

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*To know Mary
is to follow
her gaze
which is
always directed
towards her Son
and that is why
we pray:
"Show unto us
the blessed fruit
of thy womb, Jesus."*

**Cover: Mary at the
Annunciation (A detail)**

by Nino Musio



From The Editor's Desk

Oh, How Blessed We Are!

There seemed to be only one snag to Christmas when I was young: you had to write thank-you letters to the relatives who gave you Christmas presents. Sometimes it was all the harder if you did not like the present of a few pencils and some other items of stationery some aunt had given you. My mother showed rare wisdom when she explained that the people who gave me presents did so because they really liked me and I was only acknowledging their love. Like all youngsters I liked being liked, and I wrote the letters with more grace, even if I felt sending me pencils and things-of-the-sort was a curious way of showing they loved me!

I was considerably older before I applied that piece of wisdom to God. God had been showering my life with his gifts for years before it occurred to me that his gifts were his ways of telling me that he too liked me. It was a wonderful surprise and suddenly I became more aware of the many, many gifts God had given me in the course of my life. So I am always delighted when our readers write to thank God (through the intercession of Our Lady, the Help of Christians, St. John Bosco or St. Dominic Savio) for listening to their fervent prayers. I am especially delighted to think that they too have made the discovery that God is revealing his love for them by answering their prayers. How often they write that they have long intended to write their letter of thanksgiving but only got around to it just now. Or is it only now that they have made the connection between the gift and the Giver of all gifts who shows his love by sending good things into our lives?

The saints thought that this was an excellent way to pray. Would it not be a good idea to set aside a few moments maybe once or twice a day...at midday - after a hearty lunch and then once more after a well deserved dinner to pause and briefly recollect how God has been in their lives that day? There is a danger that if we didn't do this we may, like thoughtless little children, take all that we have received for granted and easily overlook God's goodness. This habit can lead you to look for significant gifts in your life: It is a great revelation at the time of a wedding for the couple to realise that God has been preparing the love-of-their-lives for them from all eternity!

In a time when we are acutely aware of what we have lost through the greed of our fellow men, it is more important to count your blessings and hold on to the reassurance that you are precious in the eyes of God. As the poet wrote: *I greet him the day I meet him and bless when I understand.*

Fr. Ian Douulton sdb

2. DANCING IN THE RAIN

by Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss

Scheduled to speak at 7:00 pm, I had been invited to be present at six to see a performance they said I would enjoy. Filled with curiosity, I was in the auditorium at 6 pm sharp in time to hear the young musician of the evening, Mr. Patrick Henry Hughes, being introduced. Hardly had the welcoming applause died down when he was rolled onto the stage in his wheelchair, and began to play the piano. His fingers skimmed over the keys as he made beautiful intricate music. Later he began to sing as he played, and that was even more enthralling. Unable to clearly pinpoint the real reason, however, I knew that I was seeing something out of this world. There was this aura about him and the smile...his smile was simply magic!

After that brief taste of what this gifted youngster had to offer, we were invited to watch a 7-minute video titled, "The Patrick Henry Hughes story" which left us all dumbfounded. Born with no eyes, and a tightening of the joints which left him crippled for life, Patrick, already as a child, was fitted with artificial eyes and placed in a wheelchair. Before his first birthday, he discovered the piano. His mother reports, "You could hit any note on the piano, and within one or two tries, he'd unfailingly get it." By his second birthday, he was even playing requests.

Today, Patrick is a junior at the University of Louisville. His father attends classes with him and he has done creditably in almost all subjects. He's also a part of the



214 member marching band, only, he, the trumpet player 'marches' wheelchair-bound and he and his father do it together. But even more than his unbelievable musical talent, it was Patrick's "attitude of gratitude" that most touched the audience. On stage, between songs, he talked to us about his life and about how blessed he was. He said, "God made me blind and unable to walk. No BIG DEAL! But He gave me the ability...the musical gifts I have... and provides me with great opportunities to meet new people."

His performance over, Patrick and his father were on the stage together. The crowd rose to their feet and cheered for over five minutes. I personally was at a juncture in life where I was ready to meet someone like Patrick Henry Hughes. I needed a hero, and I found one instantly. I'll never forget that night, that smile, that music, but most importantly, that wonderful simple, joyful 'attitude of gratitude.'

On sharing Patrick's story with several others over the next few weeks, I received a letter from a friend saying, "I think you'll love this quote: "Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass...it's about learning to dance in the rain!" - Vivian Greene. That really summed it all for me: We all face adversity in our lives. However, it is not the adversity by itself that matters, but how we respond to it that determines the measure of joy and happiness in our life. How wonderful if we could all with gratitude learn how to dance in the rain! Another friend, Sarah Breathnach said it even more admirably: 'When we choose not to

focus on what is missing from our lives but are grateful for the abundance that's present - we experience heaven on earth.'"

Take up Your Cross

Isn't it strange that almost the first thing that Jesus requires of a prospective disciple is that he pick up his cross and follow him! And Luke, with wisdom born out of practical experience adds, 'each day' to this daunting demand! Some of our daily crosses are just that, little pin-pricks that come and go, but others like that of Patrick are life-long and with very little chance of them going away. Yet, how often we see that God closes one door only to open another, or at least a window, so that the person is not totally swamped by adversity! What then is it that enables some people to take their crosses in their stride and even perhaps conquer them to a large extent while others seem to be crushed by almost every passing cross that rests on their shoulders?

The Attitude That Matters

It is the way one looks at a cross that seems to be at the root of the different ways people handle their problems. It seems to be like the proverbial 'half-empty/half full' approach to life. Some choose to look at the emptiness that fills half the glass, meaning that they are deprived of so much (underneath of course, is the belief that a full glass is one's due, that somehow one deserves to have that full glass!) that should've or could've been one's lot in life. And the more we focus on what seems missing, the more miserable we get - and this can lead to all kinds of other complications, like envying others

their good fortune, becoming bitter and pessimistic, of seeking to get what 'is our due' by hook or by crook and landing ourselves into greater problems. We are all familiar with the long list that follows, and yet when we find ourselves trapped in this kind of thinking, there seems to be no way out! Ours seems to be a downward spiral into greater and greater misery – and the worst part is that with this negative attitude towards life, we drag everyone around us into the vortex making the entire surroundings depressing and crippling.

Others, like Patrick, choose to look at the brighter side of their difficulties and find so many ways out, surely without the comforts and conveniences that others have. It isn't surprising that what struck the speaker in the story above is Patrick's attitude of gratitude. It seems to begin with the assumption that as creatures, God does not really owe us anything – that whatever we have is sheer gift, given out of gratuitous love. When one is convinced that one could have had a lot less than one is blessed with, the urge to grumble, to compare, to sulk and wallow in negativity seems to vanish miraculously. Then one is free to focus on what one does have and make the best use of it.

Risen Christ with Us Always

Some have lived this positive approach and encouraged themselves with the adage: 'It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness!' But isn't this also the most sensible way to face life and its burdens? Besides, hasn't Jesus come down and immersed himself totally into our sinful situ-

ation, showing us how to love even to the end? He certainly was disappointed that not too many chose to follow his path of total trust in God's love for his creation, choosing rather the way of self-determination, and ending up in the depths of the whirlpool. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Mt 23:37).

So one thing seems to be sure – The Lord invites us to 'rise higher' and waits for our response. That is the least that he expects of us. Once we put our shoulders to the wheel and decide to keep moving, no matter how slowly or laboriously the scenario begins to change. What seems to help in making this decision to start on a new track is the practice of looking at the larger picture. It is said that if one took a tiny pebble and held it close enough to the eye, while closing the other, it would block out all vision. But if that same pebble was held at an arm's length (framing it against the larger background), one would be able to see not only the pebble but also the background! It often seems to be as simple as that – simply the way one chooses to look at a difficulty or obstacle.

Lesson for Life

In fact, even as we page through the Gospels, we notice that no sooner a person decides to plunge into a good and profitable action, than s/he is confronted with an almost insurmountable obstacle. The classic example is that of the paralyzed man brought by four of his

(Continued on pg. 22)



"DOING ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST"

Fr. Sean Sequeira, ordained a priest in 2010

For as long as I remember, it has always been my desire to become a priest. I can honestly and with great conviction, say that it first began at home, with very devout and God-fearing parents, the atmosphere at home was and is always that of prayer and full of strong Christ-like values. My parents have always encouraged us ie. My brother, sisters and me to actively participate in all church activities including choirs, youth, lectors, etc. and I believe that is where my inclination towards joining the priesthood began. Though I always knew that this is what I wanted to do, yet I must admit making that decision and taking that final step was no easy task. Being part of a wonderful circle of friends and enjoying life to the fullest was also very much a part of me, to the extent that when people became aware of my decision to join they found it very hard to believe.

