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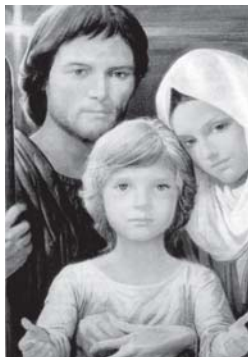
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*Grant that we may
imitate the Holy Family
in practicing the virtues
of family life
and in the bonds
of charity,
and so, in the joy
of your house,
delight one day in
eternal rewards.*

*From the Opening Prayer of the
Solemnity of the Holy Family*

From The Editor's Desk

LOVE IS AN ACT OF FAITH

Paulo Coelho tells this story from Greek mythology: "Once upon a time, there was a beautiful princess named Psyche. She was admired by everyone, but no one ever dared to propose her for marriage.

Desperate, the king consulted god Apollo, who said that Psyche should be left alone, in a mourning dress, at the top of a mountain. Before daybreak, a serpent would come to her and marry her.

The king obeyed, and throughout the night the princess waited, terrified and freezing, for the arrival of her husband. She ended up falling asleep.

As she awoke, she was in a beautiful palace, transformed into a queen.

Every night her husband would come to her and they would make love. But he had just one condition: Psyche could have anything she desired, but she should trust him completely and never see his face.

Psyche lived happily for a very long time as she had comfort, affection, joy and she was in love with the man who came to her every night.

Once in a while, however she was afraid of being married to a horrible serpent. One night, while her husband was asleep, she illuminated the room with a lantern and found Eros, a man of incredible beauty, beside her.

The light woke him up and he found out that the woman he loved wasn't able to fulfil his only desire, and disappeared."

Every time I read this story, I ask myself: Will I never be able to discover the face of love? It has taken me many years to understand that love is an act of faith in another person, and her face shall stay covered in mystery. Each moment shall be lived and enjoyed, but whenever we try to understand it, the magic disappears.

After I accepted this idea I allowed myself to be guided by a strange language, the language of "signs." All around me there are signs, as the great Jesuit poet exclaimed: "The world is ablaze with the glory of God." I know the world is talking to me, and I need to listen to it, and if I do that, I will always be guided toward what there is of the most intense, passionate and beautiful.

Of course, it isn't easy, and sometimes I feel like Psyche at the cliff, cold and terrified. Anything that is unfamiliar is awkward, to say the least, but I'm learning that we have a God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves and if I can only stop and listen to his breath in the breeze I might feel not nervous but reassured that he gently leads me and holds me close. (Is 40:11) So if I am able to overcome that night and surrender to mystery and to the faith in life, I always end up waking up in a palace. All I need is to trust in love, even running the risk of erring. It is all about trusting that the Lord wants what's best for us, our welfare in every sphere. Don't try him, trust him!

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

DEALING WITH IN-LAWS

Jeanette Brimmer

We hear many jokes about mothers-in-law and their faults and foibles and once in a while their positive points but friction or good relations can also exist between daughters-in-law, brothers-in-law and fathers-in-law as well. Some mothers-in-law can be overbearing and manipulative but many can also be excellent grandmothers and can get along very well with their in-laws. Some fathers-in-law can be grumpy and may ignore their grandchildren while others are easy going and have fun with their children's offspring. Likewise some daughters-in-law and sons-in-law can be disrespectful and demanding while others can be congenial and helpful to their spouses' parents. Genetics, family history, cultures and complex psychological dynamics all influence how extended families get along with each.



In times of strife, when anxiety is high, especially around holidays, friction can often exist

among members of the family. For instance, a friend who is a divorce lawyer confided to us that his busiest time occurs around the Christmas holidays. Unfortunately when tragedy strikes a family, especially around a holiday season, undue stress can almost tear its members apart. Take for instance my close friend Anna.

Two years ago Anna confided in me what happened after her son's suicide. There had been a great deal of tension between her son, Brad, and his wife and their son became very depressed. Anna and her husband did everything they could to help besides storming heaven with prayers. They encouraged him to take the antidepressants his doctor had prescribed for him, they were supportive when he sought counseling and listened to his attempts to express how he felt. They even invited him to return home for several weeks so that he would have more time to think about some solutions to his difficulties and marital problems. Since Brad had a preteen and teenager we felt that getting away would be a good idea. Then shortly after, he had moved into an apartment and his wife refused to have him back; he killed himself.

After his suicide Brad's wife took her anger out on her in-laws and sent them horrible e-mails saying very unkind things about

their son. To make things almost unbearable for the grieving parents their oldest son and his wife abandoned them while they eased their own grief by seeking counseling. Thankfully their daughter and her husband and their remaining son and his wife were very supportive.

Anna's family is reconciled now but will never forget the anguish they went through while trying to deal with their grief.

Many people I have met have in-laws who are kind and helpful and some who are sometimes unkind and even disrespectful. Whether they be sons or daughters-in-law or mother or fathers-in-law they each have to learn to deal with new members of the family and adjust to situations that can demand tolerance and well-honed people skills.

My sister's daughter-in-law is Persian and she highly values family closeness. When she and my sister's son visit she treats the family to delightful Persian dishes and entertains her in-laws with true tales including how her parents and her sisters escaped from Iran during a time when minorities were persecuted. Her children who are still in their teens are accomplished violinists who spend many hours practicing instead of watching TV or being glued to video games or other electronic gadgets. My sister's family is certainly an example of how an extended family can live in harmony with one another. A

friend of mine is estranged from her daughter because her daughter's husband is very controlling and does not like her visiting with family or friends. Because of this situation, Sylvia prays for her daughter often but it has been several years now and nothing has changed. Yet she gets along well with her other in-laws and they have fun get-togethers at Christmas, Easter and other family get-together events.



When I first met my father-in-law, he was very different from anyone I had ever met. Herm was outspoken and the opposite of my dad who was well spoken, rather shy and a gentleman in every sense of the world. Herman had been brought up on a farm and our family lived in Toronto and attended concerts and other cultural events. But as I began to know my father-in-law I learned how kind he was to others. For instance he visited many elderly people and he was a very good grandpa to our children. He may have been rough around the edges but he gave up smoking and drinking shortly after his wife left him and never had a smoke or drink since then. That took a great deal of courage. When he died of

cancer he was stoic and never complained and we will always think fondly of him.

A young couple said that things did not always go well around the holidays. The wife's in-laws expected them to come to their home to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter and were hurt when their daughter-in-law wanted to spend time with her parents who lived 300 miles away. The family finally worked out a solution. Their son and his wife would have their Christmas a week ahead at his home and spend Christmas with his wife's family on Christmas day. They did the same for Thanksgiving and Easter. Then everyone was happy.

Tina B. Tessina, a psycho-therapist knows how difficult it is for a newly married couple to adjust to their in-laws. She offers suggestions to couples to ease them through the transition successfully. She suggests that couples should try to get to know their in-laws by learning about their interests and opinions on various subjects. Being polite to their in-laws and not taking offense easily can help them blend in with their new family. As well, learning about their in-law's family customs and what subjects they would enjoy talking about can enable them to feel more comfortable at family outings and holiday celebrations. Of course a sense of humour can make all situations bearable.

Mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law would be wise to try to



get along with their children's spo-uses even if they find it difficult to understand their family backgrounds and different beliefs and points of view. My daughter-in-law was really shy when she met my husband and me before she married my son. I was puzzled because she always wore socks when she came to visit. My son finally explained that she had a tiny tattooed rose on her ankle and she was afraid we would disapprove.

"Of course we don't!" we assured her and from then on she became much more relaxed with us. In fact we tease her about tarts she made. That pastry was so hard we kidded her about donating them to the junior hockey team in our town to be used as hockey pucks. She teases me about my untidiness and kids with my husband about his ability to lose things including his glasses and keys. We laugh so hard sometimes that our sides hurt.

She and my son help us with household chores which require strength since I have arthritis in my shoulders and spine and my husband has trouble walking without a cane. They bring their

two boys over to visit quite often and we always enjoy each other's company. I mentioned before how we tease each other with anyone taking offense and their help over the years has been a Godsend.

