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*Mary, the Spouse
of the Holy Spirit
places herself
at God's disposal
when she proclaims her:
"Fiat", prefiguring
the words of Christ
"Thy Will Be Done!"*

**Cover: Let the Little Children
come to me!**



From The Editor's Desk

A Crust of Bread

Many years ago, in the days of the videocassette, our audiovisual library possessed a programme that I found deeply moving and profoundly disturbing. It was one of those rare documentaries that linger in the memory long after they are over. It was a documentary from our mission office on the work of our Salesians in South America. This one raised many uncomfortable questions for me: about the kind of world we live in, about the blindness which afflicts us, about human cruelty and human goodness.

The programme told the shocking story of children who live in the sewers of Bogotá, in Columbia, and a Salesian lay brother, Jaime who befriends them and tries to rescue them. These children live among the rats and the filth, hidden away from the busy world above except when they surface to scavenge in rubbish-tips. They are children who have fled to the city in desperation, where most people ignore them and the police often ill-treat them. They are exposed to disease and crime, and are sometimes found murdered by the side of the street. And nobody seems to care – except Jaime, and a few others like him.

Jaime goes down into the sewers himself to gain the children's trust. He brings them food, listens to their tales and offers help. He tells them about a home he runs for homeless boys. When they have settled in he tries to get them a job and restore to them a sense of dignity and worth.

Perhaps the most moving moment in the programme came during an interview with one of the boys in the home. He was a pleasant youngster, in his early teens, I would guess. He had spent several years in the sewers before being rescued by Jaime. He now had a job and was bright with hope for the future.

During the course of the interview he described life in the sewers: the hunger, the fears, the beatings. Eventually the interviewer asked him if there was anything at all he missed from those days. Speaking through an interpreter, he said without hesitation, 'Yes, I miss the friendship. We cared for each other and protected each other in the sewers. If you woke in the morning and the guy beside you had a crust of bread he'd give half of it to you. We were all like that.'

That image has haunted me ever since: starving, wretched children, condemned to the sewers, sharing a crust of bread with each other, while the uncaring world goes about its business above. Why is it, I keep asking myself, that it is often those who can least afford it who are most generous with what they have? And why is it that wealth and possessions so often make us blind, and callous and cruel?

But then Jesus tells us that the mysteries of God are revealed to the little ones of this world, and not to the learned and clever, the wealthy and powerful...

Fr. Ian Douulton sdb

7. ROME WAS NOT BUILT IN A DAY

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, ss

Struggling with the aches and pains of a second pregnancy coming on the heels of an ectopic conception which had to be aborted, the not-so-young mother-to-be battled on valiantly. But she seemed to be heading towards a losing battle...and then one particularly difficult gloomy day, she decided to quit... The strong religious upbringing she had received from God-fearing parents, however, would not let her quit all that easily. She found herself fighting with God: "Can you give me one good reason not to quit?" What flashed through her perplexed mind as God's answer surprised her – the story of the fern and the bamboo! Briefly put, it goes like this:

Planted at about the same time, the fern quickly grew from the earth. Its brilliant green covered the floor. Yet absolutely nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I God did not quit on the bamboo. In the second year the fern grew even more vibrant and plentiful. And again, as yet nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo, he whispered. 'In year three there was still nothing from the bamboo seed. But I would not quit.

'In year four, again, there was nothing worth mentioning from the bamboo seed. And still, I would not quit – not yet. Then in the fifth year a tiny sprout emerged from the earth. Compared to the fern it was seemingly small and insignificant... and perhaps without much promise! But just six months later the bamboo rose to over a hundred feet tall. It had spent the first five years growing roots. Those roots made it strong and gave it what it

needed to survive. God concluded: 'I would not give any of My creations a challenge it could not handle.' He asked me. 'Did you know, my child, that all this time you have been struggling, you have actually been growing roots?' 'Just as I would not quit on the bamboo, I will never quit on you even if nothing great seems to be happening!'

Each According to its Capacity

'Don't compare yourself to others,' He continued. 'The bamboo had a different purpose than that of the fern. Yet they both make the forest beautiful. God said to her... Your time will come,' 'You will rise high.'

'How high should I rise?' she asked quivering with curiosity. 'How high does the bamboo rise?' God asked in return. 'As high as it can!' she observed tentatively. 'Yes.' He mused, 'You will give Me great glory by rising as high as you can.'

With this amazing story buzzing in her head, she got back to reflecting on the matter at hand – her difficult and painful pregnancy! After a little reflection, she realized that God will never give up on anyone of his children, Never, Never, Never Give up! The problem, though, is that we humans give up all too easily. The slightest burden seems too heavy to bear even when we have a host of friends and well-wishers rallying round us to share that burden. Further, at such moments we usually feel that we are the only ones saddled with such misery while all the others around us seem

to be so happy and contented! Or, perhaps even brave and strong in the face of all difficulties! If only we could listen to the tale of woe each one silently bears within his/her breast!

Eucharist: Unite Your Cross with His

When Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, he knew reasonably clearly what awaited him in the days, or maybe hours to follow! And so, he consciously gathered his disciples around him so that they would share that crucial experience with him and ensure that they learnt the lessons of life! While at table, having taken the bread in his hands he blessed God, then he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take and eat... this is My body which is given up for you!' Later he did the same with the Cup as he passed it round saying, 'This cup is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins of the many! In this magnanimous set of gestures, he showed them the secret of how to accept suffering in their lives, not just with stoic resignation, but with love and hope. We need to remember that no suffering comes our way unless given us by the Father, and that too for a beautiful purpose – it not only purifies us but also obtains untold blessings for others.

As he approached the end of that historic Supper, Jesus gave his disciples the Eucharistic command: 'You my disciples, Do this as a Memorial of Me' – and with this he asked them to imitate and continue his self-giving for the benefit of others. While he engaged in this giving with tremendous generosity, emptying himself even to the last drop of his blood, we are asked to give in small little ways which all

add up, 'completing what is wanting in the sufferings of Christ!' (Col. 1:24). Once we are able to glimpse meaning in our sufferings, it becomes a lot easier to carry our crosses cheerfully and purposefully. History gives us numerous examples of how even young children bear immense suffering gladly and heroically once they can see some meaning in it. Often they put adults to shame with their bravery, even when their faith isn't as strong as that of an adult who has had so much more experience of life.

However, faith and meaning do not come to us automatically; we have to struggle to make sense of all that happens each day of our lives. More importantly, we need to 'listen' deeply to what the Lord says to us through the events constituting our lives. It could be just the sight of another person suffering valiantly that gives us the courage to put up with our lot. When recently I myself was battling with the excruciating pain of a slipped disc, it was the sight of a young adult with multiple fractures in the rib cage patiently yet cheerfully filling out forms and waiting her turn to enter into the MRI scanning machine that snapped me out of my self-pity and brought about a dramatic change in my attitude. How much more then would not the remembrance of Christ's sufferings do for us? 'He loved me and gave himself up for me!' is Paul's summing up of Christ's powerful message to each one of us?

We would be a lot more and better equipped to handle life's crosses if each time we celebrated Eucharist, we had something concrete to place on the paten together with the host and drop into the chalice together with the wine – as our concrete

contribution to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ! Unfortunately most of us do nothing of the kind when we celebrate Eucharist, yet Christ waits patiently for each one's 'mite' because that is what will tilt the scales and make our world not just a 'valley of tears' in which we mourn and weep, but the very antechamber of heaven, full of delightful surprises for us. Incidentally, isn't that what we promised at the time of our Baptism – that we commit ourselves to die with Christ and rise with him to a new way of life? (Rom. 6:2-8). That again is what we repeat in each Eucharist through the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the Cup – an effective sharing in the dying-rising of Christ.

Christ's Commitment to us

Whenever we recall our Baptism and Eucharist we tend to emphasize the demands of the commitment that we make to be faithful to the Lord. We focus on the numerous times we fail to live up to that commitment. However, we must not forget that the Covenantal contract is mutual or bi-lateral, in the sense that God too makes a commitment to us, that he will be ever faithful to us. And he never goes back on his promises! Paul reminds his favourite disciple Timothy, 'The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself.' (2 Tim 2:11-13).

