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***Renewed
by this paschal event
we pray, O Lord,
that we, who honour the
memory of the Mother
of your Son,
may show forth
in our mortal flesh
the life of Jesus.
Who lives and reigns
for ever and ever.***

*(From the Common of Our Lady
for Easter)*

From The Editor's Desk GLOBAL ELECTRIFICATION PROJECT

Sometimes, you only find out what you have, when you meet someone who hasn't got it. I had a friend who worked for the state electricity board. It was his task to survey outlying villages in the rural hinterland that didn't yet have electricity. That meant going to villages with his team to study the needs of particular villages to see the effects of a lack of electrification; this generally meant that it was his job to bring power and light to villages which had never had it before. He told me that it was the best job he'd ever done. Wherever he went, he was met by delighted, happy people who, for the first time, had the opportunity to make use of all the advantages of electrical power.

Suddenly, people whose lives had been governed by the light of the sun had the chance to extend their day. People who had never heard a radio now knew what was happening outside their own village. People who had never had so many of the things that we take for granted had their horizons expanded. People sometimes wonder if introducing the so-called benefits of 'civilisation' to communities is really doing them a favour but the people themselves had no doubts. They were delighted at their chance to come out of the darkness into the light.

His story reminded me of a young millennial who came to me to be counselled, even though he was not a Christian. He had made some serious mistakes in his life and was tremendously burdened by guilt. I thought, that there must be some way he could unburden his guilt and seek some kind of closure through the 'forgiveness' of God. He gave me a blank look and simply said 'no' he couldn't.

I simply could not believe that for certain people, forgiveness doesn't come easily because they couldn't in the first place, forgive themselves. That young man was living his whole life (thus far) — with no recourse to clemency or forgiveness. I have met many people who carry great burdens and immense sufferings — that is my job, but never have I met someone for whom I felt more sorry.

For those of us for whom electric light and power is part of the ordinary fabric of our lives, it comes as a surprise that there are people who are unable to take that gift for granted. For those of us who live confident in the unconditional love of God, it comes as a deep shock that there are people who are unable to take that gift for granted. And it reminds us that we too have a gift — a light and a power — that we are often tempted to take for granted.

It is important for us to remind ourselves that the light and the power we have been given is not ours to own, but is ours to be shared especially with those who have not yet received it. The Lord did not light his lamp in us in order for us to hide it under a tub. I came away from this experience, both grateful for what I had, as a Christian, and determined to help people, especially those who are hurting to know that there is a God who forgives, no matter what; hoping by that, to join the company of a global electrification project of unconditional forgiveness!

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

IT BEGINS FIRST WITH A PACT

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

Forgiveness and healing are decisive aspects in married life, integral parts of an unpredictable path and they are nourished and find their strength in the sacrament of Matrimony

In the second part of the Final Report that the Synod Fathers presented to Pope Francis, were the constituent elements of the Christian vision of Marriage and the Family, which finds its "sure foundation" in the Word and in Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life; "We are convinced," said the Fathers, "that this Word responds to human expectations more profoundly than love, truth and mercy and awakens potentialities of self-gift and acceptance even in broken and humiliated hearts" (n. 35).

At the centre of the Christian proposal is the Sacrament of

Matrimony which the text describes in intense and precise terms. Marriage is indissoluble because it is founded on God's fidelity; it is a gift and a promise that God makes to the spouses and it is unitive and generative just as God's love and fruitfulness are.

The conjugal bond which arises from the love of two young people who intend to share their life in a planned manner, is based on a pact that the grace of the Spirit compares to the living sign of Christ's bond with his Church. "Their union thus becomes, for the whole of their lives, a source

of multiple graces, fruitfulness and a witness of healing and forgiveness (n. 36). The weighty and precise words used to describe the two effects of the sacrament: first of all, making the couple, by grace not by skill or merit, a visible sign of Christ's love which Christian spouses are called to, daily more and more. Secondly, the sacrament becomes nourishment and strength for them to face some decisive aspects of married life: love and fruitfulness, Christian witness in the world and as the text says, forgiveness and healing which are an integral part of their journey that is totally unpredictable.

As disciples, Christian spouses follow Christ and he accompanies them as he did the two disciples of Emmaus on the highways of life, nourishing them with the Word and the Eucharist and enabling them to become missionary disciples. Marriage, the Synod Fathers remind us, is a way of following Christ in a specific manner indicated by baptism, pointing it out to them as a couple first and then as a family.

In these synthetic expressions of the theology of Marriage, we find the heart of the Christian message concerning the family; certainly, a lofty vision that involves the story of every couple, often fragile and wounded by family situations wherein there are only

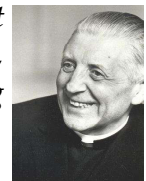
seeds that need to be brought to maturity. The Gospel not only proclaims a truth about Marriage, but it also "nourishes those seeds that are still waiting to ripen and brings back to health those trees that have withered." For that reason "without diminishing the value of the evangelical ideal, it is necessary to accompany with compassion and patience the possible stages of growth of people who are being built up day by day" (n. 51).

One of the knots of the theology of Marriage, which surfaced several times throughout the Synod, was the relationship between what is natural and creaturely and the Christian fulfilment linked to the sacrament (n.47). The man-woman bond and its realization in marriage is the experience of every culture regardless of the Christian faith. People meet, fall in love, decide to get married and the matter about the Christian depth often comes only later and very often without being influencing their married life in a Christian manner.

It is at this point that the Christian community feels called to assist in this task. The family is good for the Church and the Church feels she must take care of families, all of them, especially those who participate in her life "in a way that is still imperfect" (n. 53). □

Christ cannot live his life today in this world without our mouth, our eyes, without our going and coming, without our heart. When we love, it is Christ loving through us.

CARDINAL SUENENS



THE NOVELTY OF THE RISEN ONE!

by Chino Biscontin

A few weeks after Jesus' burial, Peter and the eleven demonstrate extraordinary freedom and courage as they meet the Master, alive beyond death!

Already well advanced in years, Cardinal Martini was once asked by someone: "If you had to go to an island and take just one Book of the Scriptures with you, which one would you choose?" His surprising reply was: "Ecclesiastes." It is one of the Wisdom Books, known for the words with which it begins and repeats several times: "Sheer futility, Qoheleth says, Sheer futility." Perhaps the cardinal found in that book of the Bible, great clarity in the face of death.

The Book of Ecclesiastes was written when, believing in life beyond death had not yet been accepted in Israel. And death in the eyes of the wise seemed to annul all meaning in life. Try to read these disconsolate words: "Yes, I have applied myself to all this and experienced all this to be so: that is to say, that the upright and the wise, with their activities, are in the hands of God. We do not understand either love or hate, where we are concerned. Both of them are futile. And for all of us is reserved a common fate, for the upright and for the wicked, for the good and for the bad; whether we are ritually pure or not, whether we offer sacrifice or not: it is the same for the good and for the sinner, for someone who takes a vow, as for someone who fears to do so. This is another evil among those occurring under

the sun: that there should be the same fate for everyone. The human heart, however, is full of wickedness, folly lurks in our hearts throughout our lives, until we end among the dead." (Ecc. 9:1-3)

To the Christians of Corinth who, according to the Greek mentality, denied the resurrection from the dead, Paul said something similar: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ cannot have been raised either, and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without substance, and so is your faith. [...] If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are of all people the most pitiable (I Cor 15,13-14.19).

The great thinker and poet Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) coined an unforgettable phrase: "To love is to tell someone: you will not die!" But against the background to this magnificent phrase is its opposite which stands out threateningly: "Since you will die, this makes love illusory."

The news of Easter has to be dealt with, keeping all this in mind: that Jesus, whom the cruelty of petty men murdered by crucifixion, God raised from the dead and glorified him by raising him to his side. Therefore, it is not true that there is only one fate for everyone in the face of death.

Since God raises Jesus not individually, but as "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18), it is not even true that there is no resurrection after death for us, thus destroying that sinister message of death with its claim to be the last and the only desperate word about our existence. Easter breaks through this depressing and desperate scenario like a triumphant sun.

The twelve who were with Jesus were people like us, wounded by their own weaknesses, blackmailed by the fear of dying. It was this blackmail that led Judas to betrayal, Peter to deny the Master and all the others to abandon him when he was arrested. Yet they loved Jesus, and Peter, in the name of all, when many drew back, exclaimed: "Lord to who shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). It is possible to apply to them what we read in the Letter to the Hebrews: "...and he set free all those who had been held in slavery for all their lives by the fear of death" (Heb. 2:15).

