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*Praise the Lord
our God,
for in Mary
his handmaid
he has fulfilled
his promise
of mercy
to the house
of Israel!*

From The Editor's Desk

CHRISTMAS HARDWARE

Ralph Stockman said, "The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable." The Incarnation of Jesus, his Nativity, has moved people throughout history, trickling upwards from the poor, broken, uneducated, and slave classes to emperors, scholars, and commercial captains. The message of the angels has made its way through generations to us this year, calling us to come with wonder and an open heart to this "Word made flesh full of Grace and Truth."

Christ Jesus' birth is the fulcrum of history. We still continue to measure our time by it. It was Archimedes who said: "Give me a fulcrum and a place to stand and I can move the world." How can the world be moved, so filled with what we read and see in the news? Think of this past year - overcast by the scourge of COVID-19 and its aftermath which we are still reeling under and the deaths, the desperation and the cynical attitudes our leaders and those in authority. Our experience is so filled with darkness, helplessness and indifference in dealing with the shadow side of human character in all of us. The God of the universe entering our world as a needy baby is beyond comprehension. Yet the Babe provides that stable (*pin intended*) point against which the lever of God's grace can act to move the immovable.

Where is that fulcrum for *our own* lives? What can we trust enough in our relativistic, aging, and ever-changing world that will be stable enough to allow us to be moved, or transformed? One thing I am certain of is that none of us can provide that sure foundation, that fulcrum in ourselves. This reference point must be given to us; we must receive it. Rarely can any of us ignore a baby that wants attention. God wants our attention at Christmas even in the midst of our busy, broken lives. He wants our faith and trust. The Lord of the Universe wants us to come and adore him in what's left as we pick up the pieces of our broken lives.

"The Good News of great joy for all people" is that we can find in the Incarnation and Nativity this fulcrum that will enable God to move us from where we are to a place of worship, peace and the knowledge of God. "In Creation, the Lord made humanity like himself; but in the redemption he made himself like humanity." (John Boys) The Holy Family did not dwell on there being "no room in the inn" or in the hardship of traveling to be taxed. Nor did they express dismay and surprise by saying: "Look what the world has come to!" but in delight proclaimed: "Look what has come into the world!"

Jesus had come and is coming. A wise old author once wrote: "The Son of God... came to seek us where we are in order that he might bring us to be with him where he is." (J.L. Packer) Where are you this Advent and Christmas?

May the Lord come to you and call you to come and experience him. May this ageless message be heard and felt, seen and sensed all around you this Christmas drawing your faith and awe, your adoration and your praise.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

HOLINESS AMONG DIAPERS

By Giampaolo Dianin

Holiness permeates all that is specific to family life: relationships and communion, love given and received, fecundity and the education of children, care for the elderly...

Holiness seems to be a word from a bygone era; the experience of some individual who detaches himself/herself from the world and can afford to devote oneself to an interior life or one who embodies some particular charism. For many centuries now Popes and bishops, martyrs and founders of congregations and some lay people too, even those who were married, have become saints. But how can we forget Aquila and Priscilla, the couple Zelia and Louis Martin, the parents of the little Thérèse and the blessed Beltrame Quattrocchi, to

name a few people from a different time in the history of the Church? Many married women and men have also become saints mainly because, often after the death of their spouse, they dedicated the rest of their lives to God or to the service of the less privileged. But more would be needed to open the doors for their canonization so, going back, they discovered that there indeed was holiness even before that; when they lived their married vocation.

But one cannot deny that according to a certain mindset even to this day, holiness doesn't

seem to be compatible with the confusion of the daily life of a family, the inevitable tensions related to relationships, the education of children, economic and work-related problems and, of course, concerning the sex life of the spouses. It was, as if to say, holiness is a luxury that few spouses can afford and if yesterday it was difficult because of so many prejudices or because there was a certain angelic vision of holiness, today it seems to be so for other reasons related above all to the complexity of life.

Pope Francis dedicates the last chapter of *Amoris Laetitia* to conjugal spirituality and affirms: "A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God." (AL 316) The following year the Pope returned to the theme of holiness in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate* where he spoke of the saints "next door" (n. 7), not to lower the bar of such an important word but to widen the horizon.

The Second Vatican Council on the other hand, emphatically stated that: "All the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to the perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect." (L.G. 11)

In *Gaudete et Exultate* the Pope quoting the *Catechism*, writes, "The measure of our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his." (n. 21). The imagery is very simple: Jesus and the Christian life in us can remain small and shrivelled because we

do not give it its due importance or it can grow in stature in the measure that we grow up and become adults. And this also applies to those who are married in the Lord and have received the gift of the Spirit, being able to love each other as Christians so that love can grow, refine itself, and become stronger and more intense.

Even for spouses we must repeat with Paul: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thes 4:3). And again: "Make yourselves imitators of God." (Eph 5, 1) How can we forget Paul's words: "You husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up to make her holy"? The love of two people: the life of a couple is the locus of mutual sanctification. Getting married in the Lord, is also taking responsibility for one's partner; that means accompanying and supporting the other on his/her journey of holiness.

Holiness is also asked of spouses not only as persons but as a couple. The other becomes my privileged way to meet God. This starts from a precise foundation: the sacraments of baptism and of marriage. The first emphasizes belonging to Christ and his call; matrimony takes up that call and specifies it, giving it a particular hue. Here the path of Christian holiness becomes that of marriage and the family. What is the central element that specifies this path? It is conjugal love.

The Pope writes in *Familiaris Consortio*: "Hence, the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord



for the Church, His bride." (n.17). Everything else comes later. We can translate this: the couple is called to grow in love so that this love becomes ever more a revelation and a witness of the Love of God.

I will always remember with affection my encounter with Albino Luciani, the future Pope John Paul I. He was still Patriarch of Venice and came visit a conference I had been attending. He began by recalling the various Marian shrines in our Veneto region and then said: "I wish there was also a shrine of the Madonna of the brooms, bowls and diapers..." meaning to tell us that holiness doesn't happen through extraordinary gestures or experiences but

it needs to be found also in ordinary life.

Holiness is a journey that is not based on the strength of our feet but on our willingness to let Jesus take us by the hand and follow him. Holiness possibly becomes a gift if we but open the doors to the Lord who knocks and asks to enter and shares in the life of the family. Holiness passes through what is specific to spousal and family life: relationships, communion, love received and given, fecundity, the education of the children, care for the elderly, hospitality and being attentive to the poor, prayer, the domestic liturgy, mercy and forgiveness and the grace to always be faithful in joy and pain, in health and in sickness. □

THE PRESSURE OF THE STATE

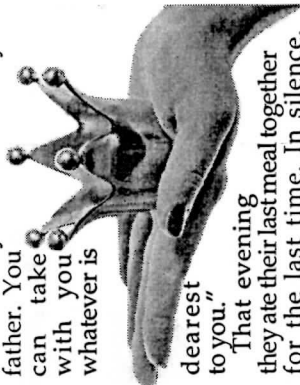
The son of a king fell in love, as happens in fairy tales, with the baker's daughter, who was poor but beautiful and he married her. For a few years the couple lived in harmony and happiness. But when the king, the prince's father died, the prince ascended the throne.

The ministers and his advisers hurried to make the young prince understand that for the safety and security of the kingdom he had to repudiate the commoner-wife and marry the daughter of a powerful neighbouring king, ensuring peace and prosperity through this marriage. "Repudiate her, sire," they said, "after all, she's a baker's daughter. The security of the throne and that of your subjects comes first." The insistence of the ministers became more and more pressing and, in the end the young king gave in. "I must repudiate you," he said to his wife,

"tomorrow you will return to your father. You can take with you whatever is dearest to you."

That evening they ate their last meal together for the last time. In silence. Apparently, the quiet queen continued to pour wine into the king's cup. At the end of the dinner, the king fell into a deep sleep. The woman wrapped him in a blanket and carried him on her shoulders.

The next morning, he woke up in the baker's house. "But how?" He was amazed. His wife smiled at him. "You said I could take with me what I hold most dear. Well, of everything in the world, you are the dearest." *Bruno Ferrero*



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Don Bosco's Madonna

FEAST OF THE MONTH

(Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception - December 8)

THE LIGHT THAT ILLUMINES EVERY HUMAN BEING

by Paola Ricci

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is like a powerful beam of light that illumines Mary, who, from the first instant of her existence was not touched by any shadow of sin; not then, not ever. Mary would become the Mother of Jesus, and would not be worthy of the Son of God, if for a single moment she was subject to sin, influenced by Satan, whom He had come to defeat.

Were we to try to ask a little girl, or any Catholic, a member of a parish what was the significance of the title "Immaculate Conception" that was reserved for Mary.