One of the most common questions people keep asking is what or when did you get your "call"? Initially that was one of the most difficult questions to answer. And every time I asked myself that question, I too could not figure out the answer. But the "call" did come and it was just after my final year of college examinations were over; on Palm Sunday when the YLT in Orlem decided after every mass to give all who attended a palm with a Bible quote on it. There was just one left in my friend's basket, and without having read it, she came to me with it saying, "This one is



for you." But that was it. It was then that I just knew what I had to do, for the message read "He is calling you!" and from that day I decided to follow the Lord and serve in His vineyard and there was and is no turning back.

I am also deeply grateful to the seminary staff and all those who have helped sustain and deepen my faith and commitment towards my priestly vocation through these past eight years. I do realize that the journey ahead is no easy one, and that there probably would be a lot of difficulties and challenges incurred along the way, but I also know that it is He who has called me, and who has "sent me" (LK 4:18) and with Him all things are possible. For as St. Paul says and I truly believe that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). □

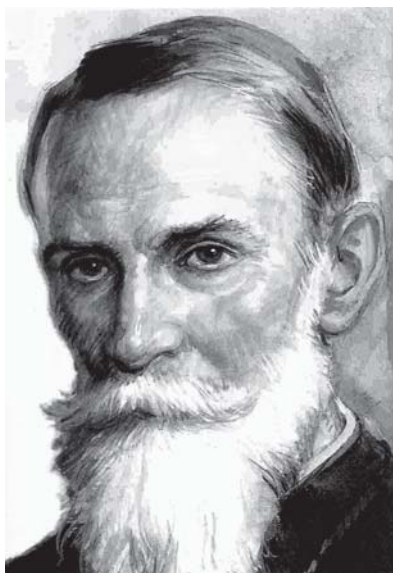
For further information contact Fr Brian Moras sdb: frbrian@rediffmail.com

SALESIAN SAINT OF THE MONTH

BISHIOP LOUIS VERSIGLIA 1873 - 1930

Louis Versiglia was born at Oliva Gessi in the province of Pavia on 15 June 1873. From the time he was very little he served Mass and many people imagined that he would be a priest but Louis would not hear of it because his one desire was to become a veterinarian. At the age of twelve he was received by Don Bosco and the priest fascinated him so much that he changed his mind. In 1888, shortly after the saint's death Louis was very moved by the ceremony of the conferring of the missionary crucifix to seven missionaries that he decided to become a Salesian with the hope that he would be able to go to the missions.

He received his baccalaureate in Philosophy and was soon ordained in 1895. Don Rua appointed him Master of Novices – and he was just 23 years old. He remained at that designation for the next ten years where he guided his charges with kindness, firmness and patience. In 1906 six Salesians reached China headed by Fr. Versiglia. He looked after the territory in the manner Don Bosco would, starting a brass band, opening orphanages and oratories. In 1918 the Salesians were given the mission of Shiuchow in the Apostolic vicariate of Canton and on 19 January 1921 Fr. Versiglia was consecrated its Bishop. Wise, tireless and poor he was constantly visiting and encour-



aging his confreres and the Christians in his territory. During his tenure he gave the vicariate a firm foundation with a seminary and houses of formation. He wrote to his priests: "The missionary who is not united to God is a stream that is disjointed from its source." The political climate in China was tense especially for Christians and for foreign missionaries. They began a persecution. On 13 February 1930 together with Fr. Caravario, the Bishop made a pastoral visit to the mission of Linchow. He was accompanied by some boys and girls. On 25 February a group of Bolshevik pirates order the bishop's launch to halt. They were hoping to arrest the girls. The bishop and Fr. Caravario defended them with all their might. They were savagely beaten and finally shot on 25 February 1930. Before they were shot they both made their confessions. Their last breaths were for the souls of their beloved China. □

A NEW TEMPLE FOR A NEW AGE

by Simone Marini

Jesus enters the temple to make of himself the new temple of the new age of history and he takes into his embrace the sufferings of the whole world to offer it to the Father as a fragrant sacrifice.

In the presentation of Jesus in the temple we witness the perfect fulfilment of the old law an intensity that surpasses all the expectations and prophecies.

The temple of Jerusalem was the ultimate place of Jewish worship. It was the total fulfilment of every religious Jew's aspirations and his yearning for God and this celebration in the temple gave him a new impetus to hope for the fulfilment of the Messianic promise. Something stupendous took place when the child Jesus was brought by his parents to the precincts of that holy place. Jesus, who is God-with-us, a manifestation of the divine glory in our mortal flesh, filled the temple with his presence. He redeemed ancient temple worship of its imperfections and rendered it only a shadow of the heavenly realities (cf. Heb 8, 5). As the liturgy of today proclaims: the ancient doors are lifted up to welcome the King of Glory! (cf. Ps 23, 9)

Jesus is presented to the Father in the temple to inaugurate a new temple and a new order. It will no more be a temple built of stone and carved in wood but it will be made of a multitude of believers from all ages of time and space since the victory of Jesus Christ extends over the entire cosmos making humanity an oblation pleasing to the Father. The transition from the old to the new order of things is made even clearer and more evident when the Divine

Child, the Light of the Gentiles (Lk 2, 32) is received by the aged Simeon who has been waiting for the consolation of Israel. At that moment the old Israel is already passing into the new. As the quivering arms of the old man cradles the Child, he is filled with the fullness of grace that he has been looking forward to for so many years.

Jesus fulfills the Old Law by submitting to its prescription. This turning point does not mark a disruption or a break, but a completion in fullness and splendour. The law is not an obstacle but an invitation to offer oneself as a gift to the Father. It is a constant reminder of the need to get out of oneself to find God who is the ultimate joy of our lives. It is also a



*The Presentation of Jesus
in the Temple
by Jan van Bijlert (1603-1671)*

safeguard of the justice that ought to inspire all our interpersonal relationships that should order the conduct of our social life.

The Fullness of Time does not hesitate to attract Simeon and Anna who are respectful and committed witnesses. Their fervent aspirations are fulfilled in a most pleasing and acceptable way. They do not do away with the externals; they are witnesses offering him new and untainted glory.

In the feast of the Presentation of the Lord we too are called to welcome and fulfill all the precepts of the law so as to put ourselves in contact with the Lord's healing presence in our lives.

It is no longer the walls of the Temple made of stone that demarcate its sacred precincts but those of our homes, hospitals, factories, offices and playgrounds that become the new temple in the new world where humankind lives, struggles and hopes.

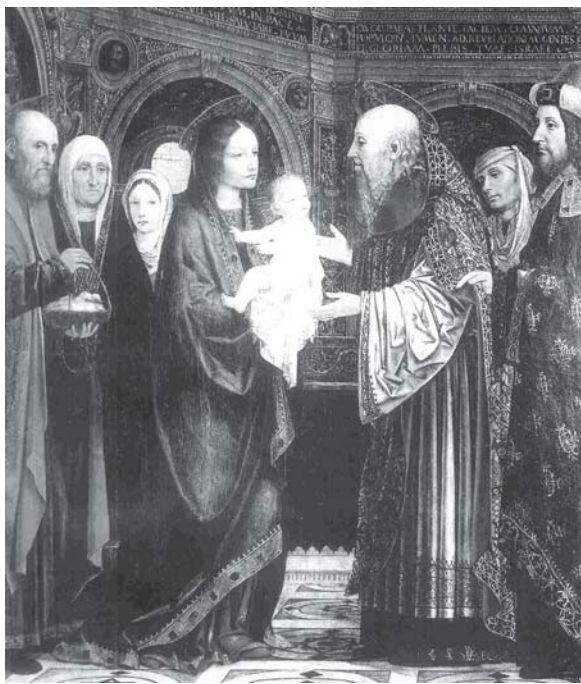
In every act of the Father's will these places turn into real and true temples where the light of Jesus Christ liberates our humanity in order to enlighten all nations.

It was for this that Jesus came to the Temple to make himself the new temple of the

New Age to take into his embrace all the pain of the world and offer it to the Father as fragrant offering.

The Presentation of Jesus is an anticipation of the fulfillment of that greater offering and that supreme gift that He will make of himself to the Father on the cross. But already today we have a foretaste of that salvation that will be ours and it is that offering that is anticipated in the Presentation today that keeps alive the flame of pure love.

Perhaps, just for this day this gift shines for us with a note of great familiarity because we see the Divine Child and the darkness of our sin is hidden at least for one day. □



*The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
by Ambrogio da Fossano 1508*

walking with the Church



The Problem of Evil, The Resurrection, Faith

from St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland

Q. Looking around the world today at the dreadful state it is in with all the injustice, poverty, sexual scandals in the church and society, my question is; if God was good and really loved us surely He should be preventing these atrocities from happening?