Amazingly, a few weeks after Jesus' burial Peter and the eleven demonstrate extraordinary freedom and courage. Many of them will face a premature and violent death, in order not to give up bearing witness to Jesus. The only logical explanation for this change is that death no longer

had any blackmailing power over them. They had met the Master who had been crucified and buried and was living beyond death.

He was not the last enemy (cfr 1 Cor 15,26) who was capable of submerging everything into nonsense (sheer futility), who would have the last word. That word was reserved for Him who at the beginning had said: "Let there be light!" (Gen. 1:3). On the lips of Stephen, the first martyr, hear this: "We have come here to tell you that the good news that was the promise made to our ancestors has come about. God has fulfilled it to their children by raising Jesus from the dead. As scripture says in the psalms: *You are my son: today I have fathered you.* (At 13,32-33). This will be the last and everlasting word about us too. □



COURAGE TO ACCEPT ACCEPTANCE!

by Anastasia Dias

What's this happening in my life? Why is this happening to me? Why am I not in control? These were questions that couldn't be answered. At least by me.

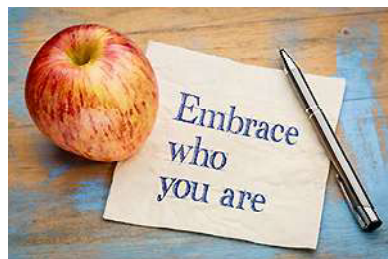
I wanted everything to happen my way and it wasn't happening. I tried as much as I could to control every single thing around me. It just wasn't happening. Period!

Even though I understood this, I was very stressed. It was horrifying. Now, you may have a question in mind. If I understood that I wasn't in control, why was I stressed? Couldn't I just accept that I was a human being and couldn't control every single thing around me?

Most of us face similar situations where we face the unexpected. Many times, we don't have the courage to face it. We really don't know why we're facing unanticipated failure, sickness, grief or trauma. And no matter how many questions we have in our minds about it, no one can really give us an answer. Not even ourselves.

None of us wants to face the unexpected, especially when the

unexpected turns out to be unpleasant. We have two options left when life doesn't turn out the way we want it to. To cave into the anxiety that uncertainty brings, or to face whatever comes our way head-on. Obviously, the latter is easier-said-than-done.



Even though it can be difficult to face life when it's unfair, it is not impossible. Especially with everything that has happened in the past year, with everything that is happening in the world and our lives right now. We need to understand that we can be brave if we choose to.

I have a true incident for people who might be skeptical of this even after all I've said. My friend Natalie was in her fourth year of college when she was diagnosed with a chronic illness. Her health was deteriorating to the point where she was forced



to leave college. No one was sure whether she would eventually end up in a wheelchair or die.

Think of it: she had put in all her efforts and money to get into college and she had spent four years in college already. She was just a step away from getting her college degree. Until she started feeling sick, terribly sick. It was very tough for Natalie and for her family to accept this. However, she didn't want to be the victim here and was committed to getting better. It took her two years to get back up and start moving around. She didn't quit. Instead of crying about all the time she had lost, she went back to college and got her degree.

For many of us acceptance can be hard. We just can't accept that life is constantly evolving and subject to change. Acceptance is pretty hard but it is the most significant step in the entire process of letting go. Only when Natalie accepted that she was sick, could she work on healing. Only when you and I start accepting that we aren't in control, only then can we fully gain control over ourselves.

I would never have written this a year ago. For a person like me, this realization came after a long period of unacceptance. I had put in all my time and effort into a project that I was passionate about. I did it expecting that I would succeed. Unfortunately, I didn't. I failed, and failed badly,

and I made myself miserable over it; simply because I couldn't accept failure. It affected both my mental and physical health. Until I decided that I wouldn't beat myself up anymore over it.

Yes, I had planned to achieve a lot. I had put in a lot, too. However, things didn't happen the way I expected them to. Not because I didn't work hard enough, nor because I was destined to fail at it. No, it just happened because I had to learn a tough lesson: of accepting success as well as failure and taking both in my stride.

It took a lot of time to condition my mind this way. For so many years, my mind had believed hard-work brings success. Yes, it does, although, not all at once. Maybe, for some people. But for the rest of us, we need to learn our lessons before we taste success. Meanwhile, we just have to give everything in life our best shot and enjoy the rollercoaster ride that life itself is.

Remember this: You cannot control everything that is happening around you. But you can control what is happening within you.

Life was never meant to be perfect, rather we were created so that we would work on the imperfect aspects of our lives. Who knows? While doing so, we might just find true happiness. We certainly will, if we give it a try. □

"Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance."

Brene Brown

ABBA PHILIP OF PUGNIDO

Fr. Philip Perin has lived and worked in the parish of Pugnido for three years with Abba Gorgio (surnamed Pontiggia, originally from the province of Como, Italy. He has worked in Ethiopia for 27 years).

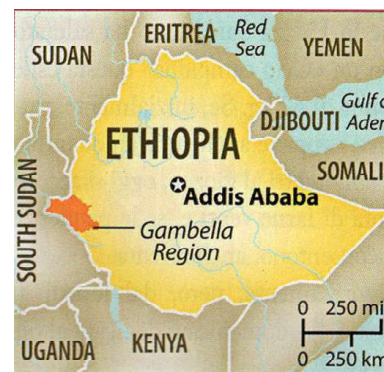
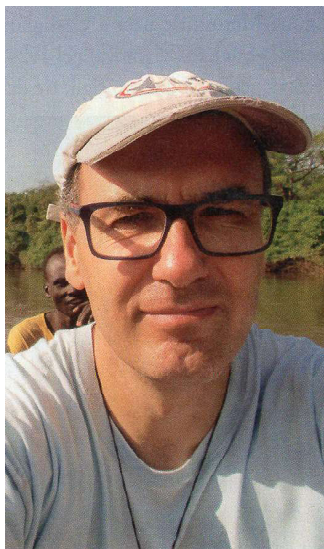
Three Lions and a Crocodile

"Among our first encounters," says Fr. Philip, "was early one morning still pretty dark, we were on our way to Pochalla to take the boat to go to the river, three lions swooped down right in front of the car. They had just come out of the bush at the side of the road. We immediately stopped the car and let them move on. At first, they looked like cows, they were so tall, then seeing them run and jump like cats, we realized they were lions. They walked ahead of us for about an hour, for 50 or 60 metres going in the same direction. We tried to honk and dip the headlights to get them to move or hurry on, but no effect. Then a big truck turned up and we got behind it hoping we could overtake our moving impediment but the driver of the truck was afraid and waited patiently. Then a motorcyclist came up from the opposite side and the three lions were in the middle. We started revving up the engine to make a noise and so did the motorcyclist; finally, the lions edged off the road and entered the forest and we were able to pass.

Driving along we met someone with a bicycle who was going to Pugnido. We told him to be careful and that there were three lions around, but he went on. Then we heard that when he reached the point where the lions had entered the forest, they (the lions) turned around and came up to the road again; maybe they hadn't had their breakfast. The cyclist seeing them, climbed up a tree to save himself. A passing bus rescued him.

Last week, we were taking the boat's outboard motor out of our little garage to mount it and a snake popped out of the engine. It frightened us all and we leapt back. The snake wasn't very long but it was poisonous. We then tried to flush it out of the engine from the engine with gasoline. Eventually, it came out and some youngsters were waiting there ready to kill it.

Finally, on our travels on the river, we don't very often encounter Nyang, (but this time we saw him), a mega-crocodile. It was more than five metres long but huge. He always hung around in the same place more or less. We knew by now where he was. When we saw it, we



tried to keep some distance from it, accelerate and run off waving goodbye to it.

There were always some adventures that we encountered when visiting the villages but what is most fulfilling, is meeting the people, so many youngsters and children who come to catechism class and to a prayer meeting. Many villages are isolated for most of the year, especially during the rains when the river overflows its banks into the forest and access roads are inundated. During that time, it is difficult to find food. There's only fish from the river. The few schools and clinics there, are closed for lack of teachers, doctors or medicines. It's really tough for the very poor.