Mothers and fathers-in-law have to resist the temptation to give advice when it hasn't been solicited. Praising and encouraging their in-laws enables them to feel they are really part of the family and are valued. Our son-in-law takes professional photos and since he specializes in environmental science he has framed many of his photos of exotic, lovely colored mushrooms, other wild plants and sea creatures that he and my daughter have spotted during their travels. I have suggested that he use some of his photos to make note cards and my daughter agrees.



God wants us to have peace in families and having good relationships with in-laws often requires a delicate balance. A mother-in-law admitted that although she was intelligent she was also a know-it-all. When her son and his spouse were considering separating she went to their home with a long list of things to do to make their

marriage work. It made things worse and now when she is tempted to give advice she asks God to guide them and realizes that she no longer has control.

If a son-in-law or daughter-in-law is disrespectful or says hurtful remarks regarding our grand-parenting skills it's wise to not try to defend ourselves but give our hurtful feelings to God and try not to fret about the way we have been treated. One of my daughters-in-law once said that I hardly did anything for my grandchildren or for them but my journal contradicted her words. I had helped them move, babysat their children more than she realized, came to help when my son was very ill and always sent them birthday cards which I still do. But if I argued with her I would only be making the situation worse.

If each one of us tries our best to be kind and tolerant to people who enter our family structure, then holidays will be more enjoyable, relationships will be more rewarding and friction will be minimal. And when arguments and problems occur we always have Jesus who will listen to our heartaches and deal with situations over which we have no control. But most of all we must love ourselves before we can really love others including in-laws. As writer Eda Leshan states, "When we truly care for ourselves, it becomes possible to care far more profoundly about other people. The more alert and sensitive we are to our own needs, the more loving and generous we can be toward others." And that, of course includes our in-laws!□

"EH, DON'T JUDGE ME!"

Melaine D'Souza

*We're all young - but wow, can we just appreciate how far we've come?
Next stop: Kindergarten 2017.*

Yes, we never stop growing, never tire of learning. Each year that passes by, you probably believe you will have become a hundred percent more self-actualized than the year before. Phew! If only that were completely true - life would be boring!

Speaking of learning, I'd love to share with you something that 2016 taught me about myself. And I am sure that if you think harder, you'll remember something new you learnt about yourself - be it a positive character trait, something you could improve on, something that is characteristically *you*.

Judgement: I learnt that I could be less judgmental. Shocking, knowing that I always try my best to put my father's words into practice - "*Give others the benefit of doubt*". Yet from time to time, I'd find myself quick to judge, and thereafter, quick to anger. From something a friend said, to the way a co-worker dressed, to the output of a fellow classmate, I

found myself always second-guessing the actions of others.

What did I learn in the process? I'll urge you to turn to the start of 1 Cor. 4 - whether you have a Bible or a computer or your smartphone nearby. How lovely if we could try to adopt Paul's attitude here: He couldn't care less for the judgement of a human court - but he tells his audience plainly, "*It is the Lord who judges me*". This doesn't mean we take on an anarchist avatar but it just advocates the fact that there is ultimately a stronger, higher Power that takes our actions into account. It reminds me all the more that we are human and it is not our place to judge when we are living with mercy - again, another lesson from last year - the Year of Mercy.

As 2016 flit by and I found myself increasingly more conscious of my quick-and-easy judgemental behaviour, I expressed the same to friends who had different things to say. Some would say, "Yep, that you are,

Mel", while others would say, "Nah, people need to be shown their place" or "No you're alright - I thought that was stupid of them too." Eventually I knew I had to stop looking for answers in a human court and soon enough I found my critically thinking twin in *Nathanael*, a disciple of Jesus (*John 1:45-51*).

When Apostle Philip called Nathanael to see Jesus of Nazareth for the first time, he immediately commented, "From Nazareth? What good can come from that place?" Of course, once he met Jesus, he didn't think that way for too long. No doubt that at that point in time, Nathanael was right to think of Nazareth as a back-of-beyond place. But what I'd love to appreciate is that he didn't let his prejudice of Nazareth interfere with his meeting with Jesus!

I cringe to think that I may have missed out similar excellent opportunities by my sheer attitude of skepticism. A job opportunity in a city we haven't heard great things about, a mutual friend we've seen despicable Facebook pictures of - these instances all show us that skepticism and *improper judgement* can be a dangerous thing simply with how we let them populate ideas in our head without trying them out. After all our enemies aren't just people, but **attitudes** as well.

But, wait a second. **Right judgement** is a gift of the Holy Spirit - for us to use.

Like some of us, I am unfortunately guilty of getting into Facebook disagreements on



sensitive topics - and I am getting better at ignoring or leaving the conversation early. The same could apply for important decisions you make at school or college for group projects or in the workplace. Let's think of it as us giving ourselves, not others, a second chance. A second chance at giving ourselves as well as the time to grow, think and learn from mistakes.

And then we can walk away with the gift of right, slower and more meaningful judgement - where we don't let our own and others' opinions deter us from discovering what God has to offer, and to eventually see, what love can do. ☐

Have a good year!



BRONISLAW MARKIEWICZ 1842 - 1912

PRIEST, BLESSED

Bronislaw Markiewicz was born on July 13, 1842 in Pruchnik in Poland, which is today in the Latin archdiocese of Przemyśl. He was the sixth of eleven children of John Markiewicz, mayor of the city and Marianna Gryziecka. In the confines of his family he received a solid religious formation. However, by the time he was in high school in Przemyśl, his faith was shaken in part due to the anti-religious atmosphere that prevailed in the school. He managed to overcome this trial soon enough and regained his serenity and inner peace.

After earning his high school diploma the young Bronislaw entered the Major Seminary of Przemyśl in 1863 feeling called by God to the priesthood. Having completed his regular course of studies he was ordained a priest on September 15, 1867. After six years of pastoral work in the Parish of Harta and the Cathedral of Przemyśl, he wanted to further equip himself to be able to work with young



people. He studied pedagogy, philosophy and history for two more years at the Universities of Lviv and Krakow. In 1875 he was appointed Parish Priest at Gaé and then in 1877 he moved to Blazowa. In 1882 he was appointed to teach Pastoral Theology at the Major Seminary of Przemyśl. Feeling called to the religious life in November of 1885 he left for Italy and joined the Salesians. He had the joy of meeting Don Bosco and it was into his hands that he made his religious vows on March 25, 1887. As a Salesian he was assigned by the superiors to various positions where he served with dedication and zeal. Due to his spirit of austerity and the changes in the climate, in 1889 Bronislaw took seriously ill with tuberculosis and was even close to death. He recovered though from his illness while

remaining all the time in Italy until March 23 1892. With the permission of his superiors he returned to Poland where he assumed the position of a Parish Priest at Miejsce Piastowe in the diocese of his origin, Przemyśl.

Besides his regular parish ministry, Bronislaw Markiewicz devoted himself, in the spirit of Don Bosco to the formation of poor and orphaned youngsters. He opened an institute for them at Miejsce Piastowe where he offered them material and spiritual support. He prepared them for life by opening professional trade schools. In 1897 he decided to found two religious congregations inspired by the spirituality of Don Bosco, adapting his rules to the specific nature of his charism. He was welcomed back among the clergy of the diocese of Przemyśl and continued his activity as Parish Priest and director of the institute to which he gave the programme of *Work and Temperance* (1898). He sought the approval of his congregation under the protection of St Michael the Archangel, with male and female branches. The approval came only a few years after his death: in 1921 to the Congregation of St Michael the Archangel (Michaelites) and in 1928, the Congregation of the Sisters of St Michael the Archangel (Michaelites).

Father Bronislaw always went ahead with the approval of his bishop, Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, as the director of youngsters, orphans and the abandoned,

using the help of his collaborators who he himself prepared. He had already begun training hundreds of boys in Miejsce Piastowe. Eager to do much for them, in August 1903 Father Markiewicz opened a new house in Pawlikowice near Krakow where more than 400 boys could find a home and the possibility for professional training as well as spiritual direction.

His absolute dedication to youngsters, his heroic self-denial took its toll of Father Markiewicz undermining his health which was already affected after his sickness in Italy. All this hastened the end of his earthly pilgrimage which took place on January 29, 1912.

