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*May he, who
at his birth from
the Blessed Virgin
did not diminish
but consecrated
her integrity,
by taking from us
now our wicked deeds,
make us acceptable
to you.*

(From the Common of Our Lady)

From The Editor's Desk

WHAT AN AWESOME MYSTERY

One Sunday, in the middle of the morning, I was standing outside the sacristy when I saw this father and daughter playing so contentedly together. I just kept watching. I was so absorbed in the duo till I was shaken out of my concentration by a lady, who I realised was the girl's mother, the wife of the 'father.' Together we watched the two of them in silence, when suddenly the lady exclaimed: "Paul, my husband, her daddy, is a good man: a devoted father, a loving husband, an intimate friend. A man of many parts, and full of surprises; even after fourteen years together. He still says or does something that surprises me. I realise that I know him, but I don't know him at all." That got me thinking...we were outside the 'house of God.' After a few pleasantries were exchanged. I came back to myself wondering about *my* relationship with God and realised shades of the same intimacy and the same mystery; I know God but I don't know him.

This wasn't always the case. Indeed, for some time in the early years of my priesthood, it was Jesus who intrigued and attracted me; it was with him that I tasted intimacy in prayer. God was a distant figure, allocated to an outer room and behind a door marked 'wise and loving Father.' I wasn't sure what those words even meant.

Somehow, somewhere along the way, this distant figure approached me and began to permeate my prayer and my life in ways I could never have believed possible. Sensitive to my needs, and to my fragility, he drew me ever closer and began to reveal himself as a God of many parts.

I came to know him, as Abraham of old did, as a God who listened to me, who respected and accepted me. I recognized a God with whom I could be real. Only gradually did I realize that there was more.

Prayer with this God became simply a matter of being with him. The periods of dark stillness in prayer were punctuated with a sense that he was so close that I was breathing his breath.

He is deep in the people I meet and he connects me at that depth, that is to others, to him, to his amazing creation. I am only beginning to sense his energy, his love and his awesome presence permeates all, saturates all. He is all!

I must admit, writing this editorial has meant often a futile search for words, a search which frequently drew me into the wordless intimacy of prayer.

Thus, have I been reminded of the purpose and the limitation of words. The word 'water' never quenched a thirst. Words can lead us to God but they cannot give us an experience of him; only God can do that. So, I leave the Lord to have the last word and invite you to be with him as he continues to draw each one of us into an ever-deepening experience of his love and the mystery that he is.

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

OF COURSE, EVEN A TIME OF CRISIS IS A TIME OF THE SPIRIT

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

Every crisis conceals a message that must be interpreted and read in the Easter hope where the heavy smell of death can be transformed into the fragrance of new life.

The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty" (AL 232). We continue our reflection on the experience of crisis after having spoken, earlier of its fecundity.

On 21 December 2020, Pope Francis, addressing the Roman Curia on the occasion of his Christmas greetings, spoke of the crisis in words that can also interpret the crises that affect the life of every family: "A crisis is something that affects everyone and everything. Crises are present everywhere and in every age of history, involving ideologies,

politics, the economy, technology, ecology and religion. A crisis is a necessary moment in the history of individuals and society. It appears as an extraordinary event that always creates a sense of trepidation, anxiety, upset and uncertainty in the face of decisions to be made. We see this in the etymological root of the verb *krinos*: a crisis is the sifting that separates the wheat from the chaff after the harvest."

Francis recalls the many crises present in the Bible, which are stages in the unfolding of salvation history. The crisis of Abraham, who leaves his land (Gen

12:12) and is faced with the great trial of having to sacrifice his only son to God (Gen 22:1-19), reminds us that every marriage is a journey that is born from an act of faith and trust in the loved one and also in history. Many years of engagement do not erase the reality that every life choice opens up a future that can never be fully planned.

Moses is afraid to return to Egypt after fleeing. "Lord, send others" Moses pleads after presenting many reasons to avoid such a risky vocation (Ex 4:13). Spouses do not lack fear and trepidation in the face of a life-changing choice.

The prophet Elijah, so strong and self-confident that he is compared to fire (Sir 48:1), in a moment of great crisis even longs for death, but then experiences God's presence in a whisper of sonorous silence" (1 Kings 19:11-12). How many times in difficult moments does the doubt arise of having done everything wrong and the temptation to leave everything. The Pope recalls that "the voice of God is never the noisy voice of the crisis, but the silent voice that speaks to us within the crisis itself."

John the Baptist also experiences his own crisis when he is gripped by doubt about the messianic identity of Jesus (Mt 11:26), because he does not present himself as the avenger he was expecting (Mt 3:11-12). He asks and questions Jesus; he trusts him but he will not have the time to follow the Master because prison and then death will abruptly interrupt his ministry. At times, during some family crisis, the Baptist's question resounds in the

couple: "Is this the right person for me? Perhaps I've made a mistake?"

But the most eloquent crisis - writes the Pope - is that of Jesus. Immediately after his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus found himself immersed in crisis and temptation. Jesus lives forty days in the desert marked by the experience of hunger and weakness (Mt 4:2; Lk 4:2). The Evil One tries to play his trump card by exploiting Jesus' tired humanity.

How can we not remember the crisis in Gethsemane: loneliness, fear, anguish, Judas' betrayal and the abandonment of the Apostles (Mt 26: 36-50) We must never be in a hurry in times of crisis; we must not make choices while we are in the midst of the storm. It is true that when we are immersed in the trial, we see everything dark and describe reality without finding signs of hope in it. To the prophet Elijah, who wants to be done with life, God suggests a different reading of what was happening, a reading full of hope that manages to glimpse the good aspects of that difficult time (1 Kings 19:15-18).

The Pope writes: "Those who fail to view a crisis in the light of the Gospel simply perform an autopsy on a cadaver. They see the crisis, but not the hope and the light brought by the Gospel. We are troubled by crises not simply because we have forgotten how to see them as the Gospel tells us to. But because we have forgotten that the Gospel is the first to put us in crisis." These words are very true and remind us that the Christian, faced with the Gospel, should recognise himself in a permanent crisis.



With humility we can recognise that “a time of crisis is a time of the Spirit, whenever we are faced with the experience of darkness, weakness vulnerability, contradiction and loss, we will no longer feel overwhelmed. Instead, we will keep trusting that things are about to take a new shape, emerging exclusively from the experience of a Grace hidden in the darkness.”

“What should we do in times of crises?” Pope Francis suggests, “First, accept it as a time of grace granted us to discern God’s will. We need to enter into the apparent paradoxical notion that “when I am weak, then I am strong” (2Cor 12,10). We should keep in mind the reassuring words of St Paul to the Corinthians: “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1Cor 10,13).

Every crisis conceals a message that must be interpreted: every crisis must be read in Paschal hope where the heavy smell of death can be transformed into the fragrance of new life. □

THE FIVE TREASURES

A very poor man once asked God, “Why am I so poor?”

God answered him, “You are poor because you don’t practise charity.”

“But how can I practise charity if I have nothing to give?” complained the poor man.

God replied: “You have five great treasures that you can share with others.



“Me? Five great treasures? Where do you ever see them?”

“My son, first of all you have your face. You can share and spread your smile: it is free and fantastic and has an amazing effect on others.”

“Secondly, you have your eyes, you can look at others with a gaze full of love and goodness. They will feel happy.”

“Third: you have a mouth, with this mouth you can say nice things to others, speak well, make them feel valued. You spread joy as positivity.”

“Then you have a heart. With your loving heart you can wish happiness for others. Make others feel how happy their presence makes you. Touch their lives.”