Our presence in some villages is a source of encouragement and support. Catechism classes and prayer meetings try to revive the faith of the people. We reach out to the villagers through the creation of mobile oratories for children and the youngsters, using balloons, games and tangible aid to the villages, some wells for drinking water and some flour mills or a boat to take the sick to Pugnido. There's also work in the

refugee camps, especially on Sundays, visiting various churches made of wood, mud and grass meeting various Christian communities, the work with the catechists is to help as many people as possible, first of all listening to their problems, then food for the children, then a future for the children at least in schools or a job for those who are older. Here it's not so much the lack of material things but hope for a future. No one wants to stay in the refugee camps. Very often in the face of all these needs we feel like a drop in the ocean but we work for the Kingdom of Heaven, a kingdom of hearts that surpasses every difficulty and problem and reaches the ends of the world, like ours.

The World's Poorest

The village of Pugnido is located in the Gambella region in the extreme west of Ethiopia, wedged largely by Sudan.

It is characteristically very hot and there is a general drought except during the rainy season (from July to mid-October). The temperature is very hot, never dropping below 20° and from the months of March and April it peaks to around 50°.

The region is divided into three administrative zones based on ethnicity. They don't get along with each other and fight each other very brutally causing several assassinations, kidnappings and raids.

The Gambella regions is among the poorest in Ethiopia, one of the 10 poorest countries in the world; one of the lowest in terms of development. In urban areas, unemployment is rampant and for those who do manage to find a job,

the normal daily wage is around 1 euro. Malnutrition is widespread along with related diseases. Infant mortality is around 200 per 1000 births and the life expectancy level reaches 42 years. Just 14% of the population has access to drinking water.

Around 110 km south of Gambella is the village of Pugnido where the Salesians have a mission. The village of Pugnido has about 10,000 inhabitants, almost all of them Anyuak, except the merchants who are mostly Ethiopian by origin. The people live mainly on the aid that the United Nations makes available to the people of both the refugee camp and the village. Every month there is a distribution programme of food, oil, soap and other materials.

The Salesian Presence

In Pugnido, the work of the Salesian missionaries is aimed at evangelization and human deve-

lopment of the local population, with special attention to the children and adolescents.

The mission consists of a central parish with a very active oratory and eleven outlying mission stations visited periodically and often reachable only by boat via the river. To these are added six communities in the refugee camps which are also visited periodically.

The oratory in particular represents a point of reference for adolescents of the area. It is always full, especially in the afternoon, with football tables and five table tennis tables, merry-go-rounds for the little ones; there are soccer and volleyball tournaments for the boys and girls. The activities and initiatives are not limited to this; there are several other works carried out: a nursery school, drinking water, agricultural and forestry programmes, a boarding for school students and tailoring classes for the girls. □



Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. GEORGE (April 23)

The image of St. George evokes a certain sense of awe and grandeur in me while at the same time appearing mysterious. When I see his image, seated on a horse clad in knight's armour while looking down on a dragon I cannot help but think that either inspired plenty of fairy tales or was inspired by them. I mean we all know that dragons aren't real right? Or are they? And how come there is a saint dressed in full battle gear? That just seems strange doesn't it?

THE LEGENDS

There isn't much historical information about St. George but this much is known: he was a Roman officer of Greek descent who suffered martyrdom during the Roman persecution. There are two popular legends about him dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries. The legend involving the dragon emerged during the 11th century.

According to the Greek legend, George was born into a Greek Christian family in Cappadocia. His father was killed because of his Christian faith when George was only 14 years old. In order, to save her son's and her own life, his mother escaped to Syria. George

lost his mother when he was in early adulthood. Since he was an orphan and had no other family, he decided to become a soldier in the Roman army. Somehow the news that he was Christian leaked out and he began to suffer discrimination and persecution within the army. When the persecution of Christians was at its height, George was martyred near the walls of the city of Nicomedia in 303. One of those who witnessed his death was converted by the experience and went on to convince and subsequently convert no one less than the empress herself. Empress Alexandra of Rome cast aside her pagan beliefs and embraced Christ. Her conversion cost her, her life too. The body of George was brought to Lydda for burial and Christians began to venerate him as a saint.

The Latin legend comes from an account dating back to the 6th century named *Acta Sancti Georgii*. The story is similar to the Greek version except that the emperor who was named Diocletian according to the Greek legend is here named Dacian, and he was not of Roman blood but from Persia. This account focuses a lot of the attention on the martyrdom. It records twenty separate tortures

that he underwent over the course of seven years. In these seven years, 40,900 pagans were converted to Christianity by the witness of his faith and courage in persecution. Among them was also the Empress Alexandra.

THE MYTH

As mentioned earlier, the legend of Saint George and the Dragon came to light in the 11th century. It became very popular because it was recorded in the *Golden Legend*, a book of hagiographies by Jacobus da Varagine, the Archbishop of Genoa.

The myth goes thus: a fierce dragon was traumatizing the city of Silene, Libya. The people tried to appease it by offering it two sheep a day. The dragon however, proved to be far more difficult and would not remain satisfied with the sheep. The people began to sacrifice human beings to the fangs of the dragon. Those who would be sacrificed were chosen by lot by the townspeople themselves. One day, the lot fell on the princess and no one from the kingdom dared to take her place. Luckily for her, George was there to save the day. He fought the dragon and ultimately subdued it with a lance. The king was so grateful that he offered him treasures as a reward but George was disinterested in the wealth. He took the treasures and distributed them to the poor. The people of the city were so amazed at these events that they became Christians and were all baptized.

The lance which George used to kill the dragon was called *Ascalon*, after the Levantine city of Ashkelon in modern day Israel. Winston Churchill used the name *Ascalon* for his personal aircraft

during World War II. Somehow the Swedes also lay claim to this legend and believed that the princess rescued by George represented the kingdom of Sweden while the dragon represented an invading army. There are several sculptures of George battling the dragon that can be found in and around Stockholm.

In this line, it is interesting to note that the icon of a horseman wielding a spear and overcoming something representing evil was commonly used by Christians. One can think of the image of St. Michael that we have. He is similarly dressed in military gear and stands over the devil ready to strike the deathblow with his sword. This is probably the source of fairytales or perhaps is a fairytale creation itself. Most romantic movies have this as the plot: a handsome and brave knight comes riding in with his shining armour, slays the villain or beast and rescues his lady-love. The details are slightly altered of course but the resemblance is uncanny.

THE MAN

Considering that we are talking about someone who lived in the first few centuries of this era, when Christians weren't very literate nor were they very historically conscious, there is very little documentary proof about George. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states that based upon an ancient tradition, narratives of the early pilgrims, and the early dedications of churches to George, going back to the fourth century, we can safely conclude that historically there did exist a person named George.

The details of the legends however are open for discussion and

debate. Having said this, I have to mention that Pope Gelasius in 495 made mention of such writings about George that were already in existence at the time. He does not categorically assert their veracity or falsity but recognizes George as one of the saints "whose names are justly revered among men, but whose actions are only known to God."

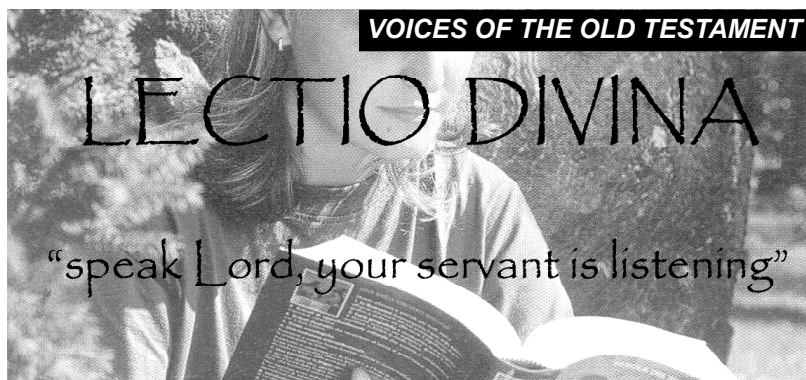
Notwithstanding the lack of historical evidence, we have a strong Christian tradition to fall back on while discussing St. George. History says that a Church was built in Lydda during the reign of Constantine the Great that was consecrated to St. George. The cult of St. George spread from Syria through Lebanon and to the rest of the Byzantine Empire. By the end of the 5th century, the devotion that had begun in the East spread quickly throughout the Western Roman Empire which was by then largely Christian.

The Church of St. George which was built during the time of Constantine was destroyed when the Ottomans began invading the Middle-East. During the Crusades, the Church was rebuilt. The relics of Saint George are preserved there even today. George rose to popularity during the Crusades. He began to be hailed as a model of chivalry and bravery especially in works of literature. This answers the questions I raised earlier. He was definitely the model for medieval romance. Due to his increasing popularity he began to be hailed as the patron of England. To this day, England celebrates Saint George like nowhere else on earth. They have a special holiday, Saint George's Day, his feast day, inserted into their calendar and

celebrated as a public holiday.