Blessed Bronislaw Markiewicz was distinguished by his great love for God and his neighbour, especially in the poor, the neglected, the orphaned and the abandoned to whom he gave himself entirely. He was always eager to accommodate as many youngsters as he could in his houses eager to offer them the human warmth that they lacked. This deep desire was expressed in his own words: "I would like to help millions of abandoned youngsters and all kinds of people, by feeding them and clothing their bodies and their spirits." He remained faithful to this commitment of love which was expressed in his bold option for the poor, until he died heroically while accepting all the consequences that flowed from such choices. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST LEONIE FRANCIS DE SALES AVIAT (JANUARY 10)

St Léonie Francis de Sales Aviat devoted herself to bringing them back to Christ in their lives and work of the people of France. She was canonized on November 25, 2001.

Léonie Aviat was born in Sézanne, France, on Sept 16, 1844, and was baptized the following day. Her father ran a store whose sign read, "Seeds, hemp and linen, haberdashery, grocery: wholesale and retail." A good customer base provided the family with a comfortable living. Leonie was eleven when her parents took her to the boarding school at the Monastery of the Visitation in Troyes, entrusting her to the superior, Mother Marie de Sales Chappuis, whom everyone called "the Good Mother." Of this Mother a priest wrote, "She runs the convent in Troyes with admirable wisdom and the most abundant blessings from Heaven."

An intelligent and lively girl, Leonie decided to reform her proud temperament according to Saint Francis de Sales' advice. Mother Chappuis, a true "Mistress of souls," taught the girls to develop the virtues they would need



in the world. She knew the potential impact that a young woman who was truly Christian and fully living her vocation as wife and mother could have on society and on the Church. Aware of the social condition of factory workers in the region, Leonie wrote, "I feel more joy in climbing a little winding staircase to comfort those who are overwhelmed by sorrow,

than in being at one of the magnificent parties" organized to raise money for the poor. In 1860, she completed her studies at the Visitation boarding school. Before leaving, she revealed her desire to enter religious life to Mother Chappuis, who advised her to wait.

A reversal of fortune

Léonie's return to Sézanne delighted her parents - cultured, accomplished in piano, and painting, she nevertheless did not disdain the ordinary chores in which her practical sense was revealed. Mr. Aviat proposed an advantageous marriage to his daughter. But a financial reversal of fortune ruined Mr Aviat and the suitor vanished. Leonie was free, and she decided to enter the Visitation. "Wait a bit longer - what God has destined you for is not quite ready," Mother Chappuis told her. Soon after, Father Brisson (her spiritual director and a friend of the family) decided that the moment had come to reveal what he expected of her.

Mysterious Call

Father Brisson had created a youth club and reception centre for young factory girls on the Rue des Terrasses. To supervise them, he had to find full-time female assistants, which wasn't easy - he would need souls dedicated to God. When Leonie visited the house with him, she received an interior enlightenment that showed her that her place was there, in the midst of these youth, some still children. She revealed this mysterious call to her spiritual director who was amazed at

what she said - finally, here was the person who could be the foundation stone for the institute he wished to establish! On April 18, 1866, following an eight-day retreat under the supervision of Mother Chappuis, the two founders of the new congregation moved into the house on Rue des Terrasses where Father Brisson's center was located. The youngest workers were quickly won over by these two young women, distinguished yet as open as big sisters.

Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis often received the two pioneers in the Visitation's parlour and formed them in religious life. "For now you are not called to chant the Office," she told them; "your primary occupation is work. Give yourselves up to it as graciously as possible...your work is for you a continuous prayer."

For me? Why?

On October 30, 1868, the first two Sisters of the Congregation of "Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales" received the religious habit. Leonie became Sister Francis de Sales, and Lucie became Sister Jeanne-Marie. These beginnings were disrupted by the war that broke out on July 19, 1870 between France and Prussia. Factories stopped running and workers lost their jobs. Sister Francis de Sales made great efforts to keep them busy. On October 11, in the company of Sister Jeanne-Marie, she made her vows before Monsignor de Segur, who said to them, "My dear children your relations with God must be characterized by a great tenderness, your love for Him must be more gentle, more

noble, more tender than in any other religious order..."

A mysterious unction

A ceremony of religious clothing and profession was prepared for January 29, 1873, the feast of Saint Francis de Sales. However, one of the postulants suddenly was struck with an abscess in her heel bone, which made her suffer terribly and kept her from receiving the habit. A novena to the Saint was begun. The evening of February 9, Mother Francis de Sales applied a second class relic of Saint Francis de Sales to the sick foot. The pain finally subsided and the young Sister went to sleep. In a dream, she saw a venerable prelate who applied an unction of oil on her foot. She was amazed when she awoke - she was in fact cured...

My little way

One day, coming across a young sister in difficulties, Sister Francis de Sales told her, "I am going to have you take advantage of my little experience. God has allowed us, Sister Jeanne-Marie and me, to have the most opposite temperaments that you can imagine. And yet here we have been on good terms for many years, haven't we? Well, if I have been able to manage it, it's because I've made it a habit to never approach my neighbour without glancing at Our Lord. Try my little way - I can assure you that it is good."

"Win them over!"

In the following years, Mother Francis de Sales travelled frequently to consider setting up the

new foundations that were being asked of her all over Europe. When her Daughters spoke to her of difficulties raised by the children, she told them, "Win them over!" meaning love them, support them, pray for them. Nevertheless, a wind of persecution was blowing in France, and religious Congregations were being suppressed. From 1901 to 1904, all the Oblates' houses were closed. Mother Francis de Sales decided to transfer the Mother House to Perugia, Italy. Taking advantage of her stay in Italy, she approached Pope Saint Pius X to obtain final approbation of her Institute's Constitutions. These steps would come to a successful conclusion in April 1911. In the meantime, on February 2, 1908, Father Brisson died peacefully. Informed in time, Mother Francis de Sales was able to be at his bedside. When she returned to Perugia, she told a Sister one day, "Oh, how I would love to become a saint! I desire this greatly! I am going to start today!" On December 26, 1913 a fever sent her to bed. Her condition worsened, and on January 9, she received Extreme Unction, then Holy Communion. The 10th, a little before 6 o'clock in the morning, she died peacefully, surrounded by her Daughters.

In canonizing Mother Francis de Sales Saint John Paul II said: "The resolution which distinguished Mother Aviat so well, 'Forget oneself completely,' is also for us an appeal to go against the current of egotism and easy pleasure and open ourselves to the social and spiritual needs of our time." □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Just no time for sight-seeing

A farmer who went to a large city to see the sights, engaged a room at a hotel and before retiring asked the clerk about the hours for meals.

"We have breakfast from 7 to 11, dinner from 12 to 3, and supper from 6 to 8," explained the clerk.

"Look here," inquired the farmer in surprise, "what time am I goin' to see the town?"

Not so convenient

The country lad who had "made good" in New York asked his old mother to come to the metropolis. He gave the old lady the best room in the hotel - one with a private bath adjoining.

The next morning the boy asked: "Did you have a good night's rest?" "The room was alright, and the bed was pretty. But I couldn't sleep very much, for I was afraid someone would want to take a bath, and the only way to it was through my room."

Just when?

The sad-looking man had been waiting for a long time for his order. Finally his waiter approached, and said: "Your fish will be coming in a minute or two now, sir." The sad man looked interested. "Tell me," he said, "what bait are you using?"

Even better at the job

"Why didn't you deliver that message as instructed?" a man asked his servant.

"I did the best I could, sir."

"The best you could! Why, if I had known I was going to send a donkey, I would have gone myself."

Politely refused

"I desire no remuneration for this poem," said the office visitor. "I merely submit it as a compliment." "Then, my dear sir, allow me to return the compliment," replied the editor with true journalistic courtesy."

Making it quick

Addressing the new class concerning the merits of shorthand, the instructor said:

"It is a matter of record that it took the poet Thomas Gray seven years to write his famous poem, *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. Had he been proficient in stenography, he could have done it in seven minutes. We have had students who have written it in that length of time."

Quite unearthly

"She sang that song in a haunting manner."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, there was just the ghost of a resemblance to the original piece."

Never out of company

"Have you ever wondered why you are so popular in your neighbourhood?"

"No, except that I told my neighbours that I have always played the saxophone when I felt lonely."



THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Cl. Ian Pinto, sdb

History and Meaning

Like many of the most ancient Christian feasts, Epiphany was first celebrated in the East, where it has been held from the beginning, almost universally, on January 6. Today, among both Eastern Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, the feast is known as Theophany – the revelation of God to man. Epiphany originally celebrated four different events, in the following order of importance: the Baptism of the Lord; Christ's first miracle, the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana; the Nativity of Christ; and the visitation of the Wise Men or Magi. Each of these is a revelation of God to man: At Christ's Baptism, the Holy Spirit descends and the voice of God the Father is heard, declaring that Jesus is His Son; at the wedding in Cana, the miracle reveals Christ's divinity; at the Nativity, the angels bear witness to Christ, and the shepherds, representing the people of Israel, bow down before Him; and at the visitation of the Magi, Christ's

divinity is revealed to the Gentiles – the other nations of the earth.

What is Epiphany?

Epiphany comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, from which "Epiphany" is transliterated, meaning "manifestation". Epiphany has a number of meanings as given in the dictionary: (1): A church festival in commemoration of the coming of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles or in the Eastern Church in commemoration of the baptism of Christ; (2): an appearance or manifestation especially of a divine being (3): A sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something; (4): an intuitive grasp of reality through something (as an event) usually simple and striking; (5): an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure; (6): A revealing scene or moment.

As the dictionary definition of "epiphany" suggests, there is a tension between the non-

religious use of the word and the meaning of the Christian observance of Epiphany: the origins, associations, and essential theological meaning of the feast and ensuing season of the Christian year are not easily perceived or intuitively grasped in a "simple and striking" manner. Epiphany is a season of variable length (depending on the date of Easter) that begins on January 6 and extends to the beginning of Lent. It was celebrated as a commemoration of the baptism of Christ beginning in the third century, but by the fourth century in the West it also became associated with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi.

Significance of the Feast

The Feast of Epiphany comes not long after the great feast of Christmas and perhaps for good reason. At Christmas we stand in awe at the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of God, who willingly became man. The grandeur of the Incarnation is often overlooked and seldom relished in a world that has so commercialized the feast so as to obliterate its true significance and value. The feast of the Epiphany on the other hand is often written off as less important. This is the case because the true significance of the feast has not been understood.

Epiphany and Christmas are in fact, two sides of the same celebration. After contemplating the staggering fact that God has become a human child, we turn to look at this mystery from the opposite angle and realize that this seemingly helpless Child is, in fact, the omnipotent God, the

King and Ruler of the universe. The feast of Christ's divinity completes the feast of His humanity. It fulfills all our Advent longing for the King "who is come with great power and majesty." We see that whereas Christmas is the family feast of Christianity, Epiphany is the great "world" feast of the Catholic Church."

The feast unites three events in the life of Christ when His divinity, as it were, shines through His humanity: the adoration of the Magi; the baptism of Christ in the Jordan; and the first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana. Moreover, at Epiphany the Church looks forward to the majestic coming of Christ when His manifestation as God will be complete. Epiphany marks the end of Christmastide, which begins with the revelation of Christ to Israel in His Birth and ends with the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles at Epiphany. The feast invites us to remember the dual nature of Christ, namely, His humanity and His divinity and focuses on His divinity so as to avoid letting us lose sight of this fact in the celebration of the birth of the baby. □



Quiet Spaces

SAVED BY A CHILD

In the Holy Father's Christmas reflection on Wednesday 30 December 2015, he invited the faithful gathered in St Peter's Square for the last General Audience of 2015, to "look to the lives of children" in order to learn to welcome and love Jesus. God too "was a child," he said. The Pope also address a special thought to the victims of natural disasters that recently struck the Americas and Great Britain. The following is a translation of the Pope's address which he delivered in Italian

Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

In these days of Christmas, the Child Jesus is placed before us. I am certain that in our homes many families still have a nativity scene arranged, continuing this beautiful tradition brought about by St Francis of Assisi which keeps alive in our hearts the mystery of God who became man.

Devotion to the Child Jesus is widespread. Many saints cultivated this devotion in their daily prayers, and wished to model their lives after that of the Child Jesus. I think in particular of St Thérèse of Lisieux, who as a Carmelite nun took the name Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. She is also a Doctor of the Church who knew how to live and witness to the "spiritual childhood" which is assimilated through meditation, as the Virgin Mary taught, on the humility of God who became small for us. This is a great mystery. God is humble! We, who are proud and full of vanity, believe we are something big; we are nothing! He, the Great One, is humble and becomes a child. This is a true mystery. God is humble. This is beautiful!

There was a time in which, in the divine-human Person of Christ, God was a child, and this must hold a particular significance for our faith. It is true that his death on the cross and his Resurrection are the highest expressions of his redeeming love, however let us not forget that the whole of his earthly life is revelation and teaching. In the Christmas season we remember his childhood. In order to grow in faith we will need to contemplate the Child Jesus more often. Certainly, we know nothing of this period of his life. The rare indication that we possess refer to the imposition of his name eight days after his birth and his presentation at the Temple (cf. Lk 2:21-28); in addition to this, the visit of the Magi and the ensuing escape to Egypt (cf. Mt 2:1-23). Then, there is a great leap to 12 years of age, when with Mary and Joseph he goes in pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover, and instead of returning with his parents, he remains in the Temple to speak with the doctors of the law.

As we see, we know little of the Child Jesus, but

we can learn much about him if we look into the lives of children. It is a beautiful habit that parents and grandparents have, that of watching what the children do.

We discover, first of all, that children want our attention. They have to be at the centre - why? Because they are proud? No! because they need to feel protected. It is important that we too place Jesus at the centre of our life and know, even if it may seem paradoxical, that it is our responsibility to protect him. He wants to be in our embrace, he wants to be tended to and to be able to fix his gaze on ours. Additionally, we must make the Child Jesus smile in order to show him our love and our joy that he is in our midst. His smile is a sign of the love that gives us the assurance of being loved. Children, lastly, love to play; playing with children, however, means abandoning our logic in order to enter theirs. If we want to have fun it is necessary to understand what they like, and not to be selfish and make them do the things we like. It is a lesson for us. Before Jesus we are called to abandon our pretence of autonomy - and this is the crux of the matter: our pretence of autonomy - in order to instead accept the true form of liberty, which consists in knowing and serving whom we have before us. He, the Child is the Son of God who comes to save us. He has come among us to show us the face of the Father abounding in love and mercy. Therefore let us hold the Child Jesus tightly in our arms, let us place ourselves at his

service. He is the font of love and serenity. It will be beautiful today, when we get home to go to the nativity scene and kiss the Baby Jesus and say: "Jesus, I want to be humble like you, humble like God", and to ask for this grace.

May the icon of the nativity scene which we contemplate in these days help you, dear *young people*, to imitate the Holy Family, model of true love. May it sustain you, dear *sick people* to offer your suffering in union with that of Jesus for the salvation of the world. May it encourage you, dear *newly weds*, to edify your household on the rock of the Word of God, rendering it, on the example of that of Nazareth, a welcoming place, filled with love, understanding and forgiveness. □



STRANGE GROWS THE HEART

From Fr. Ian Doulton's collection of stories

Suffering, pain, they fall upon our days like night that shuts out the sun of all happiness. But if we are patient, if we wait, we begin to see a meaning in the shadows. Often in our darkness, we receive – like a candle – the power to understand that this suffering of the body is blessed; sometimes it is necessary to prevent an even greater tragedy.

This happened to Fran Harrison as she tells it in her story. Her husband Kurt is in hospital. He's been there three months. When people come to visit her they say things like: "How terrible!" Then they look at her strangely and she knows they're wondering why she's not upset, why she can even smile, and she couldn't explain to them. She knew what was the worst thing in the world for Kurt, and that was not it. There was a real tragedy once. This was how she recalled it: "I thought I knew the man I married. I didn't expect Kurt to be perfect; I didn't think that I was. To me his occasional stubbornness showed a manly independence and his blunt way of speaking came from his complete honesty.

