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*Pope John XXIII spoke
"of the Mother of God
who is honored
in this Church of Our Lady
of Mount Carmel:
Devotion to her
becomes a necessity;
towards Our Lady
of Mount Carmel
we are drawn
with a most tender,
yet irresistible, attraction."*

From The Editor's Desk

CHOICES, HOPES AND CONFLICTS

Uncle Konrad was always remembered in the family because he spoke the truth to a bishop. In the early nineteen-fifties he grew up in the city, a clever and devout boy. He went on for the priesthood, and did his studies and moved smoothly towards ordination. He reached the definitive step of becoming a deacon; now it seemed that there was no going back. The ordaining bishop went through the ritual questions in preparation for the sacrament. When it came to Konrad's turn, the bishop asked solemnly: "Konrad, are you seeking ordination of your own free will, and without pressure from anyone?" Konrad thought for a moment. It was a reasonable question and he gave a straight answer. "It wasn't really my idea, my Lord. It was my mother's."

"Then go back to your mother," said the bishop calmly. Konrad packed his bags, went back home, found his vocation as a businessman and married an old school friend of his, who gave him two remarkable, much loved children. The boy died as a missionary in the Far East, the daughter died before her time as the mother of five children. The family legend added that clever Konrad's faith was tested, but he, fortunately came back to it on his deathbed.

The ordination story stuck with me because it seems like a parable of human life. It was only at the very last minute, just in time, that Konrad realized his vocation was not his own but his mother's.

I call it a parable because all of us, women and men, have such a job disentangling our own expectations for ourselves from those of our parents. Not that parents lay down their expectations in black and white. More often they are unspoken, and they become clear only when the son or daughter makes a move that clashes with what mother or father hoped for. This is not a simple matter. Parents want their children to be good and happy. But children perceive when that 'planning' is motivated by some sort of selfishness in the parents, or when it is really disinterested.

For thoughtful parents these are more painful issues. They used ask God: "What should we do? We don't want to live his life for him, but it is so clear he is sowing unhappiness for himself." What does God answer? I don't know. In the event the father and mother stayed close to their child he knows they are on his side. The story is not over yet but when is it ever over? You, dear reader, could easily multiply examples like this: a loved daughter who is targeted by a boy whom the parents see as a wastrel, but whom she adores; a son who is swept up into an organization which will take over his life for a purpose which the family sees as sinister. How do parents hold a line between living their children's lives for them, and reaching out with effective help to loved ones who risk making a mess of things? God's answer to their prayers and questions is not violent, anger-filled action. The love they feel for their child has to be evident in their reactions. Beyond that, they need to pray like the Psalmist, prayers of anguish and anger and longing, calling to the Father of us all for help and light, seeking a way of acting that is innocent of self-seeking, but effective.

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

A GIFT GIVEN IN TRUST

by Don Giampaolo Dianin

Marriage is also the experience of belonging completely to the other person. Spouses accept the challenge and aspiration of supporting one another, growing old together, and in this way reflecting God's own faithfulness" (AL 319). With these words, Pope Francis gives married couples another chapter on conjugal spirituality. We have already spoken in recent months about the spirituality of communion and presence, now we want to enter into this aspect which is described in *Amoris Laetitia*. (319-320).

Marriage gives concreteness and a future to the depth of a relationship and expresses the will to do the same together. In marriage there is something that goes beyond sexual attraction and initial fascination because people decide among themselves by deciding what their relationship means, and they can only do this together. It is a decision of the other and with the other in a mutual surrender. At least ideally, it is necessary that what is relevant for one is also relevant for the other. In promising to be faithful to each other forever, the two are aware that to want less would be to betray the depth of the relationship, and this willingness is a condition for the possibility of the relationship. In this context, the gestures of sexuality, from the simplest to physical union, become an expression of desire and the constant quest to become one flesh.

Marriage is also the place where the gift of self is expressed in its fullness and where the fulfilment

of each member of the partners passes through the gift of self to the other. At the beginning, this is perceived as a grace and seems easy and even obvious; later, the other is also perceived as a limitation because the inevitability of giving up some of one's own expectations and possibilities of realisation begin to appear. Finally, it is a question of deciding whether one wants to choose the gift of self, which can only be reciprocal, even though the ways of expressing it may be different. We feel that visions of relationships that focus on self-realisation are insufficient, either because they lock the person in their own needs or because they instrumentalise the other. This perspective always subjects the other person and the relationship to various tests and it is easy for many couples to end badly because the other person does not always meet all my expectations.