A. Thanks for your question which is similar to one I replied last year. It is an age old question of 'why does God allow evil?' If God is good and really loved us how can He stand by and watch evil being committed? The answer is that God has given us the great and beautiful gift of free will. Made in God's image, we have been given the freedom to decide how we will act and the ability to make moral choices. This is how we are different from animals, but, as we know only too well, and as you point out in your letter, it is a source of much pain and suffering in our world. God could have eliminated all evil from our world by taking away our free will. He could have made us puppets, and evil would disappear because we would not be free to choose it. When you hear of 'man's inhumanity to man,' it is just that and not, as some might say, 'God's will'. It is the will of human beings who ignore God's command to us 'to love our neighbour.' God does not cause evil, but when evil or pain occurs He is there to ease the pain and suffering. We see this in the life of Jesus, the son of God, who by his life and death revealed how much God loves us.

Q. Is the coming of Jesus and our own Resurrection really true?

A. Yes, we believe that the man Jesus was also God, that He rose from the dead, and that all those who believe in him will also rise from the dead. The Catholic Catechism (No. 998) states 'All the dead will rise, 'those who have done good to the Resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the Resurrection of Judgment.' Our Lord Jesus clearly preached that our life does not end with death, that there is life hereafter. In the gospel of St. John (Jn. 6:40) Jesus says "it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day." In another place he says, "In my Father's house, there are many mansions." (Jn. 14:2) To the repentant thief on the cross, he promised a place in paradise. In raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father confirmed the truth of who Jesus was and what Jesus taught.

Q. What did Christ mean when he said (Mark 11) that faith will move mountains?

A. The phrase "to remove mountains: was a common Jewish expression for removing difficulties. A wise teacher who could solve difficulties was called a "mountain remover". The message to us? If we praise with faith God will help us overcome difficulties and obstacles. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES ST. PAUL MIKI AND HIS COMPANIONS (Martyred on 6th February 1597)

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

After two and a half centuries of “splendid isolation,” in the mid-1800s, Japan began to share its traditions, culture and technology with Europe and the Western world. In fact, from 1825 various Western powers not only pressured the authorities of that great country in the Far East to open its markets to trade, but also asked them for a more humane treatment of their sailors, concessions at ports and freedom of movement on the mainland for their merchants (and missionaries) and throughout the entire archipelago.

It was said, in short, that, this was a turning point in Japanese history. To help this new state of affairs the Americans thought that the Japanese needed a little “shock.” In 1854, in violation of all Japanese prohibitions, an American fleet of 9 ships commanded by Admiral Mathew Perry entered Tokyo harbour. There was going to be no negotiation. This gesture became an eloquent statement that forced the “Shogun” in power to open a number of Japanese ports to Western ships. The port of Yokohama

(not far from Tokyo) was one of the first ports selected. In 1856 the first American ambassador was sent and two years later he was ready to begin trading with the Japanese and after this other European powers would follow.

After the Franco-Japanese Agreement of 1859 the missionaries of the Foreign Missions of Paris were among the first to arrive in Japan and evangelization began once more. Christians began to enjoy more freedom, even though the anti-Christian laws were still in force. Though their apostolate took place mainly at the ports where the Europeans were. It was some years later that the missionaries settled in Nagasaki and built a church there dedicated to the martyrs of Japan (1597) who had been canonized on 18 June, 1862 by Pope Pius IX.

As the handful of missionaries entered the church on Good Friday in the year 1865 they realized that there were about 10,000 Christians scattered around the islands of Goto and Urakami who had remained faithful. They called

them “*kakure kirishitan*” meaning “hidden Christians.” For more than two centuries these Christians in Japan were subjected to constant persecution and humiliation but they remained staunch in the faith. Certainly the number of the faithful had decreased significantly during the two centuries that had elapsed and also with the decrease of the Western missionaries. At the beginning of the 1600’s there were about 400,000 Christians. But the real miracle was that, given the difficult circumstances, the Christian faith was still transmitted from parents to children without the guidance of any help from ecclesiastical authorities or structures. This went on for more than two centuries till the advent of the missionaries once more in 1865. Encouraged by this witness the work of evangelization resumed with renewed enthusiasm but it was only in 1889 that the anti-Christian laws were repealed leading to renewed religious freedom.

Continuing the Work of St. Francis Xavier

Towards the middle of 1547 at the island of Malacca, Francis Xavier the Jesuit missionary, met an indomitable “sea wolf” called Yajiro, a former pirate in Sea of China. What was particularly important was that he was Japanese. They eloquently described to him Cipangu, which was Japan. Yajiro spoke of his countrymen as well-educated people who were motivated by a desire to learn and they were also interested in religious matters. Francis listened to these descriptions with great interest and he dreamed of his new mission there. He eagerly wanted to



A Japanese convert to Christianity, identified by the cross around his neck.

respond to the desire of these Japanese to know “new things about God.” He was not the first Western missionary to visit Japan but he certainly was the most famous.

He remained in Japan for only a few years but during that time he laid the foundation for the future work of evangelization which would be continued by the Jesuits, the Franciscans (who would later be joined by the Dominicans and the Augustinians).

Forty years after the preaching of St. Francis Xavier, in the year 1590 there were about 200,000 Christians in Japan. The community of Christians at Nagasaki became the nucleus of the little community of the People of God and

among them was a distinguished young preacher called Paul Miki.

Paul was born in 1556 into a wealthy and noble family of Kyoto, a city noted for its art and culture. His father was a noble samurai who was converted to Christianity along with some Buddhist monks. He was baptized at the age of 5 and soon entered the Jesuit seminary where he continued his studies of theology in order to become a priest. The young Paul was good at everything (except Latin!). This shortcoming inspired his superiors to encourage him to study his own culture more deeply so that he could dialogue with people from various strata of society including Buddhist monks and Shinto priests and others from the other social strata of Japanese society; the poor who knew nothing and those who were oppressed by their masters. Paul was able to communicate with all types of people, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, members of the nobility and those from humble backgrounds and he did this very effectively. Because of the way he spoke he earned the esteem and respect of everyone. He was a very talented and convincing preacher who preached not only by word but also by example.

Forgiving, Dying while Singing Psalms

His work of evangelization seemed to have a secure future and he was very content and satisfied with the result of his conversions and the growth of Christianity. But there were storm clouds on the horizon and they did not herald peace but pain and persecution (from the historical

point of view the reason for this is still unclear).

In fact, in 1857, the Shogun in power at the time, Hideyoshi Toyotomi, issued an edict of expulsion to all Christian preachers. Thus began the persecution: death threats, of Japanese converts and their families to be burned at the stake, churches to be burned in villages and properties to be confiscated by the authorities. Missionaries were forced to work covertly. The Shogun ordered the arrest of all the missionaries, catechists and those who worked for them especially in the cities of Kyoto, Osaka and Nagasaki. Paul Miki was arrested in 1596, and when he was sent to prison he found other missionaries (some Franciscans with Peter Baptista), lay catechists, young altar boys just 15 years old.

Even in those difficult circumstances the personality and the sanctity of Paul emerged and became a universal rallying point for the others. He was an example of courage, patience, and constancy in suffering for the faith. All those who were arrested were invited to renounce their faith but no one did. They were threatened with death, mutilation (cutting of an ear), exposed to ridicule and shame while they were paraded around, but no one gave in. The execution was by crucifixion and took place in Nagasaki. The orders were carried out on 5th February. 26 Christians were put to death. They died praying silently, some singing psalms aloud and all of them forgiving their persecutors and executioners who carried out the execution orders. They would be the first Christian martyrs of Japan. The year was 1597. ▣

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Oh, Doctor!

A doctor tells of trying to get a medical history of a patient. The man's wife answered every question the doctor asked. Finally the doctor requested that she leave the room, but after she left he found that her husband couldn't speak. Calling the wife back Dr. Brown apologised for not realising that the man had aphasia - loss of speech - and couldn't speak a word.

The wife was astonished. She didn't know it either.

Silent Witness

In heavy traffic I was edging past a woman driver who was trying to reverse into a parking space that was clearly too small. Suddenly her car swung out and bumped into mine. Flushed with exasperation, she leaned out of her window. "You could see I was going to do something stupid," she said. "Why didn't you wait to see what it was?"

Bored Company

One morning as I was making my daily train journey to work, a man sitting behind me tapped my shoulder. "You're in an awful rut," he said. "each morning you get on this train at the same place, same time, sit in the same seat and read the same paper. Don't you know that makes for a very boring existence?"

"How do you know I always sit in the same seat?" I asked indignantly.

"Because," he replied, "I always

sit right behind you."

Ask Jeeves

My 50-something friend Nancy and I decided to introduce her mother to the magic of the Internet. Our first move was to access the popular "Ask Jeeves" site, and we told her it could answer any question she had.

Nancy's mother was very skeptical until Nancy said, "It's true, Mom. Think of something to ask it."

As I sat with fingers poised over the keyboard, Nancy's mother thought a minute, then responded, "How is Aunt Helen feeling?"

