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*May Christ's coming
fill your hearts
and your homes
with his love, his peace
and his joy
throughout this season
and
the whole year
through.*

Cover: **The Nativity**
by Caravaggio



From The Editor's Desk

The Christmas Star

When I was a young boy, Christmas Eve was a whirlwind of intense excitement. In the morning the house had to be cleaned from top to bottom, shoes had to be polished, clean clothes laid out, the crib had to be finished and final touches put to the decorations.

In the afternoon while the elders took their snooze there was always a breathless excursion into town for last-minute presents, and forays to the local shop for various odds and ends that had been forgotten. Then we tiptoed home and there was the quiet wrapping of gifts. Everything and everyone seemed to hold our collective breath. There was too much excitement...and the house grew generally quiet.

As evening settled in and darkness tightened its grip, a kind of quiet calm seemed to descend over all of us. There was nothing more to do now except to wait patiently and, of course, it was time to switch on the light of the Christmas Star on the roof. Even though it was just the flicking of a switch, for us it was a special moment, because in the gathering darkness it reminded us what Christmas was all about. As the golden light in the tissue-papered star cast its warm glow just enough to light up the garden and a bit of the roof it was comforting and gently soothing. I have always loved that custom and I think it is one of the richest of our Christmas symbols.

Later in the night before we left for the midnight Mass I would love to slip outdoors by myself and walk around the silent neighbourhood by myself. There were quite a few houses with stars above their doors. They seemed rather dim yet they shone boldly in the gloom. They became a kind of silent prayer for me. They spoke of the *"light that shines in the darkness and which no darkness can overpower."* They spoke of the light of faith that gently consoles and beckons. They spoke of hospitality and safety: if Mary and Joseph arrived in our neighbourhood that Christmas night, they would not be consigned to a stable. There would be shelter and a warm welcome for them in our homes.

Yes, I loved those Christmas stars shining over the doors of our homes, and I still do. And yet, somehow, I find them less comforting now than I did then. Today I cannot help thinking of all those for whom the Christmas Star seems to be a mockery: the homeless, travellers who live in squalor by the roadside; the homeless men, women and children who end up, for whatever reason, on the streets of our cities with nowhere to go; the marginalized and those who experience disdain or rejection or exploitation.

I hope we hold on to the custom of the lighting up our Christmas Stars outside our homes on Christmas Eve. And may the Light that comes to us at Christmas dispel all the darkness of selfishness and insensitivity that lurks in our hearts.

Fr. Ian Douulton sdb

12. A SMILE MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss

While travelling along the highway, the red light forced a motorist to pull up hastily at a busy intersection. An obviously homeless man attempted to cross the road in front of several stationary vehicles. Being the first in line and engrossed in the project ahead of him the driver vaguely noticed that the tramp had turned toward him, pointing to the corners of his mouth, making a universally understood gesture indicating *smile*. Getting no intelligible response, he just stood and stared hard at the driver. With a snicker of someone who had been caught being overly but needlessly pensive, the surprised driver flashed back a smile, which the vagrant recognized as acknowledging the message. He quickly moved on to the next few vehicles repeating his motions. These seemed to need much more prodding, so Mr. Smiley pointed up to the sky, circling his finger in a 'heavenly' gesture, then stretched out his arms to indicate a worldwide expectation, and went through the smile routine again. Finally, just in time for the light to change, they got it and beamed a soulful smile. He deftly darted out of the way and all moved on, some with a smile on their faces that lasted longer than the red light.

Some hours later when the first driver happened to circle around, returning to the same intersection, he witnessed Mr. Smiley's performance for the second time, and marveled as this relentless smile-inducer scrambled across not missing too many in the short span

of time at his disposal! Meticulously he tended to the frowning drivers and passengers of each vehicle, not satisfied until they shook off their dismal looks and simply smiled heartily. Although he had no apparent way of gauging the quality of happiness he imparted to each of his startled customers, he could at least quantify the outward response - the smile was his measure of success. He never seemed to ask for alms, yet his mime motions communicated more than expensive therapists, mega ad campaigns, or a pile of self-help books ever could: 'smile, life is short, be happy, the world has a beautiful side to it!' He certainly invited them to think about what life is all about! Would his 'apostolate' have made a difference to anyone at all? Would anyone have seen him as an apostle of deeply spiritual values, or would he have been just dismissed as a silly old clown who had nothing better to do?

Greatest Reason to Smile

Anyone who believes in St. Paul's observation, "*if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain*" (1 Cor 15:14), would have the highest reason to smile not just occasionally, but all the time. Christ's unique rising from the dead offers us the possibility of sharing in the new divine life that he obtained. Through his dying-rising, he has conquered all sin and death and so there is nothing in this world that can keep us depressed and mournful. St. Paul

reminds us: *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us,"* (Rom 8:18) and further, *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"* (Rom 8:31-35).

So, there is absolutely nothing that can make a dynamic Christian frown or be anxious or worried. God holds us lovingly in the palm of his hands assuring us, *"I will never forget you... even if a mother forgets the child of her womb, I will never forget you..."* (Isa 49:15-16) *"I know what plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for your harm... I mean to give you a future with hope!"* (Jer 29:11-12). And yet, how many hours do we not spend each day in needless worry and anxiety? We really should have someone to remind us constantly that God is at our side. He guides and protects us as a shepherd guards his flock. In the Gospels, Jesus takes this assurance further when he says: *'Not a hair of your head falls without My father permitting it'* (Lk 21:18).

In fact, the true Christian who has interiorized the message and especially the promises God makes in the Bible, has every reason to trust God, no matter what storms of destructive evil engulf him. Rather, the more difficult the predicament the greater should be his smile, because this very critical calamity

provides God with the opportunity to show his infinite power and his absolute fidelity to his promises – he will never go back on his word that he loves each of us with an everlasting love. At times, of course, he will dispel the darkness surrounding us in his own time and in his own way – and to us this might seem as if he has abandoned us. But if and when we can remain tranquil and peaceful, he will give us the very best in his own marvelous way!

Eucharistic Reminder

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we are reminded of the Covenant that God wishes to make with us. For entry into this covenant the only condition he places before us is: *"If you will obey..."* And the reason for this is quite understandable. If God is to save us, we have to fall in line with his plan; we have to become like clay in the hands of a potter – soft and pliable! We cannot expect to do whatever we think is best, especially when our way of thinking is diametrically opposed to his (Isa 55:8-13) and also be perfectly happy and contented. Once we learn from experience that God's ways are, in fact, the best, there is no occasion on which we cannot be truly happy – from deep within.

Our Eucharists further assure us repeatedly that God is on our side and everything he ordains for us is for our good. Even when Israel had sinned and brought upon itself the punishment of exile, it is God who took the initiative to bring them back. In fact, God is the one who ordered the foreign nations to prepare a straight path for him in the wilderness so that his people who have already suffered twice as much as

necessary, can return without any further obstacles and hassles (Isa 40:1-10). A sad Christian, therefore, is truly a sorry spectacle! Now, if there is any situation in which this gladness should manifest itself effusively, it is while we **celebrate** Eucharist. Yet, that is the one place where most Christians wear such a mournful look – their singing and praying is so drab and lifeless that one almost feels that rather than having a celebration it is a funeral they are engaged in! In fact, most Christians today would talk of Eucharist as a celebration while internally regarding it more as a ‘sacrifice’ that will bring us the much-awaited forgiveness of sin. Even when they are instructed that God has already forgiven us all our sins in the dying-rising of Jesus (see Lk. 4:16-22 – the jubilee year in which God unilaterally forgives all the sins of his people!), they find it hard to believe and act upon.

Paul’s words are a challenge to all of us who believe in and celebrate Christ’s resurrection: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”* (Phil 4:4). Even if we do not imitate this tramp and his strange ways of spreading cheer, could we consciously seek to make our lives and especially our Eucharist more happy and optimistic? What is more, could we assist in making others also cheerful around us?

True Inner Happiness

The smile adorning our faces should not be something merely put on for the occasion – an external mask while internally we are riddled with fears, anxieties and deep disappointments. The Resurrection of Christ truly assures us that “... all things work together for good for those who love God, who

are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Much more will this be true when we sincerely seek to do God’s will to the best of our ability. This much is clear that when we *“strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today”* (Mt 6:33 - 7:1).

