

## MOKAMA SHRINE FEAST – 2013

(25<sup>th</sup> of Jan - 3<sup>rd</sup> of Feb., 2013)

### Introduction

The Shrine at Mokama (Patna, Bihar), dedicated to Our Lady of Divine Grace was built in the year 1947. Since then this place has been a holy place attracting devotees of Mother Mary. This is the only pilgrimage centre of the Archdiocese of Patna. Thousands of pilgrims from all over North India come to Mokama, *the abode of Mother* to seek God's blessings and pray through her intercession. The annual pilgrimage of this sacred Shrine is solemnized on the first Sunday of February each year. As a preparation for the feast day celebrations, Nine Days of Novena to Our Lady of Divine Grace, *Mokama Mata* is conducted in the shrine campus; along with Holy Eucharist and rosary. The feast normally is concluded with the main feast day celebrations on the first Sunday of February and a Marian procession (*Yatra*) in which many devotees take part with great devotion, faith and reverence. As usual, this year also the feast and the *yatra* were organized on Sunday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2013.

### Inaugural Day

We began the rosary cum novena on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, 2013 at 4.00 p.m. with a flag hoisting ceremony, done by Fr. Thomas Olickathotty, the dean of Nalanda deanery and Fr. Alwyn D' Souza, S.J. the Parish Priest said the prayers of blessing. Fr. Joseph Velamkunnel S.J. and Mrs. Seraphina Lawrence, one of the parishioners released one pigeon each as a symbolic gesture of promoting peace and harmony through the forth coming nine days of services. After the Holy Mass, we took out a solemn candle light procession in Mokama town. On various prominent places in the town *maha artis* were done by girls to Our Lady of Divine Grace, whose statue was well decorated and taken out in procession in a well decorated vehicle. The members of *Masihi Satsangh Mandali* took lead in conducting prayers and singing *kirtans* (hymns to Mother Mary and God in vernacular languages). Bro. Sadhu Shilanad S.J. was also present for the solemn procession. It was a unique event of this year's celebrations. People of the locality were edified by the faith and the external expression of it. People of other faith stood on pavements and paid reverence to Our Lady of Mokama. One type of *Prasadis* (blessed eatable things) were distributed to devotees on the way. Thus, it was an inspiring experience for all. On all the nine days, the ceremony began with rosary procession starting from the flag post, the faithful went around the shrine reciting rosary and concluded it at the Parish Church which is in the vicinity of the Shrine. The

Holy Mass was organized in the Parish Church. At the end of the Mass, Novena Prayers were recited and special *arti* (incensing) to our Lady of Mokama was done.

### **Nine Days of Novena Prayer, Rosary and Holy Mass**

On the first day, Fr. Alwyn D' Souza S.J. was the main celebrant for liturgy. And on all other days Priests from different parishes of Patna diocese came along with some of their parishioners, hostel students, sisters and catechist to conduct particular day's rosary, Holy Eucharist and Novena Prayer. The parishes which led different day's liturgy were as follows, Barh, Bihar Shariff, Kurji, Fatuwa, Basauni, Barbigaha, Nawada, Jamalpur and Mokama. Every day hundreds of people attended the ceremony and prayed through the intercession of Blessed Mother Mary. The Priests who were the main celebrants for the Holy Eucharist gave inspiring homilies on different themes based on the life of Mother Mary. Fr. Jesu Doss (Bettiah Diocese) and Fr. Nandu Kumar (Patna Archdiocese) who are from Mokama parish celebrated the Eucharist on different novena days. As a sign of gratitude and in view of promoting devotion to Our Lady, a statue of Our Lady of Divine Grace was presented as a memento to all the priests who were the main minister of the Eucharistic celebration on different days.

All the preparations for the feast were done well in advance this year. The entire campus was decorated and the Shrine was illuminated with special lights for nine days. Pilgrims flocked to the campus by previous day morning onwards. Quite a few number of devotees from Jharkhand reached Mokama well ahead of time as there was a *bandh* (strike day) in the state of Jharkhand. And thousands of people participated in the feast day celebrations. There were pilgrims from all the dioceses of Bihar, Jharkhand and from Kolkotta and from many parts of North India. We notice that year by year the number of devotees coming for the feast is increasing in large number and we find it difficult to provide enough facilities for all, especially, staying over night, sanitation facilities, etc. Hope that in the coming years we would be able to find some solutions to hard situations.