She would perhaps turn up her mouth and with a stammer would refer to the virginity of the Mother of God or to a dogma defined by some distant Pope, from perhaps the Middle Ages.

In other words, stuff of the past which no longer affects feminine sensibilities, not even Catholic - let alone the secularists - thus once again tending to relegate that figure so central to the Christian mystery, to a rarefied and inconsequent state.

Coming to think of it, however, this "conception" of Mary, to the death of the heart, the

completely free of sin, is of extraordinary anthropological significance: The Mother of God, a woman of her time, involved in the most extraordinary story that history records, tells us that evil was vanquished already "from the start," if it is true that she, a finite creature and not a semi-goddess, had she been filled with grace from the first moment of her existence.

It was for her, a woman, that Father invented this fascinating condition. In preparing her for the virgin birth, he wanted to point out that sin is nullified when the goodness of life is involved: caring for life, hope, maternity and the happiness of future generations.

This is why Mary is not a "symbol," but the consciousness of femininity, that is, the awareness that every woman, whose fecund body embraces life, is the true face of humanity. Blessed and redeemed by the Resurrection of her Son, she carries within herself that secret, that goodness must be fertilized, so as to annihilate all temptations towards evil. Sin is the threshold of non-life, the entry point to the death of the heart, the



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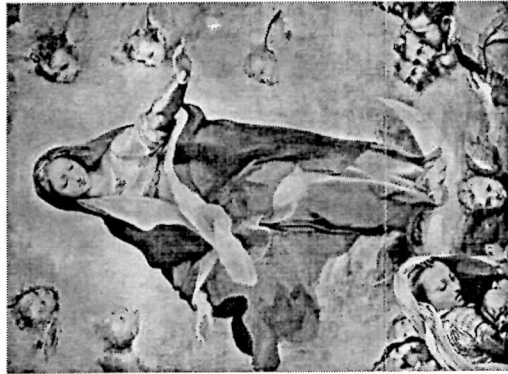
unhappiness of so many youngsters immersed in the emptiness of passions.

It is therefore necessary to search for the goodness that is lost and which must constantly be retrieved so that the goodness of all creation is regenerated.

The Jewish-Talmudic tradition is right when it says that the culmination of creation, its surprising final effect is precisely the woman, who came last and therefore is a sign of the perfection of nature. Her dignity, in fact, lies in transmitting life, perpetuating her presence over time and thus defeating any presence of death and any fear of the future. Mary, conceived without sin, capable of bringing together the fruits of the Spirit virginally and freely, is the concrete ideal to whom every woman can look to. Speaking of virginity doesn't mean demonizing sexuality, on the contrary, it emphasizes its responsible and conscious involvement.

To speak of the Immaculate Conception does not mean setting aside the human condition, on the contrary – it indicates that being a woman means being aware of having to forcefully redeem oneself from historical conditionings that have seen her and continue to see her as the object of male violence and abuse.

It is not a matter of a sexist claim, but the awareness of the inviolability of one's body, of her extraordinary power to express her willingness to become a home within which each child grows up and prepares to enter the world. The 'unique' character of the Son of God is the hallmark of the uniqueness of each individual born, just as the body of Mary is a tangible sign of the uniqueness of each



woman.

This does not mean that women are "unique" only when they have children. It is certain, however, that this distinctive character – was lost by the wayside in the name of a false emancipation which separated sexuality from procreation – producing a humanity marked by the scourge of a worrying fall in the birth-rate, resulting from a lack of trust in the future of generations to come.

However, it should not be forgotten that the corporeality of a woman is also the source of an incredible symbolic radiation; to the extent that she expresses openness and safeguards life, she also becomes a sign that this extra energy is her strength and her redemption which can be translated into a thousand gestures of sharing, emotional diffusion, of being predisposed to all forms of a fecund goodness. This is the story of Mary which must also become our story. □

BE WHO YOU WANT TO BE!

by Anastasia Dias

With another year coming to an end, you might be one of those people looking to change something in your life. There might be something that isn't right and you desperately want that to change. There might be issues that you're struggling with; depression, an addiction, a negative body-image or an unhappy relationship. Sometimes, you resolve to change these things. Unfortunately, you give up before even trying. Why? Because you lose hope. You think of all the times you've set goals for yourself but failed to achieve them. There are voices inside your head that remind you of your setbacks.

I've also been in similar situations. Nevertheless, I started believing that I could change what I wanted to, if I tried.

A friend of mine named Matthew taught me this important lesson. Matthew was one of those persons who excelled in everything. He was one of the most gifted persons I had known.

When he was in high school, his life began to change. Every time he wanted to do something, a thought would pop up in his head, 'What if I fail.' This thought made him give up even before trying. Sounds familiar? These thoughts

began occurring frequently.

As he battled his negative thoughts, he began losing his self-confidence and sinking into a depression. The worst part was that those thoughts didn't just stop there. They gave birth to other thoughts, 'You can never do it,' 'he's much better than you,' 'Forget it, you're not capable.' It came to a point where he was afraid to get out of his house. He began staying locked up in his room, as a result, he lost numerous opportunities that came his way.

However, Matthew didn't want to give up so easily. He wanted to overcome these thoughts. With the support of his family, he began seeking professional help.

The advice his therapist gave him was to think a counter-thought. So, if a thought came up like 'You can never do it,' he would say, 'Of course, I can. I've done so much before.' Another thought would then pop up saying, 'He's more talented than you,' to which he would reply, 'I'm different and I will work harder.' 'What if you fail?' He would reply, 'What if I succeed? What if this is the opportunity that I've been looking for?'

He started being aware of his thoughts. He started responding



to those destructive ones.

Gradually, there was a shift in his thoughts and feelings. Negative thoughts didn't control him anymore, he controlled them. Within a year, Matthew regained his self-confidence.

Today, Matthew is in one of the best universities in his country on a full scholarship.

Like I mentioned earlier, many of us have experiences like Matthew. We've been told that we're not good enough. We've been told that we can never accomplish our dreams. The problem is, we just don't listen to those lies, we also believe them.

When we start believing those lies, we start imagining ourselves as failures. And what we've been told by people; the lies they've told us turns into reality. Just because we believe in the lies. In short, we have faith in the lies.

What if we believed the truth? The truth about ourselves. Not what people say, but who we truly are; now, you may say, what if I really am what people have said about me?

Fortunately, you can never be what people say of you. You can only be who you choose to be and what you choose to believe about yourself.

Sometimes, you have opportunities knocking at your door. You're overjoyed about them. But again, you hear those familiar voices. You don't have to blame the people who've said that to you. Perhaps, they

were told the same things when they were young.

What you need, is to focus on your innate gifts and talents. You've hidden them for so long. You're shy, you're afraid, you're not confident. This way, you may never recognize or use your gifts. They will be hidden within you forever.

Isn't that terrible? If you only knew your true potential and what you could achieve using it, you wouldn't just sit around and do nothing. Neither would you blame others for your failures nor stop their opinions about you from chasing your dreams.

Like Matthew, you could choose to be a fighter or a quitter. You could get up and get going. Only you can overpower the negativity that surrounds you. You can allow people and situations to control your future, or you can give yourself that power.

Think about it. If Matthew had never wanted change he would still be struggling. He would never be where he is now. If you want to change, start now! Start with yourself. When you do so, everything around you will change for the best. □



The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

JOHN ENCOUNTERS JESUS

by Ian Pinto, sdb

There is some debate about the identity of the evangelist. Tradition holds that the author was indeed the disciple of Jesus but there is uncertainty about whether the two (the disciple and the evangelist) are in fact connected. Let me avoid getting into the messy details of the debate and stick to the tradition. So, John we know, was the son of Zebedee and Salome and the brother of James. By profession the family were fisherfolk. Similar to the other sibling duo of Peter and Andrew, James and John were also busy fishing when Jesus asked them to follow him. John along with his brother and Peter formed part of Jesus' innermost circle. They were witnesses to events that no other disciple saw.

Love is the Message

Interestingly, the word 'love' appears 57 times in the Gospel of John, more than it appears in the other three gospels put together! Besides, it appears 46 times in the first epistle of John. It is quite evident that for John it is all about Love. He notes that the very reason God became man in Jesus and came down to earth was because of love: "God so loved the world

From depictions of him in art, we find John to be a young man, perhaps the youngest of the lot of apostles. Maybe because of his age or for other reasons, he was also very close to the heart of Jesus. Leonardo da Vinci's infamous painting 'The Last Supper,' depicts John resting his head on the chest of Jesus. I suppose artistic imagination gave a definite form to an intuition of the kind of relationship shared by John and Jesus. In the



that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Not only did God come for love, his core teaching was also love: "Now I give you a new commandment: Love one another! Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

For John, Jesus' life and message was simply love. In nearly every event, John highlights the love behind the action; whenever possible he puts the word in Jesus' mouth. One might wonder why he goes to such extremes? Well, each evangelist was focused on a certain aspect of Jesus. For example, Matthew wrote his gospel for Jews and so tried to show how Jesus fulfilled the Jewish law. Luke wrote his gospel for the gentiles (he himself was one), thus he gives greater emphasis to Jesus' meeting and healing non-Jews and women. Mark wants to present Jesus as the Messiah and so stresses on those events that fulfill the Messianic prophecies. Finally, John seems to want to stress on Jesus, the God of love (1 Jn 4:16) who came to spread love here on earth (1 Jn 15:9), redeem His people from their sins (1 Jn 3:16) and enable them to return back to His love (1 Jn 3:17).