“The last treasure you possess is your body. With this body you can do many good things for others. Help people who are in need. Help is not only money; even a small gesture can heal, enlighten lives. And heal wounded hearts. See? You are so rich!” □

THE BRILLIANCE OF AN UNFATHOMABLE LOVE

by Chino Biscontin

The feast of the Transfiguration (6 August) speaks to us of Jesus surrounded by a light that illuminates every situation of darkness.

In Galilee, about halfway between Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee, there is a smooth-looking hill covered with vegetation. It is Mount Tabor. It is isolated and therefore gives the impression of a certain grandeur, in reality it does not reach an altitude of even 600 metres. Tradition refers to it as the mountain on which Jesus appeared to three of his disciples bathed in light when he was still alive. It is also said to be the altitude to which he took the apostles after his resurrection, to send them out to proclaim the gospel to all peoples. In fact, the Gospel texts speak generically of a high mountain. As early as Byzantine times, however, a shrine built on its summit, was later destroyed, then rebuilt during the Crusades and demolished again, finally it was rebuilt in the 1920s by the Franciscans.

The grandeur of the shrine, the expanse of the landscape and the intensity of the light, which is also affected by the Mediterranean’s influence, make it credible that this is the place where Jesus revealed his beauty to Peter, James and John, to prepare them to continue to have faith in him even when the three of them would see him sweat blood in Gethsemane.

In order to get a sense of the splendour of light with which Jesus was surrounded, I was helped by a narrative about a Russian monk, St Seraphim of Sarov

(1754-1833), which I quote here in the certainty that it will be equally helpful to readers. The testimony is from a layman who went to Father Seraphim for spiritual direction:

“It was a Thursday. The layer of snow was high and covered with frozen frost. Father Seraphim struck up a conversation



*O Christ, God, friend
of mankind, enlighten us too
with the light
of your inaccessible glory,
and make
us worthy heirs
of the kingdom
that has no end,
you who are
more than good.*

with me near a hermitage leaning against the mountain. He sat me down on a tree trunk. "God has revealed to me," he said, "that in your youth you ardently desired to know what is the goal of our Christian life. Well, the very goal of the Christian life consists in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. And it is above all prayer that gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit. Any man, poor or rich, weak or strong, sinner or saint, can pray. Great is the power of prayer: through it we are enabled to speak to our saviour."



"Father," I said to him, "you speak to me of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and you tell me that in this lies the goal of the Christian life. But how is it possible to recognise it? How will I know whether he is in me or not?" "Friend of God," he answered, "it is simple." And holding me by the shoulders, he added: "Now, friend of God, we are both within the divine Spirit... Why don't you look towards me?" I replied: "I cannot look at you, Father, because a light is coming out of your eyes and your face has become brighter than the sun." And Father Seraphim said to me: "Do not fear, friend of God, at this moment you are shining as brightly as I am. You are now in the grace of the Holy Spirit, otherwise it would be impossible for you to see that I am also in this state. What do you feel now?"

"I feel," I replied, "an infinitely blessed sensation. I feel such calm, such peace in my soul that I cannot express it in words. 'This is that peace of which the Lord said to his friends: 'I give you my peace.' 'And what else do you feel?' 'I feel an ineffable joy that is invading my whole heart.' 'This joy is that of which the Lord speaks in the Gospel.'"

I think that the splendour that emanated from Jesus came from the fullness of the Holy Spirit that was in him, a gift from the Father to the beloved Son, and it was the splendour of an immense love that led him to give his life for men. In the Gospel according to Luke we read that this is what Jesus talked about with Moses, the witness of the first covenant, and Elijah, the progenitor of the prophets who spoke in the name of God. □

COURAGE TO ACCEPT ACCEPTANCE!

by Anastasia Dias

It was a cloudy day. The sky looked sombre, as if it would rain any moment soon. Dismas sat in the crowd, with his face in the palms of his hands. His companion Gestas sat beside him. Gestas was shrieking, 'Crucify him!'

He was surrounded by hundreds of people who joined in. Dismas didn't know what was happening around him. Neither did he care. He was sobbing bitterly.

His mind kept going back to the day that he had committed the crime. He wished he hadn't. Gestas had persuaded him to. Besides, it was their only source of income. How he wished he hadn't...

His thoughts were interrupted by Gestas nudging him to look at the scene in front of them. The Roman soldiers gathered around a young man. They made fun of Him, stripping Him of his clothing and spitting in His face. Gestas joined them in ridiculing Him. "Save yourself, Son of God!" Gestas exclaimed wickedly. Dismas sat there dismayed. He knew that he and Gestas were awaiting the same fate as this young man. But, instead of feeling repentant, Gestas sat enjoying the commotion.

Dismas' train of thought was interrupted when they were about

to take the man away. Dismas wondered, "What had this young man done to deserve the same treatment as me?"

Perhaps, He had killed someone, just as Dismas and Gestas had. "No, no, maybe He was an enemy of the state," Dismas thought to himself. Both, Dismas and Gestas were thieves. While breaking into a Roman Guard's home, they had killed the Guard himself. Gestas was bitterly against the Roman Empire and so was seeking vengeance. On the other hand, Dismas went along with it only for the money.

Dismas wished he hadn't killed the man. It was a stupid impulse. If he hadn't, Gestas would have done it anyway. He and Gestas deserved this punishment. And, both of them were to be crucified that day, along with the other man.

Gestas screeched at the top of his voice, "Call out to your God to save you!" Dismas continued to gaze in the man's direction. At that moment, their eyes met, just briefly. His eyes were bloodshot, face bruised and bloody, onto his head they had pressed a crown of thorns. Yet, He managed a weak smile at Dismas. Instantly, Dismas understood that the man didn't deserve this treatment. He could



never ever have done anything close to what they had done. He had the most merciful gaze Dismas had ever seen.

He had something humane about Him, a quality that he, Gestas and the Roman soldiers lacked. Gestas kept screaming until one of the Roman soldiers hit him across the face. The soldier ordered both Dismas and Gestas to get up and carry their crosses to the hill-top. Dismas observed this young man closely and followed him from some distance.

Almost three hours later, Dismas and Gestas reached the top of the hill, the place where they were soon to be crucified. The sky had turned grey. Both of them were stripped of their clothing. Dismas looked as the Roman guards tore the young man's blood-stained robe off his mangled body. For the first time in his life, Dismas felt compassion for someone.

Both Dismas and Gestas were crucified on either side of the man who was hoisted in the centre. Dismas thought he was dead because of how brutally he had been scourged and beaten. But, Dismas heard Him whisper while the Roman soldiers jeered at him, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Gestas cackled and said, "Hey, Son of God, save yourself and save us too!" Dismas felt the life in him fading slowly away. He managed to look at Gestas and say, "Don't you have any shame? We deserve this, he doesn't." Then, Dismas looked at Him, his body growing more wear by the moment, with every drop of blood that he was losing and he managed to feebly mouth: "Remember me in your Kingdom." Did He hear that?

He thought Jesus was dead. But, Jesus said, "I promise you, this day, you will be with me, in paradise."

The rest is the story as we know it.

Don't we all have days, months and years like Dismas where we are filled with shame for something that we did and shouldn't have done? Peer-pressure, stress and our own compulsions make us do crazy things. After which we all feel regretful just like Dismas did.

What you and I can learn from this story is that no matter what we've said or done, there is always hope. Hope for you and me, regardless of what has happened. Like Andy Dufresene says in the movie "The Shawshank Redemption," "Hope is a good thing, maybe, the best of all things. And no good thing ever dies."