"So, we were married – the first month was wonderful and then weeks of fun as we house-hunted together. I thoroughly enjoyed trying to decide between the English cottage and the ultra-modern bungalow. Then in the midst of all the excitement, Kurt came home one evening and started pulling suitcases out of the closet. He urged me to start

packing; hoping that if we packed all night we could make it. *I was wondering what this was all about.* "Kurt, where are we going?" I asked. His reply came back like a shot: "To our house, where do you suppose?" *I couldn't believe that! What did he mean "our house?"* Then he told me that he had bought a house in the country and even though it was rundown and that the real estate agent discouraged us from taking it – he could have it fixed up in no time. It didn't seem to matter very much to Kurt. *We'd been planning all this together and now suddenly he'd gone and bought a house. It felt like being shoved into a house, like it or not.* Kurt simply said, and rather firmly too: "I know what I'm doing, you leave this to me. I'm paying for the house..." And he passed me a suitcase to start packing.

I cried when I saw the house, a pile of clapboards sprawled in a tangle of weeds. But in a month, Kurt had the place shining inside and out. He gave me everything I wanted for myself and the house. He was even religious – at least he went to church faithfully every Sunday. Still I felt vaguely unhappy without knowing exactly why. Perhaps because Kurt always spoke of the place as 'his' farm, 'his' house; he blueprinted the future in his mind and nothing I said ever changed a line of his plans.

The third year we were married, we had a baby. I thought that here at last there would some-

thing that would be 'ours.' But from the time Peter was in the cradle he was mine only to feed, dress and bathe. He was Kurt's to spoil and turn into a stubborn, defiant little boy expert at getting his own way with his father and Kurt boasted: *like father, like son.*

When Peter was five years and three months old, Kurt came in from the fields one day. "Where's Peter?" he asked. I told him that he was in the orchard with Mr Hanley's boys. But he wasn't there. Kurt shook his head and smiled. He would have to go and look for this son he adored. *I was upset that I didn't know where he was, but I followed Kurt.* Kurt thought nothing of it, he even commented: "It's good for him to go off by himself, it toughens him. Then I suggested: "The first place to look is where I told him not to go: down in the duck pond and all that mud." We headed that way as we noticed his footprints. He had come that way. Then all of a sudden I looked ahead at the duck pond and I shrieked as I saw his little body, face down in the pond. Kurt found him in the pond. He

wasn't breathing and Kurt worked on him for an hour before we could call a doctor. The doctor said that Peter must have been dead when Kurt brought him out but Kurt wouldn't believe it, he worked for almost another hour. He kept praying: "God.... God" But at the funeral he gave no sign of grief. The next Sunday, when

I was ready for church, I missed him. I found him out at the duck pond. He was draining it. His face was gaunt and he didn't look up but asked in a low voice: "You're going to church Fran?" *I knew he was hurting. He told me to go ahead and that Mr Hanley would drive me.* I asked when he was going and once more came the cold and bitter reply: "When God gives me back my son." I was shocked and he went on... "If this is what he calls a square deal..." *It was difficult to reason with Kurt but I tried to tell him that there were always reasons for things like this but Kurt refused to even give it a thought.* He fixed me with his cold stare and simply said: "Look, I did my part...this is what I get...I'm through. From now on I'm not asking and I'm not giving."

He never set foot in church again. He never prayed. When he had our farm running smoothly, he bought another rundown place, and a third. He made most of the repairs himself and he was away from the house for weeks at a time. He worked in his own world alone while I circled the



outside trying to break through. One evening a light plane landed in our meadow. I ran to look and Kurt stepped out of the plane. "Hey, I rented it for crop-dusting and why not, that's why I've been taking flying lessons again!" *He was doing everything by himself, though he could afford help. But he helped no one and asked no one to help him. He was even possessive of those who worked for him. They were to listen only to him. He was upset with Hanley: "I hire a man and he puts a chicken house where you tell him to?" No amount of reasoning mattered. There was bitterness writ large across his face, in the tone of his voice and in every decision he took.*

One evening after dinner I noticed Kurt in the study going over the books. Recently he was working late into the night. I thought I could give him a hand because before we were married I kept books as a kind of part-time job. The reply I got at my offer was: "No thanks, I don't need any help." As I was going out he looked up and reminded me to call George Greenwood to tell him that he didn't have time to attend any meeting. *I thought it was a good idea to meet with the other farmers and offer them the possibility of a cooperative, they would appreciate his expertise immensely but he simply replied: "It doesn't mean a thing to me. I take care of myself, they could do the same." They were simply country folk who worked hard but didn't have the breaks that Kurt had: "Luck is what you make it" was all he said.*

He didn't seem to need or

want even my love, and still I kept hoping until I saw the digger at the end of the garden where I had planted a garden where the duck pond had been. Kurt thought it was the best soil for corn and that was what he was going to do as he hoisted himself into the digger. *To me it was the place where our son had died. It held special memories for me, for us, I thought. I realised that it was not so for Kurt. There was to be no special memory of that tragedy.* He simply added coldly: "That's what it should not have. What's past is past. There's no vacuum in my life. I outgrew that years ago." I blurted out: "Kurt, what about me...Kurt, what about me?" He started up the digger and shouted with a bitterness I had never seen in his face before: "Go ask God next Sunday."

I ran back into the house as Kurt fought another battle in his war against God. He would think he had won at last, this man who had shut out faith and friend, even the memory of his child; and now his wife. I couldn't stay any longer in this house where I was a servant with no right to give or receive a gesture of love. To live in a house with one who is a stranger to your heart is loneliness worse than being alone. I decided to leave in his way: without discussion or tears. Sunday would be the best day. Kurt would think I was going into town to church.

It was Friday afternoon and Kurt had been crop-dusting all morning already. Mr Wallace, the new handy man and I were

standing on the porch watching the red plane dip up and down. It was quite a sight to see the plane make its manoeuvres while Mr Wallace said: "Ah, he's got her under control alright." Then all of a sudden there was an explosion. I screamed: "The plane... the motor's missing...it's on fire..." The next thing we saw was Kurt running towards the house but he stumbled in the field he had just ploughed the previous day. He was one ball of fire. Mr Wallace shouted: "Mrs Harrison, get back into the house and call the doctor. Get back!" I tried to follow him and he kept shouting: "No, no...he doesn't need you, he needs a doctor!"

They let me see Kurt the third day. He was covered with bandages except for his eyes and his mouth. He looked up at me and then turned his head. Every day I came and sat in the room as long as they'd let me. He gave no sign... nothing till the fifth day. Then he asked me: "Did you talk to the doctor?" I told him that I did and I said that the doctor said that he would be alright. *Bitter as he still was, out it came: "All crippled and scarred, if I ever use my legs and arms again. I didn't think you'd try any lies." He knew me too well; he could see that I hadn't told him everything.* Then I went on: "Alright, the doctor said he didn't know how bad or how long." Kurt was discouraged and painfully he tried to turn as he muttered: "Go home!"

So he lay for three days more. The nurses said he never asked

for anything. He had to be fed, washed, turned in bed...he could move less than a new born baby. But he would never ask for help. On the ninth day he was in a pensive mood. He looked up and whispered: "You've come everyday...why?" I said simply: "You're my husband." Then he shook his head and told me that the accident came so suddenly. He was flying so smoothly when suddenly everything gave way. Then he looked at me and said: "...the same way it happened with the boy." I had to tell him: "We never know, Kurt. We never know when..." I could see tears at the corner of his eyes falling on his pillow: "...will you...will you...will you give me a drink of water?" I couldn't believe my ears. He asked me for a drink of water and then: "Now will you kiss me?" I was so overwhelmed when he began weeping unashamedly: "Fran...Fran..."

He cried. I held him in my arms like a child. I kissed him like a lover lost and found. Like a husband who has returned. I wish I could explain something of this to people who think that being shattered physically is the worst thing that can happen to a man. Kurt's body may be in bandages, but his spirit is healed. Only a blow like this could make him realise the truth that our life lies entirely in the hands of God. Someday he will get well, but already he is gentle. He has found a peace which he never knew in the pride of his sound body. Now Kurt and I both thank God that this thing happened. That by the road of pain he has come back to happiness. □

DON BOSCO'S PRETERNATURAL ABILITIES

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by Fr. Elias Dias

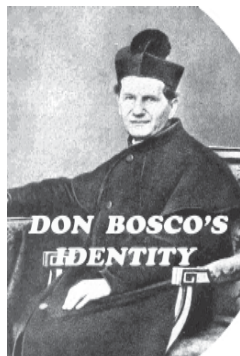
Don Bosco evoked around him a supernatural atmosphere which caused those around him to live in a climate of eager expectation. Stories of a mysterious dog which protected him, the ability to communicate with preternatural phenomena, reading consciences and predicting events, being present in two places at the same time or see things happening in the distance (clairvoyance), were God's gifts to His faithful servant.