Love is the Mission

Jesus made it very clear that his mission and message centred around one and the same thing: love. This is what he also expected and demanded of his disciples: "You will remain in my love if you keep my commandments, just as I have kept my Father's command-

ments and remain in his love" (1 Jn 15:10). He commanded his disciples: "Love one another as I have loved you! There is no greater love than this, to give one's life for one's friends" (1 Jn 15:12-13). In effect, he told his disciples to make love the centre of their lives as well. Only when the disciples could manage to do this would they really become his true followers. Jesus was clear about it: "By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (1 Jn 13:35).

Love is meant to be the identity of the Christian. Thus, love besides being the message of Jesus is also the mission of each of us. We are Christians and followers of Jesus only in as much as we love each other. The measure of our love for Jesus is the love we bear for one another. Since we are all God's children (1 Jn 3:1), irrespective of caste, creed, gender, race or status, there is absolutely no room for discrimination and hatred. Any Christian who so much as harbours the thought of hatred and/or discrimination is not worthy of calling himself/herself a Christian. How can someone who professes to follow a God who sees no distinctions between his children and who commands equality among all, go about happily practicing the contrary? Anyone who engages in such behaviours is living a farcical life that is an affront both to God and to His people. Being Christian is basically therefore, about being a loving person. John experienced firsthand the love of Jesus and translated that into his writings and behaviour. All of us, similarly, are called to live the gospel of love. □

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Don Bosco's Madonna

Witnesses in & for Our Times

ST. PETER CANISIUS

(1521 - 1597)

(DECEMBER 21)



St. Peter Canisius, has been called the Second Apostle of Germany - St. Boniface being the first - but he is also honoured as one of the creators of a Catholic press. Born in the year 1521 at Nijmegen in Holland, then a German Reichstadt in the archdiocese of Cologne, he was the eldest son of Jacob Kanis, who had been ennobled after acting as tutor to the sons of the Duke of Lorraine and who was nine times burgomaster of Nijmegen. Although Peter had the misfortune to lose his mother at an early age, his father's second wife proved an excellent stepmother, and he grew up having before his eyes the fear of God. He accuses himself of having wasted time as a boy, but in view of the fact that he took his master of arts degree at Cologne University when he was only nineteen, it is difficult to believe that he was ever really idle. To please his father, who wished him to be a lawyer, he proceeded to Louvain, where for a few months he studied canon law. Realizing, however, that he was not called to this career he refused marriage, took a vow of celibacy, and returned to Cologne



to read theology. Great interest had been aroused in the Rhineland towns by the preaching of Blessed Peter Faber (Favre), the first disciple of St. Ignatius; Canisius attended an Ignatian retreat which Faber gave at Mainz, and during the second week made a vow to join the new

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order. Admitted as a novice, he lived for some years a community life in Cologne, spending his time in prayer, in study, in visiting the sick and in instructing the ignorant. He had already begun to write; his first publications having been editions of the works of St Cyril of Alexandria and St Leo the Great. After his ordination to the priesthood, he came into prominence for his preaching; and as a delegate to the Council of Trent he had attended two of its sessions, the one at Trent and the other at Bologna, when he was summoned to Rome by St Ignatius, who retained him by his side for five months. He was sent to Messina to teach in the first Jesuit school known to history, but very shortly was recalled to Rome for his solemn profession and to be given a more important charge.

The order was to return to Germany, he having been selected to go to Ingolstadt with two brother Jesuits, in response to an urgent appeal from Duke William IV of Bavaria for Catholic professors capable of counteracting the heretical teaching which was permeating the schools. Not only was Peter Canisius successful in reforming the university, of which he was made rector and afterwards vice-chancellor, but he also effected a real religious revival amongst the people by his sermons, his catechizing, and his campaign against the sale of immoral or heretical books. In 1552 the saint was withdrawn to undertake, at the request of King Ferdinand, a somewhat similar mission in Vienna. He found that great city in a worse condition than

Ingolstadt. At first Peter Canisius preached to almost empty churches, partly because of the general disaffection and partly because his Rhineland German grated on the ears of the Viennese; but he found his way to the heart of the people by his indefatigable ministrations to the sick and dying during an outbreak of the plague.

The king, the nuncio, the pope himself wanted him appointed to the vacant see of Vienna, but St Ignatius could be induced only to allow him to administer the diocese for one year, and that without episcopal orders, title or emoluments. It was about this time that St Peter, began work on his famous catechism, or Summary of Christian Doctrine, published in 1555; this was followed by a Shorter and a Shortest Catechism - both of which attained enormous popularity.

In Prague, to which he was sent to found a college, he was dismayed to learn that he was to be provincial of a newly-established province covering South Germany, Austria and Bohemia. In the course of his two years' residence in Prague, Peter Canisius in great measure won back the city to the faith, and he established the college on such excellent lines that even Protestants were glad to send their sons to it. In 1557 he went by special invitation to Worms to take part in a discussion between Catholic and Protestant divines, although he was firmly convinced from past experience that all such conferences on doctrine were worse than useless, the heated discussions which always took place only

widening the chasm between the disputants.

Apart from the colleges he actually founded or inaugurated, he prepared the way for many others. In 1559, at the wish of King Ferdinand, he took up his residence in Augsburg, and this town continued to be his head-quarters for six years. Here again the lamp of faith was rekindled by his efforts as he encouraged the faithful, reclaimed the lapsed, and converted many heretics. Amongst the works he himself produced at the time may be mentioned a selection of St Jerome's letters, a 'Manual for Catholics', a martyrology and a revision of the Augsburg Breviary. The General Prayer which he composed is still recited in Germany on Sundays. At the close of his term of office as provincial, St Peter took up his abode at Dillingen in Bavaria, where the Jesuits not only had a college of their own but also directed the university. The town had for him the additional attraction of being the favourite place of Residence of Cardinal Otto Truchsess who had long been his close friend. He occupied himself mainly in teaching, in hearing confessions, and in the composition of the first of a series of books he had undertaken by order of his superiors. They were intended as a reply to a strongly anti-Catholic history of Christianity which was being published by certain Protestant writers commonly known as the Centuriators of Magdeburg. This work he continued afterwards whilst acting as court chaplain for some years at Innsbruck, and until 1577, when he was dispensed from proceeding with it on the

score of his health. There seems to have been no curtailment of his activities in other directions, for we find him still preaching, giving missions, accompanying the provincial on his visitations, and even filling the post of vice-provincial.

Canisius was at Dillingen when, in the year 1580, he was instructed to go to Fribourg in Switzerland. That city, which was the capital of a Catholic canton wedged in between two powerful Protestant neighbours, had long desired a college but had been handicapped by lack of funds and other difficulties. The obstacles were overcome within a few years by St Peter, who obtained the money, selected the site, and superintended the erection of the splendid college which developed into the present University of Fribourg. For over eight years his principal work was preaching: on Sundays and festivals he delivered sermons in the cathedral, on weekdays he visited other parts of the canton. It may confidently be asserted that to St Peter Canisius is due the credit of having retained Fribourg in the Catholic fold at a critical period of its history. Increasing bodily infirmities obliged him to give up preaching, and in 1591 a paralytic seizure brought him to the brink of the grave, but he recovered sufficiently to continue writing, with the help of a secretary, until shortly before his death, which took place on December 21, 1597.

St Peter Canisius was canonized and declared a doctor of the Church in 1925. □

(Courtesy: *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, ed. Michael Walsh, 1985)



A LIGHT SHINES

Carlo Broccardo

Shines: I like this verb, rather rare, but very effective. It does not say that it's the light of a candle, but a light that illumines the whole world with the fullness of its splendour

The Christmas liturgy is so rich that it offers us three sets of readings: The Mass at midnight, the Mass at dawn and the Mass during the day. Today we shall reflect on the first reading that will be proclaimed during the Midnight Mass which is from the prophet Isaiah.