There is hope for you and me. Always.

The last two and a half years have been the hardest time this generation has witnessed; one of the most challenging times that the entire human race has endured. Two and a half years ago, the end of didn't seem near at all. As we've come out of it, we have one thing to cling on to, the same thing that kept us going in the first place: HOPE.

So, when you have one of those moments in which you think, "This is it. I'm an awful person. I couldn't do anything worse." Breathe in. Look back at whatever it is that you've said or done. Reflect on how you would rather not repeat it again. And, then, like Dismas, let it go. When you resolve to never repeat it and let go, you will find your own Paradise right then and there, just like Dismas did. □

JACOB THELEKKADAN

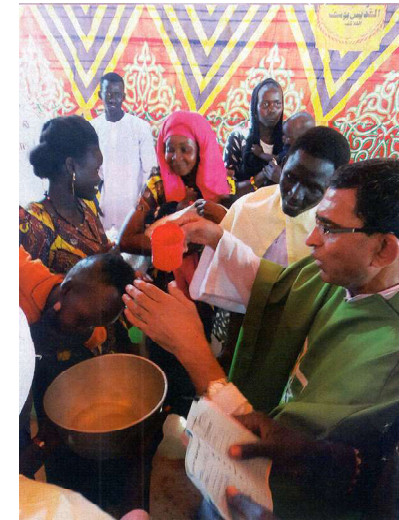
THE SALESIANS FOR YOU!

DON BOSCO IN KHARTOUM

Sudan was the largest country in Africa until 2011, when, after more than 20 years of civil war, the north populated mostly by Arabs and Muslims and the south with a Christian majority separated and South Sudan became an independent country. The northern part of Sudan is hot and is predominantly desert, while the southern part is temperate with abundant vegetation and prosperous agriculture. With the beginning of the second civil war in Sudan in 1983, which was mainly fought in the southern part of the country, thousands of South Sudanese Africans returned to the north of the country, becoming displaced Sudanese citizens. In addition to the hardships caused by the heat in the north, Sudanese citizens from the south were considered infidels, since many of them were Christians.

Thousands of Catholics and Christians of other denominations, along with many people who followed the traditional African religion, flocked to North Sudan to escape the bloody war in the south.

In the 1970s, the Combonian missionaries set up a technical school (St. Joseph Technical School) in the capital, Khartoum. In 1986, the then Combonian Provincial Superior turned to the Salesian provincial, Fr Thomas Thayyil, of the East Africa Province, and asked him to start a Salesian presence in Khartoum by taking over the management of St. Joseph Technical School and St. Joseph Parish, since the number of Comboni Missionaries in North Sudan was gradually decreasing. In 1987 Frs P.D.



Dominic and Jacob Thelekkadan were therefore sent to North Sudan to gradually take over the running of the Technical School and the parish from the Comboni Missionaries. The Salesian priests remained working together with the Combonian missionaries for more than a year before taking over the management of the Technical Institute and the parish.

Salesian Parish of St. Joseph

In 1989, the Salesian Parish of St. Joseph was entrusted to the Salesians and Archbishop Gabriel Zubeir Wako appointed Fr Dominic Padinjaraparambil sdb as the first Salesian parish priest. Although the area of the parish was very large, over 700 square kilometres, Catholics were few in number and lived in scattered communities in many parts of the large city of Khartoum.

Fr Dominic, a very zealous and enthusiastic missionary, began visiting Catholics in the different areas where they lived and established small prayer centres for them, especially on Sundays. Soon there were seven centres and Holy Masses were celebrated there with the help of some priests available in Khartoum. Since the main places where Catholics went to pray were the old centres in Azouzab and Mantiga, Fr Dominic realised that Catholics were more concentrated in the southern part of the parish. So he started a centre in Kalakla Gubba, in the south of Khartoum, where he built a large multipurpose hall for Catholics to gather for Mass, prayer, meetings, etc. He wanted to build a large church there, but since the Islamic government in power disapproved of all church activities, he preferred to wait for a suitable time to build a fully recognised church. With the regular weekly celebration of Holy

Masses in the various centres established by Fr Dominic, the number of Catholics attending these Sunday celebrations grew rapidly.

Fr Dominic resided at St Joseph's Technical Institute, but made a point of visiting most of the centres frequently, where he assigned catechists to teach the fundamentals of the Catholic faith and to provide Christian formation. However, since Catholics lived in centres far from St Joseph's Technical Institute, it became necessary to build a parish residence closer to the areas where Catholics lived. However, building permanent facilities for prayer and Sunday Mass was difficult due to the policies of the Islamic government. Most centres therefore had modest structures made of bamboo canes and wooden poles. Christian activities flourished, however, because the Catholics were happy to have a place to gather and pray! □



Volley-ball court at St. Joseph's Parish

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. MARY MACKILLOP (August 8)

Initial Years

Mary MacKillop was born into a Catholic family in a suburb of Victoria, Australia on January 15, 1842. She was the first of eight children. Her parents were quite interesting people. Her mother was a migrant along with her family who had come to Australia from their native Scotland. She was hardly in Australia for a year or two before she met and fell in love with her husband, Alexander. Mary's father, Alexander had joined the seminary and was studying to be a priest. He left shortly before his ordination for reasons we are not sure of but he soon met Flora and they married and began a family. One of their sons, grew up to be a Jesuit priest while two of their daughters, turned out to be nuns.

We wouldn't be wrong to say that the family was religious. After all, the father was nearly a priest. In nearly every case, the family is the place where a vocation to the priesthood or religious life is developed and nurtured. Alexander took great care of his family. He educated his children in their tender years and then strove hard to ensure



that they received a good education. Along with secular education, he strove to bring up his kids in the faith. He catechised his children at home. But Alexander wasn't very successful in life, if we evaluate it in terms of achievements. He spent his life trying to be a loving husband and father but his monetary endeavours were mostly unsuccessful and hence, the family had to face lots of hardships.

The MacKillop's had land that was cultivable but Alexander couldn't seem to get the land to produce to its potential. He tried his hand at other part time jobs too but did not find success there

either. The difficult conditions at home pushed Mary to mature quicker and take up responsibility for easing the burdens of her parents. She began to work at the age of 16 as a clerk in a local store. To supplement that income, she took up a job as a governess to her own cousins. Her uncle and aunt were very well off and were gracious enough to help Mary out by providing her work and a place to stay.

Mary developed a soft-heart for the poor since she knew firsthand the effects of poverty. Hence, she did not limit her care and education to her own cousins but taught the children of the labourers as well. She did this for two years before taking up teaching full time in a school at Portland. Through hard work she was able to save enough money to open a boarding school of her own called 'Bay View House Seminary for Young Ladies' in 1864 (today it is Bayview College).

Religious and Educator

Two years later, a priest she knew when she worked for her relatives contacted her and asked her to open a Catholic school since there wasn't one functioning in that whole region. Along with her sisters, Mary took up the invitation. It was at this time that she began to feel called to be a religious and as an external sign wore nothing but black garments. Her sister, Lexie soon followed suit. Gradually, their number increased and they began to live something of a religious style of life. They called themselves the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart and began a school in

*"Believe in the
whisperings of God to
your heart."
Mary MacKillop*

Adelaide at the request of Bishop Laurence Sheil. Bishop Sheil gave their society diocesan approval and the Josephites, as they were called officially, donned their simple brown habits and went about educating young people. Due to the colour of their attire the sisters were commonly called 'Brown Joeys.'