Further in the context of the Last Supper itself, Jesus himself solemnly promises us, 'Very truly,

I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you"' (Jn 14:12-18).

So when crosses come our way, especially when they dog our steps like ants in procession one following on the heels of the other, that's when we shouldn't run to tell the Lord how big the problem is, but rather face the problem squarely and tell the intimidating problem how great the Lord is! Already of old the psalmist prayed: 'Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God... As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God, which God establishes forever. We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. Your name, O God, like your praise, reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with victory. Let Mount Zion be glad, let the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgments. Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers, consider well its ramparts; go through its citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever' (Ps 48:1-14). □



**A MISSIONARY SALESIAN BROTHER:
A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS**

Br. Robert Dias, sdb, Missionary in Uganda

My Salesian confreres here call me "Bob" but my parents of happy memory would call me Robert.

I was born on 7th June, 1923 in a Christian Home, Poona. Our family consisted of 5 brothers and 4 sisters. I am the only surviving brother, whilst my surviving 3 sisters are Religious.

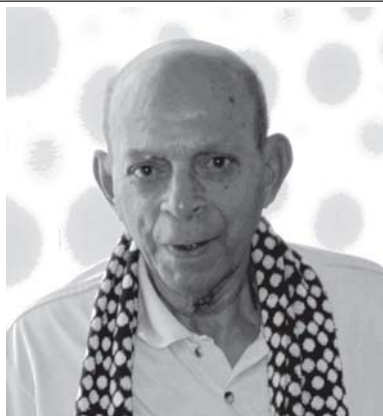
I recall faintly in my young childhood, attending a Marathi school, that's it. Later on, I did my studies at St. Vincent's, Poona and completed my Matriculation in 1939 at Don Bosco's, Tardeo.

I owe my Salesian Vocation in great measure to Fr. Aurelius Maschio, sdb. I entered the Portals of Tardeo, Cumballa Hill and Matunga. Fr. Maschio was my Protégé.

In my Religious Life over the years, I had quite a few stints. I was Secretary to Late Archbishop Louis Mathias from 1952-1965.

In 1974 Fr. Tony D'Souza, Provincial of Bombay Province needed my services and called me to Bombay to be his Secretary. This proved to be a short stint when in 1978 I was asked to help Fr. Joseph Casti in the first Novitiate of the Province. It was wonderful to interact with young Novices those days, especially on this playground.

It was in June 1982, Fr. Tony D'Souza, Delegate of East Africa, called in at Pisana to see me. He asked me if I would like to join Project Africa in Nairobi and be his Secretary. I jumped at the idea and after some hesitation on the part of



Major Superiors; I was given the green light and landed in Nairobi. On 13th August, 1982 I was given charge not only to be Fr. Tony's Secretary but also see to Shrine work and its benefactors.

It was in 1990 that I decided to quit Secretarial work in Nairobi and opt for direct Mission work in Tanzania. Till 1996 I was in Dodona, Tanzania, when I moved out to Uganda, first at Don Bosco, Bombo and later at St. Joseph's, Kamuli, where I am at present.

I gave the bye to Secretarial work and am now in charge of Savio Foot Ball Club with its three teams. This is a good and wholesome experience for me.

I go back to Uganda which has been termed the Pearl of Africa and my Salesian Mission work in Uganda is indeed a dazzling Pearl which I cannot afford to lose.

Pray for us in Uganda, now part of a new Province, Africa Grand Lakes. □

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My daughter wants to know **THE MEANING OF DEATH**

by Giovanna Colonna

A fourteen year-old girl, falling from the sixth floor; there's no hope of survival. She believed in no one and in nothing. She was desperate, too young to understand the advice of her elders and too deluded by the fables she had heard.

The meaningless fear of sickness and pain, the body, wasting away and the mind growing old, lying in a hospital mourned by the family and forgotten by doctors, unable to recognize anyone and terminally ill. Some are not really ill but they are unable to recognize anyone nor are they able to respond to a gesture of love or care. For one moment the elderly lady was slightly distracted and her husband met his longed-for death at the top of the stairs on the second floor.

He was a good driver, a very safe and experienced taxi driver, a happy husband and a proud and generous father. His heart stopped just as he reached the curb and his life slowly ebbed out; the end of life and the beginning of death.

My daughter has been away from the Church for quite a few years, I don't even know if she's abandoned her faith, but she is afraid of death. She was always saying Rosaries for the deceased, those she knew while they were alive. She is still not satisfied, but in the darkness and silence of her room she continues to brood. Our God is a God of the living and not of the dead. He gave us life and



not death. He calls us to an eternal life, not to a definite and dark end in oblivion. Our faith, without denying the inevitability of death with its corresponding pain reveals it for what it is: a tiny instant in which everything is obliterated and the true meaning of time, and history, of life and death, what is understood and what is ignored now dawns on us. We realize the meaning of "the



already" and "the not-yet."

Death is not all that there is. Only God is 'forever' for life and for eternity.

The meaning of death, my dear girl, lies in the meaning of life. When we have realized the meaning of life then we shall know the meaning of death and we will no longer be afraid of it.

For those who are afraid of life death has immense meaning. It will be the end of anguish. It will be the finish-line, the end of an appalling nightmare.

For those who are afraid of death, life has not yet been understood, intuited or perceived as an opportunity or a duty. It is understood as a free and gratuitous, unique and divine gift, something unfathomable, fascinating and precious, very precious.

The burden of living suffocates the beauty of living, the physical pain, the psychological suffering, unjust privations, the denial of fundamental rights and all these reduce life to an oppressive journey that seems futile, hostile and meaningless. Then death comes

along as a sweet companion, long-awaited and reassuring; a balm for bruises without any delusions, tricks or stealth. In fact it is liberating, peaceful from which there is no return.

The fear of death is also a fear of loneliness. Each of us dies alone. Throughout life we have so many travelling companions, but at the moment of our last breath, our last attempt to open our eyes, say our last word, our last superhuman effort to rise from the pillow...and we are alone. Those around us are waiting for the last breath, the last flicker of the eyelids when our bodies will become still and cold.

We will be alone to face this inevitable departure from life in order to enter into Life, not just another life, but a different life, the fullness of life, devoid of evil, pain or death.

For the Christian, life is a Person who is from eternity, to eternity. He died and rose to tell us that life reaches its fullness and its summit when we rise free from sin into a life of perfect grace, free from the bonds of space and time, to step into eternity...without any fear! □



walking with the Church



Haiti: Why?

by Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete

President Obama called the earthquake in Haiti an “incomprehensible tragedy.”

He’s right. But is there any tragedy that is comprehensible?

By what measure do we comprehend something like this? What could ever make it so understandable that we can eliminate from our hearts and minds the cry that surfaces again and again, the cry of why?

I am a Catholic priest. On the day the earthquake happened I was trying to answer an email from a young woman who, after the suicide of a close friend, had begun to wonder how the God who loved her was compatible with the Church’s doctrine about hell. I had also received a message from another friend who was also questioning the compatibility between the Christian God and the suffering of the innocent.

He was quoting something I wrote: “I cannot worship a God who demands that I tear out from my heart and my mind the question of why the suffering of the innocent happens.”

I remember a debate I had with Christopher Hitchens in which he was frustrated when I kept agreeing with him that things happen that make it reasonable to despise a God that demands a

blind acceptance of the goodness of His will. Then this horror in Haiti happens. What am I to say to myself about the question that will not go away: Why?

I will not suppress the question. I want to face the horror as it is, without tranquilising consolations. Officials keep coming out assuring the victims of the tragedy that their “hearts and prayers” go out to them.

Prayers? To Whom? To a God who could have simply prevented this from happening?

The Church was not spared anything. The cathedral collapsed killing the archbishop, seminaries and convents were destroyed, killing future priests and dedicated religious Sisters. The pope’s representative was saved because he happened to be outside his collapsing residence and is spending a second night in the garden with surviving workers from his office. To what kind of God can one pray in such circumstances?

Only to that God who, as St. Paul wrote, “spared not his own Son” the pain of the cry of why.

If He gave his Son to die for us, Paul argues, it is impossible that He should refuse us anything that will help or bless us, since He has nothing He values more than His

Son (Rm 8:32). I do not want an explanation for why this God allows these tragedies to happen.