To marry is to "hand oneself over" to another who is perceived as unique. The only way to recognise the uniqueness of the other is to commit oneself to a unique relationship with him or her that does not count with any other. The uniqueness of a person appeals to the uniqueness of a story. To say a unique relationship is not to say exclusive, but central, prioritised, without equivalents, irreplaceable: this is what marriage is.

Pope Francis dwells on a reciprocal sense of belonging: "A person who cannot choose to love for ever can hardly love for even a single day" (AL 319). No externality and no formalism in this belonging: "It

is a matter of the heart into which God alone sees (cf. Mt 5:28). Every morning on rising, we reaffirm before God our decision to be faithful, come what may in the course of the day. And all of us, before going to sleep hope to wake up and continue this adventure, trusting in the Lord's help" (AL 319).

But we cannot stop there, because mutual belonging, consecrated by the sacrament of marriage, leads to another belonging which precedes and follows that of the couple. It precedes it because each of the two belongs first of all to God; it follows it because at the end of life the other will return to the One to whom he or she has always belonged. Francis is also clear on this: "There comes a point where a couple's love attains the height of its freedom and becomes the basis of a healthy autonomy. This happens when each spouse realizes that the other is not his or her own, but has a much more important master, the one Lord" (AL 320).

This awareness was also clear to us when Paul, speaking of marriage, affirms: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, purifying her by the washing of water accompanied by the word, so that he might have her appear before him in glory, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish" (Eph 5, 25-27). Marriage is the place where each of the two can meet God and realise their vocation to holiness. This requires, as with any other path to holiness, reference to the Word and the sacraments. The profound attitude that should qualify

spouses is the acceptance of the other as a gift that has been entrusted to their custody, but which one day will have to be returned to God, the author of life. On that day, when death knocks at the door and the earthly experience of conjugal love comes to an end, each person will be able to have the inner peace to say: "I hand over to God this person who, also thanks to my love, is without spot or wrinkle, holy and spotless."

The Pope recalls the uniqueness of each person and his or her belonging first and foremost to God: "No one but God can presume to take over the deepest and most personal core of the loved one; he alone can be the ultimate centre of their life." (AL 320). These words give us great peace in the knowledge that in marriage the two remain limited and fragile persons and I cannot ask of the other what only God could give me. Certain idealisms of love are just out of reach with reality and deny our human frailty: we love, we forgive, we welcome, we give ourselves as we are able, always on the way, but also eternally apprentices of love. We belong to each other to sustain us on the path of life and holiness, but each one belongs first of all to God. □