What a powerful witness would we Christians not be able to give if we could be genuinely happy and contented all through the day. And since happiness is much more infectious than its counterpart, it would certainly spread far and wide like wildfire. Millions of people await this joyful message of Jesus – they may have heard it, but still wait to be reassured about how true it is from the lives of those who profess to follow him: ‘Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your father’s good pleasure to grant you the kingdom!’ Christians do not have to wait at street intersections or special places to remind people to smile; wherever they are, they could be ambassadors of the risen life of Jesus who claims: ‘Behold, I make all things new – the old has passed away’ and ‘they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’ (Rev 7:15 - 8:1). ◻

*“Be a light, not a judge,
A model and not a critic,
A part of the solution and not a part
of the problem!”*



"GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS, O GOD!"

Fr. Romulo Noronha, sdb

Shrine incharge of "Our Lady of Fatima" Panjim &
Procurator of the Konkan Province of the Salesians of Don Bosco

I hail from the beautiful village of Neura, Goa. We are the Noronhas. Dad was a doctor, mum housewife and we were a bubbling group of 12 children, six girls and six boys, with me being sixth in the family.

I remember being very mischievous and was often pulled up for not studying though I would do okay in my exams!

My dad met Fr. Carreneo (the Rector at Don Bosco Panjim) and made arrangements for me to join the boarding. Before leaving for Panjim, my Parish Priest met me and exclaimed, "So you are going to Don Bosco Panjim to become a Priest". I was a bit puzzled, I had not thought about that. Then he said in Portuguese, "*Quem vai contra a sua vocação risca a sua salvação*", ie "If you go against your vocation, you are risking your salvation". It's funny; I still remember this after so many years.

In Panjim Fr. Carreneo was my Rector, Fr. Lobo was the headmaster and incharge of the group of Latinist's (aspirants for Religious Life). These two Salesians were my first inspiration.

After my SSC, I naturally made my Novitiate in Manique (Estoril), Portugal. The new ambience was a big challenge because it was a constant struggle keeping pace with the talented Novices from Portugal. The next year, 1961, was very significant in my life. Goa was liberated from the Portuguese while I was studying philosophy. We were offered a choice either to go back to India or to join the Portuguese Province. I was in a dilemma!

In came Fr. Pianazzi and I met him and shared my confusion about the



delicate choice to be made. He listened attentively, asked about my studies, languages known, and places I'd been to and concluded emphatically, "*You don't belong to Portugal, you belong to India*". This cleared all my doubts. What a relief! Such is the work of Providence!

I came to Panjim for practical training and Yercaud (Tamil Naidu), to complete my studies in Philosophy. I completed my theology studies in Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore.

I am convinced that God's works are marvelous. He loves us and has a special plan for each one of us. **We need to trust God and be daring.** All He wants is for us to respond in faith.

God has blessed my family. Two of my sisters (of happy memory) were nuns; my younger brother is a missionary in Africa 'with the Little Brothers of Jesus', Charles de Focauld congregation, and the rest of the family members are doing fine. "Great is your faithfulness oh God! □

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God Speaks In Scripture

By Michael Paul Gallagher

PRAYER IS FOR YOU (6)

Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your letter. Don't worry - you're not alone in your 'shameful confession' that you are 'pretty ignorant' about the Bible. As you say, it wasn't 'the thing' when you were at school. But now various passages in the leaflet at Mass have whetted your appetite. How can you read them in a personal and prayerful way? That's an important question.

First of all, I don't think it's a matter of becoming more expert by reading much *about* the Bible. Something in that direction could be a great help, but it's not the key to what you are asking. Let's start from what you know: those passages read at Sunday Mass. Yes, it is possible to develop a way of listening to God speaking to you in the Scriptures.

God Speaks First

Do you really believe that last sentence? Or better, have you ever experienced the reality that God communicates to us? Because that's *the* springboard for praying with Scripture. God speaks to you first. Prayer is your receiving and responding. Approached in this way, prayer is much easier than if you imagine that it all depends on your efforts, your words, your trying to pay attention, and so on.

With Scripture the conversation starts from God. It's like a friend greeting you from across the street. The friend starts the contact; you didn't even notice that he or she was there.

Resting With a Phrase

Let's see how some passages used in the Sunday readings could help you in personal prayer. Take, for instance, the reading from Isaiah. It has this marvellous image of how God looks after us: 'As a mother comforts a child I shall comfort you' (Is 66:13).

If you want to deepen your personal prayer, Patrick, there is one almost infallible way. Have the courage to rest with a phrase like this. Repeat it to yourself quietly. You can read the words quickly, but if it is to reach more deeply you must take time. Then gradually the wonder of it can sink in. The image of the mother caring for a child in need of consolation is one of the most powerful in the world. But here it is about God...

Asking Jesus Questions

Then there is the famous parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). The trouble is that we know it too well. We are like the man who asked Jesus, 'Who is my



neighbour?' He knew the law by heart, but he didn't know it in the heart. The story Jesus told shook him into realizing the meaning of those words he had recited about love. Prayer has the same aim: of moving from surface contact with Christian ideals to letting them become powerful and personal in the presence of Jesus.

So ask Jesus the same question. Who is *your* neighbour? Who needs your care now? And pause to let his story have an impact on you. It's a shock how the officially religious people saw, but pretended not to see, the wounded man; and then this hated outsider turns out to be the hero. Take your time. Ponder what roads you are asked to cross, or what calls you tend to avoid. Don't let it sink into blaming yourself for 'not being better to people'. Let Jesus guide you to the courage you need in caring for someone.

There is another Old Testament passage that comments on this parable, so to speak (Deut 30:10-14). It says that what God wants of you is far from impossible, or distant. Instead, it is near to you, in your heart, and you have only to do it. We all usually want to be more caring. But in prayer Christ sets us free from just wishful thinking, and we find the imagination and courage to live it.

Entering the Scene

Another very practical reading after the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke is the story of Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42). Don't they seem to contradict one another? One says: be active and cross the road to help. The other stresses: sit down and listen, and don't fuss in the

kitchen.

Perhaps there is something linking these passages for a purpose. The parable is about our dealings with people in need. The episode in the house of his friends has the focus on Jesus. Others need us; we need Jesus. There are two loves at the heart of Christianity. One is active, the other passive.

So Martha's mistake was not in her generosity, but over the identity of her visitor. Mary saw that another wavelength was needed, one of quiet receiving rather than of busy serving.

To pray a passage like that some people find it helpful to envisage the scene, even to imagine themselves in the two roles. We all fuss at times, and yet we all have a 'still point', as the poet T. S. Eliot called it. Gradually, as you pray, your attention can turn to Jesus in the scene, and then little by little you can enter that silence of adoration that is the attitude of Mary.

Waiting On God Who Comes

St Paul in his letter to the Colossians (1:24-28) puts words on what Mary might be realizing in that silence. He talks of something hidden for ages but now revealed: Christ is in you, your hope of glory. Just that phrase could be an anchor for wonder and prayer.

In the Old Testament there is a story about a visit from God (Gen 18:1-10). Abraham welcomes three strangers, not realizing that this is how God comes to him.

In prayer God does come to you. Have the courage to rest with a word or a phrase because the words of Scripture, quietly received in the heart, will help you. □

walking with the Church



The Three Masses At Christmas

by Edward McNamara

Q: *When, where and why did the practice of Midnight Mass begin?*

A: Like many liturgical practices the origin of the three Christmas Masses (midnight, dawn and during the day) is not totally certain.

Christmas as a liturgical feast falling on Dec. 25 originated at Rome, in or around the year 330. It is very likely that the feast was first celebrated in the newly completed basilica of St. Peter.

From Rome the celebration of Christmas then slowly spread eastward and little by little was incorporated into the liturgical calendar of the principal Churches. Some of these Churches had celebrated Christ's birth on Jan. 6 and they have continued to give more importance to this date even after accepting Dec. 25.

During this period the Church at Jerusalem had established some particular customs.

Egeria, a woman who made a long pilgrimage to the Holy Land from 381 to 384, described how the Christians of Jerusalem commemorated the Christmas mystery on Jan. 6 with a midnight vigil at Bethlehem, followed by a torchlight procession to Jerusalem arriving at dawn to the Church of the Resurrection (Anastasis in Greek).

Fifty years later at Rome, Pope Sixtus III (432-440) decided to honour the proclamation of Mary's

divine maternity at the Council of Ephesus (431) by building the great basilica of St. Mary Major on the Esquiline hill.

Among other elements Sixtus III built a chapel that reproduced the cave of Bethlehem. (The relics of the Crib, still found today in St. Mary Major's, were not placed in this chapel until the seventh century.) Sixtus III, probably inspired by the custom of the midnight vigil held in Jerusalem, instituted the practice of a midnight Mass in this grotto-like oratory.