An explanation would reduce the pain and suffering to an inability to understand, a failure of intelligence so to speak. I can only accept a God who "co-suffers" with me. Such is the God

of the Christian faith.

But faith or no faith, Christian or not, our humanity demands that the question "why" not be suppressed, but that it be allowed to guide our response to everything that happens. This is the only way to a possible redemption of our humanity. □

Life After Death, Psychics

Life After Death

Q. My husband died recently and I am finding it hard to cope. Is there a place called Heaven? Will I see my husband again when I die? Will he still be my husband?

A. Please accept my deepest sympathies on your husband's death. I recommend him to the prayers of all our readers. Of course there is a heaven. Christ tells us that all those who believe in Him will never die. 'He who believe in me has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.' Christ told his disciples 'I am going to prepare a place for you...I shall return to take you with me' (Jn: 14) The Catholic Catechism (CCC 1023 and CCC 1028) speaking about Heaven says - 'Those who die in God's grace and friendship... life forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face. The Church calls this...the Beatific Vision.' So heaven is living for ever with the God who created us and sent his son to die for us. St. Paul writing about heaven (1Cor 2: 9-10) has this to say "We teach what scripture calls: the things that no eye has seen and

no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him." Will you see your husband again when you die? If, as we believe, Heaven is perfect happiness, then we will of course be with the people we loved in this life, especially our family and all those who travelled with us on the road of life. St. Catherine tells us that our departed loved ones long for our coming to join them just as our heavenly Father does.

Psychics

Q. What does the Church think of Psychics?

A. Thank you for your question. The Church rejects all practices falsely supposed to unveil the future. It says 'consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honour, respect and loving fear that we owe to God alone.' Psychics would be included in the list. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. CHRISTOPHER (JULY 25) SERVING AN ALL POWERFUL MASTER, JESUS CHRIST

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

Before the 1969 reform of the Roman calendar, Christopher was listed as a martyr who died under Decius. Nothing else is known about him. There are several legends about him including the one in which he was crossing a river when a child asked to be carried across. When Christopher put the child on his shoulders he found the child was unbelievably heavy. The child, according to the legend, was Christ carrying the weight of the whole world. This was what made Christopher patron saint of travellers and is invoked against storms, plagues, etc.. His former feast day was July 25.

In 1969, the Church took a long look at all the saints on its calendar to see if there was historical evidence that that saint existed and lived a life of holiness. In taking that long look, the Church discovered that there was little proof that many "saints", including some very popular ones, ever lived. Christopher was one of the names that was determined to have a basis mostly in legend. Therefore Christopher and others were dropped from the universal calendar.



Christopher's cult was not suppressed but it is confined to local calendars (those for a diocese, country, or so forth). His name Christopher, means Christ-bearer. He died a martyr during the reign of Decius in the third century.

Before Christopher became a Christ-bearer, he had a strong desire to passionately serve the person who was the most powerful man in the world.

This might be a likely story but has not been historically verified. There is little historical data on St. Christopher but enough to admit that we are in the presence of a martyr and therefore a saint. It doesn't hurt to remember him.

In Quest of the Most Powerful

The cult and the veneration rendered to this saint are manifold and are present throughout history not just in the Middle Ages. Pilgrims, who forded the Alpine passes or crossed rivers, invoked the protection of St. Christopher. St. Christopher became the patron of ferrymen, of postmen and athletes, of laborers and porters, of those who did heavy work. Then, after the XVI Century devotion to him waned. We do not know why.

Why this whole devotion and plea for 'protection'? All this is because of a hagiographical story about him in the works of *Jacob de Voragine* in his *Legenda Aurea*. There is very little of history in the story but it is significant and touching. Here it is:

Christopher was a Canaanite, a giant of a man endowed with great and impressive physical strength. He was a warrior and his face aroused terror in those who beheld him. He had a great desire to serve the strongest of men and so he went in search of such a person. At first he found a very powerful king and was employed in his service.

But one day he heard a juggler sing a song in which used the word devil and each time he used that word he saw the king make the Sign of the Cross. Christopher became uneasy and doubtful and asked the king the reason for his behaviour. When the king

hesitated, he threatened to leave. Finally he confided to him: "When I hear the name of the devil, I make the sign of the Cross to prevent any harm from coming to me." Christopher concluded that the devil was stronger than the king. He left the king and continued to search... for the devil, that he might be employed by him. He looked everywhere but did not find him. Given the ubiquity of the subject, he did not have to search very hard. Along a deserted road he saw, coming toward him a terrible-looking character who asked him: "Where are you going and who are you looking for? Christopher replied: "I am looking for the Devil because I have heard that he is the strongest person." And the devil, the Father of lies replied: "I am the one you are looking for." It was there that Christopher was employed in his service and docilely obeyed him like a true disciple.

One day they came to a Cross and the devil instinctively diverted his steps. The action did not escape Christopher: "What is the meaning of this? Why did you avoid the Cross? The devil pretended not to hear and did not answer him, but Christopher insisted: "You mean to tell me you are afraid of it" again silence. When he threatened to leave him forever, the devil was forced "to confess" that the Cross was his one weakness after a certain Jesus Christ died on it... Christopher logically concluded: "then if you are afraid, then you are not the most powerful person. Goodbye, I will go and find Jesus Christ." He parted company with the devil.

Called to be a ferryman

Once more he began his quest

for the most powerful person. "Where is Jesus Christ?" he kept asking people. They told him: "Go down there to that hermit and he will show you Jesus Christ." He went there and found a poor hermit wrapped in prayer and penance. "What have I to do to meet Jesus Christ?" he immediately asked. What a question! The poor hermit was a saint but not an expert in the discernment of spirits. He did not have time to instruct him. And besides, he did not know the proverb that said before you know a person you should have walked in his shoes. "You must fast!" He looked perplexed. "Should I fast? I cannot." Ask me to do anything else." He replied: **"to see Jesus Christ you will have to pray a lot."** Christopher replied: **"That is another thing I can't because I don't know what prayer means."** The hermit then pointed to the river nearby and said: "No one can cross without danger of death. Well, if you stay on the bank your enormous strength and your prodigious stature will serve to transport travellers. **Your service would then please Christ. You will then be able to see him.**" He was finally satisfied and he replied: "This is something I can do and I will do it to serve Christ." That was what he did day and night without hesitation and with a sense of dedication and without discrimination. It also made him very happy. But when would he see Jesus Christ?

One night he heard the voice of a child calling him: "Christopher, come and help me to cross the river." Christopher came out of his hut but found no one. He did the same thing a second time - no one. The third time he finally saw a child

who had begged for his help: **"Come and take me to the other shore."** Christopher took the child on his shoulders and began crossing. Instead of being a simple crossing it became more and more complicated. The weight he was carrying increased; the force of the water became stronger; and he, the giant, for the first time, thought he would not be able to get across. But he finally succeeded this time. When he reached the other shore he said to the child: "My dear child, you caused me some real danger. You weighed so much I thought I had the whole world on my shoulders." The child replied: "Don't be surprised, Christopher, you not only carried the whole world on your shoulders but also the one who created it. I am Jesus Christ, the master you seek to serve. As a proof that I am telling you the truth, place your staff outside your hut and tomorrow I will adorn it with fruits and flowers." After this, the child disappeared. On the next day, the staff was full of date palms.

As one notices, this story, (with its stamp of various mythological-cultural influences) is very touching and has many lessons, philosophical, spiritual, catechetical and existential.

This is how Ernest Hello comments on it: "Christopher is a dangerous name. To be a Christ-bearer is something out of the ordinary. Perhaps this mysterious name contains one of the mysteries of history in which there is much hidden meaning," and that is fine.

This beautiful story was created by Jacopo di Varazze in order to justify the name of the martyr Christopher from the Third Century but it also has much symbolism for us today.

(Continued on pg. 32)

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Prenatal Visit

A couple was making their first visit to Dr. Mike Wilson prior to the birth of their first child.

After the exam, the doctor took a small stamp and stamped the wife's stomach with indelible ink.

The man and his wife were curious about what the stamp was for, so when they got home, the man took out his magnifying glass to try to see what it was. In very small letters, the stamp said, "When you can read this, come back and see me."