### **The Main Feast Day (Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Feb, 2013)**

The main celebrations began with the Holy Mass at 5.30 a.m., which was mainly organized for volunteers; by that time campus was full of devotees and they had already queued up in front of the Shrine to enter and to have a *darsan* (glance) of Mother Mary. Among the devotees there were some people came on foot to Mokama who walked more than hundred kilometers. Some people, as the local custom goes had scrawled down on the ground for about 200 meters, part of their devotion to Our Lady

of Mokama. A team from Araah had come with their orchestra team on the eve of the feast day to sing and dance in front of the Shrine; they had vowed to Our Lady to do it when their wishes were fulfilled. Another youth team came on foot from Kurji Parish, Patna carrying the statue of Our Lady; from Patna, it took 48 hours to reach the pilgrim centre. Seeing the large crowd gathering on the feast day, this year we had organized Eucharistic celebrations in the Parish Church at 6.00 a.m. and at 7.00 a.m. also. Many Marian devotees attended the Eucharistic celebration and went home early.

Many priests, religious, Sisters and Brothers assisted in praying over the devotees, receiving gifts/offerings inside the Shrine, and also to perform a special prayer service (*mundan*) to bless and pray over children. Many pilgrims received the sacrament of reconciliation during the Healing Mass. Devotees attended Holy Mass according to their convenience; had visit to the Shrine and left for their own places.

#### Healing Mass

A special Eucharistic celebration was organized at 9.00 a.m., Fr. Satya Prakash S. J., was the minister of the services. A group of people from Fatima Mata Susamachar Kendra, Patna assisted Fr. Satya Prakash S.J. for the programmes. He preached during the Holy Mass and conducted special healing prayers for the sick and suffering. It was noted that many people of different faiths received healing and blessings from the Lord.

#### Yatra / Marian Procession

Fr. Jose Vadaseery, S.J., the Provincial of Patna Jesuit Province blessed two well decorated chariots (*dollies*) with the statues of Our Lady of Divine Grace and those were taken out in procession at 1.00 p.m. Fr. Devasia Mattathilani, the Vicar General of Patna Archdiocese, Fr. Jose Vadassery S.J., the Provincial of Patna Jesuit Province and eminent people of the locality were in front leading the procession, the popular Yatra which is the significant moment of the celebrations. People have strong faith that by participating in the Yatra, they receive favours through Mother Mary of Mokama and many devotees make their way through the crowd to touch the *dolly* (chariot) and to carry it on their shoulder at least for a short while. During the procession the devotees prayed rosary and sang hymns to Our Lady. Thousands of devotees participated in the procession. The number of devotees was more as this year set apart as "Year of faith"

### Main Eucharistic Celebration

The Main Eucharistic Celebration began at 2.00 p.m. Fr. Devasia Mattathilani, the Vicar General of Patna Archdiocese was the main celebrant. Twelve flower girls welcomed fifty concelebrants in a solemn procession. The theme of the Eucharistic celebration also was "Mother Mary-Model for Our Life of Faith." The melodious singing of the choir under the leadership of Ajay Kumar, Sanjay Kumar and Fr. Nandu Kumar added more devotion to the celebrations. The Holy Mass got over by 4.30 p.m. and people slowly started going away.

All the volunteers especially the parishioners and the parish team of priests and brothers worked hard for the success of the feast and all the related programmes. The SCN Sisters' hard work is appreciated. Youth and the parishioners saw that the parking area and the whole campus were in order which created an atmosphere of prayer and silence. This year we got full co-operation from local police stations with the help of SDO-Barh, ASP-Barh and Mokama Railway Authorities for security and for parking vehicles. They made sure that Marian devotees did not have any difficulty or inconvenience on their way to Shrine. The local print media gave enough coverage of the events and a local T.V. channel gave live telecast of all the main programmes. The parish team consisting of the Parish Priest, Fr. Alwyn D' Souza, S.J., the Co-pastors, Fr. K.P. Dominic, and Fr. Joseph Velamkunnel and the administrator, Bro. Thomas Mannaramattom S.J. worked hard to make the Shrine feast a memorable one for all. The Jesuit novices (eleven) from Lucknow stayed here for ten days and helped out in different works. The SCN Sisters, hostel boys, staff of St. Xavier's School, Co-workers, parish council members, parishioners and the catechist, Vijay Master were of great help in making the feast day a great success. The Parish Priest, Fr. Alwyn D' Souza, S.J. gratefully remembered Fr. Batson, S.J. and Mr. Martine Lesslie for their great contribution-the Shrine of Our Lady of Divine Grace, to Mokama and the whole of North India.

### **Conclusion**

The Parish team, the religious, Priests and Sisters, the Parishioners and all the devotees of Mother of Divine Grace are deeply grateful to Mr. Martine Lesslie and his family members for their constant support. All of us assure our sincere prayers to them. May God grant eternal Peace to all the deceased members of Mr. Martine Lesslie's family. We wish and pray that Our Lady of Divine Grace, *Mokama Mata* may intercede for all her devotees and bring down benign blessings on all in the years to come. Seeking blessings of God and thanking all those who support us in different ways.