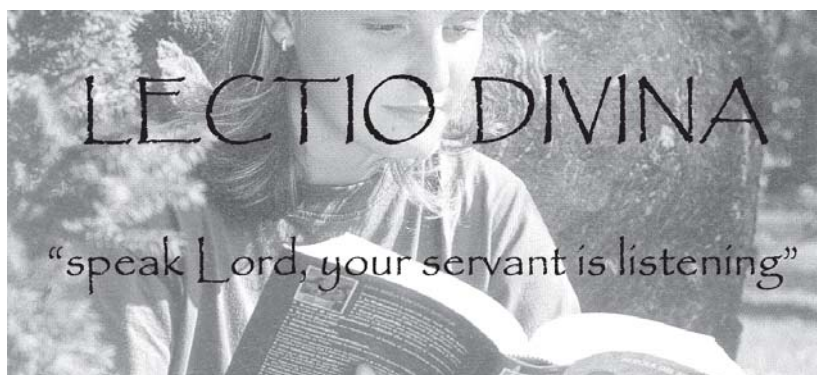
Rabbi Returns

I returned to my parents' home to attend a funeral. At the synagogue, my mother led me to a man who looked vaguely familiar. "Barbara, remember Rabbi Green?" she asked as she left me in his company.

I frantically tried to place him, and suddenly it came to me. He was the kind man who, five years earlier, had officiated at my grandmother's funeral. "It's good to see you again, Rabbi," I said. "Though I wish it weren't always under such tragic circumstances."

The rabbi looked perplexed but uttered some words of consolation before he was called away. A few minutes later, I rejoined my mother.

"Imagine," she whispered, "after all this time, to run into the rabbi who performed your wedding!" □



LOVING THE LORD VERY MUCH (Lk. 7, 36-50)

by Marco Rossetti

Well, if there's anything we can do, it's this: "to love" the Lord! "Her many sins were forgiven her because she loved much."

The Master was in Galilee (4, 14-9, 50) and he had just concluded a series of teachings. His audience had gathered in a clearing to be able to sit around and listen to him (6, 12 to 49). From there he went to Capernaum where he healed a centurion's servant and then he went on to Naim where he brought the widow's son back to life (7, 1 - 17). Further on he had worked more wonders so that the people thought he was the Messiah that Israel was waiting for but not everyone welcomed him, so he upbraided them for their hardness of heart (7, 31 to 35). It was in this context that Jesus accepted Simon the Pharisee's dinner invitation. Imagine the opening scene (v. 36-38): a notable personality of the town has a dinner party and, as the custom was, all the doors of

the house were open so everyone could see who the guests were and what the menu was. In all this confusion Simon forgets the formalities that his hospitality requires: he should give his guests water to wash their feet in and he should welcome them with a kiss. Jesus realizes this (v. 44-46) and Luke adds, drawing his reader's attention to the fact that the Pharisee was not sympathetic to Jesus. He was subtle and specious. Meanwhile, a sinful woman - not to be identified with Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus (cf. Jn. 11, 1-54; 12, 1-11), neither with Mary Magdalene (cf. Jn. 8, 1-11) - She knew that Jesus was in the house and so she decided to 'gate-crash.' She entered and did what Simon should have done. While all the guests were seated she bathed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair and then kissed them, then she anointed them. The woman, on her part, is very mortified and grateful; perhaps she had met the Master ear-

liar. Jesus remained seated he did not prevent this loving gesture. Had he not come to welcome sinners? Suddenly there was silence in the room: the woman's action created a palpable sense of discomfort among the guests. Moreover the action of loosening her hair in public was considered profligate enough to qualify the woman as despicable. If the act had been done by a married woman, that would have been considered sufficient ground to sue for divorce.

The Interpretation

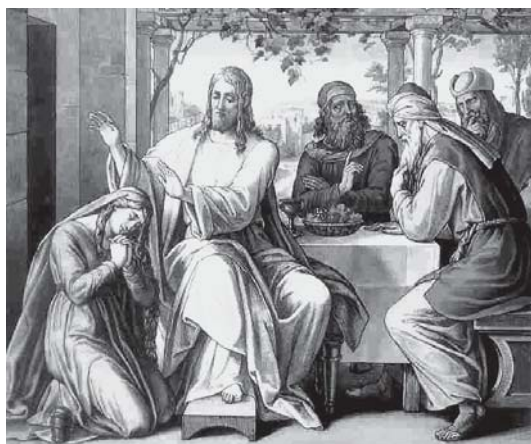
Thus ends the first scene of the story. In the next scene we hear the words of interpretation that Jesus gives and they are serious (vv. 39-47). No one speaks, the atmosphere is tense. But the silence does mean that no one has any opinions. The Lord knew the thoughts of everyone present. He knew what Simon was thinking: the loving gestures of the woman become an excuse for him to judge Jesus. Because of this Jesus turned to him and called him by name, telling him a little parable. He reviewed the highlights the event

that had just taken place and compared it with the Pharisee's negligence which led him to some self-examination about his behaviour and his prejudices. Yet, the explicit words of Jesus substantiated what was fundamental in his teaching about the two debtors: "Her many sins are forgiven, because she has loved much."

The Saving Word

The story ends with the reaffirmation of what the Lord had just said (v. 48-50). He then turned to the woman: "Your sins are forgiven." In her deep humility and devotion, her hope and faith, she approached Jesus because she was aware... that she had to pay her debt of "five hundred denarii," so she offered it all to the merciful love of God. Her offering was accepted and her desire fulfilled because she was sent away in "peace" (v. 50). To Simon, on the other hand, who had perhaps taken the place of the other debtor who owed only "fifty denarii," no further words were needed, Jesus left him pondering, because not even God could make him do what he should.

Therefore, it is with the loving heart of the repentant woman that we should approach Christ because only love will make a difference. When we approach him with love we touch his compassionate heart and we realize that forgiveness is only the result his generosity. Till then, if there's anything that we on our part can do, it is this: "to love" the Lord! □



DEDICATED TO
THE HOLY FAMILY

Quiet

LOVE IS THE SIGN

by His Holiness P

On Sunday 31 January 2010, the Holy Father introduced the recitation of the Angelus with the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square with comments on St. Paul's "hymn to love". The following is a translation of the Pope's Reflection, which was given in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Liturgy we read one of the most beautiful passages of the New Testament and of the whole Bible: the Apostle Paul's "hymn to love" (I Cor. 12:31-13:13).

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, after explaining through the image of the body that the different gifts of the Holy Spirit contribute to the good of the one Church, Paul shows the "way" of perfection. It does not, he says, consist in possessing exceptional qualities: in speaking new languages, understanding all the mysteries, having a prodigious faith or doing heroic deeds. Rather, it consists in love – agape – that is, in authentic love which God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Love is the "greatest gift" which gives value to all the others and yet it "is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant"; on the contrary it "rejoices in the right" and in the good of others. Whoever truly loves "does not insist on (his or her) own way", "is not irritable or resentful" but "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (cf. I Cor 13: 4-7).

In the end, when we find ourselves face to face with God, all the other gifts will no longer matter, the only one that will last forever is love, because God is love and we will be like him, in perfect communion with him.



N OF CHRISTIANS

Pope Benedict XVI

For now, while we are in this world, love is the sign of Christians. It sums up their entire life: what they believe and what they do. This is why at the beginning of my pontificate I chose to dedicate my first Encyclical to this very subject of love: *Deus Caritas Est*. As you will remember, this Encyclical is made up of two parts that correspond to the two aspects of charity: its meaning and hence its practice. Love is the essence of God himself, it is the meaning of creation and of history, it is the light that brings goodness and beauty into every person's existence.

At the same time love is, so to speak, the "style" of God and of believers, it is the behaviour of those who, in response to God's love, make their life a gift of themselves to God and to their neighbour.

In Jesus Christ these two aspects form a perfect unity: he is Love incarnate. This Love has been fully revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Fixing our gaze on him, we can confess with the Apostle John: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us" (cf. I Jn. 4:16 Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* n. 1)

Dear Friends, if we think of the Saints, we recognize the variety of their spiritual gifts and also their human characteristics, but the life of each of them is a hymn to charity, a living canticle to God's love!

Today, 31 January, we are commemorating in particular St. John Bosco, the Founder of the Salesian Family and Patron of young people. In this Year for Priests, I would like to invoke his intercession so that priests may always be educators and fathers to the young and that, experiencing this pastoral love, many young people may accept the call to give their lives for Christ and for the Gospel. May Mary Help of Christians, a model of love obtain these graces for us. □



A Short Story

A MATTER OF TIME

by Carol McAdoo Rehme

*I have noticed that people who are late are often so much jollier
than the people who have to wait for them.*

- Anonymous

Our four children first appeared in a six-year span. No wonder their parents found themselves happily crazed with the hullabaloo a house full of little ones entailed. Yet those same parents never gave thought to the possibility their children would depart at the identical mach-speed in which they'd arrived.

College applications, scholarship forms, senior years, baccalaureate services, graduation ceremonies, bag-packings, and leave-takings crowded both the calendar and our emotions. Each of our children - with unique personalities, plans, and dreams - vied for our time and attention.