Yellow Canaries

A lady went to a pet shop.

"I'd like to buy two yellow canaries," she told the owner.

"We don't have any canaries, but we have these," the owner said, as he showed the lady some pale green parakeets.

"That's not what I'm looking for," the lady stated.

But the pet store owner refused to give up. He said, "Just think of them as yellow canaries that aren't quite ripe yet."

Tax Reform

At an open conference in Vermont, the state tax commissioner asked the audience which sort of taxation they thought was the most fair and equitable.

There was a pause, and then a white-haired man in the back raised his hand. "The poll tax," he said.

"But the poll tax was repealed

some time ago," replied the commissioner.

"Ay-yuh," declared the old man, "that's what I like about it."

Lunch and Learn

The company I work for sometimes holds "Lunch and Learn" seminars for employees during lunchtime. These deal with a variety of physical and mental health issues. If the seminar lasts beyond the normal lunch hour, we're supposed to get managerial approval to attend.

So, last week, this flyer came around:

LUNCH AND LEARN
SEMINAR: WHO'S
CONTROLLING YOUR LIFE?
(Get your manager's permission
before attending)

Looks like that question's been answered

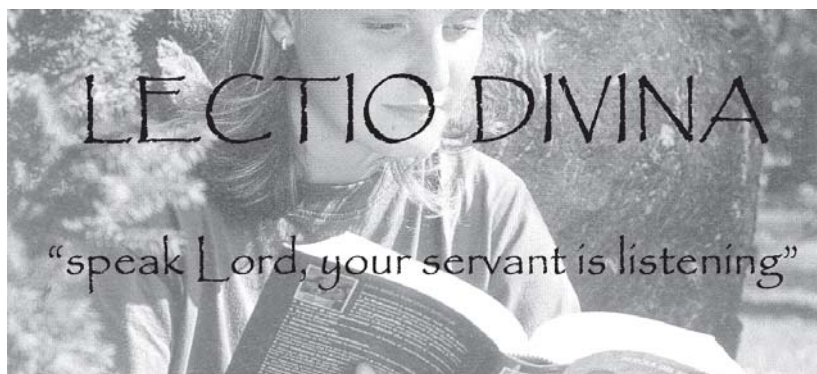
Zookeeper's Dilemma

A zookeeper wanted to get some extra animals for his zoo, so he decided to compose a letter. The only problem was that he didn't know the plural of "mongoose."

He started the letter: "To whom it may concern, I need two mongeese."

No, that wouldn't work, so he tried again: "To whom it may concern, I need two mongooses." Is that right?

Finally, he got an idea: "To whom it may concern, I need a mongoose, and while you're at it, send me another one." □



SURFACE AREA

by Dermot Connolly

The bread that we break is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

Consider your lungs: two sponges, each with an air system and a blood system that divides and subdivides and intertwines until air and blood almost touch each other - only a cell-width separates them. That's where the vital exchange takes place: oxygen from air to blood and into your body, and carbon dioxide out from blood to air where it is breathed away. If you could spread out all the tiny places and surfaces where this exchange takes place in human lungs, it would be about the size of a tennis court. That's a large effective area for gas exchange, every breath you take.

Surface area is crucial in nature and in the mechanics of our living. The grills on the radiators in our cars or in our home central

heating provide more surface area, the better to transfer heat - either to get rid of it or to warm our houses. The bristles on a brush, the tufts on a towel, the spray from a shower rose or a watering can - more surface area, more active contact. Even the clouds of pollen and seeds spreading life (and irritation!) in our atmosphere: sessile plants enlarging their surface area, reaching out to other plants or searching for fertile growing places.

Could this be Christmas language, Jesus being God's surface area in our tangible world? God with skin on, as someone put it, so as to touch





people, lay hands on them, embrace them. It's where the vital exchange takes place. She said, "If I touch his clothes, I will be made well" (Mark 5:25, and 5:41, 7:33, 8:23). At Bethlehem Jesus himself had to be touched, washed with water and rubbed with oil and ointment, as might the skin of any baby. Or the skin of a dead body taken from a cross (Mark 16: 1; John 19:40). This is indeed Christmas language, and more!

Perhaps twenty-five years after Calvary, St. Paul wrote to the church of Corinth: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). It was a thing he insisted on, that Christ has risen from death, and now the church - the body of believers - was his presence to the world. The surface area of Christ, where the vital exchange takes place. That can be hard to believe when we

look at the often sordid history of the church, or at ourselves in all our weakness and failure. But then, Jesus of Nazareth was familiar with weakness and failure.

For the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, the surface area of Christ in the world is a playground: "for Christ plays in ten thousand places,/ Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his / To the Father through the features of men's faces". I sometimes wonder why Church news is so often dispiriting and contentious, when there could be so much tangible joy in it: a mother delighting in the limbs and eyes of her adorable baby; the bread and wine and water and oil of our sacraments; the glorious companionship of a God with skin on. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1: 14). □

FATHER, YOUR

by Antonia

This is the core of the Our Father and the centre of our Christian life. It was also the core of the life of Jesus: "Not my will but yours be done." That was what he kept saying in the garden of Olives (Mt 26, 36.42.44). In fact, he had already said earlier: "I came not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (Jn. 6, 38).

It was for this reason that the Apostles were committed to telling everything about the will of God (cf Mt 28, 20 and At 20, 27).

It is only by fulfilling the will of God, doing what pleases him, that we can attain all the good that God has promised us thus leading us to Christian perfection (cf Heb. 13, 21; 10, 36).

It is Only For Our Good

But what does 'the will of God' consist in? In the final analysis, God only wants our good, our fulfillment and our happiness. God "wants everyone to be saved" (1 Tim 2, 4). It is from here that the Ten Commandments emanate, born out of the love of God for us and is synthesized with the love of God for our neighbour. They are not some whim of God who could have perhaps have wanted us to be His servants and grovel at His feet. No! They are nothing but an act of the tender love of the Father would never let His children do anything harmful. In His infinite wisdom He knows what could destroy us, ignoring His warnings; and so in His great concern for us He warns us of the risks... even though we often consider His concern for us as annoying infringements on our freedom.

Don't we find it difficult to understand our parents' warnings either when they tell us not to drive too fast, about dubious friendships, or certain dangerous substances? Yet they know only too well that their children don't really like these warnings that are actually meant to protect them!

Ask in Order to Receive

Therefore, carrying out the will of God is the only way to realize our goal in this life and in the next. But often, faced with so many temptations, this seems impossible to achieve! What then? At times our courage fails us...at other times our desire to do God's will also wanes.

Jesus places himself in our midst to give us His strength and His love! He doesn't just give us directions to follow if we want. He even offers us the means to take us through life. Did He not do the same thing for the lost sheep? He went looking for it, and when He found it He put it on His shoulders "rejoicing" (cf Lk. 15, 4-7). It is for this reason that Scripture says: God "has the power to do much more

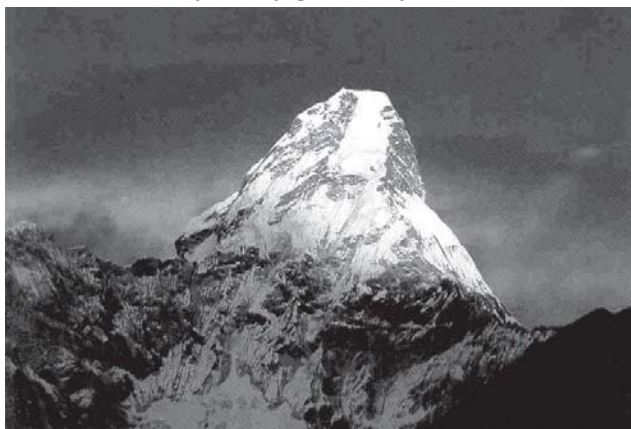
WILL BE DONE

Rudoni

than we can ever ask for or think of" (Eph. 3, 20); God "provides you with every good thing you need in order to do His will and what pleases Him" (Heb. 13, 21); "God is always at work in you to make you willing and ...able to obey his own purpose" (Phil 2, 13).