The Josephites were clear about their mission: they wanted to offer education to the poor. This passion led them to go wherever necessary even to far off places in Australia. By the end of 1869, barely a couple of years after they were officially recognized, the Josephites were educating children at 21 schools across the country. They had also expanded their work to include orphanages for the poor, orphaned and neglected children, an aged home for the poor, a home for those terminally ill and a rehabilitation centre. Their style of functioning was quite different from other religious. They did not set up their structure and bring the needy to it rather they went out and lived with the poor and set up their institution among them. In this way, they were able to touch their hearts while also looking after their needs.

Controversy

Mary got into hot water when

she clashed with the Bishop of Brisbane with regard to who should have authority on education. Mary was of the opinion that she and the sisters be allowed to handle the schools they had worked hard to establish while the Bishop felt that all Catholic schools should come under Diocesan control. Things got so bad that the bishop asked the Josephites to leave his diocese. The people who benefitted from the sister's service did not take the Bishop's order very well and protested it but to no avail. The Josephites vacated their schools and moved out.

On another side, Bishop Sheil had become quite sick and unable to look after his diocese. In his absence, the clergy began to bicker among themselves and arguments flared up. Before he became impeded, the bishop had appointed a priest, Tenison-Woods, to chair the diocesan board of education. Tenison-Woods was the same priest who had invited Mary to open a school and who had been her guide and pillar of support ever since. He got into tussles with other members of the clergy who in their turn thought it best to break him by slighting the Josephites. They began to spread rumours about financial mismanagement by the Josephites as well as bad behaviour by Mary MacKillop. One priest went so far as to convince Bishop Sheil to make a change in the Josephites constitution depriving them of rights to any property. When Mary opposed this, the bishop excommunicated her.

This action sent ripples thro-

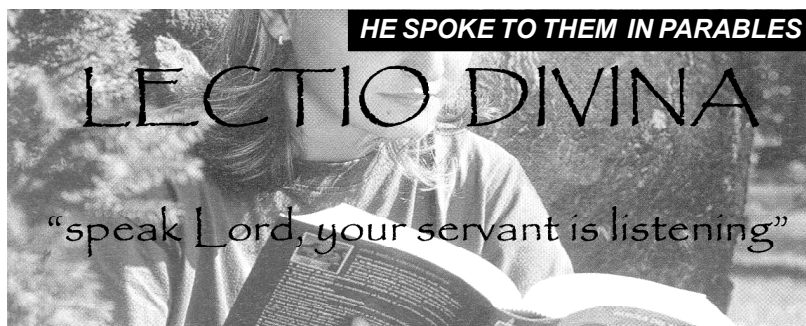
ughout Catholic Australia. The Josephites lost their footing. Without their superior they seemed all but lost. Most of their schools were shut down and they nearly packed their bags. However, thanks to the generosity of a prominent Jewish merchant who gave them accommodation and a few Jesuit priests who willingly reached out to them, the Josephites were saved from total annihilation. A few of the sisters chose to 'leave' the society and continue working under the diocese. These came to be known as 'Black Joeys.'

While on his deathbed, Bishop Sheil instructed the same priest who caused the excommunication to lift it. He did so when he met Mary in person a few weeks later.

Legacy

Mary lived the rest of her days working for the poor. After she died, she was recognized as a saint. Devotees wouldn't let her rest in peace as they continually took mud from her grave as relics. She had to be exhumed and her remains transferred to a vault of a chapel.

Her fame spread across Australia. Her name has been attached to many colleges, a district and even an indigenous rose species! Her name has been declared unusable for commercial purposes by the Government of Australia. Such is her standing. A special postage stamp was issued to honour her at her canonization and she was the first person whom the Royal Australian Mint honoured with a special one dollar coin series. □



RECOUNTING THE JOY

by Carlo Broccardo

It happens often enough, on the road up from Jericho to Jerusalem, to see Bedouin boys taking sheep out to pasture. You wonder what their sheep eat, because it's not exactly a verdant region; but having seen them once, it's enough to enter more easily into today's parable: one of these boys is looking after the sheep of some relatives and neighbours (it's hard to be that all the hundred are all his), when one evening he realises that one is missing. It is a drama, because a lost sheep meant at least a month's salary going up in smoke...

Somewhere else a woman notices that she has lost a coin. In Greek, it says that she has lost a "drachma," which is the equivalent of money, which was a worker's pay for one day's work. It is therefore a much smaller loss than that of the shepherd; yet she too cares a great deal: she lights the lamp, sweeps the house, searches carefully until she

finds it.

Jesus is really a good storyteller: we can almost see her, this woman, while she is turning the



Domenico Fetti, The Lost Drachma (1618-22) Palatine Gallery - Florence. The lost coin is glimpsed on the floor, between the uneven tiles, while the room was turned upside down during the search.

house upside down.... Just as we can imagine our shepherd finding the sheep and putting it on his shoulders, we can almost feel his feelings: he is full of joy; and then we hear the words he addresses to his friends: "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep, the one that was lost." The woman also calls her friends and neighbours, and says: "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin I had lost."

So, the setting changes; the protagonists change; the economic values involved change; but the basic logic remains the same: Jesus tells of two people who are filled with such great joy that they cannot help but celebrate together with their friends and neighbours. Well, Jesus adds: 'know that God behaves in the same way: when even one sinner is converted, God throws a party so big that you cannot even imagine! After all, if you celebrate for a sheep, or even less for a coin, do you want God not to celebrate for a person who was lost and has been found?'

Jesus told these two parables because the scribes and Pharisees were criticising him: "You being too lenient with the publicans and sinners," they said. They were the dregs of society, the worst of the worst; and Jesus welcomes them, talks to them, even sits at the same table. For this they criticise him; and he responds by speaking of joy. He does not reason, but he tells them, he makes us enter the soul of the shepherd and the woman; he

'It is not good to be with sinners,' say the Pharisees; but it is a way of behaving that can bear incredibly beautiful fruit,' replies Jesus. 'Do you realise how great is the joy that God feels for a single sinner who is converted?'

makes us perceive the concern and experience the joy. 'It is not good to be with sinners, say the Pharisees; but it is a way of behaving that can bear incredibly beautiful fruit,' replies Jesus. 'Do you realise how great is the joy that God feels for a single sinner who is converted?'

I like Jesus' method: he responds to criticism by offering a shining example; he reacts to the murmuring by telling of joy. The Pope too, writing to young people (in the post-synodal letter *Christus Vivit*, n. 117), indicates the same method: "Ulysses, in order not to give in to the song of the Sirens, tied himself to the mast of the ship and blocked the ears of his companions on the voyage. But Orpheus, to counteract the sirens' song, did something else: he sang a more beautiful melody, which enchanted the sirens. This is your great task: to respond to the paralysing refrains of cultural consumerism with dynamic and strong choices, with research, knowledge and sharing." ▣

Quiet Spaces

DO NOT GIVE IN TO FAILURE

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, April 9, 2019

It is possible to prefer failure, desolation and fatigue to healing, comfort and hope, Pope Francis said during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 9 April. Giving in to complaining and dissatisfaction, is a spiritual illness, he added.

Commenting on the day's first reading (Num 21:4-9) in which the Israelites find themselves in the desert after their exodus from Egypt, the Holy Father retraced the various stages they underwent on their journey to the Promised Land. "They had started out enthusiastically", preparing for their escape, which was followed by the "joy of having left Egypt". This joy then turned into "fear on the banks of the sea". But this fear was overcome with the miracle of the parting of the waters. Following this, the difficult times in the desert led to fatigue as "the people could not bear the journey," and began to complain.