But the one who concerned us the most was Katrina.

Second in seniority, our dominantly right-brained daughter was sweet, bright, and intuitive. She was focused. She was creative. She was artistic. In fact, her talent for painting and drawing evidenced itself at an early age and she shared it generously. Home, church, school, family, friends...extra-curricular activities. Katrina found many opportunities to tap into her flair for the imaginative. We delighted in her developing skills and successes.

What Katrina wasn't, however, was punctual.

Time - or rather being on time - didn't matter a whit to this more global-thinking girl of ours. And it affected the entire family. In fact, we all chanted the same refrain: "Katrina, you're making us late!"

No matter what the family outing, or its rank of importance, Katrina kept us from arriving in a timely manner. Especially Sunday morning church services.

"I'm going to warm up the car," her dad would holler up the stairs.

"We're getting our coats on," her brothers and sister advised.

"It's 8:55, past time to leave," I announced, the toe of my shoe tapping an impatient tattoo on the entryway tile.

With her long wet tresses saronged in a towel, Katrina appeared at the top of the stairs. Fresh from the shower. Wrapped in her bathrobe.

"What's the rush?" she asked. "Church doesn't start for five more minutes."

We groaned in dismay. And, as parents, we certainly wondered how Katrina would cope at college where she would have to rely on her alarm clock and the good

graces of her roommates. When we waved goodbye to the forlorn figure silhouetted against the bleak college skyline, my breath caught in consternation.

Even so, those of us left at home heaved a collective - and not so imperceptible - sigh of relief. No longer must we all traipse to the front for the only pew seats available. Nor would we be shushed by a concert usher as we stumbled to our dark seats during the second cantata. Or slip into a wedding reception just in time to catch the garter. From now on, we would always be on time, we vowed to each other.

As it turned out, dorm living wasn't a simple or easy adjustment for Katrina. Homesick, dealing with "impossible" roommates, our teary daughter called one Sunday morning, a mere two weeks into the semester.

I listened... and soothed... and counseled as she hiccupped her fears and sniffled her concerns into the phone. But the rest of the family wasn't as empathetic.

"I can't believe it," her dad shook his head woefully and heaved a huge sigh. "She's a thousand miles from home," he pointed to the kitchen clock, "and still making us late to church!" □

Images of God

Impersonators have always been part of the entertainment industry. Politicians and heads of State are frequently impersonated often with great comic effect. Remember Charlie Chaplin's hilarious depiction of Hitler in the film *The Great Dictator*? For many years, as long as his memory remained alive, Chaplin himself was imitated. His funny walk, his gestures and comic routines were always a sure recipe for laughs in the concert halls and local theatres. Impersonations are generally done as comic acts but impersonators, doubles, look alikes have also acted and been used with more serious intent. In recent years Saddam Hussein, who feared assassination, apparently had a number of 'doubles'. Creations of Saddam Hussein, these 'doubles' made it almost impossible for anyone outside his immediate circle to locate and identify the real Saddam.



We too are creations, all created in God's image, all called to live as the images of God we are. The problem is that we cannot see God and we look for God to provide us with an image of himself. This He did by sending us His Son Jesus Christ who says of himself, "Who has seen me has seen the Father." He is the revelation of the Father and to grow into the images of God in which we were created we must live like Christ lived and walk in his light.

He taught us about our dignity, that we are children of God, loved by the Father, and that we in turn should love one another. Christ, the image of God the Father, spent himself in love and service until finally he gave his life for us on the cross. "I am the Way," he says and calls on us to follow his way of living on our journey through life. □

(Continued from pg. 6)

friends to Jesus. They undoubtedly would have set out with great enthusiasm, but on reaching the house where Jesus was they find that the huge crowd made it impossible for them to get the man in front of Jesus. Undaunted by this difficulty, they find a novel way of solving their problem. Laboriously making a hole in the roof and let him down in front of Jesus. Perhaps a disgusting solution - at least from the point of view of the others around, nevertheless an effective and proactive one from their standpoint! The bottom line is of course that they got what they were looking for. And as Jesus pointed out, it was their faith that made the difference!

Faith reminds us always that there is another viewpoint, one that is literally 'out of the box'! We need to climb to the ceiling to view the situation from God's point of view. And his view is very simple and appealing too. Had there been no obstacles in the way, would we have ever realized that what we did get finally was a sheer gift from our loving Father?! No, most likely we would have attributed our success to our own efforts. And so Jesus reminds us forcefully, "Without me you can do nothing... remain in my love!" (Jn 15). Once we learn to look on life as a partnership with the Almighty, we soon realize that just as we are called to 'complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ' (Col. 1:24), so Jesus is ever ready to make up for what is lacking in our lives too! "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," he reminds us (Rev. 3:20). Is it too much trouble to

open the door and let him into our lives, he who has so much that he wants to give us?!

Before you complete this little article, toss the magazine aside and get involved in other activity, stop and reflect for a while on how you face your adversities. Has the Resurrection of Jesus made any difference in your approach? Or are you also one of his 'Good Friday fans', one who prefers to sit at the foot of the Cross and moan away for something better to come your way? "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus asks you as he asked the paralyzed man who waited for thirty-eight long years for his turn to come (Jn. 5). Jesus of Nazareth is passing by! There is a new life awaiting you right at your doorstep. He never comes to us empty-handed! Would you let this opportunity pass by or grab it to your advantage as blind Bartimaeus did? (Mk. 10). □



DON BOSCO'S YOUTHFUL WITTICISMS

Natale Cerrato

Already while Don Bosco was at the seminary at Chieri and later during his early years in Turin, he never failed to reveal his love for a good joke or perhaps a humorous description of a rather serious adventure. This has been well documented in his *Biographical Memoirs* (BM) and in his personal memoirs *The Memoirs of the Oratory* (MO).

The Wooden Razor

When he was a seminarian in Chieri, John knew how to keep his companions cheerful with his conversations that were often peppered with much humour.

One day he announced that he could shave himself with a wooden razor. Though by now his friends were no longer surprised at John's stunts, this time they were quite skeptical. But John insisted. Gentlemen's bets were made and a time for the test was fixed. At the appointed hour they rushed to his room and found him shaving with a real razor.

- And where's the wooden razor?
- (Well now,) what's my surname?
- Bosco!
- Whose razor am I using?
- Your own!
- Well then, this a *Bosco* razor and you've lost your bet!"

The conversation in which the bet was made was in the Piedmontese dialect in which the word "Bosco" means "wood." At first his companions were chagrined in being caught in the trap of such an easy pun, but they ended by agreeing



CHARACTERISTICS

DON BOSCO'S

that John had won his bet, and all enjoyed a hearty laugh. (cf. *EBM* 1,288)

This time it was a joke among friends; John had really made good progress.

At the house of the Parish Priest of Cinzano

In the summer of 1837, during the holidays, the cleric Bosco went with some friends on a trip to visit the parish priest of Cinzano. He was the uncle of his dear friend Louis Comollo. When he arrived he realized that the parish priest was out. They had come all this way so he had to do something. Since he did not know the housekeeper, he asked for her name and was told that her name was Magdalen. He knocked on the door of the presbytery and the housekeeper, to whom John was a perfect stranger, received him coldly. She lost no time in telling him that the pastor was not at home.

"Oh, too bad," John said with his inimitable charm and candour. "And we are such long-standing friends. If only Mrs. Magdalen were here. I've heard she is quite courteous and gracious!"

"I'm Magdalen!"

"Oh, you're the housekeeper?"

"What housekeeper! I'm just a poor servant!"

"Don't say that! Father Comollo can't find words enough to praise you."

"That's just because he's so kind. I do what little I can..."

"It's just too bad. I had planned to spend the day with him, but patience!"

"But where are you going? Have you had your lunch yet?"

"No, but don't trouble yourself about that. I'll manage...besides I've got other friends with me."

"But where can you go?"

To make a long story short...the cleric Bosco was able to sit down to an exquisite meal graced with choice wine. It could not have been any better.

In a very lighthearted way, Don Bosco had the ability to get whatever he wanted. (cf *EBM* 1, 319-321)

A curious picture

In Turin, Don Bosco's Oratory was situated just a short walk from the cemetery chapel of St. Peter in Chains. This is what the saint wrote many years later:

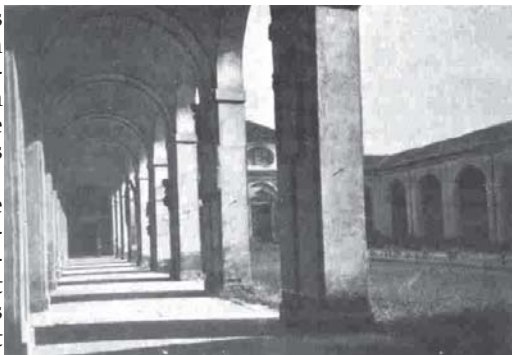
"But in that place we came up against a formidable and unsuspected rival. This was not the ghost of one of the great numbers of the dead who slept peacefully in the nearby tombs. This was a living

person, the chaplain's housekeeper. No sooner had she heard the pupils singing and talking, and let us admit their shouting too, than she rushed out of the house. In a furious rage, with her bonnet askew and her arms akimbo, she launched into tongue-lashing the crowd of merry-makers. Joining in her assault upon us were a small girl, a dog, a cat, all the chickens, so that it seemed that a European war was about to break out. (*MO* 228)

Don Bosco narrated this incident in a very lighthearted manner but it was evident that because of it he was compelled to move his motley band of youngsters to another venue for their games.