It is a hymn poetic in form which sings of the birth of an heir to the throne or, according to some authors, the "birth" of the "throne" of a king, meaning his coronation. However, it is a hymn of jubilation, because finally there is someone who will relieve Israel from the painful situation into which it



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they will roam through the land. In their hunger they will become enraged and curse their king and their god, and they will look upwards. Then they will look towards the earth, but they will only find distress and darkness and frightening gloom; and they will be driven into thick darkness." (Is. 8:21-22)

Thus, Isaiah invites us to imagine the earth: reduced to darkness and bleak darkness at that, because of the sin of its inhabitants. But now all this has passed! New days are at hand! As usual, Isaiah uses rich imagery: from darkness we will pass into the light, because 'a light has shone' on the dark earth (like this verb, rarely used effectively but that's the way it is used here. It does not say the light of a candle, but a 'light' that illumines the whole world with the fullness of its splendour). It is no longer a time of distress, rather a time of joy: like when you harvest a field or when you share a prize; these are very concrete images, easy to remember.

Isaiah gives us three reasons why we can rejoice in the joy of the rediscovered light. First of all, the oppression is ended: God has broken the yoke (in an agrarian society that is a tool made of heavy wood, which is placed on the neck of a couple of good oxen to keep them together on a cart or a plough) that kept people in slavery and the rod of the tormentor. Secondly, the war is ended; "every warrior's boot that trampled in war, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for the fire." The third motive for this change is the announcement of a birth. It is no ordinary child, but a king: on his shoulders are signs of royalty

and the titles by which he will be called an ideal leader. He is "A wonderful counsellor," capable of guiding his people with wisdom; "Mighty God," strong and capable of defending his people against enemies; "Everlasting Father," he knows how to take care of his people; "Prince of Peace"; he is able to maintain peace by exercising righteousness and justice, say the last words of the hymn.

Simply put, Isaiah sings the praises of God who intervenes to raise up his children, through the birth of a king who will know how to take care of his people by taking them on his shoulders and leading them on the path to peace. But Isaiah is not hasty; he is not content to tell us that God has freed us and will always free his children. Isaiah plunges us into darkness; he makes us feel the yoke on our shoulders, that rumbling marching sound and the smell of blood on the cloaks of those fallen in battle. Isaiah makes us almost touch the desolation of those who turn away from God, so that the joy of seeing the light shining, the exultation because of the harvest become signs of the war that are being swallowed up by the fire. And peace will spread like the morning dawn; that simple and at the same time great joy is felt only because of the birth of a child: there is still hope.

This is done by the Lord's jealous love, that is his love for us. This was done in the time of Isaiah and in the time of Jesus. This will always be done from generation to generation. We can be sure that he will never leave us alone in the dark, defenceless beneath the blows of our enemies because - as we learned during a recent jubilee - his name is Mercy. □

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Quiet Spaces

THREE TRAITS

On the morning of Tuesday, December 16, 2015,
the Holy Father celebrated Mass in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae.
The following is the edited English text of the Pope's homily which was delivered in Italian.

What are the features of the People of God? What should the Church be like? This was the theme of Pope Francis' homily.

In today's passage from the Gospel according to Matthew (21:28-32), Jesus states to the chief priests and elders: "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." The Pontiff pointed out Jesus' "energy" in reproaching those who were considered masters of "how to think, judge, and live." The prophet Zephaniah too, in the First Reading (3:1-2, 9-13), "takes on the voice of God and says: 'Woe to her that is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! She listens to no voice, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God.'" It is basically "the same reprimand" aimed "at the chosen people, at the clerics of those times." Moreover, the Pope emphasized, "to say to a priest, to a chief priest, that a harlot is holier than he in the kingdom of Heaven" is a very strong charge.

Jesus "had the courage to speak the truth." However, Francis said, considering certain reprimands, one has to wonder: "What should the Church be like? The people we read about in the Bible were indeed 'men of the church.' They were 'heads of the Church.' Jesus came, John the Baptist came, but those men 'didn't listen.'" In the passage, the prophet recalls that although God chose his people, "this people became a rebellious city, an impure city. They did not accept how the Church should be, how the People of God should be."

However, the prophet Zephaniah communicates God's promise to the people: "I will forgive you". That is, the Pope explained, in order "for the People of God, the Church, all of us to be faithful, the first step is to feel we are forgiven."

After the promise of forgiveness, there is also the explanation of "how the Church is supposed to be: 'For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord.'" Thus, the faithful People of God, Francis continued, must "have these three traits: humble, lowly, with trust in the Lord." At this point the Pontiff began his analysis of each of the three fundamental features.

First of all the Church has to be "humble." In other words a Church should "not show off her powers, her grandeur." However, the Pope advised, "humility doesn't mean a lethargic, weary person" with a demure expression, because this "is not humility, this is theatrics! This is feigned humility." True humility, instead, begins "with the first step: 'I am a sinner.'" Francis explained that if "you are not able to tell yourself that you are a sinner and that others are better than you, you are not humble." Thus, "the first step for a humble Church is feeling that she is a sinner"

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and the same is true for "all of us." On the other hand, if "any of us has the habit of looking at others' defects and gossiping", this is not humility. It is instead "thinking that you are the judge of others." The prophet says: "I will leave in the midst of you a humble people." This, the Pontiff advised, is a grace, and "we must ask for this grace, that the Church may be humble, that I may be humble, that each one of us may be humble."

His meditation then passed on to the second trait: the People of God "is poor." In this regard Pope Francis recalled that poverty is "the first of the Beatitudes," but what does it mean to be "poor in spirit"? It means "being attached only to God's treasures." It definitely does not mean "a Church that exists attached to money, that thinks about money, that thinks about how to earn money..." For example, the Pope explained, there was someone who "innocently" said to the people that in order to pass through the Holy Door "you have to make an offering." This, the Pontiff clarified, "is not the Church of Jesus, this is the Church of those chief priests, attached to money."

To further explain his thoughts, Francis recalled the story of Deacon Lawrence — the "treasurer of the diocese," — who, when the emperor asked him to "bring the riches of the diocese" to turn them over in order to avoid being killed, St Lawrence returned "with the poor." Thus the poor are actually "the treasure of the Church." You can even be "the head of a bank," as long as "your heart is poor, not attached to money" and you place yourself "at the service" of others. "Poverty," the Pope added, is characterized by "this detachment" which leads us to "serve the needy." He concluded this line of reasoning by directing a question to each person: "Am I or am I not poor?"

Lastly, the third trait: the People of God "shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord." This too brings up a very direct question: "Where do I place my trust? In power, in friends, in money? In the Lord!"

Thus it is this "legacy that the Lord promises us: 'I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord.' Humble because they feel they are sinners; poor because their heart is attached to God's treasures, and if they have them it is only to administer them; seeking refuge in the Lord because they know that the Lord alone can guarantee what is good for them." This is why Jesus had to tell the chief priests, "who did not understand these things," that "a harlot would enter the kingdom of God before them." And, the Pontiff concluded, as we await the Lord this Christmas, let us ask that he give us "a humble heart," a heart that is "poor" and above all that seeks "refuge in the Lord", because "the Lord never disappoints"□.

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THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CRECHE

by Pierluigi Menato (TA/ID)

Mark is ten years old. A radiant boy. At precisely 8 o'clock, his mother breathes a sigh of relief because Mark is off to school. Then, another sigh of relief when he leaves from his teacher's class and returns home.

His notebooks are all crumpled, a sheet torn here, or another stained there. It is half way through the class, when his concentration fails and he's drawing puppets. Immediately after the statement of the problem, with a clear allusion to the impossibility of solving it, he's drawing a donkey braying and, if the face is not enough, there's a cartoon causing quite a giggle!

That's because Mark is very good in drawing. At the sight of a sheet of paper his face lights up; the simple contact of a marker or a coloured pencil, his hand gets itchy. Too bad that the *carte blanche* is not enough, there's also the geometry or the geography book!

Here, the Scandinavian peninsula, with the mane and claws means nothing. Four strokes of a marker and the north of Europe becomes a lion with jaws wide open ready to eat Denmark, Holland and Belgium and so on, in one bite.

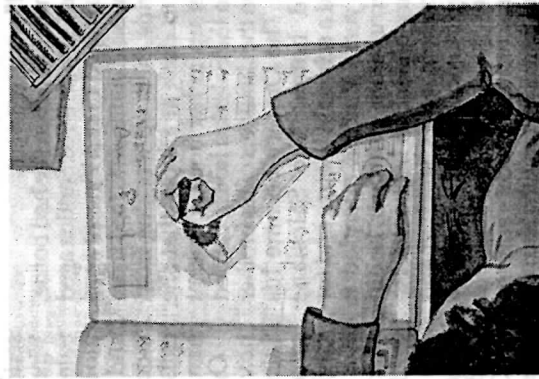
There, a cone with its head underneath, too symmetrical and is meaningless. Mark, just turned the book upside down; painted the coke a soft biscuit colour. In its mouth put a red blob as if it were a raspberry, a smear of green, the colour of pistachio; and voilà the most superb ice-cream cone comes out.