Sadly, we have no biographical details about this larger-than-life personality. His legends are great but how can they strengthen our faith? Leaving aside the myths, we can say for sure that George was a committed Christian. He loved the Lord and was ready to sacrifice his life for Him. Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Mt 16:24-25). George was ready to give up a lucrative life as a Roman soldier for the treasures that would be his in heaven. He lived with great courage and faced torture and persecution bravely. Such was the power of his witness that many of the soldiers who were present at his martyrdom were converted and professed their faith in Jesus. Consequently, they too suffered an end like his but they gained much more in the loss of their lives.

Saint George might not have actually slain a dragon but he definitely was a hero. He managed to slay the dragons of fear and hatred. He might not have saved the life of any princess or lived happily ever after but he did convert a queen and many others and in that way won souls for Christ and life eternal. So yes, even though his story might not have turned out like other medieval heroes, he did achieve all that they would; the only difference was they achieved the happiness here on earth and had it only for a short while but he achieved it in eternal life "where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt 6:20). □



VOICES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

LECTIO DIVINA

“speak Lord, your servant is listening”

HE IS OUR PEACE

by Carlo Broccardo

It is certainty that gives us the courage to choose and the strength to remain faithful to the choices we make. What surrounds us is a certainty that is not ostentatious, but a certainty that remains constantly in the background.

“A book of emotions,” that is how some authors have described the Psalter, the collection of 150 Psalms in the Bible. It is an apt definition, because these ancient prayers, written in Hebrew at least two thousand five hundred years ago (some are certainly older, date back to the time of King David, around 1000 BCE), use widely the language of sentiments, and emotions. There we find expressions of trust, anger, joy, surrender, doubt, thirst for revenge and forgiveness... When reading them, one may always ask oneself: what are the emotions behind those words? What sentiments do they express? How do they resonate with what’s going on in my heart, in my life?

On the 18th April, the third Sunday of Easter, we will read Psalm 4 as our responsorial psalm. It begins with a plea to God: “When I call, you answer

me, God, upholder of my right!” It has already happened at other times that I have called out to you, the person praying says, and “in my distress you have set me at large.” Behold, now I am in anguish again and I beg you: “take pity on me and hear my prayer.” See how I have been reduced; be moved by my condition, have mercy and help me.

But what is it that disturbs the heart of this man so much that he asks his God for help in such a harrowing manner? We notice it from the words with which the prayer continues. He is always talking to God, but he acts as if those who trample his honour are standing before him. We don’t know who they are; we imagine they are a group of evil people (he calls them “sinners” who are going down evil paths, after “vain things,” who lie and seek to lie) who are very angry with him. They are intent on destroying his

honour; who knows what slander they are spreading about him. They tarnish and ruin his reputation in the eyes of the community. In those days, family and community were very important, they were everything.

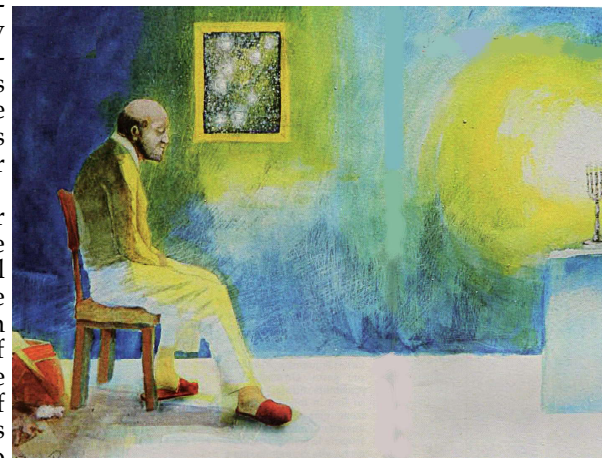
There are many emotions that our pleader is expressing. The first is anguish, because these enemies are pulling the floor from beneath his feet. But there is also trust, because “Yahweh performs wonders for his faithful. Yahweh listens when I call him.” It is almost a weapon he uses against his enemies: It would be better for you if you stop hurting me, because the Lord is by my side and you will not get away with it... There is trust, but there is also uncertainty, because, if it is true that the Lord has already intervened on other occasions to free him from anguish, now the bad guys seem to be winning and so it is time to remind God that he shouldn’t wait too long because “who will put happiness before our eyes? Let the light of your face shine on us.” One of the beautiful

aspects of the psalms is that they are very spontaneous prayers wherein the one praying feels free ask God for anything.

Finally, after having gone through several emotions, the prayer ends in an expression of surrender. In the positive sense of the term: it is trusting God so

much, that the pleader puts his whole life into God’s hands meaning to say that even through everything that was happening and what he was feeling that evening he could confidently exclaim: “In peace I lie down and at once fall asleep, for it is you and none other, Yahweh, who makes me rest secure.”

I keep thinking of the Synod of Young People on Vocational Discernment; the great effort they make to choose; to make important decisions for their lives. What is it that scares them, what is it that distresses them? Perhaps, we adults could help them by showing them (through our words and attitudes) that even in our lives there have been reasons to worry, be angry and uncertain, but in the end, and continuously though not in a dramatic fashion, but like something constantly in the background, there is the certainty that God takes care of us. He is our peace, and this gives us the courage to choose and the strength to remain faithful to the choices we make. □



Quiet Spaces

TIME IS GOD'S MESSENGER

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, April 17, 2015

Pope Francis affirmed that this very moment, many Christians “are being martyred for the name of Jesus” and gladly suffer abuse, even to death, “for the love of Jesus.”

The day's Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (5:34-42) concludes “the narrative of the persecution of the Apostles who preached in the name of Jesus,” which Francis had spoken of the day before. “They were thrown in prison, freed by the angel”, the Pope recalled; “then they were teaching in Solomon's Portico” but “they were brought once again before the Sanhedrin.”

The issue, he explained, is that “the doctors of the law did not tolerate hearing the kerygma, the proclamation of Jesus Christ.” Verse 33 in particular, says that the doctors of the law, on hearing them, became enraged, and wanted to put them to death. Their hatred and rage was so strong “that they wanted to kill them.” But “in that moment, when perhaps they were ready to seize them and take them outside to be stoned, a Pharisee stood up in the Sanhedrin.”

This act was “important”, the Pope pointed out, because “not all the Pharisees were bad.” Indeed, we shouldn't think of them “as if they were devils: no, there were bad ones and there were many good ones.” The passage from the Acts of the Apostles describes Gamaliel, calling him “a just man: he was in the Sanhedrin, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, in other words he had authority.” Thus, he was “a man of moral authority who gave the order to put the Apostles outside, by offering this reflection: “If this is a matter of men, it will fail on its own. But if it is of God, please, you might even be found opposing God!”. And so the others took his advice.”

Gamaliel's suggestion also applies to Christians today, the Pope said: “When we have or we think something against a person, and we don't seek advice, tension grows, and grows, and grows, and explodes: it explodes in insults, in war, in so many bad things.” Therefore, “when feelings are closed they grow, evil grows and it justifies itself because these things justify themselves with the law.” Thus, “the remedy offered by Gamaliel is: ‘Stop, stop.’” His advice is “to give it some time.” This caution “is also useful to us when we have bad thoughts against others, bad feelings, when we have antipathy, hate: don't let them grow, stop, give it some time.”

Indeed the Pope explained, time “places things in harmony and shows us what is right.” But “if you react in a moment of rage, you will surely be unjust.” And being “unjust will also cause harm to you.” This is why, the Pontiff re-emphasized, Gamaliel gives an excellent recommendation about “time at the moment of temptation”. This too is “the wise counsel of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus: flee from temptation, that is, give it

time, step away, don't let it grow inside and justify itself, and grow, and grow” until it explodes “in hatred, in hostility.” This even happens in families, the Pontiff recalled.

In the Sanhedrin that judged the Apostles, “this hatred is stopped by wise counsel and admonition: ‘You might even be found opposing God!’” Gamaliel makes us understand that “when we have these bad feelings against others, we struggle against God, because God loves the others, loves harmony, loves love, loves dialogue, loves walking together”. And this is “sound advice.”