So, if you want to do the will of God despite your reluctance, fear, inconstancy you should ask Him for His light and His strength and you should not doubt that He will give it to you if you ask Him. Doubtless, He will most certainly surely give it to you! I often

meditate on this passage from the letter of St. James (1, 5) in which we recall that if we have asked wisely, we ought to have the faith to believe that we shall receive!



*Prayer strengthens our faith and
our life to please God always*

We express this request particularly when we prepare ourselves to

approach the Eucharist: Christ, actively present, enters the heart and transforms it! We expressed this desire in our morning and evening prayers, the Rosary and the simple ejaculations that we repeat throughout the day: "Jesus, guide me to think of you! "Give me the strength to do what you want me to do" "I need you, I want you, I love you! "Remain always in my heart!"

It is the same Jesus that asks us to pray to Him so that we may do his will: "Remain in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it is joined to the vine, so you will not bear fruit if you are not with me, one vine" (Jn. 15, 4). This invitation to be united with God reappears in the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father: "Father, may your will be done," or in other words: "give us the grace to do what you want of us." That is how we will achieve our goal - which is doing God's will. This is what we pray for and it is what we will obtain from Him!□

*Walks in the park,
the singing of birds,
rosy sunsets, picnics
by the water
- the best things in life
are free!*

When Poverty is a blessing

by Audrey Carli

I arose at dawn as usual, sat in my cosy chair in front of the window overlooking the scenic park across the street. The old trees gnarled with a multitude of branches that swayed throughout the years seemed to gaze at me with a welcome. Now widowed with my children grown, I discovered something that morning I had not recognised sooner. It was a blessing I had enjoyed but had not told God how wonderful it was - until today.

Now I must write about this finally recognized blessing. But back then I was too "blind" to see it. My husband and I had too little money to enjoy our poverty.

Enjoy poverty? How could I say such a thing? We see poverty mentioned on TV programmes and it is a negative, deplorable thing. No one would see anything good in being poor...

Well, Dave and I had scant funds during his time as a college student. We married young, had our first baby a year later and then Dave lost his factory job. How could we manage financially? We ended up both working, part-time. He worked nights when he was



free and he also babysat. I worked days after he finished his classes and he then babysat. I recall how thrilled I was when we could manage to pay our rent, buy food and pay other bills. If there was any money left over, we might be able to buy Debbie a new

nightgown.

How soft that nightgown was! The pink flannel looked as wonderful to me and as pretty on my baby as a luxurious fur coat to someone else, I thought. We had the basics and each other!

In our spare time on week-ends, we took walks. Yes, our entertainment was walks. We saw the pretty park, the river, the birds flitting about the tree branches. We also bought our needs at the shops by going to the discount counters. We lived on day-old bread that cost half the price of fresh. Our milk was bought where it cost the least, even if it meant we had to hike a mile farther to buy it! Our joy was being together in our free hours. Yes, we thanked God for this. But I didn't know then what I would learn later.

For years, our family lived on a restricted budget. We bought what we needed and could rarely afford frills. But when we had free time, we went for a walk or a short ride to the woods to enjoy a picnic by the water. How lovely was the rosy sunset! How glorious was the sight of the moon shimmering on the river at night! "The best things in life are free," we told each other.

When our children were growing up, the stress was on giving our young a college education. "The next generation won't have to go without frills the way we did," many said.

We wanted our offspring to have a good education, so each one went to college. They got scholarships and worked summers to pay for their tuition and books, plus room and board. My husband who taught school from September to June, painted

homes summers to earn the funds to help our son and daughters get their degrees. Two now are eye doctors, and one is a college counsellor.

With the collective population working with two incomes per married couple, I have observed the needs and costs rise with this new generation. I am not criticizing them for their expenses in daily living. But in my husband's and my poverty we still had time for each other. Too often in the present lifestyle, both husband and wife are busy at jobs. Their children must be tended by hired help. The youngsters sometimes lament: "Mommy; I miss you. When can you stay home with me?"

Gone is the day when a flannel nightgown was a luxury; when cloth diapers were laundered and dried repeatedly; when Mother was the sole tender of the young. Now there are myriad needs for the family such as costly disposable diapers, hired babysitters and cleaning help and the pressure to purchase garments that fit some unknown person's designation.

For example, my nephew told his parents before school began in September: "I have to buy my jeans from a certain store and they have to be a certain brand or I'll be laughed out of school. I know my cousin Tim gave me his jeans but if I wear them, I'll get laughed at. They're not the right kind, Mom!"

How sad for this current generation who cannot enjoy leisurely walks, experience the joy of a small purchase that need not come from a certain store or bear a specific name brand, who cannot afford to let Mother stay home and

clean, bake, cook and tend the young. The cost of living is too high, she must work or the family could lose their home and have to move. They might not be able to purchase fuel for warmth or cooking. The phone might even have to go.

How blessed many of us in the last generation were! We could stay home, keep house, be with our babies and watch our school-age offspring grow-up. Yes, college education is beneficial. But what went wrong? Why did the family become a victim? Why do little ones need to cry out: "Mommy; when can you be home with me?"

The choice is not simple. My eye-doctor daughter cannot close her business and stop helping her patients. They need her expertise

and she needs their payments to pay for her optometry practice. My counsellor daughter needs to work because her husband has ill health - and what if he has to quit working? She needs to keep her job.

My son, an eye doctor, told me: "I remember when you were home all the time, Mom. I want my wife to be home and raise our children, too. My income allows her to stay home. Not everyone can do that. And I feel sad for this new trend."

Lord, thanks for the years I was able to stay home, bake and cook and clean plus tend my children. I long for the time when my grown offspring can enjoy the "poverty" benefit I enjoyed. We had plenty. We were rich! □

KEEPING A CLEAN SLATE

At one of our conferences, a man boasted to me, "You know, I've been married for 24 years and I've never once apologized to my wife for anything I've done."

"Oh, really?" I said, with a tone that urged him to tell more.

"Yeah," he said with obvious pride. "Every time we get into squabble, or any kind of disagreement, I just tell her, 'I am sorry you're mad at me.' I don't admit anything—I just tell her it's too bad she had to get so mad." Then with a cheesy grin, he admitted. "All these years she's never realized that I've never once apologized."

It's amazing how many people behave like children trying to weasel out of punishment after getting caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Yet the scripture is clear: A failure to seek forgiveness and to forgive results in an angry heart, resentment and bitterness. Left to run their unrestrained courses, these emotions will destroy a relationship.

In Ephesians, Paul tell us to put away bitterness and wrath, but he doesn't leave it there; he tells us how. Look at verse 32: "*And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other.*"

Forgiveness makes a long-term relationship possible. It keeps our slate clean.

As difficult as it is to ask for forgiveness, it's equally hard to grant it when you have been wronged. You can tell if you've forgiven your mate by asking one question: "Have I given up my desire to punish my mate?" When you let that desire go, you free your spouse and yourself from the bonds of your anger.

It's liberating to admit you're wrong, and it's even more liberating when the other person forgives and says, "That's okay—everybody makes mistakes." *by Dennis and Barbara Rainey*

KNOWING AND LOVING GOD

by Gianni Asti(T/A:ID)

Going through the *The Companion of Youth* a prayer book written by Don Bosco for his boys, we note that he points out the means to help youngsters acquire the virtues particular to their age.

It seemed elementary that youngsters should begin to know God by discovering how much He loves them so they can reciprocate that love.

In order to fall in love with someone one needs to know the other person, feel captivated by the other, loved by the other and nurture a burning desire to spend the rest of one's life with the one loved. If our boys and young people are abandoning prayer it is because they have not experienced or tasted God's love for them yet. To pray, in fact, is to think about loving God and of



ADVICE TO HIS BOYS

DON BOSCO'S

feeling loved by Him. Our first task as educators is therefore to help youngsters to know God and to experience His love for them.

God's Great Love for Youngsters

This is how Don Bosco explains the love God has for youngsters: "Convince youngsters that we have all been created for heaven. Therefore, we should do everything with this great goal in mind."

It is this great love that should inspire us. Although He loves every human being because they are the work of his hands, nevertheless, He has a particular affection for youngsters.

God loves you because He waits for you to do much good; he loves you because you are at an age when you are simple, you are humble and innocent and in general, you are not yet a prey of the Evil One.