In Rome the custom already existed of commemorating important feasts with two distinct offices, one held at night and the other toward dawn. It is easy to see how the simple feast initiated by Sixtus III at St. Mary Major's increased in importance and developed. The first development was that the oldest Christmas office, which was sung at St. Peter's, began to be also held at St. Mary Major's.

A further development occurred around 550. The Pope, and some members of the curia, celebrated a second Mass sometime before dawn at the Church of St. Anastasia.

At the beginning this happened because St. Anastasia's feast day also fell on Dec. 25 and had nothing to do with Christmas. Later however, probably inspired by the

practice of the dawn Mass in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, and coupled with the similarity of the name Anastasia, this celebration was transformed into a second Christmas Mass.

After this almost-private Mass, the Pope would go directly to St. Peter's where a large assembly of faithful awaited the solemn dawn office of Christmas. This custom continued at least until the time of Pope Gregory VII (died 1085).

Initially the privilege of three celebrations at Christmas was reserved to the Pope. The first evidence we have of a single priest celebrating the three Masses is from the Monastery of Cluny before the year 1156.

All priests may still avail of this privilege and celebrate three Masses on Christmas Day provided they respect the proper hours. The first Mass is celebrated at Midnight (the vigil Mass of Dec. 24 does not count as the first of the three Masses), the second at dawn and the third at some time during the day.

A Further Clarification

A reader from Singapore asked: *"In my archdiocese, the practice has become widespread that parishes would celebrate two Christmas 'midnight' Masses: once earlier in the evening of Dec. 24 around 9 p.m., and another at midnight. Is this good liturgical practice?"*

Since the missal provides a vigil Mass to be celebrated on the evening of Dec. 24 it makes little sense to anticipate the formulas and readings of Midnight Mass which presume that Christmas day has already begun.

The rubric for the vigil Mass clearly states that it is celebrated in the afternoon of Dec. 24, before or after Evening Prayer I of Christmas.

The Midnight Mass by its very name starts around midnight.

The slight differences in focus can be seen for example by the entrance antiphons.

The vigil Mass says: "Today you will know that the Lord is coming to save us, and in the morning you will see his glory."

Midnight Mass goes: "Good News and great joy to all the world, today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord."

As assisting at either Mass fulfills the Christmas obligation, and both Masses have exactly the same external elements, differing only in formulas and readings, it is not good practice to anticipate the formulas of Midnight Mass to an earlier hour.

Christmastide Custom

In conclusion I would like to share with our readers the practice of a Sydney, Australia, parish led by the Conventual Franciscans. This initiative, described by a reader, might be of help in other countries as well:

"On the feast of the Holy Innocents, the parish celebrated with the faithful, the annual Mass of the Holy Innocents. The main celebrant of the Mass was the Most Reverend Anthony Fisher, O.P., episcopal vicar for life and health for the Archdiocese of Sydney. The Mass is held annually on this date, for the reparation of the sin of abortion and sanctity of human life.

"Within the friary grounds, the Conventual Franciscan friars have established a Shrine for the Unborn. For the past 12 years, every month the faithful have gathered here for a Mass dedicated to the reparation of the sin of abortion and the sanctity of human life. This is preceded with 14 hours of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament." □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. THOMAS BECKET (DECEMBER 29) 'IN THE NAME OF GOD ALMIGHTY!'

by Mario Scudu (T/A I.D.)

As we come to the end of the year we celebrate the feast day in honour of St. Thomas Becket, an Englishman, the King's chancellor (number two in the realm) who was a bishop of the Church and a martyr. There is no particular reason that at the end of the year we must celebrate the feast of a martyr, but every now and again it is good to remember that one of our brothers or sisters not only lived the Faith but also died for it. From the first centuries of the Church up to our present time there have been martyrs – witnesses for the Faith. Our Faith assures us that the “great company” mentioned in the Letter to the Hebrews always assists us, reminding us by their example and encouraging to make our way towards the heavenly city, that is, toward God.

Thomas Becket too was one such witness who had his fair share of suffering because of the Faith he professed, yet he persevered to the very end by shedding his own blood. He is a martyr of the Church and a witness of courage and conviction in the face of overbearing, political power and

pressure.

Thomas a Statesman

Thomas was born in London in 1118 to Gilbert and Matilda both middle class citizens of Norman stock. Unfortunately on their death he was left penniless and so was compelled to work for some years. He received a brilliant education in civil and canon Law from Merton Priory in Surrey. Later he took to studying law first at Auxerre and later at Bologna.

He formed part of the group who assisted Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury and this position took him to Rome on several occasions to carry out important and delicate missions.

In 1154 he was made archdeacon of the diocese and in 1155 the new king Henry II appointed him chancellor of the realm. By now he had reached the pinnacle of his career: he was the number 2 after the king besides this he was also bound to the king in a bond of sincere friendship and collaboration.

Thomas found it very easy to work in his new appointment and he gladly wielded great power

that inevitably brought with it many honours, privileges, luxury, comfort and pleasure. He was an excellent falconer and never refused an invitation to go hunting. He was proficient in the use of weapons too.

Thomas was generous in entertaining people (his position demanded it), but he even entertained the poor and the disadvantaged of society. Being truly an influential person and powerful he laboured competently to restore total sovereignty to Henry, King of England. His power had been compromised by Stephen of Blois the previous monarch. In this endeavour he was truly the right-hand of the king; the true restorer of the monarchy but this was done not without attracting to himself inevitable criticism even from contemporary churchmen.

In 1161 Archbishop Theobald died and King Henry, so as to put an end to the Church's resistance to his royal rights and privileges of the previous centuries he appointed his chancellor Thomas to the see. In the whole kingdom who was more suited than he? Before such a powerful sponsor could he refuse? In fact, Thomas said to him: **"If God permits me to become the Archbishop of Canterbury I would lose your majesty's favour and affection and you would grow to hate me since your ways are directed to jeopardize the rights of the Church and I am afraid that one day you will ask me to do something that I would have to refuse and envious elements would not hesitate to use this to cause a conflict between us."** Prophetic words! But King Henry

did not give any credence to this but only insisted all the more. Thomas declined this royal invitation till the Apostolic Nuncio Henry of Pisa intervened and convinced him to accept this appointment as the Bishop of Canterbury.

Thomas, A Man of the Church

His first act was to move his see from London to Canterbury. Thus began a concrete and very visible gesture signaling his new mission and a real change. It was brave and it was absolute. He had now become a man of the Church and so no more a man of power in the eyes of the world. It was not just a simple shifting but a very deep commitment. He wanted to represent Jesus Christ as shepherd of his flock and he wanted to resemble Him as much as possible in his daily life.

He was sober in food and dress and given to prayer and



meditation on Holy Scripture everyday. He distributed alms to the poor more than his predecessor did. He visited the sick in hospitals and from the time of his appointment he lived a monastic life.

Very soon conflicts between him and the king began to surface. The occasion was the Constitution of Clarendon. It was an important chapter in English history. What did it consist in? It was the attempt to codify the ancient customs and the customs of the realm that were sometimes contrary to law and it curtailed freedom and independence. The polemic that arose was of a juridical nature: the archbishop defended the position of the Church according to Canon Law. The king and his jurists made reference to feudal customs that would benefit the power of the king (the birth of civil rights). These Constitutions can also be considered as the first legal declaration of Common Law. At first Thomas was conciliatory but then he learned the details (the devil is in the details) and he vehemently rejected it: **"In the name of God almighty, I will not sign this!"** It was a declaration of hostility against the king and the beginning of a confrontation between the two of them. Help finally arrived from Rome: Pope Alexander III rejected the proceedings of Clarendon and pleaded with Thomas to hand in his resignation rather than continue. During the negotiations between the pope and the king Thomas was a guest at a Cistercian monastery and later of the king of France. His stay abroad (which was really an exile)

lasted about six years.

When he returned to Canterbury he was warmly welcomed by the people but not by the king and his court. By now he had become an enemy. One of the historians of the time is purported to have said that the King exclaimed: *"What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and brought up in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born cleric?"* His exact words are not known, however they were interpreted by four of the king's knights as a license to eliminate him. They left for Canterbury to seek a final solution to the confrontation. They entered the church shouting loudly: "Where is Thomas the traitor? He replied: "Here I am, but I am not a traitor, on the contrary, I am a bishop and a priest of God." He was then brutally stabbed to death. He was murdered in the cathedral (the episode was the inspiration to many literary works and among the most famous was T. S. Eliot's *"Murder in the Cathedral"*). The horrendous news quickly spread all over Europe. King Henry II was deeply saddened and fasted for many days out of sincere regret and grief. **"Thomas had not lived like a saint, but he died like one, a man of many facets who sought glory, but finally found it in courage and detachment"** (A. Butler).