Artists are always underrated. Least convinced of his artistic skills is his own teacher, who like all

'male teachers', to let off steam, deals with his student in the register. Mark's name in the register is followed by a monotonous row of zeros.

If only Mark could get hold of his teacher's register with his coloured pencils! Each and every zero would become the eye of a flower: a black eye with yellow eyelashes – a sunflower. A yellow eye with white lashes: a daisy. The master's register would be a veritable flower garden open to the sunshine.

Mark is a good and sociable boy. He gets on well with his classmates, and his friends get on well with him. With Marcel he puts together a stamp collection, with Maurice he works on an herbarium. The class is divided into two football teams; Milan against Juventus, eleven against eleven, the rest sit on the side lines and cheer.



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Mark is the captain of AC Milan and since he is the best of them all, they have named him El Shaarawy; and the players of Juventus always hope he'll come over to their side, deciding to be called Pirlo or Giovinco.

For a few weeks now, however, Mark has been neglecting his companions. The two soccer teams, black and white and red and black punctually land up on the turf on the outskirts of the city. But the captain is absent and Milan is regularly losing (three to zero, five to zero).

Marcel decided to call him home to help him stick his Ghanaian stamps and Maurice has a seedling that he is finding difficult to classify on his own in the herbarium but Mark shows up at neither place. And yet, between four and five, the hour they dedicate to football, the herbarium or the stamp collection; in short, recreation time, Mark is not even at home.

His companions continue to invite him and insist that he be punctual; but somehow he seems to absent himself. They look at their companion sideways, trying to find out what he is up to, trying to find out what's on his mind. Mark comes to school; Mark leaves school and returns home, but between four and five he seems to disappear from circulation; dissolves into thin air. "I saw him, I tell you."

"Where?"

"When?"

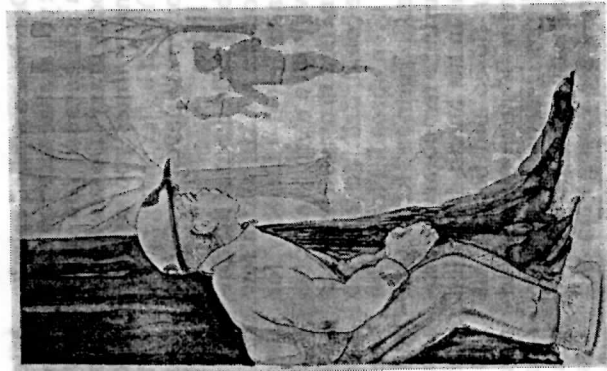
"Possibly!"

A barrage of questions and some pressing inquiries. And an answer follows: "He entered an unknown building, nine floors high. He took the elevator." A nine-storey tower block; so, here was a plan for each player on the football team, most

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interested in uncovering the mystery surrounding their captain, and the eleventh player would remain in the yard to keep guard.

The next day, at five minutes to four the ten players are on the spot. One per floor, taking advantage of a dead corner, on each landing, all five senses sharply alert, they position themselves in the shadows; Louie is left downstairs behind a tree in the courtyard.

They wait and wait; in an hour the elevator makes at least a dozen trips up and down and the nine boys shiver impatiently. At precisely six, they go down the stairs and reach Louie.

"Nothing!" says the first.

"Nothing," says the second and the seven others say "nothing," discouragement follows.

"And yet, I saw him come in," Louie assures them, "I saw him take the elevator."

The boys look at each other in amazement. Just then they hear footsteps in the foyer. "It's him." "For sure, it's him." He must have gone to the terrace."

"Right, he must have been on the terrace."

The next day, all ten crouch on the terrace floor. The wait this time is not long. At five o'clock sharp they hear the hum of the elevator and Mark comes out of the cabin, quiet and serene. Near the door of the terrace there is another door, a smaller door, almost invisible. Mark knocks on that door.

"May I come in?"

"Come in!" it's the voice of a lady from inside and Mark enters.

The ten boys, tiptoe to the door, sharpen their ears. Pushing one another to try to find out something. An involuntary nudge and the small door is flung open wide. They see a tiny room with a closet, best suited for a home, with a bed, a chest of draws, a couple of chairs and an armchair in tatters.

In the armchair sits an old lady whose appearance is familiar to the boys, but in that dim light they believe they might be mistaken. Her hair is white, her face and hands are pale. Two large eyes stand out in an absorbed face. In front of her, with his back to the door, Mark speaks loudly, on purpose but he meant nothing; but the old lady knows, her face looks beyond him to the door.

Louie is startled, so is Maurice and Marcel and all the others too. They look at each other in silence without believing their eyes because they recognized their old first-grade teacher, who, while Mark is silent, invites them to come in.

"Come in, come right in!"



The ten boys would have had the crazy idea, if only they could disappear, given the way they looked. But then, Louie entered bravely.

"Good evening, teacher."

"You too remembered your old teacher... Who are you? Let me think... you are Louie."

Maurice followed his companion. He also greeted her: "Good evening Ma'am."

The old lady immediately said, with a twinkle in her eye: "You're Maurice."

And the old teacher's greeting everyone by name, sent each one of them down memory lane. The ten names and the boys gathered around her armchair.

The old lady didn't seem surprised at the intrusion but Mark was a bit surprised and he even blushed a little. She continued to arrange the old plaster figurines of the Nativity scene on a small table leaning against the wall. Everything looked so colourful. The background was a papier-mâché

landscape with hills sloping down to the plain. There were houses, tufts of grass and a mirror to pretend a pond. In the centre, the little hut with the Child Jesus in the manger between Mary and Joseph and to warm him, was the breath of the ox and the ass. Here and there were shepherds with little lambs on their shoulders and shepherdesses with baskets of bread and fruit.

"And for so many years this crib was shut up in a box. Mark pulled it out and repainted the paper and the statues all chipped, with his markers. Mark is so good! Look how wonderful it looks. What a splendid sight! It's going to be a nice Christmas this year."

The boys were all fascinated by those bright colours. What a genius Mark is! They could still hear the voice of their teacher, bitterly reprimanding him, because he didn't know the volume of a sphere. It is important to know that the volume of a sphere is "pi to the power of three-fourths of a cube." But it is more important to slip away

between four and five to give up a football game, delay the herbarium and the stamp collection, and to close himself in this dark cubbyhole to paint the figurines and redo that drooping crib for his old first grade teacher.

That was an act that Mark would not get graded for in his school work; it was not part of his school duties, and would not merit a plus on his report card. And it was more difficult to pull off.

Marcel, Maurice and Julius, who received a ten for their conduct and an overall average of eight on their report cards, looked more uncomfortable than the others. They did not dare to look up. One at a time, they stepped back, as if they felt undeserving of the sweet aura that lingered on that evening. They greeted their old teacher happy holidays and kissed her weathered cheek before tiptoeing to the door; after smiling at Mark. They went out one after the other, silent and pensive. □



FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO

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by Michele Molineris

66. Don Bosco can't help it (1857)

Father Turchi tells us: Two years ago, a fellow seminarian of mine, a theology student, spent a few days with a fine gentleman in a little town about ten miles from Turin. On his return, he went to Don Bosco for confession. Afterward he came to me and said: "I must tell you something really funny. In that little town I went to confession to the pastor because I was ashamed to have to mention a certain sin to Don Bosco when I came back. Then, a few days ago, I went as usual to confession to Don Bosco. Afterward, he said to me, 'Look, I know well what you did.' (And he mentioned the sin.) I still can't get over it." My friend continued, "I have now learned to my own regret that when one slips up badly it's no use going to confession to anyone else. Don Bosco knows it anyway!" (EBM VII, 261-262)

Father Turchi was a pupil and later a teacher at the Oratory, where he said his first Mass on May 26, 1861. Years later, during Don Bosco's process of beatification, he gave very important written testimony to the Prefect of the Congregation of Rites concerning relations between Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi of Turin and Don Bosco.

67. Laces for shoes (1857)

Joseph Brosio gave us the following report in writing:

One day Don Bosco and I were

in the courtyard of an apartment building in Via Alfieri on a visit to a certain nobleman. Don Bosco was dressed in his best: a very old cassock and cloak and a hat that had lost all its nap. I also noticed that his shoes, shined but mended, had inked string for laces. "Father," I said, "when other priests go visiting, they wear shoes with silver buckles. Your shoelaces don't look good; you can't hide them because your cassock is rather short. Let me go and buy some decent ones!"