“I'll be frank with you,” Francis confided: “it happens to me when I don't like something. The first feeling isn't of God, it's bad, always. I have seen it in myself. Stop, let's stop!” This leaves “room for the Holy Spirit, so he may slowly heal us and lead us to what is just, to peace.”

The Acts of the Apostles, recalled the Bishop of Rome, tell us that the Apostles “left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name” of Jesus: namely, “humiliation.”

And thus “the pride of the first ones leads to the desire to kill the others; humility, even humiliation, leads you to resemble Jesus: and this is something we do not consider”. Right away the Pope's thoughts went to “so many of our brothers and sisters martyred for the name of Jesus,” even “at this moment.” And “they are in this state, in this moment they have gladness for suffering insults, even death, for the name of Jesus.”

After all, Francis affirmed, “to escape the pride of the first ones, the way is opening the heart to humility, and one never reaches humility without humiliation: this is not something that is understood naturally”. It is, rather, “a grace that we must ask for: Lord, when there is humiliation may I feel that I am following you, on your path, as you were humiliated.”

It is the grace of “imitating Jesus” which, the Pope added, concerns “not only those martyrs whom I spoke of now, but also the many men and women who suffer humiliation every day, and for the good of their own family, the good of other things, they shut their mouths, don't speak, endure for the love of Jesus. And there are so many.” This “is the holiness of the Church: the gladness that humiliation gives, not because humiliation is beautiful, no: that would be masochism”: but “because with that humiliation you imitate Jesus.”

Before continuing with Mass, “the celebration of Jesus' mystery, this mystery of the death, the humiliation and the glory of Jesus,” the Pope called all to prayer, to ask for “the grace of patience: the patience Jesus had in listening to everyone” and in “being open to all, as well as suffering humiliation for the love for all.” □

THE NEW POT

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

The hut of Hermann Marius was very peculiarly situated. It seemed to have tumbled down the summit and stopped by chance on a green hump on the edge of a meadow full of holes and mounds but as soft as a sheep's back.

When the young mountaineer entered it at dawn, a little hot from the tiring climb, trailing behind was a stream of colourless light, his eyes descended contentedly on the new pot that greeted him with its silvery glow from a dark corner of the cabin.

It was sparkling aluminium, large and pot-bellied. It had cost him seventy-five euros so it was his own possession; as clean on the inside as it was outside and he used it only to carry lukewarm milk from one hut to another which, if it was jerked dripped milk from all sides.

After quickly glancing around the cabin, Hermann ran outside to get some pieces of wood piled up by the door. He lit a small fire in the blackened hearth: he did this partly out of habit and partly to keep himself warm because the day in the mountains was not bereft of an icy breeze even in summer.

He stood at the door with a cigar between his teeth as he waited for the wood to catch fire shuddering and crackling as if out of tremendous effort. Watching the flames burning and caressing the wood always fascinated him.

Hermann was never bored out there. He liked to watch the dawn

light up the glacier on the opposite mountain. It seemed like a white marble hearth with a wonderful fire, light pink and violet flames. The serenity of the time and place stoked some pious and personal thoughts in his somewhat rustic heart.

His mind then turned to Silvia Isoletta, his fiancée, down in the village; a beautiful girl with a bold step, kind eyes and an exuberantly youthful smile. He fantasized a lot and mulled over her beautiful voice and the way she dressed always exuding the perfume of roses every day.

In the summer months, every morning was almost like this morning, like the "Hail Marys" of a rosary, all the same...but infinitely sweeter.

One September afternoon a group of cheerful vacationers went out to look for Hermann at his old house which stood on the highest point in the village where the path of the mountain forked like two cascades of white smooth stones.

They found him sitting at his doorstep, vigorously repairing a little box he was holding between his legs. His tousled hair fell over his face. Hermann was a handsome young man but at times he seemed like a real savage:

"Hermann," the youngsters shouted, "We want to go to your cabin tomorrow to spend the day on the mountain. Let us have the key, please."

"No," he replied rather abruptly, not even raising his

head to look at them.

The young girls were amused and giggled but the youngsters knew how to get to him...he was basically good so they tried again:

"Come on, be good for once, Hermann!"

This time the mountaineer did not reply, he just disappeared into the darkness of his house to return with the key. The only thing he said rather seriously was:

"Don't use my new pot," he said and added, "I'm warning you!" But then he thought he looked rather ridiculous in front of those youngsters and he stopped short.

He was tempted to go with them the following day, but he just couldn't.

The next morning dawned with all the splendour of a magnificent Alpine September day which lit up the sky and from the forest below rose the perfume of wood smoke and earth.

Around the hearth inside the cabin cheerful voices and laughter broke the silence.

As it came up to noon, one of the youngsters happily proposed they start cooking lunch:

"Look, what a beautiful pot this is," he said pointing to the only one that was sparkling aluminium. It stood out among the others and the soot on the wall,

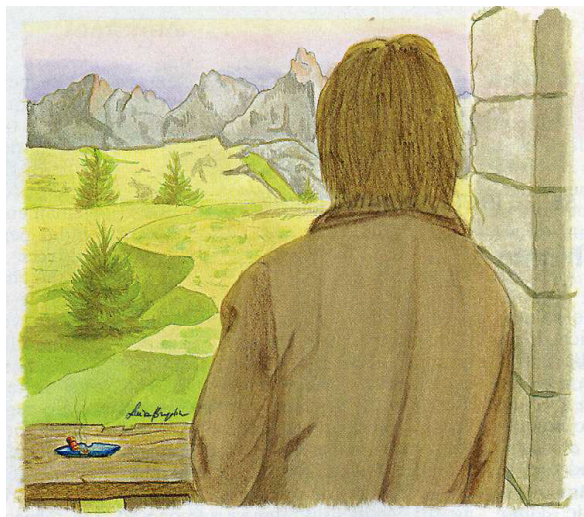
"it's just the one for me, I'll cook the pasta in it."

"You'll have to clean it later, master chef!" the young ladies pleaded, fearing for their smooth hands and painted nails.

The young man shrugged: "I hope its rightful owner will do it!"

The flame began licking around the polished aluminium which immediately seemed to frown like a radiant face that suddenly turned dark. The new pot soon became unrecognizable.

Hermann seemed to go berserk when he found that gruesome pot in his cabin. His somewhat wild nature suddenly snapped fearfully. Gritting his teeth, he rushed out of the cabin, pot in hand, and flung it across the grassy slope. For a moment he watched as it forcefully bumped its way to land on a pile of hay, which, for better or for worse, prevented its continuing dangerous tumble. Then, clenching his fists, the



young mountaineer screamed like a madman:

"They'll pay for this, those ungrateful brutes, they'll pay dearly!"

And he set off at a run into the thicket behind the cabin.

The wonderful September day seemed to hold its breath. Everything seemed suspended in mid-air, so clear and clean. Everything had taken on an ethereal lightness. Smoke serenely drifted upwards from the chimneys and light glowed in the windows; everything seemed transparent in that crystalline air as evening fell.

The meadows hummed with the songs of men and women with glistening scythes on their way back from the fields and everything smelled of greenery and peace.

In that frenzy of sweet songs and hard work, no one noticed the fury of Hermann, except Silvia Isoletta, his girlfriend.

She had watched him and understood everything.

As soon as she saw him disappear into the thicket, she slipped away unnoticed among the haystacks towards Hermann's hut which was pretty far from all the other dwellings, as if to define the unsociable nature of its owner. With his Silvia however, he was someone else. That girl, so good and as beautiful as a flower, had completely stolen his heart so that its roughness melted in her inexpressible sweetness.

Silvia picked up the pot near the haystack and trudged up into her boyfriend's cabin. Its door was still wide open. She knelt on the damp dirt floor, rolled up her sleeves revealing her strong arms and began scrubbing the pot with warm dry ash.

Flashes of



bright aluminium, like smiling eyes gradually widening under the pressure of those tanned hands and that beautiful face seemed to be gradually revealed. She smiled with sweet thoughts:

"Hermann will not be back till this evening (she knew how long his rage took to simmer down). He would find his pot as beautiful as before. 'Who could have been here? he would think...' But instead, Hermann came back rather quickly, his heart dulled with that earlier rage, thanks to the silence of the woods.

The faint sound coming out of his cabin surprised him.

He quietly peeped through the

cracks in the old beams that held the cabin together and saw Silvia lovingly bent over toiling and scrubbing. The setting sun coming through the windows framed her face and the gold in her hair.

Hermann, felt his rage subside as he rushed in calling in a voice that trembled a little:

"Silvia!"