The fame of his holy martyrdom spread beyond the borders of Canterbury. Alexander III canonized him in 1173. Many miracles were attributed through the intercession of this new martyr and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Tree Trouble

Unexpected cold snaps had destroyed the buds on my father's young peach tree for two years in a row. This spring, Dad was ready. He replanted the sapling in a large box, mounted it on wheels, and put the tree in the garage whenever the temperature dropped.

One warm April day, Dad was wheeling the tree out into the yard, and he stopped to give our dog a drink from the garden hose. A neighbour watched the scene with amusement. "Frank," he finally commented, "you're the only man I know who walks his tree and waters his dog!"

Driving Flash

A man was driving down the road. He passed a traffic camera and saw it flash.

Astounded that he had been caught speeding when he was doing the speed limit, he turned around and, going even slower, he passed by the camera.

Again, he saw it flash. He couldn't believe it, so he turned and, going a snail's pace, he passed the camera. Again, he saw the camera flash. He guessed it must have a fault, and home he went.

Four weeks later he received three traffic fines in the mail, all for not wearing a seatbelt.

Sermon Comment

After a very long and boring sermon the parishioners filed out

of the church saying nothing to the preacher. Towards the end of the line was a thoughtful person who always commented on the sermons. "Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God."

The pastor was thrilled. "Nobody has ever said anything like that about my preaching before. Tell me why."

"Because it endured forever."

Ladder Borrow

My next-door neighbor and I frequently borrow things from each other. Not long ago, when I requested his ladder, he told me he had lent it to his son.

Recalling a saying my grandmother used to repeat, I recited, "You should never lend anything to your kids, because you will never get it back."

With that, he responded, "Tell you the truth, it's not even my ladder. It's my dad's."

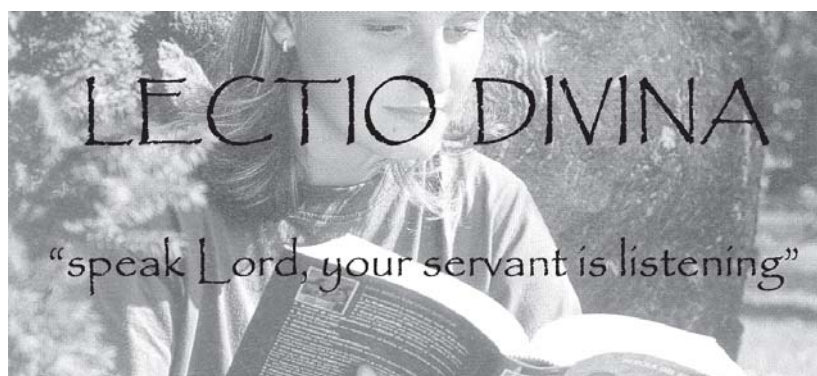
Collateral

I accompanied my husband when he went to get a haircut. Reading a magazine, I found a hairstyle I liked for myself, and I asked the receptionist if I could take the magazine next door to make a copy of the photo.

"Leave some ID, a driver's license or a credit card," she said.

"But my husband is here getting a haircut," I explained.

"Yes," she replied. "But I need something you'll come back for." □



"HOW GREAT IS YOUR NAME OVER ALL THE EARTH"

Psalm 8

by Roberta Fora

We praise the infinite greatness of God as we pray this psalm. He is infinitely great and has filled everything with his ineffable Love. We also acknowledge the greatness of the human person who is the marvelous masterpiece of his creative power.

In fact we say: *"Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet."*

Man has so many reasons to constantly praise the infinite glory of God.

"When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art

mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?"

Taking up this psalm what comes to mind is the scene of a summer evening with its vast and serene sky that looks like a dark embroidered veil studded with marvellous brilliantly shining stars and the silvery rays of the moon. How can one not pause in admiration at this sight of unspeakable beauty?

God has so marvelously created the sky that is so beautiful.

The lines of this psalm flow so





beautifully as we ponder the wonders of the universe. We most certainly will not forget to acknowledge, praise and adore our God who so lovingly safeguards his creation and towards this creation each of us ought to contribute our mite. What about man? God has thought about him, he has willed him into existence and will never abandon him.

Why does God think of us, reflect on us, on each one of us?

Perhaps it is because the human person is his most precious creation that God loves every one who exists. He has a unique and irreplaceable relationship with each one of us.

What a wonderful feeling it is to be embraced and loved by God our Father who pours out on us his abundant love!

That is truly a great gift that we will certainly not forget. Indeed our

life acquires a sense of depth if we know how to live each day cherishing this special relationship of love with the Lord.

To begin the day knowing that by our side is a Father who infinitely loves us more than anyone else does cannot but make us very glad. It gives us a taste of his stupendous beauty here on earth which is the antechamber of eternity.

Help us, O Lord, in moments of peace and serenity, to cherish the wonders of your creation and to admire your wonderful works by sincerely praising you.

We are certain that your Love constantly assists us to overcome the adversities of life. We shall take this back to our journey of Faith and our hearts will be at rest calmly assured by your peaceful presence. □

DEDICATED TO
THE BEAUTY OF
CHRISTMAS

Quiet GIVEN TO P

by Antonio R

We've reached that magic time of the year once more. It's a time that goes by very swiftly. Christmas softly breaks into time and all of a sudden we're in a great hurry because the time is so short and there is so much to be done before Christmas day dawns. After Christmas things won't be the same, everything seems to change and we'll have to begin again. Isn't that perhaps what the mystery of Christmas is all about?

It's truly such a wonderful time. I certainly understand why poets, artists, musicians, preachers and even Santa Clauses in shopping malls around Christmas trees also seem to think so? Even these fanciful and meaningless entertainers succeed getting you into the Christmas mood while combining it with a little business on the side. It is as if, because it's Christmas "anything goes". And is it not a fact that Christmas itself is that Great Justification?

My dear computer-wizzes, surfers of sites, researchers of "levels of intelligence," only give me that simple Gospel passage so that I may believe once more that the Angel appeared to Mary in that little village house in Nazareth bringing her the message and a little later another angel went and informed Joseph too. Then a host of angels sang glory and peace (*to all people of good will* - that was what was reported). Now permit me to imagine the warm breath of the ox and the ass while Mary holds her Child close to her breast as she watches the shepherds come in bringing their gifts. I do get a little emotional at this spectacular scene.

It is incredible because the One is now alive is already a political spectacle, a religious spectacle, a live-show. It is even more unbelievable that He who himself is a *Spectacle* chose to make an entrance into history. I think he was too small to take it all in right from the beginning.

Don't come and ask me to think of something else, the costly wars that are being fought in many parts of the world for instance or the exploitation of the poor and the hungry by huge multinationals. It's true - that is a fact. That is today's reality, it is today's history and Christ is incarnated and inserted into today's history, but beware of reducing Christ only to history. He has never stopped being the God and he continues becoming human. I learned this from the catechism that my mother taught me and I have confirmed it in the theology

Spaces

TEACH OF US

Barbierato

that has come to us from the time of the early Church.

Yet, Christmas is the most wonderful time. Humankind is waiting. The angels have to announce peace, peace and nothing else, just peace; a peace that is desperately prayed for, yearned for...and hopefully peace that will be received. But the problem remains: do we want that peace? Bethlehem has the awesome right to even refuse it.

The scene is absolutely true, there is nothing missing around the crib, not even consummate stupidity caused by envious machinations of a greedy megalomaniac. But Christ was not born in Bethlehem because we kept wallowing in our poverty and crawling back to repent about the mistake we made at Bethlehem.

The mistake lay in Bethlehem's refusal, Bethlehem, the house of bread, the harbinger of peace. It was man's refusal not God's. God cannot refuse. If Infinite Love refuses someone or something, Infinite Love is refusing itself. Then Infinite Love cannot be God, then you should go looking for another god. Will you ever find another God? But God instead is here! He is still here because he is eternal and his soul is eternal. He is present in history. He is living for humankind because he is God and in fact, this same God is given to each of us to bring us *"that peace that the world cannot give"*. □



PUTTING CHRIST BACK INTO CHRISTMAS

by Audrey Carli

Norma and Carl put on the tree lights and smiled at each other. "The kids'll be up any minute!" said Norma.