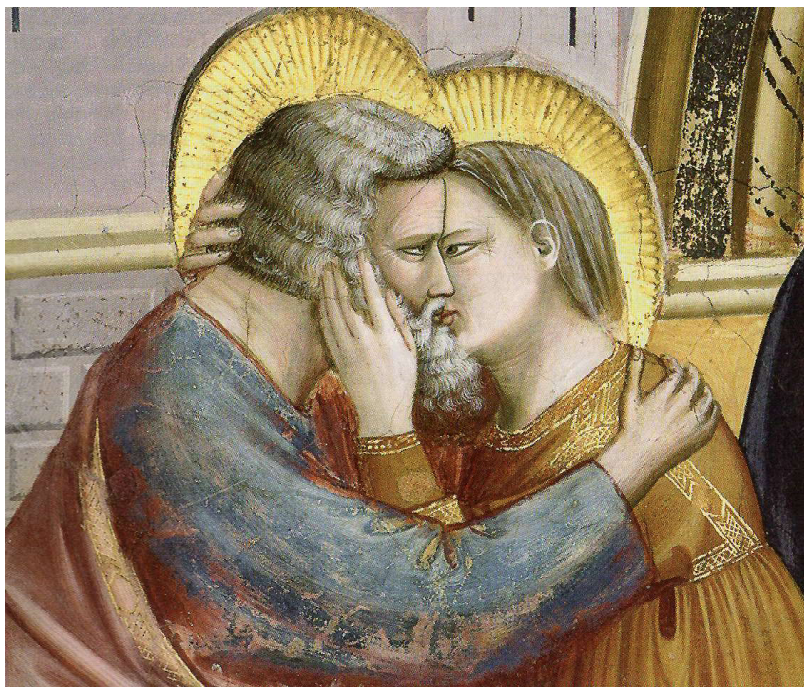
JOACHIM AND ANNE: A WISE GAZE

Chino Biscontin

Since 1969 the commemoration of Saints Joachim and Anna has been inserted on 26 July. This was intended to honour not only the two saints, but also marriage, the family that lives by faith and all grandparents!

Alongside the four Gospels recognised by the Church as Holy Scripture, there are also very ancient texts, some of them dating from the II century, called "Apocryphal Gospels." These are a heterogeneous set of writings, some considered useful by the Fathers of the Church, others condemned as containing false doctrines, none of them included in the list of 'canonical books' that

we read in our Bible. One of the purposes for which these writings arose is also popular devotion, sometimes animated by curiosity that could not find answers in the approved Gospels. A clear example is the parents of Our Lady. From the books of the New Testament we have no information about them and we do not even know their names. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary generated,



understandably, the desire to have some information about them. An apocryphal text called the Proto-Gospel of James provided this. It was written by an author who was very familiar with the biblical accounts of the Old Testament and was inspired by them. However, we cannot completely exclude the possibility that he also used some oral tradition.

According to this account, Our Lady's parents lived in Jerusalem, since Joachim was a priest in the temple. They had no children and this was considered a sign of a divine curse. This was what the high priest held against Joachim, declaring him unworthy to offer sacrifices. Deeply hurt, he left home and went to pray and fast for forty days and forty nights in the desert. Anne also prayed intensely at that time. Their prayers were heard, they were both warned by an angel, they resumed cohabitation, Anne finally became pregnant and gave birth to a girl, who was named Mary, after Moses' sister. The Proto-Gospel of James also tells of Mary's childhood, her presentation in the temple and her engagement to Joseph.

Devotion to St Anne first spread in the East and later in the West. She was invoked as a protector and help in cases of marital sterility, difficult pregnancies, successful childbirth and breast-

feeding. Devotion to St Joachim was less widespread and his memory was celebrated on a different date from the feast in honour of St Anne. Since 1969, the memory of St Joachim and St Anne has been unified on 26 July. This was intended to honour not only the two saints, but also marriage, the family that lives by faith, and also grandparents, since they are the grandparents of Jesus.

Several times Pope Francis has spoken of the risk in our society that sometimes treats the elderly as 'dispensable.' Indeed, the elderly, who find themselves living the last season of life can therefore now embrace the whole of existence with the eyes of someone who has been through it all and are indispensable in the community because they see clearly what really counts and what doesn't, or what is illusory and harmful. We all need their wisdom so that we do not neglect the true values of life without unnecessarily wasting energy on what has no real human value.

But in order for this wisdom to be formed in the consciences of older people and to enter the circle of community culture, it is essential that older people feel loved, considered, respected and listened to. The feast of the grandparents of Jesus, the parents of Mary Most Holy, also invites us to this. □

POPE FRANCIS ON GRANDPARENTS

"Use the inventiveness of love, make phone calls, video calls, send messages, listen to them and, where possible, in compliance with health care regulations, go to visit them, too. Send them a hug," he said before leading visitors in giving a big round of applause for all grandparents.

The pope made his remarks on the memorial of Sts. Joachim and Anne - Mary's parents, Jesus' grandparents and the patron saints of grandparents in 2020.

GIVING UP OR GOING ON!

by Anastasia Dias

Have you ever tried to do something you've only dreamed of doing? Have there been unpleasant situations or people you've encountered on the way? Have you given up on your dreams because of them? If you're one of those people who've given up or have been thinking of giving up, I have two true stories for you. They've both made me realize the power of never giving up. And I hope that they will help you give up the habit of giving up.