She looked up at him blushing and then said very simply: "I thought you were in the woods." Then she added: "Look at the pot: it's just as it was before."

But Hermann was instead looking at her, her face and hair and her blue eyes aglow in the light of the setting sun. □

Lift beyond our wildest dreams

St. Luke tells us that after the apostles had witnessed the ascension 'they went back to Jerusalem full of joy.' Maybe Luke, writing many years afterwards, saw it in hindsight as a joyful time for Jesus had to ascend to the Father before the power of the Spirit would come. It was in the power of that Spirit that Luke saw the message of Jesus spread to the whole known world. Once they received the Spirit, nothing was going to stop them from answering the call...no looking back over the shoulder, no regrets... but they just forged ahead as the Lord gave them help and direction.

It is the same with our lives. Constantly we are called on to change... change our life style, change our attitude, change from laziness, from envy, from pride, from fear.

There is a well known treatment centre for people with addictive problems, run by a Sister of Mercy



and it is called Aisieri — Resurrection. In order to rise out of the imprisonment of addiction, a person has to change deeply and widely. No more sessions in the pub, leave one's old drinking buddies, move into a different life style. At the gates of Aisieri, this new life looks very daunting and the selective memory only recalls the good, friendly comfortable times... the memory conveniently forgets the hellish times. Resurrection is hard but gives you a life beyond your wildest dreams. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 27

by Michele Molineris

86. Discipline presupposes a sense of morality (1859)

Although Don Bosco was very kind, he did not take kindly to a lack of discipline. In the month of May 1859, a cleric named Marcello, although he was an assistant never came in time for spiritual reading and the blessing that was given every evening; this and other failings. Again, while it was this cleric's duty every Sunday to help out at the Guardian Angel Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia, he took it upon himself to bring along some boys, ordering to the contrary notwithstanding. For this too he was admonished in vain. Now it happened that one Sunday, that the oratory was holding a special celebration, and again the cleric took along several boys without Don Bosco's or Father Alasonnati's permission. Then and there, Don Bosco decided it was time to put a stop to a public disorder and end a bad example which others might imitate. Accordingly, that evening after prayers, he told all the community of a grave disobedience of whoever had taken boys out of the house without permission. Then, continuing in Piedmontese dialect - quite an unusual thing at the "Good Night" - in a hurt tone, he publicly asked each of those boys: "Where were you this morning?" "At the Guardian Angel Oratory."

"Who took you there?"

"The cleric Marcello!"

In profound silence, coming at

brief intervals, the repeated questions and answers became a refrain.

After the last boy had answered, Don Bosco expressed his keen displeasure curtly but calmly. (EBM VI, 164-165)

87. Opportunity makes a thief (1859)

"A few years ago," Don Bosco spoke to his youngsters one evening in 1859. "A poor boy from the city of Turin went to buy a penny's worth of tobacco. Back with his companions, who were waiting for him, he wanted to read the piece of paper in which the tobacco had been wrapped by the tobacconist. It was a prayer to Saint Joseph for a good death. He could hardly understand what it meant, yet he was so moved by the little that he could understand and couldn't take his eyes off the paper. His friends, driven by curiosity, would have liked to read it too, but he held it tightly to his chest and began to revel in that prayer. He was also impatient to reread it, such was the sweetness that he felt every time he read it, as if he was doing so for the first time. In fact, he studied it so well that he committed it to memory and recited it every day. Almost unconsciously he was formally praying to obtain any grace.

"St. Joseph was not insensitive to that homage, I would say, involuntary though it was, touched the heart of that poor youngster, who, having come to see me, gave me the inestimable good fortune to bring him back to God. The youngster corresponded to God's grace; he had the time to educate himself in the Faith,

which till then he had utterly neglected though he was not aware of it. He was able to make his First Communion well; but shortly afterwards he fell ill, the illness of which he died, praising and invoking the name of St. Joseph who had obtained for him grace and the comfort in his last moments." (BM VI, 190 - omitted in the English Edition)

88. A Story of Caterpillars (1859)

In May 1859 through his priestly blessing, Don Bosco obtained a singular victory that made his boys laugh heartily. They exclaimed: "Too bad that Don Bosco isn't a general!" they remarked. "He would rout all enemies!"

Joseph Reano described this incident in writing to Father John Bonetti:

One day an old lady who rented and tilled a vegetable garden close to the Oratory came to see Don Bosco. She was very upset.

"Father," she said, "caterpillars are crawling all over my garden and eating up everything."

"What can I do, my good woman?" Don Bosco replied.

"I want you to chase them away. They are ruining me. Give them a blessing and make them all die."

"Why do you want those poor things to die?" Don Bosco replied smilingly. "I will bless them and send them where they can do no harm."

Next morning [Joseph] Buzzetti and I went to a small lot flanking the Church of St. Francis de Sales and belonging to the Oratory. It was enclosed by a ten-foot-high wall. To our astonishment



The Spire of the Parish Church of Buttigliera D'Asti

caterpillars covered the whole wall, as well as the beams and heaps of stones and bricks lying on the ground and stunted trees. The old woman's garden was entirely rid of them" (*EBM.*, VI, 125).

89. Woe to the poor if there were no poor (1859)

One day in 1859 a lady of some seventy-five years came to the Oratory, asking to speak to Don Bosco. He thought she had come for a recommendation to city authorities or to some wealthy person.

"No!" she replied to his inquiry. "I came for something else."

"All right!" Don Bosco replied. And taking her aside, he invited her to sit. She went on: "I am a poor old woman. I have worked all my life. I had an only son but now he is dead. There is nothing for me to look forward to in this life. I have no other heirs. Before dying, my son told me to give my savings to charity! Here they are – one hundred lire – all my wealth after fifty years of work. I want you to have them. I still have a small sum for medical expenses and fifteen lire for my funeral. I'll take to bed tonight and all will be over in a few days."

"I accept your offering most gratefully," Don Bosco replied, "but I will not use this money till after your death. If you need it, come anytime. It is still yours."

"No!" the good woman said. "I have gained some merit with these alms. Use the money. If I should be in need. I'll ask you for alms, and by giving it to me, you too will gain merit. Will you come to see me when I'm sick?"

"Certainly!" Don Bosco replied.

Next day, Don Bosco, still deeply touched by her genuine, simple charity meant to visit her, but could not remember her address. Two days later, though, another woman came to call him. Don Bosco went with her immediately. On entering the room, he instantly recognized the old woman. Smilingly she gestured that she needed nothing.

"It can't be!" Don Bosco exclaimed. "You must need something, or you would not have sent for me."

"Well, yes," she replied. "I need the Last Sacraments." She received them most devoutly and then peacefully passed away. (*EBM.*, VI, 100-101).

90. Stern but just (1859)

Among the numerous and well-trained members of the brass band there was at this time a good organist who, while boarding at the Oratory as a guest, earned good money with his piano lessons in town. He was a good fellow, but rather flighty and independent. The pupils palled around him, and now and then seemed receptive to opinions of his not conducive to submission to superiors. This led to some slight breaches of discipline which a warning from Don Bosco seemed to have remedied. Don Bosco, however, did not relax his vigilance.

For some years now, on the feast of St. Cecilia, Don Bosco had, for special reasons, allowed the band to hold a picnic at some place designated by himself, if the feast fell on a weekday. This year [1859] he announced that the picnic would be discontinued. The young bandsmen at first

made no fuss over it. Later, stirred up by some senior members who promised to obtain Don Bosco's permission – and perhaps also counting on impunity – half of them decided to hold a celebration anyway. They agreed to have a dinner outside the Oratory two or three weeks before the feast of St. Cecilia, lest Don Bosco get wind of their plans and foil them. Accordingly, toward the end of October, they went to a nearby inn. Buzzetti alone – invited at the last moment – refused to join them and reported the matter to Don Bosco.

Not the least put out, Don Bosco immediately dissolved the band and ordered Buzzetti to collect and lock up all the instruments. He then told him to draw up a list of new recruits. The next morning, he sent for the young rebels one by one and reprimanded them for forcing him to be severe. He gave them a word of spiritual advice, and without further ado, sent them away – some of their parents or benefactors, others to prospective employers (*EBM.*, VI, 165-166).

91. Don Bosco and the dance (1859)

On the evening of October 4, 1859, Don Bosco with his youngsters triumphantly entered Villa San Secondo (Asti) to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Grace. The parish priest who was disturbed because a dance had been arranged in the middle of the village. He lost no time in telling Don Bosco of the matter.