The evidence of none other than our Divine Saviour assures us



that He considers anything good done to these youngsters as done to Him and He threatens anyone who scandalizes them. Here are his words: "If one of you should scandalize one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better that a millstone be tied around his neck and he be thrown into the depth of the sea." He loved children when they gathered around him. He embraced them and gave them His blessing. He said: "Let the little children come to me."

Since the Lord loves you so much you should make it a point to respond to that love...." (*The Companion of Youth S.E.I. Turin, reedited in 1957, - In Italian only*).

We believe that it was the experience of Don Bosco's presence among his boys that gave rise to these expressions. In his **life of Dominic Savio**, after his first encounter with the lad, he wrote: *I saw that the child was really filled with the Holy Spirit, and I admired the work of Divine Grace in one so young.*" He went further, "he was so habituated to conversing with God that he could be in any place, in the noisiest surroundings and he would be wrapped in prayer to God."

I have not loved the Lord enough during my life

These were the touching last words of **Francis Besucco**. He was barely fourteen years old and he lay dying in the Oratory of Valdocco without his parents at his bedside. Don Bosco however, was present and here is the youngster's advice to his companions as Don Bosco recorded them:

"When he had somewhat regained his calm, I asked him if he would like to see his parents. "I

know I won't see them again," he replied, "because they are too far away and can't afford the trip, and in addition my father is working far from home. Please let them know that I die resigned, happy and content. Tell them too to pray for me. I hope to go to Heaven. I shall await them all there. Tell my mother..." he could not go on.

Some hours later I asked: "Have you a message for your mother?"

"Tell her that God has heard her prayers. Several times she said to me: 'my little Francis, I wish you a long life, but I'd rather that you die a thousand times than become God's enemy through sin.' O God! Bless my mother, may she be resigned to my death, and grant me the grace to see her and all my family in heaven, so that together we may enjoy Your glory!"

He would have gone on talking, but I urged him to keep quiet and rest. When his condition worsened we decided to give him Extreme Unction. When asked if he wished to receive the sacrament, he answered, "Oh yes, with all my heart!"

"Is your conscience perhaps, still bothered?"

"Yes, something keeps bothering me deeply."

"What is it? Do you want to say it in confession?"

"It has always been on my mind when I was well, but I would never have believed it could upset me so at this point.... *You can't imagine how much I regret that I have not loved God as much as He deserves.*"

Don't worry about that. Now get ready for Extreme Unction which will take away all remains of sin and even restore your health, if it is good for your soul." (EBM 7,359-360)

Don Bosco urges us to make our youngsters conscious of the fact that they are loved by God from the moment of their conception. We must help them to imagine Jesus, the Son of God made man, a youngster, a teenager, their own age, someone who wanted to share their joys and who was tempted as they are. At fifteen he was already working miracles, preaching and living his hidden life in Nazareth, just like youngsters today who live hidden lives. Who knows what a glow must have emanated from the face of that boy, what beauty, innocence shone through those eyes.

A friend to be known and loved

This Friend listens to conversations that are confided to him about things his young friends cannot reveal to either their companions or their parents. We must help them to cherish those moments of communion, those brief visits to the Blessed Sacrament; those moments of recollection that they spend in a corner of their homes that they reserve for prayer.

Domenichino Zamberletti, was a thirteen year-old youngster who, emulating Dominic Savio, died in 1950 of an incurable illness. He suffered a slow martyrdom for 8 long months and he confided to his mother:

When I receive Jesus I don't know how to express the joy I experience throughout the day... I don't sense this joy on the outside... I let go of all the craving to be cured... I know that it displeases them... but I know that I will not get well. I cannot imagine what a grace it is to die at thirteen! Heaven is assured.

They say he was very devoted to the Sacred Heart. He used to fix



his gaze on the picture while his lips moved in a mysterious conversation. Just think of how these youngsters experienced the love of Jesus and how they learned to follow him along the way of the Cross.

To the wonderful testimony of Domenichino we could add that of **Silvio Dissegna** of Poirino (Turin) who died at the age of 12 in 1979. From the time his sickness was detected he accepted the will of God and saw how similar were his sufferings to those of Jesus. He said:

Dad, let's be courageous, Jesus will not abandon us... Every pain of mine is an act of love for you, O Jesus... I wish to remain only with Jesus, to talk to him and to tell him what is in my heart. Mummy, go and rest, you are tired and you need sleep... Jesus, I suffer when I see you carrying the cross and when you were scourged. I unite my sufferings with yours. Jesus, be near me! ...Mummy, I am walking the road of Calvary, but there is yet to be another crucifixion, mummy, be prepared! I wish to pray alone.

And this is the Jesus that youngsters ought to know and love and follow. It is so necessary to help them to meditate on the Passion of Jesus and on the Sacrifice of the Mass. Only in this manner will they be able come back and take part in the Sunday Eucharist that will gradually become a daily celebration for them. □

NEWSBITS

KANNUR, India

Church people in Kerala state are mourning the death of an Italian missionary, who built several institutions during her four-decade work among leprosy patients.



Canossian Sister Antoniette Sala died of old age on April 3 in Cherukunnu village in Kannur district. She was 96. Her funeral was held the following day.

"Missioners like Mother Sala are a great inspiration. Her life was a blessing to Kannur diocese and her death is a great loss," said Vicar General Father Devassy Earathara.

The Milan-born nun came to India in 1938 and in 1960 chose to work in Chirakkal mission, one of the least developed areas in northern Kerala, said her companions who work in the region.

Before coming to Kerala, the late nun taught in a school in neighboring Karnataka state's Belgaum town and worked in a missionary hospital in Lucknow, northern India.

In Kerala in 1968, the nun started St. Martin De Porres Hospital at Cherukunnu with 72

beds. In the course of her work, she set up another nine institutions, including hospitals and old age homes, in various parts of the state's Malabar region.

"She set apart her life to serve the poorest and to save the leprosy patients in Malabar," said Sister Laly, a tutor at St. Martin De Porres Hospital and Nursing school.

Every week, she organized awareness programmes in tribal hamlets. "Her visits helped many get rid of their fear of the disease," the nun told UCA News.

When the Italian nun began her work, leprosy was considered a curse and patients were ostracized even by their families. But the nun "took care of the leprosy patients without any hesitation" and healed them as well as society, Sister Laly added.

The late nun, who had a doctorate in skin diseases from Spain, introduced multi-drug therapy and treated nearly 7,000 leprosy patients in one hospital alone - the Father Cairony Memorial Leprosy Rehabilitation Centre at Cherukunnu.

Jose Thankappan, a local Catholic, said people of various religions have already started praying at the nun's tomb. "Soon we will have a saint, who has spoken to us and touched us," he told UCA News.

VATICAN CITY

The pope gave the students an "A plus." That was the grade awarded by Pope Benedict XVI to the young Catholics who sang "Happy Birthday" to him in

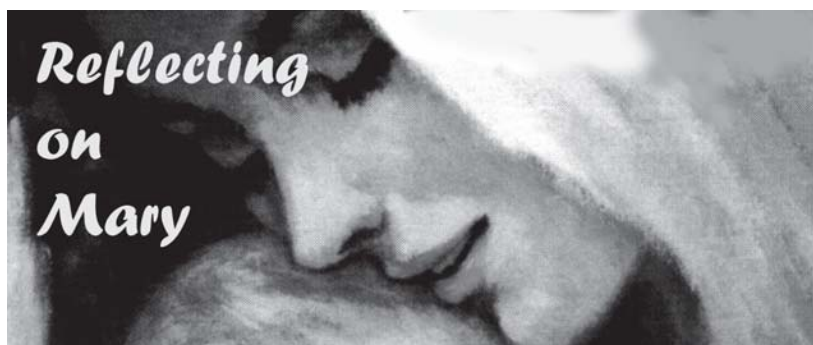
German at a gathering with young people at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., in 2008. The incident reveals the warm relationship that Pope Benedict, the former teacher, has enjoyed with young people since his election to the papacy five years ago at age 78. His connection with young adults began as a priest and a theology professor whose lectures were standing-room-only at German universities in Bonn, Munster and Regensburg. He has continued to nurture young people in the faith after inheriting Pope John Paul II's legacy of strong relations with young adult Catholics. As Pope Benedict once told President Nicolas Sarkozy during a visit to France, "Young people are my greatest concern." During his papacy the Vatican has attempted to reach out to the young through the new social networking media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Many of the pope's international travels have included separate meetings with the young people of various nations, including Brazil, Cameroon, the Czech Republic and France.