Was Don Bosco Insane?

In the early days of the Oratory of Don Bosco at Valdocco, when he was a young priest in Turin, things were anything but easy. Difficulties in finding a secure base; the lack of understanding of those who saw him at the head of a band of street urchins; his fragile health; while all the time dreaming of having a church at his establishment and a flourishing centre of activity in the



The long porticos of St. Peter in Chains

locality. All this lead his priest-friends to believe that he was delusional and perhaps a little "touched-in-the-head" and so for his own sake they decided... But let us hear it from Don Bosco himself as he describes it in his memoirs:

"Meanwhile, the reports that Don Bosco had gone mad were gaining strength. My friends were grieved: others were amused. But they all kept far away from me. The archbishop did not interfere. Fr. Cafasso advised me to bide my time; Dr. Borrelli kept quiet. Thus all my helpers left me alone in the midst of about four hundred boys.

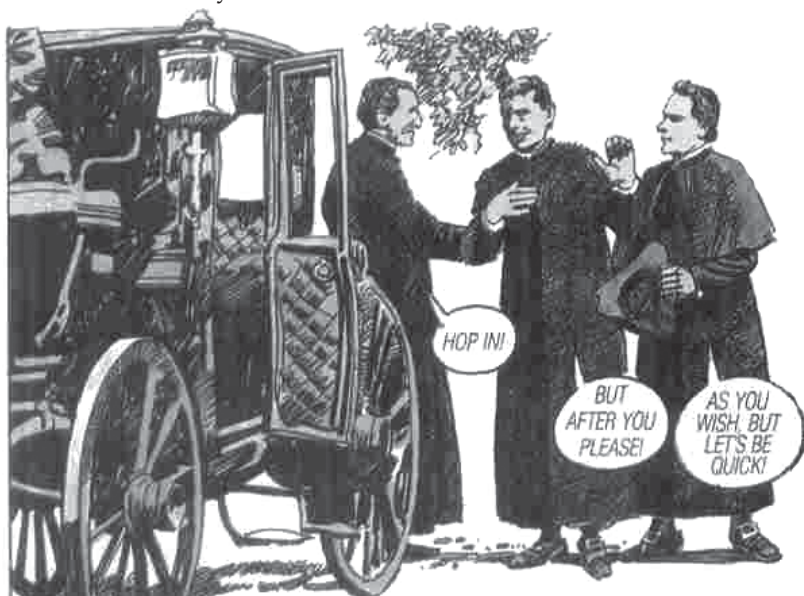
At that time some respectable persons wanted to take care of my health. "This Don Bosco," they said amongst themselves, "has some fixations which will inevitably end up in madness. Perhaps he would benefit by treatment. Let's take him to the asylum and leave it to them to do whatever they think best."

Two of them were appointed to come with a carriage to pick me up and escort me to the asylum. The two emissaries greeted me politely and then inquired about my health, the Oratory, the future building and church; they sighed deeply and exclaimed aloud, "It's true."

After that they invited me to go for a drive with them. "A little air will do you good. We have a carriage at hand. We'll go together and have time to converse."

At this point I understood their game, and without letting on that I had them figured out, I walked with them to the carriage, insisting that they get in first and take their places. But instead of getting in there myself, I slammed the door shut and called out to the coachman, "straight to the asylum with all speed. They're expecting these two priests there." (MO p. 252)

It's easy to imagine what happened next. □



TAIYUAN

At least six young men from three mainland Chinese dioceses were ordained priests on Oct 28, the feast day of Sts. Simon and Jude the Apostle.

"I will increase efforts to evangelise," said Fr. Deng Xiaobo, one of the two new priests of Zhanjiang diocese, noting that the Church has "a big market" as Catholics account for only a small percentage of China's 1.3 billion people.

"I vow to build a good image to attract more young men to explore their vocations," he added. He believes that the quality of clergy has much to do with the number of priestly vocations in China.

In Beijing diocese Bishop Joseph Li Shan ordained Frs. Augustine Cao Wei and Peter Bai Guoliang, who have spent 10 years studying at the diocesan seminary and the Seoul archdiocesan major seminary.

Bishop Ignatius Wang, retired auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and a Beijing Native, also laid his hands on the new priests' heads.

Ten priests from Korea were among the 65 priests concelebrating at the ordination Mass.

In northern China, three bishops concelebrated at the ordination Mass for Frs. Paul Sun Ruigang and Thomas Liang Weiguo of Taiyuan at the 100-year-old cathedral in Shanxi. UCAN

SEOUL

As the smart phone phenomenon gathers pace, religious groups in South Korea have been busy developing mobile applications to attract more young people.

Catholics, Protestants and Buddhists are taking the lead in providing *free apps* such as a GPS service for locating temples and churches or an application for studying religious scriptures.

Fr. Bartholomew Choi Gi-hong, who created an iPod broadcast service for Chunchon diocese, told ucanews.com that religious groups can reach young people in cyberspace with "impressive digital content."

Fr. Choi, who is director of media in the diocese, stressed that religious authorities should recognize their faithful as "consumers of religious content in cyberspace."

Early in 2010, Seoul archdiocese launched iPhone and Windows Mobile *apps* for Bible readings, hymns, information on saints, radio broadcast extracts and a Catholic address book.

In late October 2010, the archdiocese started a mobile web service providing Bible information, daily missal readings, prayers and churches, as well as a GPS tracking service to find the nearest parish.

It is also working to develop a liturgy *apps* for the iPad.

Meanwhile, a Buddhist groups are offering a "temple stay" *apps* introducing information on local temples and their programmes. A free *apps* for studying Buddhist scriptures is also available.

Protestants are trying to facilitate interactive communication with their flocks with various applications for Christian music, Bible reflections, homily video clips and Church news.

Fr. Choi said in a report that the thought that "almost everyone will use a smart phones in two or three

years" inspired him to launch iPod broadcasts in September 2010. *UCAN*

TOKYO

Young people in China could soon be reading the Japanese comic book version of the Bible, a Protestant delegation from the mainland says.

"Chinese youth love the Japanese animated comics," Elder Fu Xianwei, chairperson of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of the Protestant Church in China (TSPM) told a press conference in Tokyo on November 8, 2010.

"Our Church is discussing with the Japanese Bible Society if we could publish the Manga Bible series in China," he said.

The Japanese Bible Society has been publishing the Bible in comic-form since 2008. The last of the five-volume series appeared in December.

At the invitation of the National Christian Council of Japan, Elder Fu and four members of the government-sanctioned China Christian Council and TSPM visited the Protestant-run Rakuno Gakuen University, an aged home and a kindergarten in Hokkaido in trip November 2-9, 2010.

In the press conference, a reporter asked if the territorial disputes on the Diaoyu islands (called Senakau in Japanese) had affected the two Churches.

"We did not feel so. The visit has been very smooth," replied Elder Fu. *UCAN*

MANILA

The Philippines' "running priest" called for the creation of "armies" of natural family planning educators in every parish to counter the government's push for modern

birth control methods. Father Robert Reyes, known for his penchant to run for a cause, said that if the Church is serious in its campaign against the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill pending in Congress, "the noise against the measure should be coupled with action."

"If we are serious in promoting natural family planning, let's not just talk about it. Let's create armies of educators who will teach people how to use it," he said.

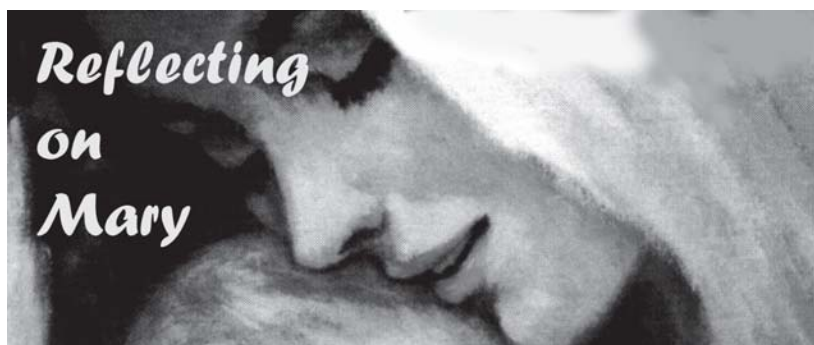
According to him, the Church needs "a change in its campaign approach," especially after a survey revealed that most Filipinos support the RH bill, which reportedly promotes the use of artificial birth control methods.