"Leave it to me," Don Bosco replied. Without arousing the least suspicion concerning that dance, he told some boys to set up

a makeshift stage in the large courtyard of the Perucatti family. On the day of the feast, people all rushed to the show. The promoters, after waiting for a good half hour for the people who didn't come, also went to see the play. But they were very resentful and tried to meet Don Bosco to tell him how they felt.

In the meantime, they cherished the hope of making up for the damage and the mockery on the following Sunday; but this time too they hadn't reckoned with the host. In fact, at the request of the population, the programme of the feast was repeated with the same 'deserting' results. Then the head of the dance committee could bare it no more, they introduced themselves to Don Bosco, they asked him for compensation for the damages: they had in fact hired the music, the refreshments and the stage.

Don Bosco kindly welcomed them into the room and asked them:

"Did you too come here to see our performance?"

"Yes, sir! I challenge anyone not to do the same; we were deserted."

"And did you enjoy it?"

"We stayed till the end."

"Well," Don Bosco concluded, "What then do you want me to compensate you for? While people were free to go where they wanted, weren't they? I didn't come to your ball and I'm not asking you for anything. You enjoyed my performance and you didn't pay me. So, what do you want and why do you ask?"

"Yes, he's right," they replied and left." (*adapted from EBM.*, VI, 149-151). □



MOTHER OF THE NEW CREATION

by Joseph Pelizza

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene. Jesus therefore, seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved present there, said to his mother: "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple: "Here is your mother." (Jn 19: 25-27)

It was not just a filial gesture of piety. It was not John who would take care of Mary; just the opposite. John was entrusted to Mary, since the text clearly emphasizes the female function: woman, mother and son, rather than the male function. Faced with this predominance, the disciple agrees and takes Mary into his home. That moment was so crucial that the evangelist used the term "now" to indicate the fulfilment of something new and decisive, foreseen and desired in the plan of salvation. The time when John, the symbol of all humankind, welcomed Mary into his home, thus extending the realization of the salvation achieved on the cross, throughout history.

At the beginning of his Gospel,

John said that the Word came to pitch his tent among us, but that the raising of that tent – the symbol of God's presence in history – had been refused. Jesus was sacrificed on the cross, outside the city of Jerusalem (symbol of human civilizations that reject Christ and salvation), pretending to be able to redeem themselves.

However, now, it was a man's home that welcomed the one who was fully woman, since she was both virgin and mother and he welcomed her out of obedience to the One who had been rejected.

In that hour in which the salvation offered by the Father was rejected by man, here it was a man, John, who accepted to be a son, to recognize himself from a mother, from an origin; to have roots. This son brought into his house the woman who was recognized as a Woman by her crucified Son. In that hour in which God accomplished the salvation of humanity, here was the hour of the man who welcomed into his earthly home, the one who allowed the fulfillment of this salvation; the one who gave mortal flesh to the

immortal God; who gave the invisible God a visible face.

Thus, the earthly hour and the heavenly hour meet in Mary and John. The Apostle, as a new son, was renewed and welcomed by the one who is now the Mother of all the living. She was made new in the death of Christ and was welcomed into his house – as a symbol of the human fulfilment in history – by the one who is now his mother.

But this welcoming by John did not refer only to the gesture of a son who receives his widowed and lonely mother into his home, it refers to something more. The vocabulary used by the evangelist evokes nuptial overtones. The "taking to oneself" or "into one's home," echoes the spousal flavour. In fact, from that moment on, Mary would become fecund with new children and she will generate for the Head, Christ, crucified and Risen One, new members who will form with him, the Mystical Body of Christ.

The language of the home, therefore, is not a language of pain, but of nuptial joy. The recollected face of the one who contemplates the scene is not overcast with sadness, but by the surprising realization of a new creation.

To the abundance of human iniquity corresponds the superabundance of divine wonder creating the enchantment of eternal salvation in the human torment of history.

Before the cymbals of the feast begin to clash, however, Mary must accept the cross. She is now completely immersed in the redemptive mystery; she is empty of herself and she is all intent on the glory of the Father. She is totally

abandoned to the event so that she can be completely associated with the Passion.

Thus, mother and son are in perfect communion and their unity is the fruit of a permanent fusion of two hearts and two lives. It is not a question of placing the suffering of the Saviour and that of his mother side by side; there are no two crosses that rise on Golgotha, it is a single cross that crucifies them both simultaneously.

It is at this moment that a new proclamation takes place for Mary. First, she represents humanity waiting for redemption and the angel offered her the possibility of becoming the mother of God. Here in the name of all humanity she joins her 'yes' to the 'yes' of her Son and becomes a unique offering with him; she offers the Son everything the Son wanted from his mother. Mary is part of humanity already saved that joins the work of salvation for the rest of humanity. With this union of the mother to the Son, Christ saves humanity by wanting to unite to his redemptive action that part of humanity already redeemed, which is Mary. Even though Mary is saved in view of Christ's merits, the Son now wants the Mother to join him in the work of redemption. This is because the Son, whose will of love is sufficient to save the world, in fact, wants his mother, the All pure one, to be one with him in the salvation of the world.

Even in this gesture, which is also of divine concern, the Son wants his Mother to be united with him, thus becoming not only a new creature, but truly mother of the new creation. □



MY VOCATION STORY

THE TWO WHO SHOWED ME THE WAY

Fr. Akhil Abraham, sdb

My Journey to the priesthood.

My journey to the priesthood began 14 years back when during my 10th grade I told my mother that I wanted to become a priest. I never mentioned about what kind of a priest but just randomly told her that this is what I had in mind.

The same year after I finished my 10th Board Exams, a friend and I would go to Don Bosco Church, Yerwada to spend time playing basketball. It so happened that one fine day Fr. Manuel Murzello, sdb, the then parish priest of Don Bosco, Yerwada joined us playing basketball. That match was a memorable one not because we lost but that was the first time, I saw a priest playing basketball so well.

That moment caught my attention and I wanted to become like him. That was the first time I came across a Salesian priest. Another moment that attracted me to the Salesians was when I began to volunteer for the summer camps at Don Bosco Yerwada.

One of the Camps was organised by a certain Fr. John Gonsalves. After each day he would invite all the volunteers for an evaluation of the day. Fr. John had a very unique way of conducting the evaluation. He would bring his guitar for the meeting, sing songs, chat with us volunteers, bring laughter out of our funny moments and then before



we could wind up the meeting, he would have the actual evaluation of the day. As I sat for the evaluation my attention was drawn to the wonderful guitar that Fr. John was playing. Looking at it, I said to myself 'I want to be like him, playing the guitar.' That was the moment when I actually saw a priest sitting with us youngsters and getting involved with us in our conversations.

During my earlier days, my mind had the vague idea that priests are men who only looked into spiritual matters and spent most of their time in church, but looking at those two Salesian priests whom I encountered left me amazed and I decided that I wan-

ted to become like them. That was time I spoke to these two priests about joining the vocation camp at Lonavla.

That was where my journey to be a priest in the Salesian Congregation began. Today, when I look back at those events, I thank

God for the seed of a vocation that He sowed in my life through those two Salesian priests and for being with me throughout this journey. I am sure that He will be there walking by my side using my life to inspire many more youngsters to come closer to Him. □

LAMBS INTO SHEPHERDS

One of Don Bosco's greatest joys was definitely to see from among the boys growing up around him, those who would follow him to the priesthood and the consecrated life. Educators and priests who have had this good fortune (this grace) will experience such a joy.

Of course, this experience of Don Bosco was already foretold by the Lord through the repetition of the prophetic dream which occurred at the age of nine. Few are aware that that dream occurred several times during his life: at sixteen, at nineteen, at twenty-one and then at twenty-two. He himself tells us its most complete form when he was 29: "On the second Sunday of that year (1844) I was to tell my boys that the oratory was being transferred to the Valdocco area. I was, however, truly worried because I was uncertain about the exact location, the means and the people (to help me). On Saturday night, I went to bed feeling uneasy, but that night I had a new dream which seemed to be a sequel to the one I had had at Becchi when I was about nine years old.

I dreamed that I was in the midst of a multitude of wolves, goats, kids, lambs, sheep, rams, dogs and birds.

The whole menagerie raised an uproar, a bedlam, or better, a racket that would have frightened even the bravest man. I wanted to run away, when a Lady, dressed as a shepherdess,

beckoned me to follow Her and accompany the strange flock She was leading. We wandered aimlessly, making three stops along the way, at each of which many of the animals changed into lambs, so that the number of lambs continually increased.