"Wait," Don Bosco said, rummaging in his pockets. "Let me give you the money. I must have some change with me." As he was about to hand me a coin, a beggar woman came up to us. Don Bosco immediately gave the coin to her. I then wanted to pay for the shoelaces myself, but Don Bosco wouldn't allow me to do so, and there was no way of getting him to consent to a purchase which he considered unnecessary. He went right on wearing those miserable shoelaces.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco always looked neat, and like St. Bernard he could rightfully boast: "*Paupertas mihi semper placuit, sordes nunquam!*" ["Poverty, yes! Dirt, never!"] (EBM V, 443)

68. A Devilish Infestation (1857)

It was in 1857 Don Bosco seemed to be troubled by the enemy of mankind who, naturally, could not look favourably upon his plans. "We noticed," Canon John Baptist Anfossi declared, "that Don Bosco, as a rule, was harassed by the devil whenever he was about to start some important work for the

greater glory of God. One morning when I asked Don Bosco how he had slept, he replied: "Not very well, because I was tormented by a hideous beast, something like a bear that tried to smother me in bed." This occurred repeatedly, and Don Bosco admitted quite frankly that these were diabolical vexations. Others who lived at the Oratory said the same thing, convinced by several indications that there was really something preternatural in these occurrences.

On the night that he finished the first constitutions of the Salesian Society – the result of much prayer, meditation and effort – the infernal enemy made his appearance as Don Bosco was writing the closing words "*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*" The table shook, overturning the inkwell and smearing the manuscript, which was suddenly wafted into the air, as by a gust of wind, and then fell in a scatter of sheets to the accompaniment of frightful screams. The papers were so blotted and illegible that Don Bosco had to start all over again. He himself revealed this incident to several people, including Father Evasius Rabagliati, a missionary (EBM V, 458-459).

69. Somnia somniabunt! (1857)

One day during that same year 1857, Don Bosco prayed fervently during Mass for enlightenment on a certain project. Afterward, in the sacristy, the altar boy kissed his hand and then whispered: "Do as you have planned. It will be alright!" Don Bosco was amazed. "But how do

you know? Who told you?" he asked him. The boy became uneasy and stammered evasively. Don Bosco did not insist. In the course of years, he had several such experiences. He and his boys were one in heart; their combined prayers worked wonders. (EBM V, 479)

70. Patience is the measure of sanctity (1857)

Don Bosco was very patient with his spiritual sons, especially the underprivileged. In 1857 he admitted a boy to the Oratory whose name I can't remember. The police had found him in a corner of Piazza Castello, huddled up and shivering. A few days later, Don Bosco got him a job with a good blacksmith in town and personally took him there. The boy did well for a couple of weeks, but then he became so unruly that the blacksmith fired him. With his customary patience, Don Bosco found him another job. Within a week, he had been fired again. Don Bosco continued to find jobs for him at various shops for some two years. It is no exaggeration to say that this boy made the rounds of all the shops in town, wearing out everybody's patience.

When his last employer dismissed him, the boy came back to the Oratory. It so happened that it was lunch time. Therefore, he went straight to the dining room and told Don Bosco to find him another job. "How about some lunch?" Don Bosco asked him. "I've already eaten," the boy answered. "Well then, let me finish and then we'll take care of it." "I can't wait. Come right away." Despite the boy's rude-

ness, Don Bosco replied calmly: "Don't you realize that you can't hold a job because you drive everybody crazy? Do you know how many times you've been fired? You'd better change your ways or you'll never be able to earn a living!"

The boy stalked out of the dining room in a huff, and a few days later left the Oratory for good without a word to anyone. He then tried to make a living as best he could, drifting from job to job, even abroad. Finally, he returned to Turin and fell ill. One day, during a temporary improvement in his health, he called on Don Bosco and begged his pardon for all the trouble he had caused him. Delighted to see him after so many years, Don Bosco comforted the young man and assured him that he still cared for him and that he had always prayed for him. He then added: "Remember that the Oratory is still your home. If you wish to return when you feel better, Don Bosco is always your friend. All he seeks is the salvation of your soul!" The young man was greatly moved at Don Bosco's words and tearfully thanked him, saying: "Now I have to go back to the hospital. If God willing, I recover, I'll return to make up for all my misdoings." Don Bosco blessed him. It was the last blessing that the young man received from Don Bosco; he died a few weeks later, resigned and repentant. (EBM V, 491-492)

73. Don Bosco in the prisons of Rome (1858)

In Rome, in 1858, Don Bosco was invited by the Pope to preach to the prisoners of San

Michele. Don Bosco humbly recorded the details of this retreat in a few words, but the prison chaplain was much more eloquent. He had attentively watched those poor women listening intently to Don Bosco with tears in their eyes and compunction in their hearts. He had been impressed by the visible fervour of Don Bosco and his zeal for souls. By the second day, many of these women had asked Don Bosco to hear their confessions and free them of the pangs of remorse, and during the succeeding days all approached his confessional with perfect disposition of soul.

One morning Don Bosco preached on mortal sin. Words cannot describe the scene. After enumerating God's unceasing acts of generosity and mercy toward His creatures and the insults with which ungrateful Christians daily repay Him, he asked his listeners with vivid emotion, almost sobbing: "Are we then to continue offending this good God?"

A deep murmur ran through the congregation: "No, no." Turning to the crucifix, Don Bosco went on: "Lord, You have heard them. Help them to persevere. They want to love You. They did not know what they were doing when they offended You."

The chaplain enthusiastically told Nicholas Cardinal Clarelli Paracciani, the president of that penal institution, of the good results of Don Bosco's preaching. In turn the cardinal mentioned it to the Pope, thanking him for having provided so well for the spiritual needs of the women prisoners (EBM, V, 572). □

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SALESIAN SAINTS

VINCENT CIMAATTI 1879 - 1965 JAPAN'S 'DON BOSCO'

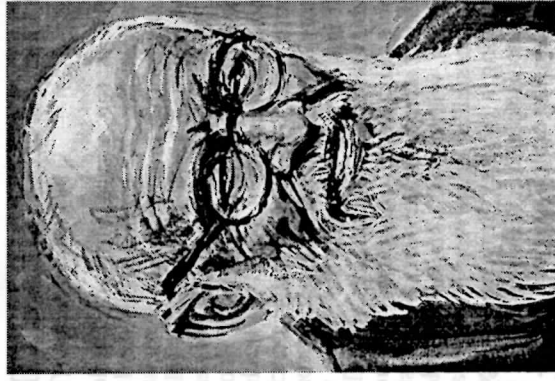
In the beginning there was a Christian mother, Rosa Pasi who married Giacomo Cimaatti on November 10, 1859.

In May 1882, Don Bosco came to Faenza, (his Salesians had reached there a year earlier and had opened an Oratory that was immediately flooded with a crowd of youngsters). When Don Bosco had finished, he said that he wanted to bless everyone on behalf of the Madonna. Rosa immediately raised her son Vincent and said to him: "Look at Don Bosco! Look at Don Bosco!"

Of the six children she had borne, she was left with three: Santina aged 19, Louis aged 15 and Vincent aged 3. She would continue to feed them and bring them up working from dawn to dusk at a loom that she had set up in her home. Vincent went to the Salesian house carried there on the shoulders of his brother Louis. The Oratory became his second home. The Salesians opened a school in Faenza and for seven years Vincent attended it uninterruptedly. However, he did not bury himself in his books. He liked comedy, jokes, laughter and making music. He put together a complex group of "ocarinas" - a little terracotta instrument - with ten cheerful boys like him who learned

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to blow happy marches and catchy tunes all written by "maestro Vincent Cimaatti."

Six children given to the Lord

Aged 16. One needs to think seriously about life. What would Vincent do? Vincent wanted to be a Salesian but he didn't dare ask his mother. It was she who sensed this and spoke to him with her huge mountain-like faith: "If the Lord calls you, I'm happy to give you to him."

On October 14, 1896, after a year's novitiate, Vincent becomes a Salesian. On March 18, 1905, that great Salesian missionary Mons. Cagliero ordained him a priest. In the nine years that followed, Vincent Cimaatti wasted no time: he graduated in the natural sciences and then went on to graduate in philosophy-pedagogy and later he graduated in music composition at the Conservatory in Parma. Like all Salesians at that time, he could not

afford the luxury of dedicating himself only to his studies. While studying and giving exams, he taught Italian, Latin, Physics, Chemistry, science and pedagogy to young clerics in the Salesian house at Valsalice, on the hill of Turin.

New thoughts: Japan

The Pope asks the Salesians to open a mission in the provinces of Miyazaki and Oita: there are one and a half million Japanese there but just 300 Christians. The Superior General responds by asking the Vatican for a year to prepare his people. He then calls Father Cimatti for a private and secret meeting.