Carl nodded. "I only hope they like the presents! Hate sounding like Scrooge, honey. But it'll take months to pay for these gifts. Does Christmas have to be so expensive? Does it really give happiness?"

"Listen to you! Christmas morning and you're...worrying!"

Carl hugged his wife and they went into the kitchen to make coffee.

The bubbling percolator hadn't stopped yet when Cindy appeared in the kitchen, wide-eyed. "Christmas? Okay if I wake up Sara and Donny?"

"Sure!" the parents seemed to echo each other.

Tearing wrapping paper soon sounded. Oohs and aahs until...Cindy began to cry. "Where are the ice skates I wanted so badly?"

"Did you ever mention wanting them?" said Norma.

"I asked Santa in the store!"

Norma and Carl exchanged glances. Santa had caused enough trouble. They had both hoped that Jesus would take first place - even though they knew gift giving was necessary in today's society.

Donny's face was gloom when he groped around for still another present. "I was sure I'd get a new baseball glove, Mom and Dad. You sure it's not here

somewhere?"

Sara: "I'm happy! I got what I wanted!"

The other two sullen-faced children made the parents say: "Christmas has to change!"

After Christmas, Carl bought Cindy some used skates from the hardware store. And she smiled and jumped up and down, clapping. "Why didn't we just give her those skates and skip all the other junk?" Carl later told his wife.

Norma had several books of green stamps she had saved. Those provided Donny's baseball glove. His squeals and leaps revealed he'd have been contented with that for Christmas.

Going to church the following Sunday, Norma and Carl held hands in the pew when they prayed together. "We're putting Jesus into Christmas next time," they agreed.

All year the couple looked for ways to put Jesus into their Christmas - and to cut the "commercial rat race" as they termed it.

By November, the children were told they could have one especially-wanted item for Christmas. "So think hard and be sure you make that one item want list!" said Norma. "Then you can make the list of what you're going to do to put Jesus into Christmas."

Before December 1, the family gathered to read their gift-and-give lists. The children had

noticed others who were needy. Cindy wrote: Give the Jenkins a food basket. Ask Mrs. Walters if she wants to come over for cookies and punch.

Sara wrote: Volunteer to sing in the children's choir for Christmas. Go caroling to cheer others. Send Grandma and Grandpa James and Grandpa Miller special letters with our pictures.

Donny wrote: Shovel snow to give Dad a rest. Rake leaves in the fall. Help Mom clean the kitchen. Stop teasing my sisters (The parents were asked to help with spelling.)

The parents shared their list: Visit the nursing home to cheer the lonely. Donate money to the missions and charity. Buy more gifts from charitable groups to help them and to surprise each other. Phone or visit more lonely people this year, choosing someone to cheer every week. Walk together as a family once a week. Talk together as a family every day. Pray together daily.

When Christmas arrived and the family shared their gifts, each was contented with the one item on their list. "It was just what I wanted!" was the usual comment with a broad smile.

A doll, baseball shoes, music tapes, bedroom slippers and a pair of gloves lined up beneath the trimmed pine tree reflecting pastel lights.

The surprises lined up, too. The parents wrote love letters to each other and to their children. Cindy wrote a promise to go to bed without being asked twice. Sara promised to begin picking up her toys without being told.

Norma had surprised her family with homemade oatmeal bread, their favorite. Carl offered his earn from the sale of a tool he no longer needed, to his family out for pizza.

I can never forget the happy look on that lady's face in the nursing home," said Sara. "She said she didn't think anyone would visit her! And then we walked in!"

Donny told how much stronger he felt now that he's been shoveling. "I'm glad you don't have to do the work all the time, Dad!"

Cindy liked all the interesting stories about the woman's childhood that Mrs. Walters told when she came over for cookies and punch.

Christmas day ended with a fresh fall of fluffy flakes, the family gathered around the tree.

"I always wanted us to sing carols together," said the mother. "Let's sing 'Silent Night', okay?"

They sang and gladness soaked into the parents. Later they said: "This Christmas was better."

Norma smiled. "This Christmas we were rescued from...tears and gloom and...greed," she thought. "Thanks, Lord!" she prayed. □

FLOSSIE

by Birdie Etchison Perry

It was going to be a bleak Christmas. Mama had said so. But my eight-year-old did not comprehend the meaning. I was involved with my make-believe world which consisted of an old

doll called Shirley; with painted-on hair, and a one-eyed, very worn, very dirty panda bear named Walter. I pretended I didn't hear my parents talking.

"There won't be money for a

new doll," Mama said.

"But there'll be oranges and bananas in her Christmas sock," Papa said. "That'll be enough."

"I don't want a new doll anyway," I said under my breath, grabbing Shirley and giving her a resounding hug. Since I didn't know what I was missing, I didn't have thoughts about such things.

The next morning Mama announced it was time to go clean Grandpa John's house. He wasn't really my grandpa. I called him that because it made him happy. He lived alone on the edge of town in a run-down house with floors that slanted and curtains that hung in shreds from the windows. The yard in back was littered with boxes of old fruit jars, a hand cultivator and rotting lumber.

Grandpa John was sitting at the kitchen table, looking out the window as we drove up and parked in back of his Model A. He always sat there. And when he heard our car, he'd reach for his cane and come hobbling toward the door to greet us. He couldn't walk fast because he had two wooden legs. That was why he couldn't go out in his yard and clean it up.

"Hello, hello!" he called, a big smile spreading across his leathery face. "It's so good to see you!" Then there were hugs and I lifted my cheek to be kissed.

"You're just as pretty as ever," he said, giving me an extra squeeze.

Then Mama set the casserole on the table and I put the plate of sugar cookies beside it. We always brought something to eat and we always stayed long enough to sweep and dust. Grandpa John didn't have relatives, so we came visiting once a month.

"You'll never guess what I won on the punchboard when I went to town Monday," he said suddenly.

"A hundred dollars," Mama guessed.

"Nope! It's something for Missy here - something she'll love." He got to his feet and hobbled down the hall toward his bedroom. I waited in eager anticipation.

Soon he was back with a long box. He thrust it at me. "Here look inside."

"Now?" I asked, looking over at Mama for approval. She nodded.

Carefully, I removed the lid and stared. Inside on a layer of red velvet was the most beautiful doll I'd ever seen! She had real hair, blue eyes that opened and closed and she wore a soft yellow coat with a matching bonnet.

"Oh, how lovely!" Mama exclaimed.

My heart started pounding as I reached out and touched her face. She looked so real.

"Her name is Flossie," Grandpa John said proudly; "Yep, that's what I decided to name her Flossie."

"It's my Christmas doll!" I said, finally finding my voice. "My own Christmas doll."

I looked up and saw tears in Mama's eyes, and the look of satisfaction on Grandpa John's face.

I didn't know it then, but as I look back now; I realize Grandpa John received as much pleasure in that one moment as I ever had in owning such a magnificent doll. And Mama's prayers had been answered, for a doll had been supplied when there wasn't money to buy one.

And how true are the timeless words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." □

Don Bosco: The Times, The Man, The Facts

DON BOSCO AT FENESTRELLE

by Natale Cerrato (T/A:ID)

It is not possible to proffer an exhaustive list of journeys that Don Bosco made throughout the land of Piedmont, but there is no city or country town that does not forget his visit. Among these places is most certainly Pinerolo and the surrounding valleys.

The Pinerolo valleys, also called *Valli Valdesi*, were known for their pristine beauty and the wealth hidden in its mountains. The area is redolent with history that often is tragic and dark and which is also known as the Piedmontese Pasch (*Pasque Piemontesi*) for example, the glorious and heroic



*The forbidding fortress of
Finestrelle*

battle of Assietta.

For many years the princes and armies crisscrossed the terrain clanging their weapons. But there was also a poor priest who passed through these valleys among its humble people without "the din of drums or the waving of flags."

He would be called St. John Bosco.

Every now and then Don Bosco went to Fenestrelle, to Alta Val Chisone, known as Val Pragelato to spend some time preaching at the church where Don Gian Battista Guigas the curate was a friend of his. (cf *EBM* 4,75). What is known about the friendship between Don Bosco and Don Guigas is probably due to another priest, hailing from those parts, who had the same last name and was probably a relative. He was Don Stefano Giuseppe Guigas

(alias Guidassi).

Don Stefano was born at Fenestrelle in 1818, and received the clerical habit at his parish church of St. Louis IX on October 16th 1836. He went to live at Moriondo and entered the seminary at Chieri where he studied philosophy from 1836 to 1838 and theology from 1838 to 1843. Though he was never a companion of Don Bosco he was in the seminary at the same time as Don Bosco for 5 years and he came to admire the latter during that time. That explains the friendship between these two priests.