They had thus "lost their memory," Pope Francis observed. Fatigue is selective: it always shows us the bad side of the moment we are experiencing



and makes us forget the good things we have received," he pointed out. And finally, the Pope noted, the people distanced themselves from the Lord and gave in to idolatry because the "spirit of weariness takes away hope". The same thing can happen to us "in times of desolation,



when results from promises are not immediately noticeable." And that is when we "seek refuge either in idols or in complaints." The "spirit of weariness" also brings with it "the spirit of dissatisfaction."

The attitude of dissatisfaction "is the

perfect soil for the devil to sow" and people become incapable of reaping "a sign of hope." To illustrate this point, the Holy Father gave the example of the disciples who left Jerusalem, bound for Emmaus, despite learning from the women that the Lord had risen. Indeed, they preferred their own desolation. Many Christians experience this "Christian desolation," the "temptation to give in to failure" and to "fear solace, fear hope, fear the Lord's caresses." Just like the Israelites in the desert, the Pope added, we Christians also at times struggle to endure our journey, choosing to live by complaining, criticising, and experiencing general dissatisfaction. And this desolation, he stressed, is that of the serpent who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. Pope Francis concluded by invoking the Lord to "free us from this disease" and calling on the faithful to reject this attitude that prefers failure to hope, healing and consolation. □



AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

That September afternoon was such a sweet-scented afternoon; the scent of blossoms wafted through the air and a quiet serenity spread, as if those hours were suspended in time by a sudden moment of enchantment.

However, Helen could not be concerned with natural beauty, caught up in her resentment which made her face dark and her spirit rebellious.

She drove her VW Golf in a tight rush, along the grey asphalt road that skirted fields and deep ditches: her eye fixed ahead, her nervous hands on the steering wheel and her cap askew on her brown curls. Did they want to make fun of her? To arrange a meeting with a view to marriage without her knowledge? And when the plot was uncovered in time, she had left, that very afternoon of the reception, leaving her angry and weeping mother to vent her spite on her accomplice-friend!

First of all, Helen had no desire to think about a house of her own for the time being; secondly, she wanted to choose her husband herself. Oh, it wasn't the old days when fearful girls had to obey and accept, even against their will, a "party" or an arrangement devised by others! Now in the twenty-first century, girls enjoyed a certain freedom of choice without much interference. Used to seeing her every whim satisfied, Helen imagined what would happen if she wanted to give in!

"But with that foolish head! With those ideas!" her worried Mother, nervously bit her lip, "I have to take care of it!"

Helen was the last child to come to brighten up Commodore Carli's family with a smile. When his eldest son had already graduated as an engineer and Helen's older sister was getting married. So, all the cares, anxieties and preferences of everyone were surrounded around that new bundle of life.

Her father had given that young girl the predilection of his great affection and enough wealth to satisfy her desires and ambitions; her mother had spoiled her, bringing her up with jealous love, attentive even to her very breathing, and her brothers competed to see who could best lavish gifts and favours on her.

So, the girl, though good-natured, had built up a cheerful and modern existence, spending her days in the city with her friends, playing sports, holding sleepovers and other amusements, and spending her hours in the countryside at the farmhouse halfway up the hill, at an accelerated pace of tennis matches, car races and fun get-togethers. And there were many bumblebees buzzing around that flower, without yet having aroused her to flutter or move her with sympathy.

But her mother wanted her Helen to find a sure footing for

the future and a wise heart to rely on, and she had little faith in that young girl with her share of suitors! So, secretly, in agreement with a close friend, she had thought, studied, searched and finally found the phoenix, in an acquaintance: already a famous doctor, although still young. He had returned from America a few months earlier and seemed well disposed to settle down.

It was on that unfortunate afternoon that the unwitting encounter between the two people concerned, both unaware and moreover unknown to each other, was to take place!

But how had Elena guessed and discovered the intrigue? From a few words, a few hints? Who knows! The fact was that the girl had become very indignant, messing everything up and leaving everyone in the lurch, before the arrival of the afternoon train that was supposed to take the guest, to leave by car to breathe better air. No one had been able

to hold her back or make her see reason.

Although a good distance had now separated her from the villa, young Helen was still seething with anger. And the ill-fated wannabe was struck mercilessly. "I have never seen him, I, this illustrious doctor! He will be as ugly as an ogre and as old and pedantic as to drive anyone crazy! And why should I sacrifice myself? I'll be able to find excellent "suitors" without getting bogged down with my mother's choices!" And so on and so forth building up into such a loud and resentful crescendo that even the car seemed to act mad and crazy.

It was so crazy that one fine moment it began to crackle, as if it had a great boiling pot inside the engine; then, little by little it slowed down, stopping, hard and stubborn, almost in the middle of the road!

Helen wanted to insist,



pressing on the accelerator several times to start it up again, but there was no way: was there not enough petrol?

She remembered that she had not looked, as she usually did, before setting off: she was in such a hurry! It had already passed the reserve mark: it was already dry too; she got out, lifted the bonnet and gazed in. Ah, that was not her lucky day! There wasn't a drop of petrol!

The neighbouring town was still a couple of kilometres away, so there was nothing left for her but to wait for a ride with the first driver to pass by. She sat down like a little boy on the bumper of her car and waited. The afternoon, still in its full splendour, moved towards sunset in a harmonious calm.

While she brooded, she thought that the suitor was certainly at the villa and her mother, poor thing, dismayed by that useless effort, suppressed her worry under an apparent and cordial serenity. Helen almost felt the sting of remorse!

Then she heard a distant honk and saw a car, another VW Golf, coming towards her. She stood up, raising her hand in a halting gesture.

The car stopped a few steps away. "Is it a car problem you have?" said a strong, confident, and a young man jumped out, questioning her with a faint smile.

He wasn't handsome, but his gentle and straightforward

manner made him likeable.

"I'm out of petrol," Helen explained. "Can you help me with a bit to get me just to the next village..."

"Of course, at once," he said, and set about the short operation. "Have been waiting for a long while?"

"No, just about an hour. Actually, I left suddenly and didn't bother to check the tank. Phew! I was in such a bad mood, so irritated!"

The young man looked at her, amused:

"Eh, when young ladies get mad or angry, everything seems to conspire to make them suffer more!"

They both laughed, happily; the past seemed far away, and the present was filled with a strange sweetness.

"There you go, young lady." Helen thanked him effusively, then, after a cordial goodbye, they went their separate ways. When she arrived in the village, she filled up with a good dose of petrol, then looked at her watch and thought she should go back.

She would reach home by six, after the last train had left to take the obnoxious doctor away, without the inclination, oh yes, to think about a second visit! The car was going fast and the engine seemed to be playing the notes of a triumphant hymn in its regular beat.

Helen spotted the villa and breathed in relief. It was immer-

sed in the twilight and only the light in her mother's living room, as it did every evening, cast a dim glow over the driveway. The coast was free at last!

She slowed down as she passed through the open gate and drove the car into the garage. Singing her heart out, as if to pull herself together and immediately beg her mother's forgiveness, she climbed the steps and entered the living room.

But on the threshold, she was petrified with astonishment: sitting in the large armchair, the kindly driver from before was chatting happily with her dad and mum. What arrangement had brought him to her house? And what about the car, perhaps left in some by lane nearby, which she had not even seen?

At her appearance, he too jumped up, pleasantly surprised, but they did not have the chance to exchange a word, as mum was already introducing her:

"Dear doctor, here is my Helen! I'm delighted that she can meet you too!" She looked at her daughter with such a meaningful and happy look that the wavering doubt vanished. She had to give in to the evidence and put a good face on to that evil fate, which at the end of the day had dealt her the biggest and most malignant blow!

