St. Philip's Parish in the pastorate of Father Bala.

I have attended Mass and services at St. Philip's Church since the pastorate of Father Henry Faucher, in 1979—that is, since the last century! I have noticed many things about our pastors—when they put on their vestments and ascend to the altar to utter the Holy Words, to invoke the Mystery of any of the sacraments, they cannot hide who they are. It has been a pleasure to attend services presided over by Father Bala over the time of his pastorate, 2019-2024, because he has always shown he is sincere, or striving to be sincere. The sincerity of the pastor brings out the sincerity in us his attendees.

It is always touching to notice the most typical gesture of Father Bala. He finishes so many of his statements by placing his hand over his heart. May that be the picture we retain of him in our affections—hand over heart, usually accompanied by an encouraging smile.

It is so easy to make snapshots of people—these days it seems snapshots are what we do best, six-second TikTok screenshot videos that say it all! But should we let Father Bala leave here, where we have seen and heard him so many years, so many days—imagine, five years, sixty months, 1, 725 days, without a fuller picture? On every one of those days (minus the needed time off) Father has been open and available for spiritual counsel or the duties of the Church. He has always put his obligations as pastor first, his own desires second. We should not take leave of his pastorate without a fuller picture of his devoted service to us without a grateful farewell.

We might start by calling him by his proper name: Reverend Balaswamy Govindu. That suggests a great deal: a pastor from another country, the other side of the globe, speaking to us in our English language but coming from Andhra Pradesh state, India. Of course, Father Govindu is much more than his origins and native tongue, but these nevertheless make him singular: his parishioners sometimes cannot quite tell what word he has just said. Sometimes his sermons strain the attention. Nevertheless, we can notice the sincerity and the effort he makes—for Father Balaswamy Govindu always has something he genuinely wants to communicate. Father is a true believer—the opposite of a skeptic.



(Not every priest is, one comes to notice!)The rituals, the gospels, the 2,000-year tradition of the church are all real and present for him. The hand naturally is placed over the heart, recall. When Father puts on his vestments, he also puts on the whole of the Catholic tradition, the Catholic belief. One might say: how old-fashioned! I say, how refreshing and inspiring!

Our Parish was blessed to have Father begin his duties as pastor in June of 2019, and his modest and gentle demeanor endeared him to many of his parishioners. From our viewpoint in 2024, we look back and say, “You came just in time, Father, to get ready for the stress and strain of the pandemic.” We remember the efforts to stream Mass and services to us, and the long closure of both St. Theresa’s and St. Philip’s, and then the halting opening of Mass once a week in Bodega, people wearing masks and spaced apart, and finally the opening of St. Philip’s again after a long interval.

I have been a lector and choir member at St. Philip’s for many years, and I vividly recall Father Bala’s concern at the reopening of the church in Occidental. One dark winter Sunday morning there was Father, myself, and one other congregant! Let us never forget how the pandemic tried all of us and our beloved institutions; it was a trial of grave concern to Father.

It also has not been easy to be a Catholic pastor in these tumultuous years of rapid social change and challenge on many fronts. Father Bala has bravely and cheerfully served and carried out his manifold duties while the Diocese of Santa Rosa filed bankruptcy, a blow to the organization and authority of the Catholic Church—and as we are aware, this is not the only, or even the most serious, shadow overhanging the Church. Vocations in California have greatly declined, church attendance has not attained its pre-pandemic fullness, both in older and younger parishioners. Meetings of the parish Council and finance committee have had to address the decline in donations to the parish and wonder how at minimum to work toward the upkeep of our historic, beautiful, and venerable church buildings. Through these difficult last five years Father Bala has cheerfully and optimistically provided his leadership to the Parish. He has never ceased to point out the spiritual nourishment of the Eucharist and the power of sacred ritual, and the positivity of his belief and faith has been a source of strength to his parishioners.



Kelly McCool, Christine Cromwell, Ed Castellini, David Brown,
Janis Wilson, Christmas carols 2023

I have noticed that the priest in his vestments elevated on the altar, or at the podium during homilies, must always appear to his congregation as the person he authentically is. There is no hiding in such a position. It has always given me great consolation to perceive the sincerity, the modesty and the humility before God and Christ that Father Bala radiates—from his heart. We know that he will continue to help and encourage many others whatever his next steps on his life’s journey, and we wish him our very best. We know he goes in the spirit of the Gospel: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. (Matthew 28: 19-20)



Celebrating mass outside in the cold during Covid



Christmas 2023 with Ella Rozett and Sheila Almquist

FATHER BALA'S HYMN 'VARAGUNA DEEPIKA', WRITTEN IN 1976

Refrain :

Vara-gunaDee-pikaVeli-gin-che,
Vish-wavi-dhataJayamuJayamu,
Vish-wavi-dhata Jaya Jayamu

Verses :

1. Naalomanchininelakolupu
Neeloniluvagananunilupu (2 times the whole thing, 2 times more the second half)
2. Manasunamamathanumelkolupu
Mahilomanishigananunilupu (2 times the whole thing, 3times the second half)
3. Maatakuchethakushruthikalupu
Manishikimanishikimathigarapu (2 times the whole thing, 3times the second half)

Translation :

Refrain :

You are the One who is and who lights up Eternal Light. Praise to you, Creator of the universe!

Verses :

1. Instill in me all goodness; let me remain in You.
2. Awaken love in my mind; make me fully human in this world.
3. Let my words and deeds beharmonious; enlighten every person deep in their soul.



Fr. Bala with his good friend Fr. Sudhakar, who has been a constant strong support for the last six years and who did the layout of this special farewell program.

WELCOME FR. JOHN PLASS!



Dear Parishioners,

It is with great joy that I look forward to becoming your pastor this week! I would like to take this opportunity to thank Fr. Bala for his kindness and assistance to me during this time of transition, and I wish him the very best in his retirement. I also look forward to getting to know you all in the coming days and weeks, especially at our parish picnic!

A little about me: I grew up in the rural community of Tulelake, CA, where my parents still live. I have three siblings and five nieces and nephews. I attended seminary in Seward, Nebraska, and Menlo Park, CA, and was ordained on March 7, 2020. Since then, I have served as Parochial Vicar at St. Joseph, Cotati, and Chaplain at Cardinal Newman High School in Santa Rosa. In addition to my new role as your pastor, I will continue to serve the diocese as a part-time Vicar General. In my spare time, I like to garden and walk, two hobbies that should be easy to keep up in our beautiful parish!

I very much look forward to serving you, getting to know your needs, desires and interests, and bringing Christ to you in the sacraments. I couldn't have asked for a better parish for my first pastorate, and I am excited to grow in holiness with you for years to come!

Sincerely yours,

Fr. Plass