A few years ago, my friend Rebecca had just graduated from college. She had applied to a reputed firm for a job. Rebecca knew that she would get the job; she'd always believed in herself and her potential.

However, when the day of the job interview arrived, she was down with fever. She couldn't walk and had been throwing up since the night before. Her interview was in the afternoon.

Everyone, including her parents told her, 'Let this interview go. There will always be a next time.' But Rebecca was determined. She was prepared for it.

By the afternoon, she felt better and got herself ready for the interview. I was waiting for her

outside the office. After the interview, she told me, 'It doesn't really matter if I get the job or not. I just don't want to look back and say that I could've gone for the interview but didn't.' A few days later, she got a call saying that she was selected and could begin work the following day. She went on to receive a promotion within a year. Today, she is CEO of that firm. I can't help but wonder what would have happened if she'd listened to what everyone around her had told her? Probably, she would have been somewhere else, wondering what would have happened had she attended the interview.

I learnt a lot of things after that incident. I'd always believed I was not strong or determined like her. I would cave in, in the face of my problems and say, 'Oh! I'm tired. I'm going to give up.' Then,



I'd blame situations or people or even the weather for demotivating me.

I too had wanted to do things in my life. But, when I finally got the chance to do them, I felt that there was a lot of struggle involved and, I didn't want to struggle. After this incident of Rebecca, I was motivated to work towards the goals I'd given up on earlier.

I know that all of us face similar situations in our lives where we choose to give up. Sometimes, we're physically unwell, actually, most of the time, we're mentally unprepared. And, we're always trying to blame someone else or something else for it. Trust me, I've done it myself.



Most of us are familiar with the Biblical story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. We all know that the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. They were forced into hard labour throughout the day. The Israelites had been ill-treated and tortured for quite a long time.

Finally, when they did escape Egypt, their journey was long and arduous. They had to traverse through deserted land; they were physically and mentally tired. Their children were hungry. They started to complain and told Moses that it would've been better if they'd been enslaved in Egypt. It would've been better for them to

suffer at the hands of the Egyptians instead of this never-ending journey to a place they had never seen. Think of it: they were ready to give up the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey to turn back to slavery in Egypt. They wanted to go back to their old ways which apparently seemed easier than their journey towards the new land.

Many of us can relate to this. We want to break an addiction or get out of an abusive relationship or work towards fulfilling our ambitions. Sadly, when we take the first step, we see that the journey is longer and tougher than we expected. Our old, destructive ways start to seem easier to us, and, most of us, like the Israelites, turn our backs on the new. We go back to our old ways.

Imagine this: If the Israelites had given up on their journey, they'd still be in Egypt. We'd never know of them today. If Rebecca had given up, she'd be somewhere else, wondering what could've happened.

If you give up, you'll always be left with questions and excuses. And believe me, no one likes to hear excuses.

If you truly want to change something within you or around you, start now. And if the road seems tiring and long and you feel like giving up, I want you to think of the Israelites. I want you to think of all the goodness that lies ahead of you. I want you to choose between moving forward or backward, and, believe me, I'm sure you'll make the right choice. □

"THE INMATES CALL ME BOSS-DAD"

*Interview with Fr Valentino Favaro,
a missionary in Congo-Brazzaville*

Father Valentino, originally from Veneto, was born on 20 December 1938 into a farming family that owned a good piece of land to cultivate, but above all maintained a simple and genuine faith. And this faith had already borne fruit: his elder brother had become a Salesian.

How did you get this missionary ideal?

I felt the desire to become more involved in pastoral work, and the idea of being a missionary in *Operation Africa* and in Cameroon, which had been entrusted to the Ligurian-Tuscan province (of the Salesians), began to take shape. The French I had learned at the University of Pisa and during several stays in France, made it easier for me to realise this desire. The Provincial Fr Liberatore asked me to replace Fr Bocchi for a time as Director and parish priest. He had returned to Italy because of a heart attack, but this did not prevent him from resuming his work in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. The parish covered three quarters of the town of Ebolowa, in the south of the country. And it extended into the forest with about 40 villages up to 50 km from the parish church. I stayed there for about 17 years, the happiest of my life.

What is the scope of the Salesian Community?

