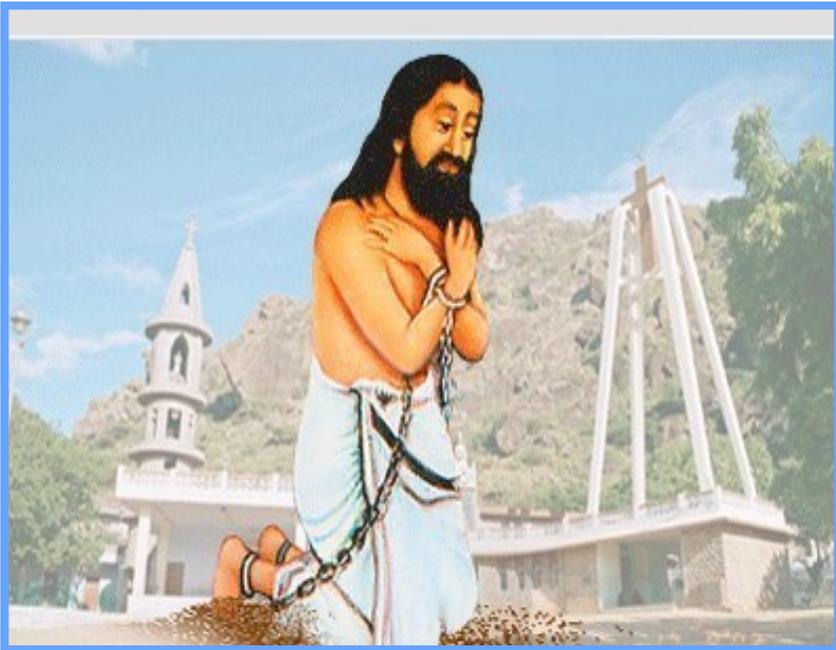


It was at Kattadimali in Kanyakumari district that Devasahayam Pillai died on 14 January 1752. His mortal remains were interred near the altar inside St. Xavier's Church, Kottar, Nagercoil, which is now the diocesan Cathedral.

Since the days of the interment of the mortal remains of Devesahayam Pillai many Christian pilgrims visited his tomb and offered prayers.

He was beatified on 2 December, 2012, and is the first lay person to be elevated to the rank of "Blessed" in India.

\* (excerpted from: nobility.org)



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## **BLESSED DEVASAHAYAM PILLAI OF INDIA**

**Memorial — January 14th**



**His name at birth was Lazar, although he is more widely known by the Tamil and Malayalam translation Devasahayam (meaning God's help).**

## Blessed Devasahayam Pillai

\*Devasahayam Pillai (named Neelakanda Pillai at birth) was born into an affluent Nair-caste family at Nattalam in the present-day Kanyakumari District, on 23 April 1712. His father Vasudevan Namboodiri, hailed from Kayamkulam, in present-day Kerala state, and was working as a priest at Sri Adi Kesava Perumal temple in Thiruvattar in present-day Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. His mother Devaki Amma hailed from Thiruvattar in Kanyakumari District. In the Nair matriarchal traditions of the day, Devasahayam Pillai was raised by his maternal uncle, and was inculcated with Hindu beliefs and traditions early on.

Devasahayam's family had much influence in the royal palace of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, king of Travancore, and Devasahayam went into the service of the royal palace as a young man. His capabilities and enthusiasm did not go unnoticed in the palace, as he was soon put in charge of state affairs as an official under Ramayyan Dalawa, the Dewan of Travancore.

In 1741, Captain Eustachius De Lannoy, a Dutch naval commander, was sent on command of a Dutch naval expedition by the Dutch East India Company to capture Colachel, a port under the control of Travancore, and establish a trading post there. In the battle (Battle of Colachel) that followed between the Travancore forces and De Lannoy's men, the Dutch forces were defeated and the men were either killed or captured. Eustachius De Lannoy, his assistant Donadi and a few other Dutch soldiers were captured and imprisoned.

De Lannoy and the Dutchmen were later pardoned by the king, on condition that they serve in the Travancore army. De Lannoy later earned the trust of the king and went on to become the commander of the Travancore armed forces, winning many battles and annexing various neighbouring territories to Travancore.

It was during their influential roles under the King of Travancore that Devasahayam Pillai and De Lannoy became well acquainted. De Lannoy's Christian faith interested Devasahayam and De Lannoy enlightened him on the faith, leading to his conversion in 1745.

On Devasahayam's acceptance of the Christian faith, he was baptized at the Roman Catholic Latin Rite church at Vadakkankulam village (in the present Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu), where the Jesuits had a mission under Rev. Fr. R. Bouttari Italus S.J. Neelakanda Pillai, his name at birth, was then changed to Lazar, although he is more widely known by the Tamil & Malayalam translation Devasahayam (meaning God's help). Pillai was married by this time to Bargavi Ammal of Travancore. She was also persuaded and converted to Christianity by her husband. His wife was given the baptismal name of Gnanapoo Ammaal (equivalent to Theresa in Tamil & Malayalam). Fearing reprisal in Travancore against her religious conversion, she chose to be a migrated-resident of this village. Some of Devasahayam Pillai's immediate family members also received baptism later, after being converted to Christianity.

Church chroniclers say that the Brahmin chief priest of the kingdom, the feudal lords, members of the royal household and the Nair community brought false charges on Devasahayam to the Dewan, Ramayyan Dalawa. Pillai was divested of his portfolio in the administration and was later accused of treason and of divulging state secrets to rivals and Europeans. He was later arrested and tortured for three years. After his execution orders were passed, he was initially ordered to be taken on a buffalo to Kuzhumaikkad, where he would be executed. But the original Royal order was altered later to finally to be taken on a buffalo back to Aralvaimozhy border for a meaningful punishment of banishment after carrying out a series of tortures by ten different karyakkars on the advice of the ministers.

Devasahayam Pillai was marched from Padmanabhapuram Palace to Aralvaimozhy by soldiers, over the period of a few days. Pillai was treated like a cruel criminal and as was customary in those days for very cruel criminals, his body was painted with red and black spots, and was intentionally marched through populated areas, sitting backward on top of a water buffalo (the mythical vehicle or vahana of Yama, the lord of death in Hinduism) through the streets of South Travancore. As a method of torture, he was beaten everyday with eighty stripes, pepper rubbed in his wounds and nostrils, exposed to the sun, and given only stagnant water to drink.

While halting at Puliyoorkurichi, not far away from the Padmanabhapuram Palace of the Travancore king, it is believed by Christians that God quenched his thirst by letting water gush through a small hole on a rock, the very place where he knelt to pray. The water hole is still found in the compound of a church at Puliyoorkurichi, about 15 km from Nagercoil.

It is also believed that the leaves of a neem (Margosa) tree in the village of Peruvilai, to which he had been tied while being marched to Aralvaimozhy, cured illnesses of sick people in the village and around. Many more miracles are attributed to Devasahayam Pillai.

In 1752, the original order of the King and his Dewan was to deport him from Travancore, into the Pandya country, at Aralvaimozhy. He was let off in the forested hills near Aralvaimozhy. There, he is believed to have begun deep meditations, and the people from the adjacent villages began visiting the holy man. Christian sources allege that at this time, high caste Hindus plotted to do away with Devasahayam.

The soldiers went up the forested hills and tried to shoot Devasahayam, but were unable to fire; after which he took the gun in his hands, blessed it and gave it back to the soldiers to shoot him to death, if they wished to. The soldiers took the gun back and fired at him five times. His body was then carelessly thrown out near the foothills at Kattadimalai.