

His Life During Years of Torture:

During the years of his arrest and torture, the Servant of God led a life worthy of a candidate for martyrdom. Every morning and night he dedicated time to contemplative prayer, and often during the day he turned to God in moments of brief prayer. He also spent time reading books on the lives of the saints, and when people were around, he read them aloud. He fasted on all Fridays and Saturdays in honour of the death of Christ and of Mary, the Mother of God. When a priest visited him, usually at the dead of night, he confessed his sins and received the Holy Eucharist with utmost devotion. The priests were impressed by the joy and consolation that the Servant of God experienced.

Killed for Faith:

Devasahayam had to be killed quickly and secretly because large numbers of Catholics started visiting the Servant of God. Government officials kept secret the place and the date of his execution for fear of popular unrest. Finally, a little before midnight on January 14, 1752, they took him to the place of execution. As he was totally exhausted and unable to walk he was carried to the nearby hill called Kattadimalai. There he knelt and prayed for a while intensely. The marks left by his knees and elbows can still be seen today. Then he was shot dead by the soldiers with five leaden bullets, at midnight between 14 and 15 January 1752.

Burial:

His body was thrown in between rocks and left there to be eaten by wild animals. His mortal remains were discovered by Christians and buried in front of the main altar in the most important church of St. Francis Xavier, which is the present Cathedral of the Diocese of Kottar. While laypersons are not usually buried within a

church, it is significant that the Servant of God lies buried in a most revered church, a fact that attests to the regard that the faithful and the clergy had towards his sanctity and towards the greatness of his martyrdom.

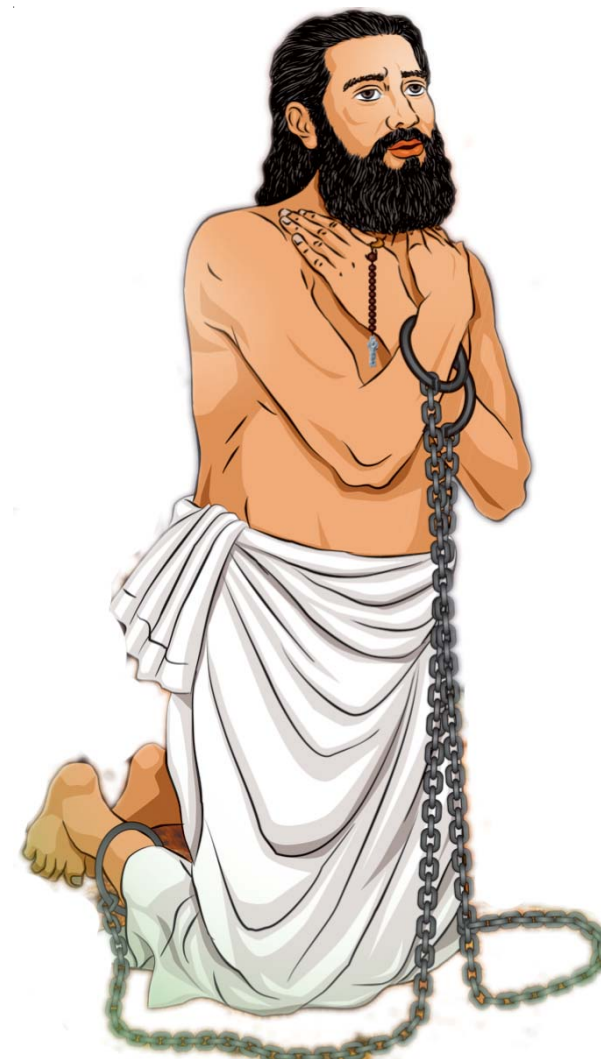
Devotion to the Servant of God:

Ever since the death of the Servant of God, many, irrespective of caste or religion, started to visit the place of his death and prayed to him for favours. Soon a small church was constructed at Kattadimalai and was dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, in remembrance of his heroic death for faith. The life of Devasahayam is being acted out in dramas, sung out in *Villupattu* and narrated in folklore. Thus, the message of his life and death and devotion to him spread throughout Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Considering the Servant of God as a saint, several people began to name themselves Devasahayam and the practice continues to this day.

Canonisation Process:

The canonisation process comprises a number of phases, such as the Preliminary Phase, the Introductory Phase, the Diocesan and the Roman phase ; among which the diocesan phase had five sections. Currently in the Roman phase, The Congregation for the Causes of Saints appointed Fr. Zdzislaw Kijas, OFM. as "Relator" for the Cause of Devasahayam Pillai (July 9, 2010) and Msgr. John Kulandai as "External Collaborator" for the Cause of Devasahayam Pillai. Monsignor's task, as prescribed by the norms of the Congregation, consists of collaborating with the Relator in the preparation of the text of the 'Positio'." The two appointments mentioned above are expediting the process.