MESERO, Italy

Pietro Molla, the widower of St. Gianna Beretta Molla, died at his home in Mesero April 3 at the age of 97. In September 2005, on what would have been their 50th wedding anniversary, the saint's husband wrote, "I've often thought and said that not even eternity would give me enough time to thank the Lord for the very unique gift he gave me" in "seeing my beloved Gianna elevated to the highest honors of the altar." Fourteen months after their



marriage, Gianna and Pietro welcomed their first child, Pierluigi. Maria Zita was born in 1957 and Laura was born in 1959. But in late 1961, pregnant with the couple's fourth child, Gianna was diagnosed with a uterine tumor. The couple refused treatment that could have harmed the unborn child. Gianna Emanuela was born in April 1962 and her mother died one week later of an infection. On the 40th anniversary of his wife's death, Molla wrote that he still felt his wife's presence "in the memory of our six months of engagement and our six and half years of married and family life, filled with full and perfect joy with our children." Addressing his late wife, he said, "When the Lord called you to heaven 40 years ago, although we were suffering we continued to feel that you were increasingly present and near, our protector in heaven." Gianna was a pediatrician and Pietro was an engineer. They were married in Magenta, the town outside Milan, where Gianna was born. Pope John Paul II beatified Gianna in 1994 and proclaimed her a saint in 2004. (CNS)□



THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

Roman Ginn, OCSO

The mother of God and the first followers of Jesus after his ascension were Jews who continued to frequent the temple and practice the law of Moses, because they believed that Jesus had come to fulfill and not to destroy that law. They venerated the Old Testament as the divinely inspired writings and the source of light and direction for their lives. The New Testament did not yet exist. They had neither the gospels nor the apostolic letters. What set them apart from the rest of Judaism was the conviction that the messiah had already come and would soon return in glory. Two or three decades later when St. Paul began to write his letters, he reminded his readers of the perennial utility of the Old Testament. For since he had taught his Jewish converts that they were now free from the Mosaic law, some of them may have concluded that the entire writings of the old covenant were not irrelevant. "So whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the

encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." (Rom 15, 4)

The church has certainly had much to endure lately and is in need of encouragement to fill it with hope. Consequently some reflection on the life and message of one of Israel's most ill-treated holy men may provide some of the succour we long for. If the prophet Jeremiah is not always an ideal model of endurance, even his weakness brings him closer to us and teaches us to hope.

The book of Jeremiah is long - the longest in the bible in fact-and complex. It covers four decades of Israel's history, during one of its most critical periods: the events in Jerusalem leading up to and concluding with the destruction of the city and its temple by the Babylonians. Babylon was the new super-power in the Near East at this moment but Egypt was unconvinced and was still trying

to revolt. The ruling class in Judah persistently toyed with the idea of joining the revolt. This policy was bitterly opposed by Yahweh who sent Jeremiah to convince the nation that its salvation lay in submission to Babylon. But if the prophet is to be sent, he must first be called.

"Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'" (1, 4) No mention of an angel or a vision. Yahweh invaded Jeremiah's intimacy with a silent thought. But the invitation did not appeal to him. He recognized the voice and sought an excuse for refusing. "then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.'" He was in his early twenties and so pleaded underage. Yahweh however overruled the objection. "But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to

whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.'" (1, 6-8)

Pope John Paul II gave three reasons for the lack of priestly vocations. The first is the fear of commitment. Like Jeremiah, many young people today are not capable of rising above their own insecurity and consecrating their lives to someone greater than themselves who will take care of them. Instead of seeing a call from God as an invitation to a life of communion and trust with him, they look on it as an assault on their freedom. No one can accept an invitation from God for a lifetime commitment without the willingness to live with certain margins of insecurity and the readiness to soil one's hands by contact with life's muddy reality.





It may be helpful to compare Jeremiah's reaction to God's call with Mary's as recorded in St. Luke's gospel. When the angel Gabriel addressed her, "Hail favoured one! The Lord is with you," and then went on to explain what God was asking of her, she did not fish for an excuse to avoid the mission but merely requested its clarification. "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" She wanted to understand the nature of the task she was to undertake. And here the Pope finds the second reason for the lack of priestly vocations: confusion about the priesthood itself. A sacerdotal identity crisis. Once Mary had seen more clearly what was required of her, her response was generous and whole-hearted. She knew she had a call from someone who had confidence in her, that she must strive to prove worthy of. Although much of her future was opaque and impenetrable, she would slowly discover God's plan for her life by living and moving from one situation to the next seeking in each God's will. Only in darkness does the light of the stars appear.

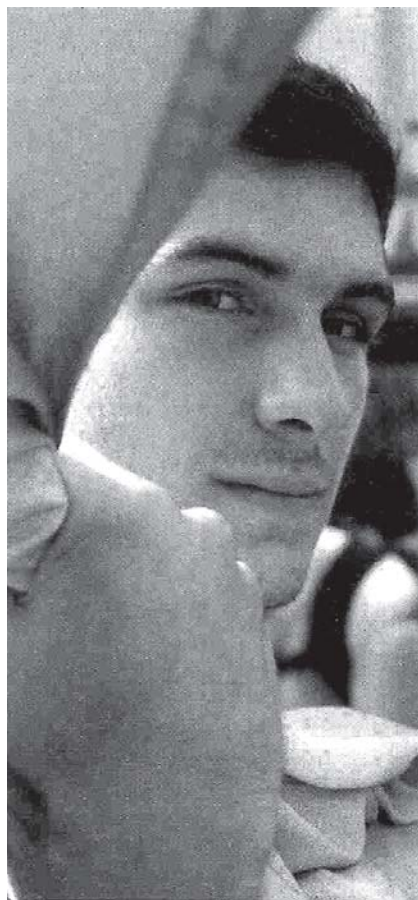
Some vocations take off with a bang leaving no delay to disorientate them. St. Paul, for example. But divine grace allows

other possibilities. It can work slowly "down the nights and down the days...down the arches of the years. This seems to have been the case with Jeremiah. After Yahweh's initial call and its confirmation by a touch of the divine hand to the prophet's lips, (v. 9f) the young man still remained adamant. So one day, when Jeremiah is looking at an almond tree blossoming, the divine word came to him again. "Tell me, Jeremiah, what is it you see? The branch of a tree, I told him, with the eyes already open. Well seen, he answered; and I too have my eyes open, watching for the opportunity to carry out the threats I utter." (v. 11ff) Yet another vision followed, (v. 13-19) before the divine call was accepted.

The hesitancy of Jeremiah may be a symptom that reveals that he was suffering from what Pope John Paul II saw as the third reason for the shortage of priestly vocations: a deficiency in divine intimacy. In the New Testament this means there is lacking a personal and passionate love of Jesus. For Jeremiah it signified a weakness in his love of Yahweh. A weakness that was slowly overcome. It was burnt out of him by the fire Yahweh lit in his heart. As the prophet himself cried out, "There is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones." He experienced in his century what then Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) says should be the lot of every Christian today. "Whoever comes close to Christ must be prepared to be burned. Christianity is great because love

is great. It burns, yet this is not the destructive fire but one that makes things bright and pure and free and grand. Being a Christian then, is daring to entrust oneself to this burning fire. His whole life is a witness to Jeremiah's surrender to this divine fire.

A call to communion with God in many of its phases will demand painful separations. For Jeremiah, it meant ostracism from the people he loved and even at times from Yahweh. Often the God that invited



us to share his life will seem to have walked out on us, and we will find ourselves without men and without him. If we can't accept this as a test of our love, we will drop out. For through this trial God is asking us if we followed him because he supplied something we wanted or answered our questions about life's meaning, or because we love him and want to live before him like the mother of Jesus in pure self-oblation. Deprived of his friends and pulled out of the peaceful life he had planned for himself, the prophet was offered the opportunity of being reborn as Yahweh's son standing before him in dialogue and prayer.