"The sad thing is that we are just talking. How many parishes now have real, intensive natural family planning programmes?" he added.

A 2008 survey done by the National Statistics Office showed that only a few women used natural family planning methods - 6.4 percent were using the "calendar" or "rhythm method" or were practicing abstinence, while 9.6 percent practiced the "withdrawal method."

The same survey showed that 28.6 percent practiced modern family planning methods, such as the use of contraceptives and ligation. The rest of the surveyed females - 49.3 percent - didn't practice any birth control methods.

Father Reyes said teaching natural family planning methods is not easy because it is not only about learning how to examine fertility signs, but also requires discipline among couples. "It cannot be done overnight. So we must commit to it, not only through preaching and definitely not by fighting the government," the priest said. □



PRAYER, METHOD or LIFE?

by Robert Ostermann

Not to be rude, but if you really want a prayerful relationship with God, you might consider putting aside all the books and manuals and discussions of prayer that you have ever looked at. They are worth keeping if your interest is in learning more about prayer. Becoming a better "pray-er", however, does not happen through study. Becoming a better "pray-er" starts with learning about yourself, the person who prays.

The first lesson one must learn is perhaps the hardest to accept. Although prayer manuals tend to play down the obstinacies of prayer, we humans, in fact, are not naturally praying creatures. There is excellent evidence that prayer is not a breeze.

Even Jesus' closest friends and followers had a tough time with prayer. Remember the scene in the Garden, when Jesus, several times asks his companions to watch and pray. It is the time of history's greatest betrayal, and yet only the air hears the Lord's appeals. Each time, Peter and the others once again return to sleep.

Writing to the Thessalonians,

Paul is driven to urge his neophyte Christians to "pray without ceasing." One imagines that their lazy ways may have been showing and Paul wants to be clearly understood. He will not tolerate the slightest sign of indifference from these new followers of Christ. Saints are as unlike each other as the activist Catherine of Siena and the detached, contemplative Bruno or John of the Cross did not hide or disguise their own difficulties with prayer.

Prayer is no different for us in our time, and I, a convert to the Faith, illustrate all the worst of it.

During my conversion preparation in the late 1940s, I had my own contentious run-ins with the conventional instruments of faith. Prayer, for example, faced me stubbornly like a sentry blocking my path, and my efforts to get round the obstacle or to dissolve it failed.

In the 18 months or so before baptism, I studied many books on living a Catholic life and acquiring a Catholic mind and attitudes; their authors had unimpeachable academic or scholarly credentials. When it came to prayer and pray-

ing, their accounts were invariably dramatic, thoughtful, confident, positive. They stressed prayer's significance as an essential feature of a life centred on Jesus. I filled my journals with many, many pages of notes drawn from this reading.

These writers, specialists and leaders in their fields, offered a variety of prayer techniques and methods aimed at covering all possible problems. They counseled perseverance in periods when prayer seems a waste of time—just keep going, no matter how badly you feel. They cautioned against discouragement in those even more desolate moments when the heart seems dry, cold and untouchable and prayer is as agreeable as sand in the teeth.

Bored, disillusioned, depressed when God seemed to have fallen silent, I could find a full catalogue of the methods saints have used to circumvent such experiences. Many writers compiled packages of sample prayers to try when one's own efforts came up dry.

It took me forever, or so it seems now, to appreciate that the devout expositions of my wise, patient, knowledgeable authorities failed to touch me in my distress. Putting it simply, their discussions of prayer did not seem to have me in view. The examples they used were totally strange to me. I felt an immigrant. The language spoken was not my language.

More to the point, the various "Ways," "Paths," "Methods," and the like—the how-to's of prayer that one or another authority urged me to honour and to emulate struck me as immaterial and unproductive, misleading. What I needed, I sensed, was a prayer-life that matched my history and experi-

ence.

I was stupid to have been surprised by what appeared to be happening to me. After all, I knew that one does not read a book to learn how to build a computer circuit board or, even, to ride a bicycle—not if one really wants to acquire the necessary skills. Trouble was that I had learned this simple truth back when I was in my teens and trying to help my father keep our old Buick running.

Background is important here, and I must say something about it if you are to see my situation as I was living it at the time. The year this is happening is 1947 and I was an incompletely adjusted ex-soldier.

I had spent a substantial part of my World War II years fighting across Europe in an armoured cavalry unit of George Patton's Third Army. Like thousands of other soldiers, I had yet to put completely aside the memories, the habits and patterns of thought, the quick-as-a-blinking-eye reflexes that combat typically burns into a fighting soldier.

Here's the truth of the matter. My mentors were in no position to illuminate my way. I was not walking where their lamps shed light. They could not see the shadows I had brought with me from the war and through which I still walked.

The result, for that distant, post-war me was that prayer was not living up to its glowing press and offered nothing to me. Living in harm's way teaches one self-reliance. Pre-packaged prayers, like messages from a fortune-cookie, were too generalized.

At the same time, I was insufficiently at home in the Christian life to find a personal prayer-language.

I longed to be able to speak both from my heart as well as to my desire to be closer to Our Lord. It never struck me to consult the men and women who had become "experts" in prayer the hard way; who had learned by doing prayer.

Time for an embarrassed confession

I had to travel a long road in my new life before I even began to understand that the place to look for obstacles to prayer was in me, not in prayer. The commonsense conclusion I finally reached struck me like a blow to the heart. I had been cheating prayer.

Take the phrase "cheating prayer" in its most literal sense. I had not dealt fairly with prayer and praying.

Here's what I now realize must have happened. In my confusion, I assumed that one reserved prayer for select times, needs, places, emotions, and so forth. "Pray when it's called for" was the advice my counsellors had given me, as doctors instruct one how to take the prescribed medicines.

I had isolated prayer as a separate act in the Christian life. Prayer might have been a skill one must acquire, like those that had meant survival during the war-marks-manship, keen hearing, map-reading, hand-to-hand combat, disarming a land mine, the like. I had made prayer a "specialty of the house," when the simple fact is that prayer is the house, the house one occupies every minute of the day.

I wince when I recall how long it took me to realize that the God I prayed to was as close to me as my breathing and required no special tactics to reach. What a fool I had been not to see that it must be the

same for prayer. If we never are independent of God, never totally cast off, even when we are vile and despicable, then prayer must always be there, too.

There is no escaping the sense of failure that writing these words revives in me. For I had all along been more ignorant and more foolish than ever I had thought. The perfect model of prayer, the perfect praying person, had never been far from me, from the very first moment of my Catholic existence.

There was this young Jewish woman, hardly more than a girl, whom I had first read about when I was not even sure I intended to become Catholic. Throughout her story as I followed it, until she left the story behind her, life and prayer in this girl/woman were inseparable. Hers was the very model of a life lived within prayer. She far exceeded the action we familiarly call "saying prayers."

Mary was prayer

Her life on earth, from birth to death, turned into an anthology of danger, hardship, pain, suffering, anxiety, loss. By the simple expedient of praying, however, she was able to find the way to her own destiny through the most awesome as well as the most humble events of which she was a part.

Mary's prayer - that is to say, her entire life-drew its power from the words she uttered in her first encounter with the unimaginable reality of God: Let what you have said be done to me.

It is this woman Mary, the price-less Mother of God, who sums up everything one can possibly know about praying. It is she, in her every appearance in the Gospels, who makes the truth of prayer visible

despite all its mystery.

Whether one petitions God in trust, glorifies Him in praise and gratitude, or speaks to Him in loving acceptance, prayer declares one's deepest longing never, never to fall out of tune with God's will.

Oh, that I had had this insight earlier....

And so I am brought to where I am today.

The prayer I finally came to understand as mine in those far-off years turned out to be the beginning and the end, continuous, uninterrupted, for all my ways, all my times and days, at any age and any ability. Prayer, as Mary teaches one in her person, suffuses life as dye stains the fabric or it is no more than noise in the air or in the mind. Prayer, like dye, is unequivocally, inseparably present to one.

In any workplace-home, office, field, factory, hospital, fast-food joint, dry cleaner, gas station, newsagent; in any employment, career, or profession; in responsibilities great and small, actions local and universal, individual and communal, wherever one may chance to be selfless prayer presents everything that one is and has known: failures, frailties, strengths, successes, lost and fearful of never being found, all that one is before God, stripped of disguises and deceptions.

Prayer, I hold to this day, is offered in one's most private voice. Its "amens" are quiet, muted. It does not shout or call attention to itself, as if approval, or fame, or celebrity were at stake. Prayer speaks in every accent of love, from gratitude and praise to appeal and uncertainty and fear and loss.

