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## **Sermon** **on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2019** **at Ranchi, Jharkhand, India**

My dear brothers and sisters!

In these days, when we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the independence and autonomy of the Evangelical Lutheran Gossner Church in India, we think back gratefully – and we are looking hopefully into the future.

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We think with gratitude to the Father of the Gossner Mission, Johannes Evangelista Gossner. He has inspired countless people to embark with body and soul on the path of following Jesus Christ. Father Gossner has also written many books in which he invited people in Germany to believe in the Lord Jesus, encouraged them in their hope and comforted them in their suffering. His probably most famous book is called „Schatzkästchen“ which means „Little Treasure Box“, in which he has laid down short biblical reflections for each individual day of the year.

When the Evangelical Lutheran Gossner Church became independent, our revered father Gossner had of course already died many years ago. Nevertheless I found it exciting to read once what Father Gossner had noted for the Day of Independence of the Indian Gossner Church. As you may know, the actual day of the 100th anniversary is July 10th. This day is solemnly celebrated by our brothers and sisters of the North West Gossner Church. As German brothers and sisters of all Indian Gossner Christians we will participate in three days, full of hope for an early unity of all Gossner Christians of India, before in October a much larger delegation from Germany takes part in the celebrations of the GELC.

Now then: What does Father Gossner write for 10 July in his famous book „Little treasure box“?

He opens his thoughts with two quotations from Holy Scripture, beginning with Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6: **„Those who sow in tears / will reap in songs of joy. / He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, / will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.“** And the second Bible passage comes from Revelation, chapter 7, verses 13 and 14: **„These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?“ - „These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.“**

Inspired by these biblical words, Father Gossner wrote for his Christian companions then and now: "Without sowing tears no harvest of joy. Without great tribulation no great joy; without cross no crown; without battle no victory. Without labor there is no birth. Not as if we had to earn joy and happiness through suffering, the cross and struggle. Not at all! Ask the apostle Paul, who also speaks about it: although we become righteous and blessed by

grace and without merit of works, we cannot enter the kingdom of God without tribulation, persecution and great sufferings. ... Who would know that you love your Saviour if you did not suffer for him and wanted to walk into heaven on roses instead? Ask all Christians of all centuries whether they did not suffer much and sow with tears before they could reap with joy. And as John the seer, who saw further than I and you, tells us in Revelation, there is nothing else to be said in the place where the Lamb and his entourage walk in white garments than that all who are clothed there in white were burned quite black by the heat of the tribulation here; that all who entered into the glory there had to enter into the joy of their Lord through thorns and rough ways. If you want these contractions, you will be blessed by grace and will lay down your crown before the Lamb.“

Hallelujah, I would like to say. Hallelujah, dear Father Gossner, you are giving us guidance, then and now.

(2)

Certainly in 1919 it was very difficult for the Indian Gossner Christians to find their way into independence and autonomy. Surely there was a lot of praying, but also crying and mourning. The German missionaries of the Gossner Mission were not allowed to stay any longer in the country and to engage themselves locally for their Indian fellow brothers and sisters – so it wanted the colonial power at that time. Certainly it was a difficult way not to join the Anglican Church but to preserve one's own Protestant tradition - and one's own Christian freedom too. Freedom from political power – that was the difficult, thorny path of which Father Gossner had spoken. *Without tears no harvest of joy. Without great tribulation no great joy; without cross no crown; without struggle no victory.* But indeed, the thorny way to independence and autonomy was under God's blessing, for it was a way to freedom. Because our Lord Jesus Christ gives freedom to all people: freedom from sin and guilt - and because our God wants to free all people with body and soul, the way of our Indian brothers and sisters had to be blessed. And even if the way was always rocky and thorny, it became a happy way in view of the whole. This year we can celebrate together, German and Indian Gossner Christians together. The decision for the stony, thorny way 100 years ago was the right one. On this path the Gossner Mission in Germany has never forgotten its Indian brothers and sisters. For 100 years we lived side by side and visited each other and prayed for each other and tried to support each other as best we could. The unity seemed broken – but it was God's good will that we could live our Christian togetherness in new ways. God also blessed this togetherness. We are also infinitely grateful for this blessing in this anniversary year.

(3)

But the stony and thorny way is not over yet. This cannot be any different as long as we as Christians are on this earth. We are faced with new challenges. *Without sowing tears there is no harvest of joy. Without great tribulation no great joy; without cross no crown; without struggle no victory.* There are political and social challenges that give us Christians many thorns on our way. Everywhere in the world, in Germany and also in India. They are different challenges than 100 years ago. And yet the year 2019 is also about freedom from political and social paternalism. In the spirit of Jesus Christ, Christians are free and independent people who stand up for other people, for justice, peace and reconciliation in society. This way may be rocky and thorny, but in the end it is a blessed way, because our Lord Jesus Christ leads and guides us on this way.

The question of Christian unity also remains a great challenge in this Jubilee Year 2019. This time I do not mean unity between German and Indian Christians. Because I am sure that nothing and nobody can separate us from each other. German and Indian Gossner Christians belong to each other. As it was 100 years ago, it is still the same today, and it will be the same in the future.

No, my dear brothers and sisters, this time it is not about unity between German and Indian Christians. It hurts me to have to talk about it, and it hurts my soul not to be able to remain silent at this point: It is about unity among the Indian Gossner Christians. It makes me very sad that there is

no united Evangelical Lutheran Gossner Church in India in the jubilee year of independence and autonomy. It makes me very sad that the wonderful jubilee which the God of Freedom gives us cannot be celebrated in a united Evangelical Lutheran Gossner Church on a common date. And please don't believe that only I as Vice-President of the Gossner Mission am very, very sad about it - all Gossner Christians in Germany are very, very sad about that.

Please don't get me wrong: It is not about accusing anyone. But perhaps you will understand that we in our deep solidarity with all Gossner Christians cannot understand that this rift is going through the Indian partner church and that this rift is still not healed after so many years. No, it is not about accusing anyone. It is only a matter of sharing our sadness with you.

We suffer with all the Christians among you who suffer from the inner conflict.

We long with all Christians among you for healing and reconciliation and unity.

We hope with all Christians among you who hope for a new togetherness and for a cordial unity among all Gossner Christians.

We know: The way to this cordial unity and to a new, reconciled togetherness is stony and thorny. We also know that you began this journey years ago. But we fear that the stones on this path have been too big and the thorns too piercing. We fear that you may have lost the courage to continue along this path.

That is why I call it to you all, dear brothers and sisters, and if you cannot listen to my voice, please listen to the voice of our revered Father Gossner: *Without tears no harvest of joy. Without great tribulation no great joy; without cross no crown; without battle no victory.* So I ask you as Father Gossner himself would have asked you:

Notice the tears, your own tears and the tears of your brothers and sisters in your sister church, so that together you can bring in the harvest of joy of reconciled unity!

Notice the tribulation, your own tribulation and the tribulation of your brothers and sisters in your sister church, so that together you may experience the great joy of a new, blessed togetherness!

Take the cross upon you, and if necessary: deny yourselves, deny your demands and your own intentions, take this cross upon you to experience a wonderful resurrection together with the brothers and sisters of your sister Church: the Resurrection into the bright light of a united Evangelical Lutheran Gossner Church of Gossner, a divine sign for the whole torn society of your country, a sign for all the Christians and for all the other religions in your country, a sign of the great love of our God!

This is what we German Gossner Christians wish you in the year of the Jubilee 2019. This is what our common missionary father Johannes Evangelista Gossner calls us to do today. And in his words we hear the voice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

His Spirit of unity, His love for one another and His eternal peace be with you all! Amen.