Don Bosco had already been visiting Fenestrelle from 1841 and he went there again in 1850. We have this information from his old students. It was concerning a trip he made at the end of August or during the first days of September that year. When he was questioned many years later about the reason for that trip, he replied:

"I was planning to a *History of Italy* and I wanted to see the mountains where the battle of Assietta was fought."

At that time the reply seemed rather lame and hardly in keeping with Don Bosco's habits. The hill of Assietta (2472 metres) was an overhang that looked down on the Chisone valleys of Susa and was the scene of an epic battle on July 18th 1747 that took place during the last phase of the war of Austrian succession (1740-1748). The Piedmontese troops repulsed the enemy who were far superior to them and they succeeded in preventing the French from invading Piedmont.

It was not very likely that Don Bosco went to Fenestrelle just for a visit during a period when he was beset on all sides by so many duties and to simply research the site of a battle that could very well be described without going there. Therefore his first biographer was convinced that the reply given by



him was meant to avoid the main reason for that visit which was to visit Monsignor Louis Frasoni the Archbishop of Turin who was imprisoned at the fortress of Fenestrelle.

The archbishop was detained at the fortress awaiting trial for his public opposition to the Siccardi Laws that were aimed at withdrawing ecclesiastical privileges from the clergy and for having denied the sacraments to a dying Minister Pietro di Santarosa who was responsible for the approving of those laws. On September 28th 1850 the Archbishop was eventually expelled from the kingdom and forced to live in exile in Lyons for the rest of his life. He died in Lyons in 1862.

One knows how much Don Bosco loved his Archbishop and how much he yearned to express to him his devotion, gratitude and comfort. Thus, accepting the invitation to preach and visit some places of historical interest he could accomplish his act of charity towards his great benefactor without being noticed. That was the main purpose of his visit.

History or Legend?

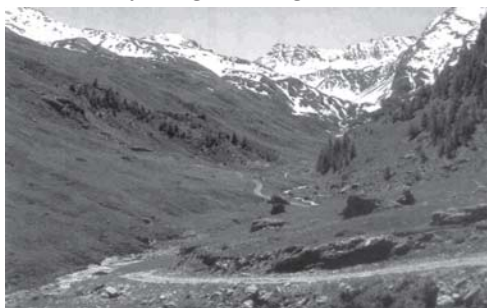
There are those who express serious doubts about Don Bosco's visit to Mons. Frasoni at the fortress in Fenestrelle asserting that from the beginning it was never historically verified.

Yet, if it is true that the visit did not take place because there was no documentary evidence, that in itself does not make it contrary to the

facts. Therefore there is no need to make a fetish out of documents even if the historical profession needs procedures and documentation which are not found. Don Bosco himself said: "No one will ever know a great many of the things I have done!" (EBM 4, 76)

Now if it is certain that Don Bosco frequently went to Fenestrelle till 1868, it is a fact that according some old past pupils he also visited the place towards the end of August and the first days of September of 1850 for a more evident reason. Recalling the archbishop's imprisonment in the grim fortress and Don Bosco's contacts with the family of Alphonse de Sonnaz, the commandant, we suggest that there may have been some connection between this trip and Don Bosco's statement.

Would not Don Bosco try to visit his shepherd in prison or at least send him some desired information either by word of mouth or in writing through some trustworthy person? Because of the testimonies of his followers and the logic of the facts we are inclined to believe that Don Bosco's visit under those sad circumstances could be considered anything but a legend. □



The Valley of Pragelato

PERU

OCONGATE, - At the end of an all-night procession, several thousand pilgrims in colorful garb gathered on a hilltop in this remote corner of the Andes, waiting for dawn. As the sky brightened behind an eastern mountain peak and light swept along the ridge, a tall young man sounded a long, plaintive note on a conch horn.

The sun burst over the Andes and Quechua-language prayers floated over the frosty fields. Melodies rose from wooden flutes and drums played by musicians with weathered faces. The assembly broke into smaller groups, dancing down the mountain in colorful columns that snaked and twined, celebrating the new day and the end of a pilgrimage that drew some 60,000 people.

At the bottom of the hill, Jesuit Father Luis Herrera waited in a rustic adobe chapel, where a solemn procession arrived, carrying images of Jesus and Mary. Father Herrera prayed with the group, bringing the nearly weeklong pilgrimage to a close. If God wills it, he said, they will gather there again next year.

The festival of the Lord of Qoyllur Rit'i, marking Christ's appearance to a young shepherd boy and coinciding with the full moon nearest to the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, dates to the 1780s, though its roots probably go back further. Like many religious traditions, it has evolved over the centuries, but it

is now threatened by tourism, global warming and simple economics.

"We do this out of faith," said Adolfo Quispe, 23, leader of a group of 18 young dancers who set out from their hometown of Chincheros, near the tourist mecca of Cuzco, four nights earlier, June 6. "We are faithful Catholics who believe in Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in many ways."

"It is obvious that people live and breathe faith and devotion" at Qoyllur Rit'i, he said, "but if this is not lived out, (the fiesta) will just become a tourist attraction and a show. If the devotion is not accompanied by a life of mercy, help for one's neighbour, truth above all else, and justice, it will be empty – it will one day be just folklore, with no meaning." (CNS)

ROME

The Italian Archdiocese of Turin has announced that the Shroud of Turin, which many believe is the burial cloth of Christ, will be on public display April 10-May 23, 2010.

The public exposition in Turin's cathedral will offer members of the public their first opportunity to see the shroud since it underwent major cleaning and restoration in 2002.

The work involved removing 30 fabric patches and a fabric backing, known as the Holland Cloth, sewn onto the shroud in 1534 after a fire.

At the time of the work, Cardinal Severino Poletto of Turin said trapped particles of dirt and

scorched fabric had darkened parts of the Shroud of Turin and eventually could have made it difficult to see the shroud's image of a crucified man.

The removal of the Holland Cloth also permitted experts to photograph and digitally scan the back of the shroud.

The last public exposition of the Shroud of Turin was in 2000. It remained hidden in its specially designed protective case even in 2006 when the Winter Olympic Games brought tens of thousands of visitors to the city.

The Archdiocese of Turin's official Web site for information about the shroud — www.sindone.org — is operational even though it is undergoing a redesign in conjunction with the 2010 exposition. Visitors will be able to reserve an appointment in advance to see the shroud.

The archdiocese also said it expects Pope Benedict XVI will visit the city during the exposition period and celebrate Mass on the grounds outside the cathedral. A specific date for the papal visit has not been announced.

USA

CLEVELAND—Some people in Cleveland were connecting a 26-year-old local man's recovery from a gunshot wound to the head that doctors said should have killed him to a rosary blessed by Pope John Paul II that the man received from a hospital chaplain.

Some labeled the recovery of Jory Aebly, who was shot execution-style during a mugging Feb. 21, a miracle and were speculating his case could help the sainthood cause of the late pope.

Neither the Cleveland Diocese

nor Vatican officials have commented on the case.

Aebly and a co-worker, Jeremy Pechanec, 28, were both shot in the head in an apparent robbery when they were heading home after an evening out with friends in downtown Cleveland. Pechanec did not survive his injuries.

After the shooting Aebly was taken to MetroHealth Medical Center, where doctors expected him to die. His family was told he had suffered "a nonsurvivable injury," according to the hospital Web site.

Father Arthur Snedeker, a Cleveland diocesan priest who is a chaplain at the hospital, gave Aebly the last rites of the church.

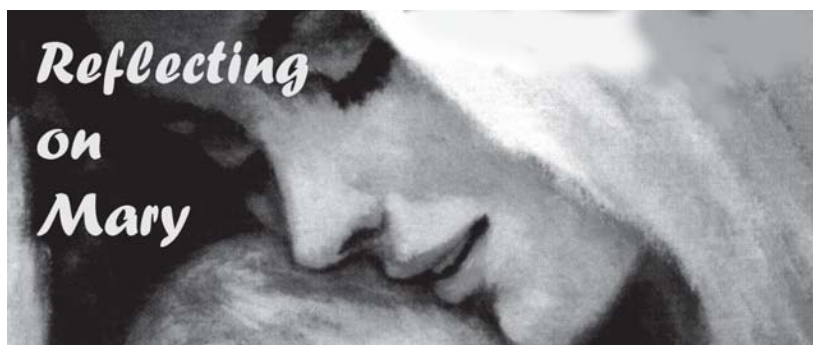
At a press conference March 30, the day Aebly was released from the hospital, the priest told reporters he had prayed to Pope John Paul "to pray for Jory and to protect him." He said he gave the young man the last of a dozen rosaries the pope had blessed years before for the priest to give to patients.