After a long trek, I found I was in a meadow where those animals were grazing and frolicking, making no attempt to bite each other.

I was exhausted and wanted to sit by the roadside, but the Shepherdess invited me to keep walking. (...) At that moment many young shepherds came to watch over them, but they remained only a short time and walked off. Then a marvellous thing happened: many lambs turned into shepherds, and they, in increasing numbers, took care of the flock. (MB 2,190-191).

In the shadow of Mary Help of Christians and around Don Bosco a miraculous flourishing of vocations would take place.

It is said that a vocation passes through the heart of a mother and this is true particularly through the heart of Mary who oversees the formation of the heart of every aspirant to the priesthood or the consecrated life. □



NEWSBITS

VATICAN CITY:

For the Church, he is now venerable, even though he was already considered a saint during his lifetime, especially by the more than 9,000 patients he treated who came to him from all over the world, to see him and hear his always calm voice, filled with words of comfort, courage and consolation. Jérôme Lejeune, the French doctor who discovered Down Syndrome, has taken a step towards beatification. On January 21, 2021, the Pope authorized the Congregation of the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree recognizing the "heroic virtues" of that great scientist, geneticist, paediatrician, husband and father of five, who was born and died in France in 1994.

The geneticist's work was also instrumental in bringing down the social stigma on children who were contemptuously called "mongoloids." They were considered contagious at the time; their parents were blamed for their inappropriate behaviour such as alcoholism or sexually transmitted diseases. With scientific evidence and consolidated theories, the 'future-blessed' was recognized as a man of deep faith and great human virtues, sweeping away all prejudice and false beliefs.

A staunch anti-abortionist, Lejeune promoted an approach totally opposed to eugenic application, extracorporeal fertilization and any form of selection and forced natural motherhood; convictions rooted in faith and scientifically argued in every academic venue. He was, in this sense, an example of how faith and science



can coexist and complement each other. *"Medicine has always fought for health and life, against disease and against death: it cannot change sides,"* was one of his most famous phrases.

John Paul II, who with the motu proprio *"Vitae mysterium"* created the Pontifical Academy for Life in February 1994. The Polish Pontiff wanted Lejeune, of whom he was a great admirer, as the first president of the organization dedicated to the defence and promotion of the value of human life and the dignity of the person. The French doctor directed it for only two months, from February to April 3, 1994, when he died in Paris.

Thanks to Pope Francis, the decree attesting to the heroic virtues, an antechamber for the elevation to the honours of the altars was promulgated. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Labour of Love

Lady: "Have you ever been offered work?"

Tramp: "Only once, madam. Apart from that, I've met with nothing but kindness."

Weights and Measures

In a men's clothing shop, a tiny slip of a girl was serving a man who must have weighed at least 250 pounds. He wanted to buy a belt but did not know the size, so the girl produced a tape measure. For a moment she stood eying her customer, a puzzled look on her face. Then she smiled in relief. "Here" she said cheerfully, "you hold this end while I run around."

The Point of View

One aimless shopper to another: "If you don't plan to buy anything in this shop, let's look at something more expensive."

For Peace Sake

An Irishman hurried into the public house and said to the bartender: "A pint before the row starts."

He drank that up.

"Another pint before the row starts."

He'd drunk that halfway when the bartender asked: "What row?"

"I've no money," said the Irishman.

Slow Train

A passenger train is creeping along slowly. Finally it creaks to a halt. A passenger sees a conductor walking by outside.

"What's going on?" she yells out the window.

"Cow on the track!" replies the conductor.

Ten minutes later, the train resumes its slow pace.

Within five minutes, however, it stops again.

The woman sees the same conductor walk again.

She leans out the window and yells, "What happened? Did we catch up with the cow again?"

Tree Feller

While working as a radiology technician in a hospital emergency room, I took X-rays of a trauma patient. I brought the films to our radiologist, who studied the multiple fractures of the femurs and pelvis.

"What happened to this patient?" he asked in astonishment.

"He fell out of a tree," I reported. The radiologist wanted to know what the patient was doing up a tree.

"I'm not sure, but his paperwork states he works for Bob's Expert Tree Service."

Gazing intently at the X-rays, the radiologist blinked and said, "Cross out 'expert.'"

Watermelon Mistake

Discovering too late that a watermelon spiked with vodka had accidentally been served to a luncheon meeting of local ministers, the restaurant's owner waited nervously for the clerics' reaction.

"Quick, man," he whispered to the waiter, "what did they say?"

"Nothing," replied the waiter. "They were all too busy slipping the seeds into their pockets." □

ONE LAST THOUGHT

ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS

Vincent Travers OP

A good pilot does whatever it takes to get his passengers safely home to their final destination. I was travelling on a flight from Vancouver to Toronto. At some moment, when we were flying over the Rockies, the flight attendant made an announcement telling us to take our seats because of imminent turbulence. People standing in the aisles were slow to respond so she warned them again.

"This flight is about to become very bumpy, so please take your seats."

Most did. A few paid no attention. So, she changed her tone of voice. "Ladies and gentlemen, for your own good, take your seats and fasten your seat belts."

I thought everyone was seated. But I was wrong. The next voice we heard was that of the pilot: "This is your pilot speaking. People have got hurt going to the bathroom instead of taking their seats. Let's be clear about our responsibilities on this flight. My job is to get you through the storm and safely home. Your job is to do what I say. Now sit down and buckle up."

What good pilots do

I was seated next to the bathroom. The bathroom door



opened and a red-faced man, pulling up his pants, emerged hastily and took his seat.

Was the pilot wrong in what he said? Was he being insensitive or thoughtless in his demands? Would you agree that he was being very caring, and would rather have the man safe and embarrassed, than uninformed? Good pilots do whatever it takes to get their passengers home safely!

So too does God! How far do you want God to go to get your attention? If God has to choose between your eternal safety and your earthly comfort, which one do you hope he chooses? Don't answer too quickly. Give it some thought.

If God sees you standing when you should be sitting, what would you like Him to do to get your attention? God has options. He can whisper. He can raise his voice. He can give you a jolt that

brings you to your senses. But He will also leave you with the final say. The choice is ours. Try to understand. God's goal is to get you to believe that his love is eternal, and that you are eternally his beloved. He also wants to get you home safely, to the plan where you belong.

Just think of God as your pilot and think of yourself as his passenger. Consider these line as your inflight reading, God speaking to you in the circumstances of your life and please think twice about getting up and going to the bathroom. □ (From *St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland*)

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Recently I've been promoted to the status of a Grandma by being blessed with an adorable grandson, I offer my immense heartfelt gratitude to the graciousness of God Almighty and Our Lady. Thank you dear Lord Jesus Christ for all the benefits bestowed upon me and my family. Dear Loving Mother Mary please keep my children in your loving care and custody and always guide them to follow the Christian way of living now and for evermore.

Mrs. Vivian Christopher- Samuel, Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg
We are sincerely grateful and thank our Lord Jesus Christ, Mother Mary Help of Christians and St. Anthony for blessing my daughter with the gift of a baby boy after 12 years of marriage. We also thank Mother Mary Help of Christians for protecting and blessing our family always."

Maria Fernandes

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

My thanksgiving to Divine Mercy Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby to my son Dennis and Sneha and for numerous Blessings received.

Mrs. Margaret Abraham, Bangalore
For curing a person from Covid. Thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco, Dominic Savio.

F. D'Souza
Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for my success in my Predegree exam. By the grace of God, I had passed the exam successfully even though it was difficult.

Lou Morris, Kollam, Kerala

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

APRIL 2021

Universal intention - Fundamental rights

We pray for those who risk their lives while fighting for fundamental rights under dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and even in democracies in crisis.

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MARY WAS THERE

We are on the “threshold of the house of Zechariah,” in the town of Ain-Karim. Mary comes to this house, bearing within herself the joyful mystery. She comes to Elizabeth, someone who is very close to her, she comes to share her joy with her. On the threshold of Zechariah’s house “a blessing awaits her,” which is a sequel to what she heard from Gabriel’s lips: *“Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb...And blessed is she who believed in the fulfilment of the words of the Lord”* (Lk 1:42,45).

And at that instant, “there bursts forth that song” which expresses the whole truth of the great Mystery. It is the canticle that announces the history of salvation and manifests the heart of the Mother: “My soul magnifies the Lord...” (ibid 1:46) - *St. John Paul II*

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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