February 1926. The first nine Salesian missionaries headed by Father Cimatti arrive in Miyazaki. "If you want to take care of poor boys you must come to Tokyo," the Franciscans told Father Cimatti. He went there to explore the prospects. The capital of Japan was, already in those years, one of the largest and most chaotic cities in the world. There were endless expanses of houses, gigantic industrial buildings that pushed toward the Pacific coast. Side by side with the wealth were dark swades of misery. "The Mikawagina neighbourhood is extremely poor," notes Father Cimatti. "It is considered the poorest part of the city. There are thousands of kids on the streets. We will go there."

They arrived there at the end of January 1933. "Don Bosco went about the streets of Turin looking for boys," wrote Father Cimatti. "Here the boys are looking for the Salesians." It doesn't seem fair that they don't have a nice playground to run around. It is

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hard to believe that we were able to start, what we called an oratory, so easily."

On March 19, 1939, Father Cimatti witnessed the happiest day of his life: standing next to the bishop he stretched out his hands over the head of a young Japanese. He was the first Salesian priest born on Japanese soil. That priest recalled: "During the consecration function I saw him weep with emotion. At the end he came and knelt before me and asked for my blessing."

The Years of the War

But already in 1939 there is talk of war all over the world. In 1941 Japan entered the terrible Second World War. Forty young Salesians were called to arms.

Tragic news broke his heart: Father Cimatti had accepted them as boys from their families and followed them as children. The news of their deaths (there would be ten by the end of the war) left him totally distraught.

1949. Father Cimatti turned 70 and succeeded after much struggle to turn the general direction of the Japanese Salesian works over to another person. He lived the remaining years of his life on the outskirts of Tokyo among clerics preparing for the priesthood: a gardener, teacher and confessor for a few years and even a rector. Then gradually fading away during the last few years of his life: a smile on his lips, the Rosary beads in his hands, the Lord came to pick him up on October 6, 1965.

The Church recognized that Father Cimatti practiced Christian virtue to a heroic degree and declared him "venerable" in 1991. □

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MARY: THE ALPHA AND OMEGA OF TIME

Maria Ko Ha Fong, FMA

Dad, what was God doing before he created the world?" With this simple but clever question, as is often the case with children, little Maria Mazzarello, without realizing it, entered into the mysterious realm of curious philosophers, theologians and thinkers of all types.

The "beginning" and the "fulfilment," the "protology" and the "eschatology," the Alpha and the Omega of history: these are not questions of abstract speculation or idle curiosity. They arise from the depths of the human person.

God, in his dialogue with humankind fulfills those desires that he has put into the heart of the creature made in his own image. In the first book of the Bible - Genesis - in mythical-wisdom language he reveals to man something that was "in the beginning" and in the last book - the Apocalypse - in apocalyptic-prophetic style God alludes to the "end of times." He wanted, above all to give us the interpretative key to these two extremities that have come to form "salvation history."

However alongside Jesus Christ, there is a mysterious, discreet and silent presence: a woman.

From Genesis to Apocalypse

In the account of Genesis, after the sin of man, God pronounces judgment on the serpent and at the same time announces the good news: "I will put enmity between you and the woman; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel" (Gn. 3, 15). In the Apocalypse, the story is presented symbolically as a fierce struggle. On the one hand, there is a woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars around her head (Ap. 12,1-2); on the other hand there appears the dragon-destroyer trying to devour the newborn child but who in the end is defeated.

Between the beginning and the end, the story unfolds with a complex and eventful plot, as a continuous struggle between the kingdom of God and the adverse forces. However, from the beginning, the story is marked by

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the promise of salvation. Just as at the moment of the fall of man, together with the punishment, good news resounds. And in the end the promise will be fulfilled and God's victory is assured. But who is this woman? Ecclesial tradition sees in these pages of Genesis and Apocalypse the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus and mother of the Church. That is why *Lumen Gentium* contemplates on Mary "already prophetically foreshadowed in that promise made to our fallen first parents, the victory over the serpent" (n. 55). For St. John Paul II it is Mary who "from the first chapters of Genesis to the Apocalypse, accompanies the revelation of God's saving plan for humanity" (*Redemptoris mater* 47).

The Beginning and Fulfilment

As the woman of the beginning, Mary is a sign of hope, the bearer of the saving promise. As the woman of the fulfilment, she is the sign of God's definitive victory over Satan, of good over evil, of light over darkness, of love over hate, of hope over boredom, of joy over sadness of life over death.

From the dawn that precedes the sunrise, to the woman clothed with the sun, from the "in the beginning" of creation to the "new heavens and the new earth" of the final fulfilment, the direction of the story is clearly marked and infused with hope. The Church, journeying like a pilgrim through this history of difficulties and trials, looks to Mary who shines before her "as a sign of sure hope and consolation" (LG 68). Mary guarantees that God is faithful and keeps his

word. "From the beginning to the end she announces 'From the beginning I foretell the outcome; my plan will stand, and whatever I please I will accomplish'" (Is 46, 10).

The Immaculate and the one Assumed into Heaven

As the woman of Genesis and the woman of the Apocalypse she is not only designated with the salvific plan of God, but also with the vocation of every human being on his/her journey to God. The two realities of the life of Mary - defined by dogmas of faith - the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption to heaven - clarify this plan.

In Mary most holy, conceived without sin, shines the original beauty of the human person conceived and willed by God from the beginning. What Adam and Eve should have accomplished now shines resplendently in Mary. In Mary, assumed into heaven, we see the first fruits and the anticipation of humanity saved from death and perfectly configured with the resurrection of Christ. Mary reminds us of what man would have been like if he had been faithful to God, and she prophesizes what s/he can achieve and where he can arrive if he agrees to walk in the footsteps of Christ.

If you should ask God: "What was your first dream of us, how had you thought of us - 'in the beginning' before the creation of the world?" Perhaps he would have replied: "Look at Mary." And if you should ask him: "What would you want us to become at the end of time?" His answer could still be: "Look at Mary." □

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NEWSBITS

Vatican City

Hidden among the paving stones of St. Peter's Square there is a simple clock and calendar. All you need is a sunny day.

The 83-foot stone obelisk in the middle of the square acts as a sundial that can accurately indicate midday and the two solstices thanks to a granite meridian and marble markers embedded in the square.

Pope Benedict XVI proudly pointed out the hidden timepiece during an Angelus address he gave on the winter solstice a few years ago.

"The great obelisk casts its shadow in a line that runs along the paving stones toward the fountain beneath this window and in these days, the shadow is at its longest of the year," he told pilgrims from the window of his library.

In fact, at noon on Dec. 21, the obelisk's shadow falls on the marble disk furthest from the obelisk's base, while at noon on June 21 - the summer solstice - the tip of the shadow will fall just a few yards from the obelisk. In between are five other disks marking when the sun enters into which sign of the zodiac.

A long, thin granite strip running from the obelisk toward the pope's window and through one of the fountains acts as the meridian: a line that indicates when the sun has reached true or solar noon and is at its highest point in the sky.

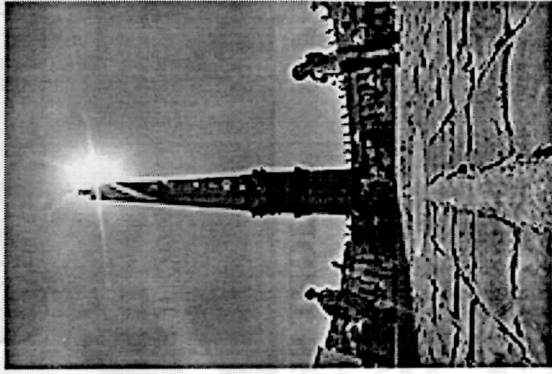
The pope, in his solstice soliloquy, reminded people that the church has always been keenly interested in astronomy to help guide and establish fundamental liturgical days and the times of prayer such as the Angelus, which is recited in the morning, at noon and in

the evening. While sunrise and sunset are easy to figure out, sundials could accurately tell midday, he said.

Even when early mechanical clocks were introduced, they were a luxury item for a few and not always accurate, so using the sun to mark true noon was an important backup.

In the 18th-century, Pope Clement XI decided to create an official reference point for telling time in Rome. He commissioned astronomer Francesco Bianchini to build a meridian inside Michelangelo's Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels and Martyrs.

The basilica's elaborate meridian was meant to do much more than mark midday; it was built to make highly accurate celestial observations and solve complex astronomical problems, said a U.S.



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historian of science.

John Heilbron, emeritus professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote "The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories," said the basilica's meridian was also used "to establish a very good value for the length of the year."

Pope Clement wanted to verify the accuracy of the Gregorian reform of the calendar and its calculation of Easter, which had still not been widely accepted among the Protestant churches at the time.

The real problem for the church was "how to compute the moons which are essential for the determination of Easter," said Jesuit Father Juan Casanovas, a solar astronomer and historian of astronomy.