Preternatural refers to phenomena that are beyond what is natural or normal and is inexplicable by natural means.

Our purpose is not to prove their validity or make the reader a victim of make-believe but to appreciate and cherish all that helped Don Bosco carry out his apostolate effectively for the welfare of the young.

Cleric John Bosco in his *Memoirs* summarized his first year in the Seminary as follows: "My stay in the seminary was pleasant and fruitful, and I enjoyed the friendship of both my companions and superiors". It was at this time that John became a good friend of the Cleric Louis Comollo. He was a wonderful friend of John Bosco. They shared their lives and aspirations. The friendship led John to lead a more austere life.

At the beginning of the scholastic year 1838-39, Comollo sensed that his life was coming to a close, and he confided this to John.



After a brief illness, Comollo died.

Hardly had Comollo been buried than he appeared again in a dormitory full of seminarians. Here is how Don Bosco described this astonishing event: "Louis and I were close friends. One day while recalling what we had read in the lives of some saints, we remarked, half-jokingly and half-seriously, that it would be a great comfort indeed if the one of us first called to eternity were to return to give news of himself to the other. I was not fully aware of the importance of such a promise and must admit that we acted very rashly. We renewed it again and again especially during Comollo's last illness. Comollo's last words and his last look at me had assured me that he would keep our agreement. It was the night between April 3 and 4, the night after his burial; I was sleeping with twenty other students of theology in the south

dormitory facing the courtyard. I was in bed, but not asleep and I was thinking about our promise as though I had a premonition of what was about to take place, I was strangely afraid." A strange sound became stronger and violently shook the dormitory. All in the dormitory were startled but nobody dared say a word. In this atmosphere of awe, a light shone and I heard Comollo's voice, "Bosco! Bosco I am saved!"

John was so shaken and frightened that he fell so ill, that he almost reached death's door, leaving him weak for several years. At the end, still in poor health, John left for home for a vacation. This incident had a great influence on the life and ministry of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco wrote and published the biography of Comollo in 1844 while he was at the *Convitto*. It is certain that by imitating Comollo, a young man could become virtuous and a seminarian could become exemplary, and a worthy minister in the Church.

One night in January 1886, Don Bosco appeared, while in Italy, to Fr. John Baptist Branda, the Director of the Salesian house of Sarrià, Barcelona in Spain. Fr. Branda was sleeping peacefully when he heard someone call him, "Wake up!" He clearly heard Don Bosco's voice. "Father Branda get up and come with me." Father Branda thought that he was dreaming and went back to sleep. He slept and did not give heed to the voice until the octave of the Feast of St Francis de Sales.

Then, during the night of February 6th, while he was sleeping, he heard another summons: "Father Branda, Fr. Branda!" It was Don Bosco's voice again. He

wore an expression of paternal trusting affection. He showed him things that he least expected. Fr. Branda went into the dormitory with Don Bosco. They saw boys sleeping. He pointed out three boys hideously disfigured. He said to him: "Do you know these three boys? You will never believe who corrupted them unless I come to tell you. They are the victims of a coadjutor who led them astray." Fr. Branda heard the names and was dumbfounded. Don Bosco told him to send them away.

Fr. Branda did not have any exterior evidence. Don Bosco ordered him to send them away immediately. At the end of the trip, they saw the three boys and the coadjutor hanging their heads in shame. There were others also who were involved in such cases. Father Branda did not know how to execute the orders. He was upset at the prospect of having to expel confreres. He heard an inner voice that kept on repeating "Act! Act!" He summoned the prefect of the house Father Anthony Aime and the assistant and urged them to keep an eye on those persons.

While he was in this state of mind he received a letter from Father Michael Rua in Turin which said, "I was walking with Don Bosco this evening and he told me he had paid you a visit. But perhaps you were asleep at that time."

A few days later after the dream-vision, Fr. Branda went to celebrate Mass in the home of Dorothy de Chopitea Villota. Before the Mass she said to him, "Do you know what? I dreamt of Don Bosco last night!" Fr. Branda was keener on celebrating the

Mass. As he began his Mass, he was seized with fear and trembling. Within a voice resounded "Do at once what I have told you. Otherwise, this is the last Mass you will celebrate."

They took the drastic step and dismissed the boys and later the Salesian. Father Branda told them, "Don Bosco came in person to tell me!" Later when Don Bosco visited Barcelona, Fr. Branda told him about his decision and he approved of it.

Don Bosco was endowed with the charisma of bilocation. He was on retreat at St Ignatius. One Sunday during afternoon church service, two Oratory boys went secretly to bathe in the Dora Riparia River near the arsenal. After splashing about in shallow water, they stretched out on the sand. Suddenly they felt a sharp slap that left a mark on their backs. Exclaiming that it must have been Don Bosco, they scrambled into their clothes and raced back to the Oratory. Pale and frightened, they sneaked through the church door and hid in a dormitory.

Once Don Bosco asked a boy, "Don't you recall being slapped by an invisible hand one day?" Quite surprised the lad admitted it. "And what were you doing that time?" The boy turned red. Don Bosco took him aside and whispered something into his ear and that solved the problem.

Don Bosco was most certainly in Turin on October 14, 1878. Yet that very day an unknown French-speaking priest who refused to give his name was the guest of Adele Clement at Saint-Rambert d'Albon, in the department of Drome. Giving in to the lady's

insistent questions as to his identity, he replied "A few years from now my name will be printed in books, and these books will come into your hands. Then you will know who I am."

The lady's husband who was a merchant noticed that the priest was weak and plodding along with difficulty. He told the lady's husband, the merchant, that he walked a long way. The merchant offered him a lift in his old cart. Though the priest sat in the cart nobody paid attention to him.

When he arrived home Monsieur Clement helped the priest to alight and requested him to stay for dinner. His wife complained about the poor health of her infant son. The priest told her "Keep praying, Madame and your prayers will be answered." After the meal the priest told them to keep a jar as a present in his memory."

After the meal the priest said to the lady, "I must leave for some important work." He left and they could not trace him. They were surprised to know that he went and cured the child of a nurse who was living at Coinaud, a village about two miles from Saint-Rambert. Seven years later, someone who was present when he cured the child of the nurse recognized him seeing the picture on a book. This is the priest who healed your child."

Don Bosco loved people but there were some who were against him because of his support and defence of the Church. In addition, he fought against the Waldensian errors. The grey dog *Grigio* was the topic of many conversations and many wanted to know about this dog. Laying aside the fantastic stories, which

are told of this dog, Don Bosco plainly tells us the truth (*MO*, p 240).

Don Bosco was aware that his life was constantly in danger. Listening to his friends' recommendations he did his best to avoid being on the streets after dark.

One dark evening, rather late, he was making his way home with some trepidation when a huge dog appeared beside him. At first sight, the dog gave him a start, but then he seemed friendly and even nuzzled him as if he was his master. They quickly became friends and he accompanied him as far as the Oratory. Many other times that evening's experience reappeared. Indeed he might say *Grigio* did him valuable service.

During dangerous periods of his life Divine Providence sent him *Grigio* for his protection and his defence. The grey dog often appeared in the Oratory and the boys treated him well for they knew that it was Don Bosco's dog. Mama Margaret was frightened of it. The dog would not do any harm to anyone in the Oratory but was always ready to assist Don Bosco.

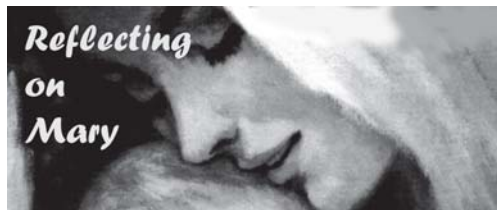
The last time Don Bosco saw *Grigio* was in 1866 when he went to Becchi with a group of boys for the feast of the Holy Rosary. One night he went to visit his friend Louis Moglia at Moncucco. Two farm house dogs furiously went at Don Bosco. He exclaimed, "How I wish *Grigio* were here. He would get me out of this mess!" Instantly *Grigio* appeared from nowhere and took them on and so badly mauled them that they had to

retreat with painful howls.