Jeremiah can be an excellent model for today's Catholic. As Pope Benedict XVI has said, "Christianity, as compared with the religion of Israel, is not a different religion; it is simply the Old Testament read anew with Christ." Without the New Testament, the Old Testament remains an unfinished fragment. This is especially clear in the case of our prophet. With his whole soul he insists on a doctrine of self-surrender, of sacrifice, of divine intimacy and of meaningful suffering that ancient Yahwism did not possess. His heart is too great to be confined to the limits of the Old Testament. His life has something tragically unfinished about it. From the mire of the cistern into which he had been cast by the princes of his people, (38, 6) his anguished cry will be picked up and magnified by the king of prophets in the garden of Gethsemane. □

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My most grateful thanks to the Holy Spirit and Our Blessed Mother Mary for the clear medical reports of my daughter and my husband.

Mrs. deSouza, Australia

My younger daughter Tanya was seriously ill in February 2010 with high fever, cold and cough. The doctors could not specifically diagnose her condition. I prayed ardently to Our Blessed Mother for her assistance. The CT scan of her chest showed that she had a mild attack of Pneumonia which was quickly brought under control and she was able not just to get back to her studies but could answer her board examinations too. I am most grateful to Our Blessed Mother for her love and protection.

Margaret Pinto, Goa

Our belated thanks to our dear Lord Jesus and Mother Mary for giving us a wonderful house and the many other favours we have received too.

S. Wilson, Thiruvananthapuram

Our long delayed but sincere thanks to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady for granting us a big favour five years ago.

Sylvester Dias, Castle Rock

My sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians for the safe delivery of our baby.

E. Roderick, Pune

My sincere thanks to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary for helping my son to clear his examinations and for many other favours received.

Monica, Mumbai

In the year 2009 I submitted my petition for the speedy processing of my Portuguese passport. In less than a year our entire family received their passports. I am most grateful to Our Blessed Mother.

L. Monteiro, Goa

St. Christopher: *Continued from pg. 14*

I think every person should see his life as a duty to ferry his fellowmen from one shore to the other, crossing some dangerous "rivers." Parents who choose to bring a new life into the world have to ferry their child from the realm of the womb into to life. After this they still have to ferry him/her from the shores of infancy to childhood and then continue ferrying him/her in a thousand other ways. They have to lead their child to the other shore of adolescence. The journey across the 'river' of adolescence is never easy, it is definitely risky, turbulent, difficult and sometimes circuitous. In short, they have to accompany

them to decisively "make that passage" to God. We who are teachers, what do we do daily; ferrying our students to the other shore of knowledge, helping them cross the dangerous river of ignorance? We are constantly ferrying people to the other 'shore' seeking only their good. In short we are all called to be ferrymen from one shore to the other. If this duty is performed in the same spirit of Christopher, with devotion and out of love for Jesus Christ, then each of us has found our own particular path to holiness. It is original, different and precious just as every single flower in our garden. □

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.

Our sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother for all the favours granted to us through the faithful recitation of the 'Three Hail Marys'.

Mario and Angela Lobo, Gujarat

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Help of Christians for the favours granted through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Please protect and bless my family always.

Ruby Rodrigues, Vasco da Gama, Goa

Most loving Mother thank you for the many favours received through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

A child of Mary, Mumbai

Our sincere thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary, through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys we have been blessed with so many favours.

M.S.R.

On the 21st August 2009, my daughter met with an accident on her way back from work. She fractured her right hand and had bruises on her forehead and leg. She was unconscious for two days but she has since recovered and is in perfect health. Her office handbag was handed over to me by her colleagues. Everything was intact except for her Rosary which was inside a thick leather purse. The beads were all broke in half. It seems Our Lady took the impact of the accident. We are most grateful for her protection.

Mrs. M.L.Monteiro, Goa

Our sincere thanks to Mother Mary for taking care of me during my surgery and for curing me of severe anxiety attacks. Our heartfelt thanks also for the many favours received through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Dear Mother do continue to bless and protect all the members of my family.

Irene D'Silva, Canada

Dear Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco I am most grateful for the gift of a son to my nephew, the betrothal of my niece and for helping my son to get admission into an International MBA course. Please keep my entire family in your care. I continue to pray the 3 Hail Marys fervently and faithfully.

Sarojini, Pune

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother for all the favours received and for answering our prayers. Please continue to shower on us your blessings and keep us in your care.

P. Bhatt, Mumbai

Our special thanks to Mother Mary. After praying the 3 Hail Marys faithfully we received news that a friend of ours was released from prison in one of the Gulf countries.

Mrs. Nancy Bhardwaj and Family, New Delhi

**THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO
OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO**

My sincere thanks to the Lord Jesus, Mother Mary, St. John Bosco and Dominic Savio for the many favours received.

A devotee, Ahmedabad

My sincere thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the favours received through their intercession.

Camino B. Goes, Goa

A million thanks to Almighty God, Our Blessed Mother and St. John Bosco for blessing my daughter with 2 healthy baby girls after 8 years of married life.

Hilda Coutinho, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for blessing my son and giving him good health, for granting my mother good health too and for peace in our home. I am also grateful for the numerous other favours granted to me.

S.A. Goa

My sincere thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco for the various graces and blessings received.

Effie, Mumbai

I am here to thank the Lord for all the graces I have received through the intercession of Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. John Bosco who constantly listened to my prayers and showered on me and my family their abundant blessings.

Novella Pinto, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for the gift of a baby girl to my sister and a baby boy to my friend Lata. Do continue to bless us all.

Mrs. Maxy L. Dias, Papdy, Vasai

My sincere thanks to Our Lady. I had to undergo a DNC test since I had a miscarriage. The matter was then sent for a biopsy. I was very worried. Before visiting the doctor I said the 3 Hail Marys. The doctor then said that there was nothing to worry about. I am fine now. I am thankful to Our Blessed Mother - Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio.

J.N. Mumbai

During the fifth month of her pregnancy, my daughter suddenly developed an alarming colour to her skin which grew darker as her pregnancy continued. I was worried and feared that it would affect the child. I just prayed the 3 Hail Marys to Our Lady. My heartfelt thanks to Our Blessed Mother and there was no effect on the baby boy that was born.

M. Martins, Goa

My heartfelt thanks to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians for all that has been done for me and given to me.

M. Dodd, Pune

My sincere and heartfelt gratitude to dearest Divine Mercy, Mother Mary, Help of Christians and St. John Bosco for the favours received.

Annamary Das

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



My sincere thanks for the powerful intercession of Our Blessed Mother, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio my husband now has a good job after a year's break.

Veena D'Souza, Doha, Qatar

Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a lovely baby girl (Catherin Rose) please keep her always under your care.

A Devotee, Australia

My sincere thanks to dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for a safe and

healthy holiday and for a safe return to Sydney without any problems.

Tessy Tellis, Sydney, Australia

Our sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of a baby boy.

Helen Augustus, Mumbai

I am sincerely grateful to Our Blessed Mother and Dominic Savio for the safe delivery and the gift of a baby boy.

Mrs. Donna Gomes, Goa

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery and the gift of a baby girl.

Mrs. Sally P. Vasai

Our sincere thanks and gratitude to Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy.

Rajesh and Joan D'Souza, Goa

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

JULY 2010

Holy Father's General Intention: *That in every nation of the world the election of officials may be carried out with justice, transparency and honesty, respecting the free decisions of citizens.*

Holy Father's Missionary Intention: *That Christians may strive to offer everywhere, but especially in great urban centres, an effective contribution to the promotion of education, justice, solidarity and peace.*

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MARY WAS THERE

In the month of February my son and my brother-in-law were on their way to Chennai by car. The road had been recently widened and this was every driver's delight. It was past midnight when my son suddenly woke up to find that the car was about to collide with a lorry that our driver was trying to overtake. The driver swerved at the last minute and the car landed on the median with its front axle broken in two and both the front tires burst. But for the damage to the vehicle there was not a scratch to any of those in the car. Mary was there and averted, what could have been a major accident. My sincere thanks to Our Lady, as a family we always recite the 'Three Hail Marys' before we undertake a journey.

P.T. Babakar, Erode

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay.

The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (*Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail*). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors. Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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