The Council of Nicea tackled the problem in 325 and interpreted the Mosaic rule by defining Easter to be observed on the Sunday that followed the first full moon after the vernal equinox on March 21.

However, there were still complicated tables involved in calculating Easter because the Julian calendar used at the time was no longer in sync with the seasons.

The Gregorian reform got rid of 10 days to bring the vernal equinox back to the traditional date of March 21, Father Casanovas told CNS.

However, the Orthodox Church did not accept the pope's authority nor his calendar.

While Pope Gregory XIII's reform of the calendar in 1582 was not perfect, it is still easy, practical and almost universally accepted in civil society today, Father Casanovas said.

Calendars will never be perfect because "a calendar deals with

whole days, not fragments of hours, seconds and thousands of a second so you have to be ready to add one day or remove a day from the calendar now and then," he said.

Having a leap year has been successful but "it's not enough. There is still a little error and after centuries it accumulates," he said. The calendar is expected to gain a day by the year 4500.

There have been many proposals to get the world synced to one perpetual calendar, but perfection and accuracy would come at a price.

For example, a seven-day week doesn't work well mathematically, the astronomer said, because "if you divide the number of days in a year by seven, there is one day left and with a leap year there are two days left."

But no one wants to meddle with the seven-day week, he said.

The Hebrew, Muslim and Gregorian calendars - even though they are radically different - are all based on a seven-day week as reflected in Genesis' account of the number of days of creation. "It's a sacred number," he said.

Heilbron said attempts to further reform the calendar by making it more rational are not only unsuccessful, some proposals have been downright "nuts."

The most extreme being the French revolutionary calendar, which had three 10-day weeks in a month, 100 minutes in an hour and 10 hours in a day, he said.

"In calendars, precision and perfection should not trump practicality," he said.

The imperfect marking of time "is just too deeply engrained in our social life," he said. □

IN A CHURCH MOM

Picture Favour

Dining out one evening, I noticed six teenagers boisterously celebrating some event at a nearby table. Toward the end of their meal, one of them got up and produced a camera.

"Hey, wait a minute," one of her companions said. "You have to be in the picture too."

When I approached and asked if I could help, the girl who owned the camera was delighted. I snapped a picture of the group and then, being unfamiliar with the camera, I asked her, "Do you want me to take another in case that one doesn't come out?"

"Oh no, that's okay," she chirped innocently. "I always get double prints."

Putting it Bluntly

An English master, confronted with what to put on a boy's report when he knew the child was cheating but couldn't prove it, finally wrote down: "Forging his way steadily ahead!"

Unenviable Solution

On a ferry I boarded in the Sudan, scores of people stumbled over the squatting form of a small boy, who persisted in sitting at the bottom, despite oaths and kicks. I asked the captain to move the boy somewhere to save him from being hurt. "Very good, your excellency," he replied, "but it is only fair to warn you that if the boy gets up, the boat will sink."

In Hindsight

In a contest in Surrey for road safety slogans, one youngster came up

with this suggestion: He looked, she didn't. He is, she isn't.

Feverish Pitch

An aspiring vocalist had just completed a lesson. "Professor," she asked, "do you think I shall ever be able to do anything with my voice?" "Well," replied her instructor, "it might come in handy in case of fire."

Advance Notice

A kindergarten teacher smiled pleasantly at the gentleman opposite in the bus. He did not respond. Realizing her error, she said aloud, "Oh, please excuse me. I mistook you for the father of my children." She got out at the next corner.

Corresponding Love

A young lad we know is still trying to decipher the following letter from his current girl friend: "Dear John, I hope you are not still angry. I want to explain that I was really joking when I told you I didn't mean what I said about reconsidering my decision not to change my mind. Please believe me, I really mean this. Love, Grace."

Manual Dexterity

Wife to husband about to hang picture: "You'll find the hammer in the drawer, the nails in the cupboard and the bandage in the medicine cabinet."

Swift Thrift

One man to another: "It's not that I spend more than I earn, it's just that I spend it quicker than I earn it. □

WHAT GIFT DO WE BRING?

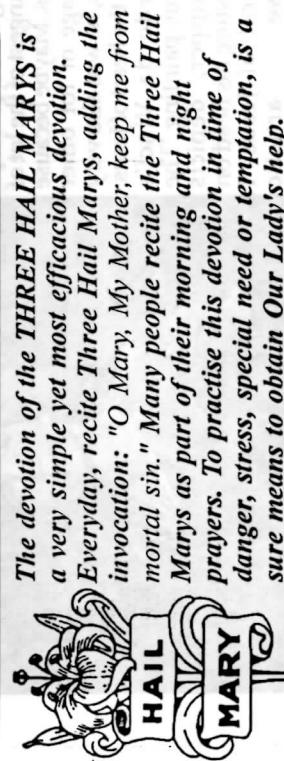
John M. Cunningham, OP

At the end of the fourth century, a homilies and feasts in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary began to appear more and more. One of those who made an important contribution to this development of devotion to the Mother of God was St. Proclus of Constantinople and he ranks among the best preachers of the Greek Church in the fifth century. In 429 he preached a famous sermon in which he praised the Virgin Mary as Mother of God. Indeed, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (509) teachers 'Mary is truly Mother of God since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself.'

In another of his homilies Proclus addresses the Mother of God 'O fruitful Virgin, who conceived from heaven! O Mother, who bore the salvation of all mankind! O womb in which the decree of our liberation was composed! With these words he reminds us that God the Son became man 'for men and for our salvation.'

To understand the words of this great preacher, it is important to remember that it is not birth from the Virgin Mary that makes Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is God the Son from Eternity. In a Christmas sermon St Proclus observed that at the birth of Jesus Christ 'all creation brings gifts to the Child - the earth offers a crib - the cities offer Bethlehem, - the shepherds offer a hymn of praise, - the East offers a star, - the Magi offer their gifts. 'What gift do we bring?' □

THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



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

I would like to share this powerful testimony to my daily devotion of the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys in honour of the Power, Wisdom and Loving Mercy of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A couple of months ago, I was going for my usual early morning walk and decided to take my grandson who was 16 month-old. I put him in the stroller

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and ensured that he was strapped well. I was about to walk down the driveway when I got distracted by my wife who was seeking assistance to hold down a sheet of plywood. I left the stroller immediately to help her, when suddenly I heard screams from my wife and daughter to see the stroller run away down the drive and across the road to the other side ending up on the footpath. I ran down the driveway and was relieved to see my Grandson was safe and was oblivious to what happened. I am confident that Mary was there to protect my Grandson, this could have been quite tragic if it wasn't her intercession.

Danny Ross, Perth WA

I regularly pray the 3 Hail Mary's. I have been praying this for the protection of my parents. They were miraculously saved from major injuries in an accident, especially my mother who fell but her head was protected. I thank the Queen of Heaven for protecting my Parents.

Elvis Pink, Mumbai

I am sincerely grateful to Jesus Christ and Mother Mary through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys, my son got the excellent result (91.4%) in S.S.C Examination. Thanks to Mother Mary Help of Christians.

Sylvester Fonseca

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I Lou Morris, hereby declare that by the grace of Almighty God, I had passed successfully in Pre-degree exam even though the exam was tough.

Lou Morris, Kerala

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Holy Trinity, Mother Mary, St. Joseph, St. Anthony, thank you for the great miracle you worked in our family. A relative was to get married. From the very beginning the boy's family showed utmost hurry to complete the marriage formalities. They were not interested in seeing their house nor finding out any details about the girl, nor did they demand anything. Without any opposition they complied to all suggestions and fulfilled them in a jiffy. Their sole aim and purpose was to celebrate the marriage on the fixed date. This made us suspicious. We prayed asking the Lord to show us the way. And the miracle took place, we came to know that the boy has spinal complications which prevent him from standing, walking or sitting for a long time. The girl was saved from the eternal abyss of despair and tribulation.

A Devotee

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

DECEMBER 2020

For a Life of Prayer

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MARY WAS THERE

It was July 31, 2017. I had finished my Rosary, had dinner and was about to go to the kitchen, but delayed to watch the TV serial. Suddenly, the whole hall shook, windows rattled and before I could get my wits about me, there was a loud bang. Trembling with fear I stood at the kitchen door and saw that the kitchen ceiling had come crashing down along with debris all over. Had I been in the kitchen at that moment I could have been killed on the spot. Not only that, surprisingly the mixer-grinder and the fridge I had bought only a day earlier were intact without a scratch. Besides my life even that was taken care of by our Loving Mother. My neighbours came running up and were glad and surprised to see that I was safe and alive. Thank you Lord Jesus and Mother Mary.

Maria D'Souza, Mumbai
Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay. The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors. Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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