His neurosurgeon, Dr. Robert Geertman, has called his patient's recovery "one in a million."

Aebly's case has fueled speculation that it might be looked at by the Vatican as a possible miracle that could be credited to Pope John Paul's intercession.

The initial diocesan phase of Pope John Paul's cause was completed in April 2007.

The sainthood process generally requires two miracles occurring through the intercession of the candidate, one for beatification and one for canonization. (CNS) □



AN ONGOING MIRACLE!

by John M. Scott SJ

The first time in my life I witnessed an "ongoing miracle" was on the afternoon of Aug. 15, 1968 when I was in Mexico City and visited the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe and saw the Image which is known throughout the world as Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The story behind the Image began on the morning of Dec. 9, 1531. A recently baptized Aztec Indian who had taken the Christian name of Juan Diego at Baptism, was on his way to Mass.

When he reached the hill called Tepeyac, Our Blessed Mother appeared to him. She called him "my son" and said to him in the Aztec tongue: "Here I will offer all my love, my pity; my aid and my protection to the people."

She ordered the Aztec to tell the bishop to build a sanctuary to her on this hill where the Spanish had destroyed a temple to the Aztec goddess of earth and corn known as the "Little Mother." When the bishop refused, Our Lady made Castilian roses bloom among the hillside rocks, and Juan Diego took them to the bishop in his serape.

When he opened his cloak, it bore a miraculous Image of the Virgin in unmistakably Indian form, with a brown face and black hair.

Why do scientists refer to this Image of Our Blessed Mother as an "ongoing miracle"?

The reasons are many and varied. The Image is emblazoned on a peasant's tilma or cloak, a coarsely woven cloth made from ayate fibers from the maguey cactus. One well-known property of that type of cloth is that it tends to disintegrate in about 20 years. Yet this Image-bearing cloth is over 460 years old!

For over a century the Image hung above an altar with no protection whatsoever. It was exposed to the smoke from hundreds of thousands of votive candles placed around the altar and, despite this, the Image shows no smoke damage.

During the first 116 years the Image was displayed in the original, virtually open-air chapel, built at the foot of the hill, Tepeyac, and surrounded by a salt lake that has long since been drained away.

The humid Mexico City air had a high concentration of corrosive matter. And the smoky nitrous air was not the only potentially destructive element. In the early decades of the Tilma's existence, it was common for the faithful to touch the image out of respect and love for it, a practice that surely should have hastened its deterioration.

By way of contrast, consider what happened to the famous statue of St. Peter in the city of Rome. Countless generations of tourists feel that they have not visited the Holy City unless they lean over to touch and kiss the right foot of St. Peter. After the impact of thousands of kisses, the big toe has been worn away to a smooth contour, almost kissed away to the vanishing point.

In 1791 the Image suffered a disaster. A workman who was cleaning the gold and silver frame with nitric acid accidentally spilled it across the Image. Instead of dissolving the fibers, it left a barely visible watermark on the material. Worst of all was the attack on the

Image during the Catholic persecutions in Mexico in the 1920's. A powerful bomb, hidden in a vase of flowers, was placed on the altar below the Image. It exploded during Mass on Nov: 14, 1921. It tore chunks of marble and plaster from the sanctuary and shattered glass windows in the Basilica. The heavy iron crucifix on the altar was twisted into an almost circular shape.

Despite the brutal force of the explosion not a single man, woman or child was hurt. The Image itself was not harmed in the slightest. Not even its thin, protective glass covering was cracked! (The twisted cross is preserved for view in the new Basilica to give visitors an idea of the force of the explosion.)

Not only is the continuous existence of the Image a miracle, but even more miraculous are the properties of the Image itself.

Careful studies have revealed inexplicable qualities. Usually colours look stronger and



brighter at close range. Not so the colours of the Image! They look strong and brighter at a distance. The pink of Mary's gown is pale close up, but very rosey from a distance. Her mantle is blue-green at close range, but a much darker blue from a distance. Our Lady appears to increase in size as one moves away from it.

Another inexplicable element. The colours used for the Image are of unknown origin. They are neither animal, vegetable nor mineral dyes. Synthetic colors were not invented for at least another 300 years following the apparitions.

Also unknown is how the colours were made to adhere to the rough coarse cloth. It was not "sized" - a process used to insure that paint adheres. Infrared photographs have shown that the Image was made without any underdrawing sketch, an essential first step for portraits made during that era. Nowhere on the original Image are there any brushstrokes to be found.

Another inexplicable element. There is none of the cracking that is typical of old paintings, which usually show a web of hairline cracks over their entire surfaces.

Philip S. Callahan, an accomplished painter as well as a scientist, analyzed the Image in 1979. In his report to the Archdiocese of Mexico and in his booklet "The Tilma Under Infrared-Ray Radiation," published by the Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) Washington, D.C., he concluded that the aura of golden rays, the background of clouds and sky the dark crescent moon, and the angel at the bottom, along with the stars, the trim on the blue mantle, the black tassels at the waist, and other details were "added

by human hands long after the original image was formed." He went on to say that these man-made pigments are cracked and falling away and will continue to deteriorate with time.

The "original form" includes the face, hair, hands, the turquoise mantle and rose-pink tunic.

According to Mr. Callahan the changes in both size and coloration of the Image, when viewed from various distances, is an effect caused by surface light diffraction. This is comparable to the diffusion of light on the wings of certain butterflies and bird feathers which gives them a shimmering aura.

One of the most amazing things about the Image is based on something you may have observed yourself. If you are standing close to a friend on a bright day you may have noticed a reflection of yourself in his eye.

In recent years over 20 scientists have looked at the eyes of the Image under high magnification. Dr. Enrique Graue, director of the ophthalmology hospital, Nuestra Senora de la Luz, in Mexico City said: "I was dumbfounded. The eyes displayed depth and curvature and reflected light exactly like living eyes! What's more, the curvature-distortion obeys perfectly the laws of optics."

Scientists agree: "The reflections in the eyes conform entirely with the laws of optics." And what did the scientists see?

In both eyes of the Image were reflected 12 people who were present in the courtyard on the day Juan Diego opened his cloak.

Anthropologists have identified the sharply outlined features of a white-bearded face with the large aquiline nose and high

cheekbones as typically "Basque." Bishop Zumarraga was a Basque.

The face on the bishop's left is believed to be that of the translator, Juan Gonzalez, whose presence was necessary in the handling of Indian affairs. At that time a scant 12 years after the Spanish conquest of Mexico, the Indians spoke only Nahuatl.

The amazing thing is that the same figures appear in both eyes at precisely the positions demanded by the law of optics and two-eyed physiology.

According to Dr. Aste Tonsmann, "the scene represented agrees perfectly with historical documentation. The size of these images is so small that only the utilization of an advanced computerized photographic process could have brought them to light and proved their existence."

According to Francis Johnston in his book "The Wonder of Guadalupe," it was as if Juan Diego's tilma had been an exposed colour film. The eyes of the Virgin captured and froze in time the images of the people who were present at the moment Juan Diego opened his cloak.

It is estimated that by 1546, 15 years after the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, there had been nine million Baptisms. It was these Baptisms, which took place within a decade and a half, that effectively created Catholic Mexico.

The Basilica 1 visited in 1958 was the old one, built in 1709. It held only 2,000 people, and was sinking in the spongy soil. The structure was cracked and had to be shored up.

The new \$24 million concrete and marble Basilica is supported by 1000 subterranean pillars and can hold 20,000 people without a single column obstructing the view of the altar. "Thousands of pilgrims want to get a glimpse of Our Lady's Image at the same time," explained its

architect, Pedro Ramirez Vasquez.

Today, pictures of the Image appear everywhere in Mexico, from cantinas to taxicab dashboards to countless adobes.

Pope Pius XII proclaimed Our Lady of Guadalupe Empress of North, Central, and South America. Her feast is celebrated on Dec. 12th.

Of all the many marvelous things I have seen, nothing so overwhelmed me with the spirit of faith and devotion as did the Indians I saw kneeling before the Image on Aug. 15, 1968.

After I looked long and reverently at the Image of Our Blessed Mother, I turned around to glance at the Indians praying on their knees. The impact of those hundreds of faces, looking up at the Image of Mary; and completely absorbed in prayer, overwhelmed me!