Grigio appeals to our curiosity in a unique way and makes us ask about his origin. Don Bosco remarked, "It sounds ridiculous to call him an angel, yet he is not an ordinary dog. He believed that he was really providential for him on many occasions when he found himself in danger."

Extraordinary phenomena after Don Bosco's death: The family of Count Cravosio was one of the many Patrician families of Turin where Don Bosco was always wholeheartedly welcomed. The Count's daughter Rosa who had seen him many times became a nun and took the name of Philomena. As the Mother Superior of the convent of Garesio she was suffering greatly from spiritual torments and physical infirmities. On January 31, 1888 at day break after a sleepless night, the nun fell into a daze and beheld Don Bosco standing at the foot of her bed, wearing his usual cape. Seeing Don Bosco the nun exclaimed, "Oh Don Bosco! Did my mother tell you about me? I am upset for I can no longer do anything worth-while." Don Bosco replied "I know your mother was supposed to come to see me but she was unable to do that. You see, while I was in this world, I was able to do little things for you and your family, but now that I am in Heaven I can do a lot more." She asked his blessing and Don Bosco assured her all God's help in her life.

The Lord of wonders endowed Don Bosco with all kinds of gifts and talents and he used them solely for one purpose: To save souls and to serve God alone. □



A POET CELEBRATES MARY'S BEAUTY

by Roberto Spataro

Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Manzoni, Testori and a long list of poets have praised the Madonna in their compositions. Who won't recall the inspired words of Dante in the prayer that St Bernard says in Canto XXXIII of the *Paradiso* which begins with the words: "Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son"? It seems that no great poet in the history of Italian literature has been able to resist praising the Madonna. It is not surprising. Poetry is a translation into words of the facets of beauty that the poet, who is inspired, manages to put together. In this case, it is the Madonna who is a creature in whom the fullness of beauty resides.

The First Poet of Mary

One of the Church Fathers, who lived in the fourth century, is, chronologically speaking, the first Marian poet; one who (one might say) opened the way to many others, of all ages and languages. This Father of the Church was called Ephrem. It's an unusual name. In fact, he's Syrian, a native of Nibisi, an ancient city now thought to be in Iraq. Christians in Syria and



Saint Ephrem the Syrian is the greatest poet of the patristic era. In his poetic compositions, he made use of a particular form that was especially congenial: metric prose (memre). He was a follower of the theological school of Antioch. He wrote much to defend the faith from the attacks of the Gnostics.

those of Mesopotamia have always held him as a great doctor of the Church and still do to this day. Even amidst the great difficulties that they face, they venerate him with great devotion. His

compositions amount to around three thousand verses, rich in mystic harmony. He has been called "the lyre of the Holy Spirit." If all Ephrem's poems are so beautiful those in which he speaks of the Madonna are extremely fascinating because they spring from a tender filial heart and that was why he was rightly accorded the title of "Mary's Bard." Ephrem is not a speculative theologian looking for new ideas. He, instead, dwells on the traditional content of faith, especially Bible stories which he adorns with lyrical imagery and in this lies his expertise.

All in me and everywhere

You might, or might not know, but there were already other Christian writers before Ephrem, like Justin or Irenaeus, for instance who likened Mary to Eve in order to show, by contrast, the role that the Blessed virgin Mary played in Salvation history. Ephrem takes up the same theme but dresses it up with truly inspired poetic imagery: "Look at the World: it has two eyes. Eve, the left eye, that's blind; Mary, the seeing eye, on the right. The left is the eye of the guilty world which remains in the dark. But because of Mary, the right eye illuminates the world with heavenly light that dwells within her and all who are united to her." When he wants to assert the virginity of Mary, an article of faith that the Church has always adhered to, Ephrem does not proffer arguments to refute his opponents, he sings this great mystery employing poetically biblical imagery, such as the burning bush that is not consumed, "Just like at Sinai, I was alight but not consumed by the flames." Perhaps, am-

ong Christians, there is no more joyful celebration than Christmas. We are all drawn to the manger even the most hardened, and violent. Naturally, this also happens to our Syrian poet Ephrem, who while contemplating the events unfolding at Bethlehem is transported through his religious and poetic fervour to put into the mouth of the Madonna these verses, a kind of lullaby, that the Mother of God sings to the Son of God, her Child: 'Mary gives vent to the sentiments of her heart as she sings this cradle song: "Who ever allowed this solitary little girl to conceive and give birth to him, at the same time, one and many, little and grand, all within me and everywhere? The day Gabriel came to poor me, in an instant he made me a lady and a handmaid. Who am I a handmaid of your divinity but also mother of your humanity, O Lord, and my Son?"'

Co-participant in glory

Sometimes, Ephrem puts in details that are not contained in the Gospels. We could say that he permits himself some "poetic license." One of these that is truly delightful and reasonably true, is the belief that the Risen Lord appeared first to his Mother. Ephrem writes: "Go, tell my brothers: "I am ascending to My Father and Your Father." Mary, as she was present at the first miracle, also experienced the first fruits of the Risen One from the underworld." Several saints and other mystics have also confirmed this opinion which is deeply rooted in popular piety which holds that as Mary participated in the pain of the Crucifixion, so she must have been the first to rejoice at the joy



As Mary was present at the first miracle so she had the privilege to be the first to see the risen Christ when he rose from the dead

of the Resurrection. Sometimes poets are great theologians and Ephrem is one such example.

Your Mother, a prodigy!

Strumming the cords of his heart, that never seem to tire of celebrating the beauty and grandeur of Mary, he senses a profound similarity between the Madonna and the Church. Both are united in multiple ways. As always, Ephrem expresses these concepts artfully, delicately yet robustly at the same time, steeped in Biblical overtones. "The Church has given us the Living Bread in place of the unleavened bread they ate in Egypt. Mary gives us the bread that truly nourishes us,

in place of the hard bread that Eve had given us." A distinguished scholar of Ephrem and of ancient Christian literature in the Syriac language (very similar to the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic) has said that for this Father of the Church, the Holy Virgin is a person to whom he feels intimately connected and towards whom he feels bound by an immense debt of gratitude for the contribution that she made toward the salvation of humankind. Ephrem is drawn to the Madonna. The mystery that emanates from her person fills him with admiration and wonder: "O Lord, no one knows how to address your mother. If she is called Virgin, there is the presence of the Son; if she is called bride, she admits that she has never known man. Your Mother is a prodigy! Your mother's womb has upset the order of everything; the Creator of all things entered it rich and came out a beggar. There is a baby in the womb and seal of virginity remains intact. What a great portent!"

Ephrem, while speaking with utmost respect, turns to her with a trust from which comes this confident prayer as we end our presentation of the Mariological thought of Ephrem the Syrian, which seems to anticipate centuries of other heartfelt prayers to the Mother of God composed by other saints: "O Mary, our mediatrix, in you the human race finds its joy. From you, we seek protection. Only in you we seek refuge. And behold, even I come fervently to you, because I do not dare approach your Son: I therefore implore your intercession to seek salvation, O you who are compassionate, you who are the Mother of the God of mercy, have pity on me." □



walking with the Church

The Name of Jesus, Reserved Sin & Abortion

From St Martin's Messenger, Ireland

Q. Every day I hear the name 'Jesus' being used in a profane manner. You hear it on TV especially on the plays/soaps, and in conversations in pubs and on the streets. It pains me a lot to hear it as the Lord is our Saviour and to use his name in this way seems to me to be a serious irreverence. Please let me know what you think about this?

A. Thank you for your question and for bringing to our attention the frequent misuse and the disrespect for the name 'Jesus.' Sadly you hear it misused quite often in present day society. Some people seem to be unable to complete a sentence without the use of the Holy Name or some swear word or other. The second commandment prescribes respect for the Lord's name, 'you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.' Respect for his name is an expression of the respect owed to Jesus Christ himself. And the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: The holiness of the Divine name demands that we do not use it for trivial matters.' You will, as you say, hear it used in plays, on TV, radio, or theatre. Producers of these plays explain the frequent use of the Holy Name in their productions by saying that the plays etc. are a portrayal of the real world where the use of the Holy Name is part

and parcel of everyday conversation for many people. What ever be the reason given most people still feel offended when they hear it used disrespectfully. We pray that people everywhere will grow in their respect for the name of the Lord and use it always with reverence.