The parish has about three hundred thousand Christians,

with a nursery school, primary schools, a middle school, a high school, a dispensary, a Caritas centre, a vocational centre with various specialisations. We work with prisoners who are crammed into a prison built at the time of colonisation for 75 inmates, now houses 350/400. They are crammed into small cells, forced to sleep on the floor, facing each other and on their sides because there was no room to sleep on their backs. I am their chaplain, *daddy-in-chief*, as they affectionately call me. I have never experienced such affection anywhere else in my years in Italy or Africa.

Is prison ministry difficult?

In 2009 I was sent by the Superiors to Congo-Brazzaville in Pointe Noire where the parish priest, now bishop of the Diocese, Father Miguel Olaverri, immediately asked me to consider the prison where we had already started a certain presence, even though it was not in the territory of the parish. But it seemed to us that it was in our spirit since Don Bosco too had also started with prisons. For me, everything I did gave me much satisfaction, but I must say that my greatest satisfaction came as chaplain of Ebolowa prison which fell in the territory of the parish. I regularly visited the prisoners, brought them medicines, prepared them for the sacraments and they always called me *mon père*.

Unfortunately, minors were

mixed in with the adults and that was not good, so I undertook to build a separate section for minors and women. During the summer we organised the *great Olympics*, starting with the Bible, and this initiative was much appreciated. Let me tell you about two significant episodes. One day a riot broke out in the prison because an inmate attempting to escape was seriously injured and left to bleed to death. The inmates smashed everything and barricaded themselves inside the prison. I was called and found the Governor, the Mayor and the other authorities standing in front of the entrance not knowing what to do, because stones, sticks and other blunt objects were raining down from inside the prison. I arrived and decided, to everyone's surprise and fear, to enter. When they saw *mon père*, they opened the door and agreed to let the city leaders in. There was a dialogue between the prisoners and the Governor, the Mayor and the Director, to find out the causes and motivation for the

revolt. At my invitation, the inmates put back all the cell doors that had been unhinged.

Another episode. Some detainees were sick and I immediately thought it was cholera. I went to the director and told him that there was something strange. I also took two doctors with me and they said it was cholera. But only one old man died and all the others were saved.

How do you deal with the problem of 'les enfants de la rue', the street children?

This is a really big problem. Many children and young people live, eat, sleep, forage or steal food in markets and abandoned houses; victims and often protagonists of theft and violence, even children as young as 7/8 years old. Without schedules, without moral values, without guidance. They sleep under market stalls, on station benches, in containers. The youngest hide to escape the sexual violence of the older ones. These children count for nothing, people despise them, fear them, chase them away. They are human potential that could become explosive in a few years. The Salesians immediately set to work to ensure that the children found what they were unconsciously looking for: a family, a school, an environment that would welcome them, adults who would take care of them, their health, in short, an environment that would protect them.

"Now I have a home and a father too..."

For a year now, we Sales-



Fr. Valentino Favaro

ians of Don Bosco here in Pointe Noire have created a centre - *Foyer* - to take in the children we have managed to take off the streets. They are called "*les enfants de la rue*", but they want to say that they are no longer "*les enfants de la rue*" after they entered the house we rented and which has become theirs. One boy recently said to his father, who had found him after they had lost him: "I'm not going with you because I have a house here and I also have a father who looks after me." These are children who come from the most diverse situations - abandoned by their parents, running away from home, influenced by their peers - living in groups dominated by the older ones, looking for victims among the younger ones, victims of physical, moral and not rarely, unfortunately, sexual violence.

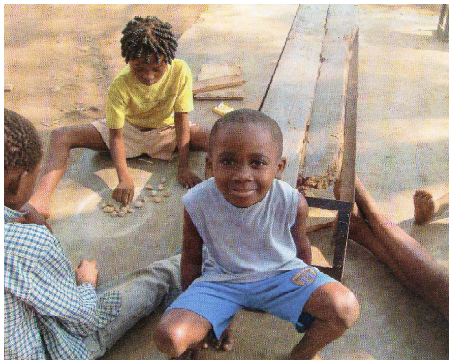
They are the great-grand children of slaves