Each face was so alive with faith and devotion, so exalted and noble from contact with the Divine, I could feel myself rising high on a tidal wave of faith that surged upward towards the high altar, and the Image of Mary.

So intent was each face, the eyes of the Indians seemed to burn past me like lasers, quivering with a deep and unexplainable light. If ever I need to define a "living faith", this certainly would be it. Each Indian face was a study in faith that was so complete, so deep, so dynamic, it swept me along like a high tide, and left me breathless with wonder and admiration. Here was a sermon from people on their knees, with their eyes on Mary and their hearts in heaven. □

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

On July 23, 2009 my wife and daughter woke up at 4.15 am to go to the bathroom. As soon as they switched on the light they saw a viper. It was certainly the presence and protection of Our Lady that saved them from being stung. Thank you Jesus and Mother Mary for having protected us and thank you for all the graces and favours we have received.

Mr. Tony D'Souza, Goa

My humble and belated thanks to Our Blessed Mother for having to go through my treatment for breast cancer and for keeping my eldest daughter in good health and for helping her to excel in her VCE and securing a seat in the university. Mother keep my children and grandchildren in good health.

Mrs. H. Gleeson, Western Australia

A million thanks to Mary Help of Christians for curing my children of all their illnesses and for other favours granted to me. Do continue to bless us.

Mrs. Bernadine Colaco

We thank you dearest Infant Jesus and Mother, Mary Help of Christians for granting our favours.

Joseph and Family, Chennai

Thank you Jesus and Mother Mary for a safe and normal delivery of a healthy and cute baby girl.

Glipson & Senya, Goa

Our sincere gratitude to Mother Mary for her care and protection because of which we have been safely and comfortably relocated to Delhi. We are thankful for all the graces and blessings showered on our family.

Preeti Menezes, Gurgaon, Haryana

Thank you Lord Jesus for healing me from my illness through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians.

Smti R.M. Mawlieh, Meghalaya

Thank you, Mother Mary for a good season.

S. De Souza, Mumbai

My sincere thanks for all the graces and favours received through the powerful intercession of Mary Help of Christians.

Mrs. Anastasia F. Rodrigues, Goa

My heartfelt thanks to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians for granting me a safe trip to Tabor and back.

Mark W. Dodd, Pune

My sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians for helping my son to get a first class in his SSC examinations and for all the favours granted.

Audrey Rodrigues, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mother Mary for a successful open heart surgery and for a speedy recovery.

Zenaflor Braganza, Mumbai

Our daughter fell off a moving bus four years back and she felt two hands hold her up. It could have been fatal. In August this year the cab she was riding in collided with another vehicle. The cab overturned but nothing happened to her. Thank you Mother Mary for being there and always protecting our family. We know **Mary was There.**

Francisca and Francis Machado, Goa

I am grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for granting a safe, normal and quick delivery to my younger sister, Shaila.

Veena D'Souza, Doha, Qatar

THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



The devotion of the THREE HAIL MARYS is a very simple yet most efficacious devotion. Everyday, recite Three Hail Marys, adding the invocation: "O Mary, My Mother, keep me from mortal sin." Many people recite the Three Hail Marys as part of their morning and night prayers. To practise this devotion in time of danger, stress, special need or temptation, is a sure means to obtain Our Lady's help.

We have received so many graces and favours through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys and we are immensely grateful to Our Blessed Mother for her intervention.

T.C. Mumbai

Thank you dearest Mother for helping me pass my MBBS examination with 90%. I thank her sincerely for helping me to pass my practical examination today (3 August 2009). I have a great devotion to the 3 Hail Marys.

Jennifer Joseph, Yemen

I am very grateful to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for granting us so many special favours through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

Ms. Safira Fernandes, Goa

Our sincere thanks for all the favours received through the intercession of Our Lady and the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Ashley, my grandson passed his computer engineering examinations. He was selected by a good company. We are most grateful to Our Lady for all her love and protection.

Mrs. Rita Norris, Nagpur

Thank you, dear Mother Mary for the numerous graces received and special thanks for helping us and blessing us with love, peace, happiness and your protection.

Antonieta Simoes, Macau (South China)

I am in the habit of praying the Three Hail Marys in times of crisis. At first I used to pray it fast but then I calmed down and started saying it in a more controlled way. Our Lady granted me the grace I required just four hours later.

Mary Ann, Sydney, Australia

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary Help of Christians, through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys my daughter was cured of her illness and she received a clear report.

Mrs. A.M.C., Pune

Thank you, dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the favours received through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

Shiju, Colachel, Kerala

I was living in constant fear. But with the help of Mary our Mother I have been able to overcome my fear and live a peaceful life.

Ciena, Mumbai

Thank you dearest Mother for looking after us.

John, Kolkata

My sincere thanks dear Mother Mary; through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys I have received so many blessings and the success of my grandson in his SSC board examination.

M. Lobo, Mumbai

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

I was sick from October 2003 with deep depression. I had reduced from 125 kg to 70 kg and I was unable to sleep without the help of tablets. I was unable to take any fruit and all my systems refused to coordinate. I kept praying to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio. From February this year I was in my village of Kallinapur (Mangalore) for the annual feast of Our Lady of Miracles (Milagres). On my return from there I have been feeling much better. I owe it all to the intercession of Our Lady.

Richard Fernandes, Mumbai

Our sincere thanks to Our Lady Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the numerous graces and blessings that have been showered on our whole family and especially for helping my son to pass his TYB Com examinations. Do continue to shower your blessings on all our near and dear ones.

Mr. J.B. D'Souza, Mumbai

We are grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for having preserved us to celebrate with joy our 40th wedding anniversary in December 2008. Do keep us under your protection dearest mother.

Mrs. J. D'Cruze, Australia

My humble and sincere thanks to the Most Holy Spirit, Our Lady and Don Bosco for healing my grandson Rhys of a nagging cough.

Mrs. A. deSouza, Australia

I am most grateful to Our Lady and Don Bosco for the relief after the routine medical tests of my mother were normal. *Ajit Pinto, Mumbai*

My sincere gratitude to Our Lady and Don Bosco for granting my brother the grace of a good confession and for blessing him with a happy death.

Mary, New York

Many thanks dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for granting me a good job that would take care of all my financial problems. Thank you for interceding with your Son to grant me so many blessings.

Sherri Pereira, Mumbai

Thank you, dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for granting my son Shane good results and for numerous other favours received.

Mrs. Corrine D'Souza, Trichy

Many, many thanks dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for hearing our prayers and answering them.

Mendonzas, Pune

Our grateful thanks to Our Lady, Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the safe Caesarian operation of my daughter in law and the gift of a baby boy and for helping my grand daughter pass her board examinations with high marks and secure a place in a good Christian College in Vashi.

Joseph Lopez, Alleppey

Thank you, Mother Mary for the biopsy of my wife's mouth ulcers that proved negative. Thank you for saving us from so many injuries too.

Edward O'Connor, Hubli

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for helping me financially and for all the other favours granted to my family.

Devotee

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



My daughter was pregnant and she was due around the 11th December. My wife left for the USA on the 3rd December. She carried with her a scapular of Dominic Savio. On reaching there she gave the scapular to our daughter who delivered a baby girl safely and normally on the 6th December. We are most grateful for this grace.

Jose Palamattam, Secunderabad

Thank you, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy to my daughter and for all the blessings showered on us.

Lynette, Ajmer

Thank you, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for granting me a favour.

Dorita, Mumbai

Thank you, dear Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for fulfilling my wishes.

Maria Carvalho, Sharjah, UAE

My daughter was in a serious condition during the eighth month of her pregnancy and the doctor had advised a Caesarian operation. I prayed to Mary Help of Christians and Dominic Savio and she had a normal delivery and a healthy baby girl was born.

Mrs. L. C. Vaz, Mangalore

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for granting my son success in his BE (Mechanical) Engineering examination. Please continue to shower on us your blessings.

Mrs. L.M. Fernandes, Mumbai

Thanks dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery and the gift of a baby girl on Mother Mary's birthday.

Milred and Frank Heredia, Goa

My sincere thanks to Dominic Savio for showering his countless blessings and protecting me and my loved ones and also for helping us in difficult times. Please continue to protect us.

Pearl P. Fernandes, Mumbai

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

DECEMBER 2009

Holy Father's General Intention: *General: That children may be respected and loved and never be the victims of exploitation in its various forms.*

Missionary Intention: *That at Christmas the peoples of the earth may recognise in the Word Incarnate the light which illuminates every man and that the Nations may open their doors to Christ, the Saviour of the world.*