Prayer proceeds through every permutation of human need, all the



way through to the desolate cry of the lonely, frightened child, the abandoned lover. I am yours. Do not leave me. It is awful to be alone. Where are you? I can not bear being apart from you. I was a fool to think I could live without you. I know better now. I am nothing, unless I am yours. Living without you is dying, not living.

Prayer, if we give it half a chance, makes of each of our lived moments an acceptable offering to God.

The timeless Eucharistic sacrifice is (I, a pilgrim now for more than 50 years, cling to this) the true and perfect model for all prayer. Like that sacrificial offering, in which each of us has an active role, our modest private prayer too is an act of love, faith, hope, and trust.

And, like the Eucharist, our prayer gradually imports into our deepest being the true, for-all-times, perfect love. □

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Dear Mother Mary, I thank you from the deepest core of my heart for being with me during a very crucial time in my life. I pray that your astounding grace may radiate throughout the universe.

Jacquiline Jameela Ignatius, Kerala

Thank you Mother Mary for answering my prayer.

Vincent de silva, Malaysia

I am sincerely grateful to our dear Mother Mary. She saved my son from a dreadful mishap. It was October 14th, 2010. As usual I dropped my son (aged 6 years) at a School in Margao. When I turned to get home, a car sped into the school compound. My son, who was running towards his classroom almost met with an accident. If it was not for Mother Mary, he would have been under the wheels of the car. Watching this incident, the watchman screamed at the top of his lungs. At this I turned to see what had happened and went to be beside my son. Mary was there. She miraculously saved my son. He has great devotion to her and always wears her scapular daily.

Mrs. Senicca Moraes, Goa

My uncle was diagnosed with cancer of the urinary tract and the doctors initially decided to remove the bladder. My family was greatly troubled and prayed to Our Blessed Mother very fervently. We were led to another hospital and we found that the infection had not spread at all. We sincerely thank our dearest Mother from the bottom of our hearts.

Michael Aruldoss Ratnam, Tirunelveli, TN

Thank you Mother Mary for giving us a wonderful job.

Doreen Ivy, Abu Dhabi

After an exhausting day out my children and grandchildren returned home only to find we did not have the keys to our house. All efforts to open the house had failed. Being a public holiday we were unable to even get a locksmith. After praying the 'Hail Mary' the lock suddenly snapped open. We were all stunned. The lock was perfect and there was nothing wrong with it. We are sincerely grateful to Our Lady for her intervention.

Mrs. J. Viegas Belgaum

On our journey from Tiruvannamalai (TN) to Chennai we were travelling in the middle of the day but my younger brother dozed off at the wheel. We could have met with a very serious accident but the car only drifted off the road and was stopped by a nearby boulder. We are all grateful for the protection of Our Mother Mary.

YCE Balaraj, Chennai

I was not well and Mother Mary saved me. All my reports are clear.

Arvind Somant, Pune

My sincere thanks to Our Lady Help of Christians for many favours received.

Norman Paul, Mumbai

Heartfelt thanks to Jesus and Mary for curing my father of a rare eye ailment and also healing me of cysts I had under my eyelids.

Lorna DeSouza, Goa

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.*

I have received numerous favours through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys, I am sincerely grateful to our dear Mother for all her blessings. Thank you so much dearest Mother for the many favours received through your intercession.

Antonieta Simoes, Macao, South China

Thank you dearest Mother for granting our prayers. *Alice, Chennai*
Thank you for all the favours received. *Sweebert Dantes, Bahrain*

My sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians for saving my husband from getting a mild attack and the the medical reports that were normal and for having blessed him with good health. Dear Mother bless our family with good health and keep us under your protection. *A Devotee*
Thank you dear Mother Mary for coming to my aid during a difficult situation. *Mary Ann, Australia*

I am grateful to Our Lady who preserved me from a serious accident after having tripped over a chain on the floor. I am a senior citizen and the fall could have been rather dangerous. *Victoria, Chennai*

On August 8, 2010 my grandson was driving rather fast, exceeding the speed limit. To avoid something on the road he swerved and lost control of the vehicle. He landed in the path of an oncoming vehicle but thankfully no one was injured. We recite the 3 Hail Marys daily and we are most grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio.

L & C. D'Cruz, Australia

Thank you very much dearest Mother Mary for the many blessings and graces especially for good health and safety in my family. I have received so many graces through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Dearest Mother please continue to help, guide and protect us.

S. Monteiro and Family, Goa

My sincere thanks to our dear Lord Jesus, Mary Help of Christians for helping me to secure a job. I prayed the powerful 3 Hail Marys and through her intercession I obtained a job. *Z.F. D'Souza, Bangalore*

Thank you dear Mother Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio through the intercession of the 3 Hail Marys I have received so many favours. *Angelica & George, Mumbai*

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

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, St. John Bosco, St. Dominic Savio all the other saints for getting my daughter a suitable life partner.

Alphonsa, Mumbai

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco for the gift of a beautiful baby boy on 23/10/2009. I apologise for the delay in acknowledging my gratitude.

Doren James D'Souza, Naigaon

My sincere thanks to the Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for their protection over my son and for helping him to get an admission abroad. Please continue to keep my entire family in your care.

G. George, Mumbai

Thank you Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for the successful result of my daughter in her final Engineering examination. She passed with flying colours and with a distinction.

Jessi Ghosh, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Lord, in the Blessed Sacrament, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for saving me from a serious accident.

M. Dodd, Pune

I am grateful to Our Blessed Mother, Don Bosco and all the saints for protecting me after a terrible fall while I was on a holiday in Lonavla. My reports of the CT Scan were found all clear.

P.M. Mumbai

Our sincere thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco for helping my son pass in his examinations, for my husband's good medical reports and for success in business.

Client of Our Lady, Mumbai

I am sincerely grateful to Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for the gift of a baby girl.

Mr. Sunil and Mrs. Karen Coutinho

Belated thanks to Our Blessed Mother for blessing me with a baby girl after 6 years of marriage and another 2 years later.

Maria D'Souza, Goa

In excruciating pain I prayed to our Blessed Mother. I couldn't walk nor climb stairs. I thank her sincerely for coming to my assistance and for curing me.

Ramona D'Costa, Mumbai

I am grateful to Our Blessed Mother for protecting me from a serious back injury while I was in Trivandrum visiting my daughter. I slipped down a flight of stairs and the fall could have been disastrous.

Wg. Cdr. P.K. Thomas, Retd., Coimbatore

Thank you dear Jesus and Mother Mary for granting Maya good health and for helping Rohan secure a good job.

Mrs. P. Samagond, USA

Thank you, Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and the other saints for granting us so many graces.

Mr. & Mrs. D'Souza and Family, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco for all the favours received.

D'Costa, Goa

Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for granting a visa for my son and a beautiful house for my daughter and for many other favours received.

B. Solomon, Mumbai

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



My sincere thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for blessing all my family members, my relatives and friends too.

Shaji, Kalistin, Apoline, Mary, Theodore, Muscat, Oman

I am grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for granting me the grace to preach the Word of God with all my heart and mind and to serve the people of God. I am also grateful for the good health that I have and for protecting me from my enemies. I pray for a long life for my mum, dad, my wife and myself.

Rohan Niar, United Kingdom

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy to my daughter against all odds.

Mrs. Louisa Coelho

My sincere thanks to St. Dominic Savio for providing my daughter with a job.

Emily Pinto, Mumbai

Our grateful thanks to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for our children's success in their examinations and for many other favours received.

Mrs. V. Soares, Goa

My sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for all that they have done for my daughter and her family, for my grandchildren doing well in their studies, for helping my daughter and her husband overcome all their problems.

A Devotee, Australia

Dear Dominic Savio, thank you for protecting my family and keeping us in good health.

Selma, Mumbai

My belated thanks to Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for granting admissions to both my sons, one in the engineering college and the other at a catering college. The admissions took place a few years ago and I have acknowledged my gratitude. Please forgive my delay.

Mrs. E. D'Souza, Goa

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

FEBRUARY 2011

General - The Family:

That the family may be respected by all in its identity and that its irreplaceable contribution to all of society be recognized.

Missionary - Those Suffering from Disease:

That in the mission territories where the struggle against disease is most urgent, Christian communities may witness to the presence of Christ to those who suffer.

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MARY WAS THERE

My son's friend was driving from Goregaon to Navy Nagar and there were two other friends. They were on their way to appear for their last examinations. As they cruised across the sea-link one of their tyres burst and the vehicle skidded. Thankfully a good Samaritan came to their rescue and reached them to the examination centre. They were very shaken and frightened yet they sat for their examination. They were miraculously unhurt and for that I'm sincerely grateful to Our Lady Help of Christians, Don Bosco and all the saints, for saving my son and his friends and for all the other favours I have received.

Mr. & Mrs. Leिताo, Mumbai

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.

To help a poor lad to reach the priesthood, is a privilege

You can help by establishing a Perpetual Burse with:

Rs 5000/-, 10,000/-, 15,000/- for a boy studying for the priesthood;

But any amount, however small, will be gratefully received.

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