The History of Devasahayam Pillai



1712 - 1752

The History of Devasahayam Pillai

Birth and Boyhood:

The Servant of God, Devasahayam, was born in 1712. Being Hindu, he was given the name *Neelam (Nilam)*, and was also known as *Nilakandan*. As he belonged to the royal Nair caste he is also popularly known as *Devasahayam Pillai*. Growing up, he learnt Sanskrit and had traditional training in martial arts.

Youth and Marriage:

Nilam was brought up as a devout Hindu. Besides Tamil and Malayalam, the languages of his people, he also trained himself in Varmasastra, archery and the use of weapons of war. He was made an official at the royal court at *Padmanabhapuram*. He was respected for his personal sincerity and firmness of mind, which endeared him to his colleagues and to King Marthanda Varma. He married *Bargaviammal* of Mekkod, a neighbouring village.

Conversion and Baptism:

In performing his duties as a palace official, Neelam Pillai came into contact with a Catholic, *Eustachius Benedictus De Lannoy*, a Dutch military officer, arrested by King Marthandavarma after the Dutch were defeated at the Port of Colachel in 1741. At one stage of their relationship, Nilakanda Pillai was found to be extremely unhappy and sad. Following De Lannoy's enquiry about his sadness, he narrated a series of tragedies that had overtaken his family. His bulls had died one after another and crops had failed, which meant tremendous financial loss for him, causing immeasurable sadness. On hearing all this, De Lannoy told him the Old Testament story of Job and demonstrated how God tested the faith of a good man through suffering.

Finding De Lannoy's explanation reasonable and convincing, Nilakanda Pillai expressed his desire to become a Christian and requested that De Lannoy instruct him for baptism. De Lannoy sent him to *Vadakkankulam*, a hamlet outside the limits of the Kingdom of Travancore, with a letter to *Fr. Giovanni Baptista Buttari*, a Jesuit Missionary, requesting him to baptise Nilakandan.

Fearing that Baptism would spell suffering and persecution, Fr. Buttari hesitated for some time to baptise him. Fr. Buttari examined his past life in order to instruct him and to test the maturity of his decision and the depth of his conviction in the Catholic faith. This instruction continued for nine months. Finally, moved by the persistence of Nilakanda Pillai, he baptised him at the church of the Holy Family, Vadakkankulam on 14 May 1745. At Baptism, the Servant of God was given the name "Devasahayam," which is a Tamil rendering of the biblical name Lazar, which means, "God has helped"

Life after Baptism:

Having joined the Catholic community, Devasahayam himself started exhorting others to receive Baptism and even converted some to the Christian faith, one of them being his own wife, who took the name "*Gnanapu*" which is a Tamil rendering of "Theresa". In his personal life, the neophyte Devasahayam mixed and mingled with people of all statuses and castes. His newly found faith caused him to disregard caste distinction, throw away the symbols of his "high" caste, eat and live with people of "low" birth and come to the palace office as a "polluted" person. Noticing the marked changes in Devasahayam because of his Christian life, high caste people accused him of the crime of betrayal and contempt of religious practices and of insulting the gods, the Brahmins and the royal throne.

Tested for Faith:

Although some Brahmins and court officials tried their best to woo the Servant of God back from his newly-won Christian faith, Devasahayam showed great fortitude in expressing firmness of faith and even daringly declared that he was willing to be tortured, or even to be put to death for Christ.

Persecuted for Faith:

Having been incited against Christians, the king arrested Devasahayam on 23 February 1749, putting him in a very strict prison. Soon, condemned to death by the king, he was tortured in several ways. He was paraded in many towns and villages, both hands bound behind his back, seated on a buffalo facing backward and garlanded with *Erukku* flowers as a symbol of shame.

Some Miraculous Events:

The Servant of God was brought through a small place called *Puliurkurichy* where overcome by thirst he planted his elbow on a rock, which gave forth water which he could drink. This rock continues to give water even today and people visit this fountain in large numbers. After Puliurkurichy, the soldiers brought him to Peruvilai and detained him there for about 7 months, tied to a neem tree. It is there that Devasahayam became friendly with the soldiers and met the Catholic priests, from whom he received Holy Communion. Thanks to Devasahayam's prayer, the gaoler (executioner) whose wife had been without child for a long time fathered a child. From Peruvilai, Devasahayam was taken to the prison at Aralvaimozhi, where condemned criminals were sent to death by the king. It was on the border between the kingdoms of Madurai and Travancore.