Q. What is reserved sin?

A. A term used for sins whose absolution is not within the power of every confessor, but reserved to himself by the superior of the confessor. The Pope alone can make reservation for the whole Church and the Bishops can do the same for their diocese only.

Q. Why is abortion forbidden by the Church and has it always been so?

A. Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. This is an essential tenet of Catholic teaching based among other things on the lovely words of Psalm 22:10-11 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." It is a tea-ching which forms the bedrock of Catholic Moral Law and which the Church hold sacred and inviolable. □

NEWSBITS

BUDAPEST



President Viktor Orban meeting Pope Francis in Italy

The Hungarian government has established an office to assist persecuted Christians.

"Hungary considers itself Christian, and is interested in the situation of Christians all around the world," Eduard von Habsburg, the ambassador of Hungary to the Holy See, said of the decision to establish the sub-secretariat, which has a \$3.35-million budget.

"Somehow the idea of defending Christians has acquired a bad taste in Europe, as if it means excluding other people," he added. (*Cruix*)

CHINA

Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang of Wenzhou, China, who spent more than 20 years in prison camps, died at the age of 90.

After years serving the "underground" Church, Bishop Zhu finally received official recognition from the government in 2010. But his conflicts with the government continued, as he denounced a campaign to destroy crosses on church buildings.

Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin, the coadjutor bishop of Wenzhou,



was designated to succeed Bishop Zhu. But as the elderly bishop's health deteriorated, in late August police took Bishop Shao into custody and removed him from the province - apparently to ensure that he would not preside at Bishop Zhu's funeral, and perhaps in order to install another government-appointed bishop in the diocese in defiance of Rome.

Despite this there have been a series of attempts towards reconciliation. Two priests (underground) of the diocese of Wenzhou, interviewed by AsiaNews, express their respect for the deceased bishop and describe Msgr. Zhu Weifang as a man of faith, committed to evangelization, attentive to mending relations between official and underground. (*AsiaNews*)

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.

It was December 2015 and I was faced with a difficult situation to handle alone. I began to pray the 3 Hail Marys and through the intercession of Mary I received help. Thank you, dear Mother for your constant help.

Mrs Imelda Fernandes, Mumbai
My husband and I were to travel to Norway on March 8, 2016, to visit our daughter. Just 3 days prior to our travel my husband had mouth ulcers and was in severe pain. We went to our family doctor and he gave him some local application. The pain did not subside and there was a swelling on his face. The 8th March being Sunday there were no doctors available and we were supposed to travel that night. I just kept praying to Jesus and Mother Mary and proceeded with my travel. To our surprise while we were in a queue for boarding his blisters burst and the swelling began to subside. We reached Norway and the swelling and the pain both vanished. My grateful thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for answering my prayers and protecting my family always. Thank you Mother for all the blessings you showered on my family and me through the faithful recitation of the Three Hail Marys as part of our daily prayers.

Ninfa Britto, Mumbai
Thanks dear Mother Mary for curing a family member's health problem.

Theresa

Thank you Mother Mary and St. Anthony: I left my wallet at an ATM kiosk in a rural area. After 30 mins I realized it was not with me. I went back to the ATM and saw it wasn't there but a CCTV camera showed us the face of the person who entered the ATM a second after we did. A police complaint was made but I knew they would do nothing. It was not the wallet but the ID proofs that were the concern. We know how difficult it is to get these done. I prayed to St. Anthony and said I said 9 Memorares and prayed to Mother Mary to help me get at least the ID cards and my license back. It was time to leave and guess what! To our surprise we were contacted by the same person on the CCTV camera and I got the whole wallet back. It was a miracle, Mother Mary and St. Anthony heard my prayers if not I wouldn't have never got the wallet. Thank you Jesus for being with us.

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Thank you Our Lady of Carmel for hearing my request. *Theresa*
Thank you Holy Spirit, Jesus and Mother Mary for numerous favours received. *H.M.V. Mumbai*

Belated thanks to the Divine Mercy and Our Lady for saving me from a serious stroke. I didn't know what was happening to me. I went on praying for 15 to 20 minutes - 'Jesus help me.' Suddenly this sensation stopped and I began crying bitterly and I smiled and said 'Thank you Jesus.' I was all alone, I called up my daughter and my friend. They took me to the doctor and I was admitted to the hospital and remained there for 10 days. I had lost my balance because of which I couldn't walk but Jesus and Mother Mary helped me. It was a miracle and I can now walk and do all my work.

Angela Pinto, Thane
I had rheumatoid arthritis and suddenly developed excruciating pain and at the same time my son developed an eye infection. I began a novena to Our Lady of Valankanni during which I also prayed for my daughter-in-law's safe delivery. On the 6th day of the 2nd novena the pain in my leg disappeared my son's eyes were healed and my daughter-in-law had a safe delivery. Mama Mary, protect us always and thank you for your miraculous cures.

Mrs Ellerena Peters, Chennai

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Our grateful thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco, Dominic Savio and all the saints for curing me from hernia. *A Devotee*

A million thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco, St. Dominic Savio and all the saints for (1) My daughter and son-in-law for having secured a PhD degree and for a gainful employment; (2) Protecting my husband after a fall - all the tests are normal; (3) Countless blessings and favours received.

Mrs Karis Rodrigues, Bangalore
Many thanks and praise to Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for answering our prayers and the marrow bone report of my niece-in-law was shown as normal against the prediction of the doctors.

Effie, Goa
My sincere and a million thanks to Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for granting my prayers and giving a life partner to my boss' daughter after 14 years.

P. Gomes
We thank our loving Mother and her dear son Jesus, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for their manifold blessings. Our Lord Jesus Christ saved my nephew Angelo from two major accidents. My niece was also saved when she had a fatal fall from the bike and hurt her head. Thank you, dear Mother, if it was not for your help, both my nephew and niece would not have been saved. A million thanks to you, our loving Mother.

Ms. S. Arputhaswamy

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



I am grateful to St Dominic Savio for a safe delivery and for the gift of a sweet second baby girl after 13 years. I daily recited the prayers to St Dominic Savio and wore the scapular throughout the pregnancy. Thank you dear Mother Mary and St Dominic Savio.

Sharlet Barnes, Mumbai
Thank you Jesus, dear Mother Mary and St Dominic Savio for keeping us safe and healthy.

A Devotee
Thank you, dear Mary Help of Christians and St Dominic Savio for the many favours received and for helping my granddaughter in her Std IX exams.

Joan and Eric Peters, Pune
My grateful thanks and praise to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for keeping my daughter safe during her pregnancy and for the birth of her healthy twin babies. *Jean Mathias, Mumbai*

THE POPE'S PRAYER INTENTIONS FOR 2017 ENTRUSTED TO THE APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

Starting in 2017 the Pope will present only one prepared prayer intention per month, rather than the two presented before this year. He plans, however, to add a second prayer intention each month related to current events or urgent needs, like disaster relief. The urgent prayer request will help mobilize prayer and action related to the urgent situation. The Apostleship of Prayer will publish these urgent prayer intentions on their website as soon as we receive them from the Vatican. (www.apostleshipofprayer.org)

What is the process in the preparation of the prepared prayer intentions? The faithful from around the world suggest papal prayer intentions to the international office of the Apostleship of Prayer in Rome. Through prayerful discernment the Apostleship selects a large number of them and submits them to the Vatican for further selection, with the Pope making the final selection. The Vatican then entrusts to the Apostleship of Prayer the official set of monthly prayer intentions, which the Apostleship then translates into the major world languages and publishes in print and digital formats.

JANUARY Christian Unity

That all Christians may be faithful to the Lord's teaching by striving with prayer and fraternal charity to restore ecclesial communion and by collaborating to meet the challenges facing humanity.

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MARY WAS THERE

It was on 7th October 2014, the feast of Our Lady of Rosary. As I was returning home from the market a stationary car suddenly took off and hit my bike. I fell under the bike and when I was lifted up by the passers-by I could stand on my feet and ride the bike. Except for the damage to the back panel of the bike I got out of the accident without any injury. I always recite the Rosary at night and on the way to daily Mass. My belated but grateful thanks to Our Lady of Rosary for protecting me from this accident.

A devotee, Goa

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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