After all, Helen had to agree that the suitor was not an ogre at all as she had imagined, and she felt all her great rebellion disappear from her heart!

That arranged marriage now appeared to be a love marriage! □

TWO SPARROWS

Two sparrows were blissfully sitting in the shade of the same tree, a willow. One perched on the top and the other on the fork of a branch lower down.

After a while, the sparrow standing on the top branch, just to break the ice after a siesta said, "Oh, how beautiful these green leaves are!" The sparrow standing a little lower down, found it a provocation and replied, rather annoyed: "But are you dumb? Can't you see they are white?" "The one above was now annoyed: "Now you're dumb! They're green."

And the one below, with his beak up said: "I bet you my tail feathers, they are white. You don't understand anything. You're crazy!" The sparrow on the top felt his blood boil and without thinking twice, he rushed down to his opponent to teach him a lesson. The other did not move. They were close facing each other with feathers ruffled in anger. But before starting the duel, they had the good-sense to look upward in the same direction. The sparrow who had come down from the top exclaimed: "Oh," in wonder, "Look they're white." But he said to his friend, "Try to come up to where I was earlier." Both of them flew to the highest branch of the willow and this time both of them exclaimed together: "They look green!"

Don't judge anyone if you haven't walked an hour in his shoes.

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 31

by Michele Molineris

162. Cured by Don Bosco, by order of Pius IX (1867)

Two illustrious and very wealthy persons from Marseilles, husband and wife, had tried all the resources of the medical science to cure their only son, the heir to their fortune. He could hardly stand upright and was deaf and dumb. He was unhappily just five years old. His desolate parents had taken him to Rome, firmly hoping for Pius IX's blessing.

Pius IX blessed him, but after giving him the blessing, he strongly advised his parents to go to Turin to ask for another blessing from Don Bosco. Although they had never yet heard of this person, nevertheless, on the Pontiff's word, they prepared to leave Rome, to meet the holy priest in Turin whom the Pontiff had been pleased to point out to strengthen their faith.

In Turin they looked for him and recommended their unhappy son to the charity of his prayers. In spite of the seriousness of the illness and relying on the faith of his relatives, Don Bosco recommended the child to Our Lady and, after blessing him, took him by the hand and invited him to walk. The invitation was matched by movement and the movement was matched by the amazement of the parents who could not believe their eyes.

Don Bosco, encouraged by that first success and intimately convinced that this was the Lord's

will, passed behind him and, unnoticed, intentionally clapped his hands to call his attention. The child, deaf from birth, turned, amused and amazed at the same time, to smile at the person who had provoked him.

Then, to the growing amazement of those present, he went further and invited him to call daddy and mummy. And the child meekly repeated: "Daddy Daddy, Mummy Mummy!"

At this point, the parents could resist no longer and rushed to the healed child to compete for the first caresses. Indeed, the child had been the object of a remarkable grace, which at the same time had made him independent of others, giving him the movement of his legs, which had been numb until then, and enabling him to express for the first time his desires and needs, which until then had only been entrusted to gestures that habit had then become conventional. He walked, he heard and he spoke!

Conclusion: these gentlemen made an offer worthy of the grace received, without skimping and spontaneously feeling indebted even after the conspicuous donation. Passing into the anteroom, weeping and transfixed, they told the secretary that they were leaving that house with a heart full of envy for those who lived there. The secretary's name was Fr Berto and it was he who wrote the report. It is a pity that the name of the family remained in his pen. (M.B., VIII, 745).

163. He will return better (1867)

On his way to Rome in 1867, Don Bosco stopped in Florence, where he had already been two years earlier. "In Florence, therefore, even though only a pilgrim, he was immediately well received. His work for the true good of the people made him open the doors of the most powerful, and he willingly entered them to do good to all. So, among the people he met who immediately wanted to be benefactors of Don Bosco's work was Countess C... wife of the finance minister. As soon as she was able to approach him, pious and intelligent as she was, she immediately considered him a man of God, and worthy of all her devotion. In every family trial she turned to him for advice and comfort, as to a person possessing the great-est knowledge.

When the war broke out in 1866, many young men left home to join the army as volunteers. Among others, the eldest son of the honoured family ran to enlist under Garibaldi. If he had wanted to pursue a military career, he would have had the family's full support: but to join those volunteers, with people, as was generally believed, having no faith, pained his mother's heart most acutely. While she still did not know where he was stationed, and as soon as he had made known his willingness to fight among the volunteers, the good lady, thinking in her imagination of the dangers that her poor son would encounter because of his beliefs, immediately wrote to Don Bosco for comfort.

"My good lady," Don Bosco answered her: you wanted to adopt

the poor children of Mary Help of Christians, and this good Mother will soon give her back her son, and much better! - Don Bosco."

This letter went around Florence in a short time, and everyone was waiting for the fulfilment.

In fact, a few days later, she received a letter from her son, in which he was moved by the displeasure he had caused her, and said he regretted his escape.

"Good mother, beloved mother! How I suffer at the thought that I have left you so badly, without first receiving your blessing! I constantly have your sad and distraught image before my eyes: I imagine you very sad and crying; I hear your voice that seems to be calling me by name... But it is all an illusion! I am here in the company of people who, I think, are the worst in the world. But I do not forget to say my prayers; and I defy everyone and the wrath of all when I ask to be left out. Your example is always here in my memory and I will never forget it. Send me your blessing. In a few days we will be at the camp and I will recover my health."

If those words comforted her, they did not take away the pain of knowing that he was in such company, as her son expressed. But after five or six days, she received another letter.... And this one was stamped with the words: Headquarters. The poor mother opened it with much trepidation. It was a letter written by her son, saying that a beneficent hand had taken him from Brescia, where he had been, and had brought him

to the General Headquarters and placed him as a military attaché to the person of the King.

How did this happen? I have already said that his father was a minister, so as soon as his name was picked up among the volunteers, the order came to send him to the camp of the regular army, where the headquarters were. From that day on, his life was completely normal; if there was still the noise of the camp, the environment, as they say, or the comrades were quite different. He seemed to come back to life himself, and he told his mother all too happily, assuring her that he had changed, and that his heart, too, in the midst of so much noise, loved peace and tranquility... "Oh, dear mother," he said, "you can't imagine how being away from home makes your

company sweeter, more pleasant. Oh, may that day come soon when I can return to Florence!"

And that day did finally dawn, because after the terrible and unhappy battle of Custoza, peace returned little by little, and he was able to see his mother again.

Who could describe their joy?

Don Bosco had said that he would come back better, and even in this he was mysteriously a prophet. As a dear son he loved religion again and practised its precepts serenely without any respect for the world.

"I have defended my king," he said, "on the battlefield, at the risk of my life, and why should I be afraid to defend my God from the insults of some wicked people?"



His journey to Rome

As long as he wore the bright uniform of an army officer, he received the sacraments, setting a fine example to all who saw him, and when he was able to put on the civilian habit, he never stopped practising his religion without blushing. It was beautiful to see this young man of about twenty-two years of age, with a good figure, a florid and almost handsome appearance, accompanying his mother to Mass and attending it with the greatest devotion. His mother would have liked him to go into society... to see if he wanted to return to the formerly foolish life, and to say to him: "Hey! how you've changed! You no longer remember anything of what was once everything in life for you. Today you have forgotten that home was waiting for you.... There you could have had so much fun!"

Instead, looking at his mother with a twinkle in his eye, he answered: "Mother, if you don't mind, I want to stay with you. If you knew how good it feels! When I was at the camp, in the loneliest hours. In my mind I used to wander about here between one room and another, and I felt an inexpressible pleasure... Now it's no longer fantasy, but joyful truth. Leave me alone, mother dear."

His mother looked at him with tears in her eyes, and murmuring because she didn't have words to say. She kissed him saying: "Yes, yes, dear son, stay with your mother, no one can love you more than her." Then, often, when she was with her friends, she would talk about her son and hear him being praised and she would repeat: "Don Bosco had told me: *He will come back even better.*"

(Francesia, *Two months with Don Bosco in Rome*).

164. Can I or can I not? (1867)

Shortly after Don Bosco's arrival in Rome, Father Lawrence Bertinelli, a Camaldolese monk, hastened to call on him to thank him personally for a favour received. Some time previously he had written to Don Bosco to ask whether he could safely carry out a plan of his. Naturally Don Bosco replied inquiring what the plan was, "I won't tell you," Father Bertinelli replied. "I want to see if your advice is inspired. Please advise me."

Don Bosco ignored the request until he received a telegram with prepaid answer: "I am about to decide. Answer requested." "Think it over and pray," Don Bosco replied. "Your decision could be fatal to you."

He had spoken the truth. This religious was on the point of deciding to go to a house of his order in Poland, indeed he was almost ready to leave, when some time after Don Bosco's reply news arrived that the house had been collapsed, crushing the religious in it. The monk, full of admiration, when Don Bosco arrived in Rome, ran to his feet to thank him.

Now the latter, who had become his friend, and with him his two brothers, one a canon, the other a lawyer, wished to make him known to the other religious; and in the name of Father Arcangelo, Superior General of the Camaldolese, Don Bosco was invited to visit their hermitage at Frascati, on the day of Saint Romuald, their founder (EBM., VIII, 289). □



MARY AND THE CHURCH

Ch. VIII of "Lumen Gentium" no 60

Peter M. Ceresa

In the words of the apostle there is but one mediator: "for there is but one God and one mediator of God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a redemption for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6). But Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather

shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men originates in any necessity but in the disposition of God. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. It does not hinder in any way the immediate union



of the faithful with Christ but on the contrary fosters it."

St Paul's text in his letter to his disciple Timothy is immediately quoted: there is only one Mediator. In this famous and much-used text there is an affirmation of the one Mediator, but not in the way in which this one mediation is implemented. Some of the words of the conciliar text make one think of the image of a source: in fact, they speak of "springs forth" and "draws." Moreover, in n. 62 it speaks of the participation of creatures in the work of Christ "shared from a single source".

Christ is therefore the source of salvation, redemption and sanctification together with the Father and the Spirit: Mary leads her children to this source, and as she wishes and as long as she wishes she draws upon it for their salvation. The Church does the same, because it is not the fountain that is responsible for channelling the water of salvation to all, but those to whom the fountain has been entrusted.

For those who wish to explore this image, see Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (Jn 4:13ff) and the discourse on living water given by Jesus in the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles in his last year of life (Jn 7:37ff).

This must then be compared with the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the water or river of life flowing from the Temple of the Lord, and described in his prophecy in chapter 47.

Therefore, we can summarise the ideas as follows: Mary participates in the Mediation of her Son and acts in the same mediation by

"Every salutary influence of the Blessed Virgin on men... does not in the least prevent the immediate contact of believers with Christ, indeed it facilitates it".

virtue of her maternal function, not restricted only to the temporal generation of the Redeemer Messiah, but by the Father's blessing and through the Work of the Holy Spirit, extending to all the redeemed, the fruit and achievement of her Son's work and her own collaboration.

Another affirmation of the Council Fathers must be highlighted: "Every salutary influence of the Blessed Virgin on men... does not in the least prevent the immediate contact of believers with Christ, indeed it facilitates it". Virgin Mary's healthy influence on mankind... in no way impedes the immediate contact of believers with Christ, but rather facilitates it. My personal experience of almost forty years of priestly ministry, most often at Marian celebrations, has always shown me that through and as if by Mary's maternal seduction souls draw near to Christ, purified in the sacrament of Confession and nourished by the Eucharistic Bread.

This is, after all, the reality of all Marian shrines, large and small. □



MY VOCATION STORY

DON BOSCO SMILES IN ANGOLA

Fr. Martin Lasarte, sdb

*Meeting with Father Martin Lasarte Superior of the Angolan Visitatory.
"The name Don Bosco arouses sympathy and is much loved."*

Can you tell us about your beautiful Salesian adventure?

Of course, I can! We only have one life and we have to live it as well as we can and with intensity. And what better way is there to live it with and for the Lord together with Don Bosco? My adventure began in a Salesian secondary school in Uruguay.

How did your vocation come about?

I come from a Christian family, particularly on my mother's and grandparents'. I went to primary school and part of secondary school with the Marist Brothers. Then I was a pupil in a Salesian school called John XXIII. I think three elements marked my call. Firstly, I was struck by the figure of our director, Fr Félix Irureta: a very good Salesian: humble, simple, close to us, always in the courtyard and at the entrance to the school to welcome the students, whom he knew by name. On the first day of school, he called me by my first name. Finally, 1981. The Salesian project 'Africa' began. I was in the last year of the preparatory courses for the university of engineering. The first Salesian from Uruguay to leave for Angola arrived at our



school: Father Milan Zednicek. He introduced us to the Africa project. That was where the match fell and the straw caught fire... At first, I thought I would continue my studies and then leave as a lay volunteer, but if you give God your hand, he will gradually take everything from you... and so I joined the Salesians, with a clear missionary vocation.

How did you end up in Africa and Angola?



Fr. Lasarte's contagious smile

My vocational bus already had a clear destination sign: Angola. A first idea of the superiors was that I should go to do my internship in Africa, but for political reasons and the war in Angola, it was difficult to enter the country. So, after beginning theological studies in my country, I went to Brazil and then to Rome. A few days after my ordination as a deacon, in 1990, I arrived in my Promised Land.

When did the Salesians arrive in Angola?

In 1881, Don Bosco replied to the bishop of Luanda (Angola) about the request for Salesians, whom he could not send him at that time, but who would go in the future. Exactly one century later, the Salesians arrived in Angola in September 1981. The first to arrive was a good and zealous Brazilian Salesian, Fr Albino Beber, who was also a good builder and mason. In fact, this year we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians in Angola. Then, other sons of Don Bosco arrived, particularly from South America.

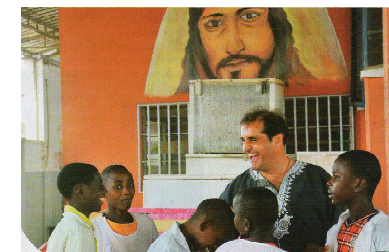
What kind of a country is Angola?

It is a large country of 1, 247,000 km² (four times larger than Italy).

It is beautiful, with its deserts, tropical forests, mountains, forests, meadows, savannahs... It is rich in rivers, fauna and unfortunately rich in minerals. I say unfortunately, because it is because of its mineral wealth that the country's civil war was self-fuelled for years. But the greatest wealth of any people is its people. Angola is a united nation, rich in different ethnic groups and nationalities, particularly the Portuguese.

What are your biggest problems today?

The situation of widespread poverty (37% below the poverty line), accentuated after the pandemic crisis. The legacy left by the war is still being felt, noting the fragile family fabric that has repercussions on the marginal situation of many children and young people. There is also a huge religious fragmentation with the consequent 'faith trade' by various neo-Messianic and neo-Pentecostal groups. And of course, all the negative challenges of today's increasingly globalised culture, which is



Thanks also to the help of the local people, who welcomed the sons of Don Bosco, they set up a small vegetable garden, with a poultry attached.



The Huambo children

particularly present in urban and youth environments.

What are young people like? What are their problems?

Two-thirds of the population is under 25 years old and the population growth rate is 7%. This is why it is a Salesian paradise, full of smiling and dynamic youth, eager to study, to progress, to play a leading role in society. I would like to point out some of the problematic bridges experienced by young people.

What is the most important Salesian work?

All the works, in their own way, are important and significant where they are. At the moment we have 13 communities in the country. We should highlight the network for the care of vulnerable children and young people in 6 centres, the vitality of the Salesian Youth Movement with almost 18,000 young people and adolescents, a network of schools and Vocational Training Centres with around 22,000 students.

Thanks be to God, the Lord is blessing the Salesian presence in Angola with many good vocations. We will have for Don Bosco's feast (January 2022): 21 novices, 60 young post-novices (in Palanca), 15 practical trainees, 19 theology

students. It is an enormous responsibility to accompany these 115 young confreres who are a hope for Angola and for the whole Congregation (in fact there are already missionaries in Portugal, Ireland, Papua New Guinea, the Middle East).

How are the Salesians seen by the people?

We feel very much loved by the population and young people, and also respected by the authorities and civil society. The name "*Dom Bosco*" arouses sympathy and calls for work with the young people most in need.

What is the future of the congregation here?

The future is in the hands of God alone, but our dreams and plans are many. We would like to consolidate vocational training, so that we can offer young people a dignified insertion into society. We want to consolidate the network of children and adolescents at risk not only in Luanda, but in other cities in the country. But above all, our deepest vocation and joy is to be able to communicate Jesus Christ to thousands of young people who are eager to know, love and follow him. This is our commitment to a youth ministry that is livelier and engaging through association groups, catechesis, and the oratory. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Pants Dilemma

A young man came home from the office and found his bride sobbing convulsively. "I feel terrible," she told him. "I was pressing your suit and I burned a big hole in the seat of your trousers."

"Forget it," consoled her husband. "Remember that I've got an extra pair of pants for that suit."

"Yes, and it's lucky you have," said the woman, drying her eyes. "I used them to patch the hole."

Sister Repair

My sister has the courage, but not always the skills, to tackle any hope repair project.

For example, in her garage are pieces of a lawn mower she once tried to fix. So I wasn't surprised the day my other sister, Pam, and I found our sister attacking her vacuum cleaner with a screwdriver.

"I can't get this thing to cooperate," she explained when she saw us.

Pam suggested, "Why don't you draw it out to the garage and show it to the lawn mower."

Dear Dog

I am so sorry about you being sent to the dog pound for the broken lamp which you did not break; the fish bowl you did not spill; and the carpet that you did not wet; or the wall that you did not dirty with red paint.

Things here at the house are calmer now, and just to show you that I have no hard feelings towards you, I am sending you a picture, so you will always remember me. Best regards, The Cat

Reading Glasses

I took my 5 year old grandson to the optometrist to pick up his new glasses. The glasses were prescribed "to help him read and able to see the computer better."

When we got back home, he got on the computer to play a game. In a few minutes he called me and said there was something wrong with his glasses.

I asked him what was the problem and he said, "I still can't read."

Fate

A young pupil asked, "Master, what is fate?"

"Ah, my son, it is what has brought great nations together. It has made the world a smaller place in which to live. It has inspired men of worth to work endless hours. It will some day enable to span the universe and light years of travel will soon become mere seconds in time." "And that, master," is fate?"

"Oh, fate! I thought you said freight."

Dog Growth

A distraught dog owner called his vet pleading for an immediate appointment. He explained that his dog had a large growth or swelling near the corner of its mouth. The vet told him to bring the animal right over.

When the man came in, the vet examined the dog as the man stood by, anxiously waiting. At last the vet turned to him and asked, "Do you have any children?"

"Oh, good grief, is it contagious?" the man gasped.

"Nom: the doctor answered, "It's bubble gum." □

ONE LAST THOUGHT

THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN US

Donagh O'Shea, OP

Many years ago, during the lifetime of Bernard Leach, the greatest Western craft potter of modern times, a ceramics teacher showed slides of Leach's work to his own students. To his surprise and disappointment, they made little or no comment. But he noticed that from that time on they kept few of their own pieces! — they returned them to the lump because they could see now how uninspired their pieces were! That is what happens when you see the work of a master. It becomes easier to give up things because you see how little you are giving up; in fact, you can hardly wait to give it up, because you want to keep the coast clear for a thing of real value.

We all plod our way as best we can. We try to keep the commandments, or at least not to disown them formally. We even manage to give body to one or other of the Beatitudes. But where is the inspiration? Inspiration is that magic ingredient without which there can be satisfaction, yes, but no joy. An ancient pagan poet, a contemporary of Christ, wrote, "There is a God within us, and we glow when he stirs us." Why don't we Christians glow more? There are some who do, but why so few when we

have the very Spirit of God living within us?

Religion is a challenge

Look at the rich young man mentioned in the gospel of St. Mark 10:17-22. He came running up to Jesus, and with totally exaggerated courtesy (there is only one parallel to it in Jewish literature, and that in the 4th century A.D.) asked him what he must do, etc. Full marks for enthusiasm, but not a lot for follow through! Jesus loved him and said 'for you one thing is lack-ing. Go sell what you have and give the money to the poor.' You can imagine him running up to any and every new teacher, and turning away disappointed when they asked him to change his life. He wanted religion as entertainment, not as challenge. Some of us avoid the challenge by refusing to change, others by changing all the time. We feel we will have to give up too much. But the strange thing



is that it's much easier to give up something than to think about giving it up! "The more a person gives up the easier it is to give up," said Meister Eckhart in the 14th century. "One who loves God could give up the whole world as easily as an egg."

Unless I have given up something with joy, I haven't really given it up: its shadow is still over me. And of course, I will see myself as a bit of a martyr: "If you only knew what I've had to go through!" This doesn't set anyone free, least of all oneself. I have to look beyond. I have to be attracted beyond my self-imposed limits and expectations. I have to have seen the Master at work. I have to know the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within me.

Matthew and Luke write simply, "Jesus answered . . .", but Mark writes, "Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and said..." From Matthew and Luke, you get the impression



"There is a God within us, and we glow when he stirs us."

Why don't we Christians glow more? There are some who do, but why so few when we have the very Spirit of God living within us?"

that that rich young man was a write-off. True, he is never heard of again in the New Testament, but could anyone whom Jesus loved be a write-off? Jesus did not demand perfection of him; he just held it before him as an invitation. An invitation is an invitation, not a command. There are ages and stages in our life, and the Lord has more patience with us than we have with ourselves or with one another. All three Gospel writers say that the rich man became "sad." They didn't need to say that Jesus was sad, because it was so obvious. □

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

AUGUST 2022

For small businesses

We pray for small and medium sized businesses; in the midst of economic and social crisis, may they find ways to continue operating, and serving their communities.

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MARY FOR US

Our repeating the 'inspired' words of Elizabeth in greeting Mary to honour her would not be complete if they were not followed and supplemented by the other words that - as the Gospel tell us - were jointly uttered in the house of Zechariah.

Just as Elizabeth, without ever separating mother and son intimately associated them immediately adding: "and blessed is the fruit of your womb," so too must we ourselves address her with the promptness of a lively faith and with the strength of an ardent love for the Lord Jesus.

Pope St. John Paul II

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