At first, they slept on the floor on mats - which was already a lot for them, because they were used to sleeping on the ground, on pavements, late at night after washing cars, sweeping shop fronts, finishing selling plastic bags, emptying rubbish, and getting up early in the morning to avoid people's footsteps or police batons. They sleep everywhere. Have I told you about the two kids who took refuge to sleep in an old broken-down truck and were found dead, but why? Strangled, my dear! It's atrocious, it's sad, but that's how it is. Who will cry over them, who will put a flower on a non-existent grave? We try to spare them this new slavery of moral and physical misery,

of moral degradation. They are the great-grandchildren of slaves who were led in chains onto slave ships: half died on the voyage and the others would never see their land, their forest, their gods again. We would like them to be well integrated into society and to be protagonists of their own future.

Here in Pointe Noire, they have seen this small town literally explode - it has more than a million inhabitants, - enormous oil wealth, a port that serves landlocked countries, and wood. But they watch all this as spectators because all these riches are now - and for how long - in the hands of foreigners. Companies like Total, Eni, Chevron, Chinese, Indians, Lebanese, French, Italians: each one carves out a piece of the cake: and what do they get? Well, now I come to the problem: we have decided that our boys must have beds with a mattress - *mon père*, they tell me, we are no longer "*enfants de la rue*", we now have a house, directors and a school - and then we will add tables.

That's it, for them, at eighty, if God gives me a hand, I'll hang on. □



At Pointe Noire, the Salesians have opened a centre for street children

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. JOHN CASSIAN (360 + 838, JULY 23)

by Ian Pinto, sdb

There is little known about the early life of this stalwart of monasticism. We know that he was born in Dobruja, Scythia which is somewhere between present day Bulgaria and Romania, in the year 360 and that he went on to become a monk, an ascetic, a theologian and the founder of a famous abbey. He was born into a wealthy family and received a good education. He was fluent in Latin and Greek and from his writings we can glean that he was also fluent with the works of Cicero and Persius.



HOLY FRIENDSHIP

We do not know much about his family. He mentions having a sister in one of his early works but nothing is known about her either. However, we know that he had a friend by the name of Germanus who was older than him in years and had some influence on him. John and his family trusted Germanus because as a young adult, he travelled with him to Palestine where he would live for the next 25 years!

Germanus was full of good intentions and sincerely desired to

commit himself to the Lord. Possibly this caught the attention of John and the two travelled to Palestine and got themselves admitted in a hermitage near Bethlehem. They spent the next three years there learning the basics of monasticism and developing a taste for asceticism. After three years, they left the hermitage to test themselves in the desert of Scete in

Egypt. During that sojourn they spent time at different monasteries. Besides spiritual practice, John and Germanus engaged in the study of theology and prepared themselves for pastoral ministry.

John and Germanus shared a special friendship that went beyond appearances. They were emotionally and spiritually invested in the progress of each other. This is something striking that we can learn from them. Friendship is a beautiful gift and a special privilege. Friendships have the power to make or break our personalities and our futures. Proverbs 18:24 reads, *"Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin."* Friends are the next best thing to family; we can't choose our family but we can choose our friends and so we have to be careful who we choose to call friend.

John and Germanus shared a bond of friendship that one could say was more like kinship. Their friendship was directed toward God. Their friendship spurred them and if we are able to venerate John Cassian as a saint today we must not forget his excellent friend, Germanus and his role in shaping John.

THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

Around the year 399 a huge controversy broke out in the Church of Egypt. It came to be known as the Origenist Controversy. It got the name from an Alexandrian theologian, Origen (184-253 BCE) who was quite popular at the time and whose writings were studied by all those living a monastic life. This is how John got embroiled in the controversy.

The problem arose when Epiphanius of Salamis raised certain

objections to the writings of Origen which he deemed were heretical and asked that Origen be condemned. One of the chief problems, he pointed out, was Origen's concept of an incorporeal God, and who is erroneously limited to a human form in the person of Jesus. It was his insistence on the formlessness of God and its possible derivation from Greek philosophy that really incited the controversy.

Things came to a head when Theophilus, the Archbishop of Alexandria wrote a letter condemning Origen. This letter created strife within the Alexandrian Church and things got so bad that over 300 monks who sided with Origen's ideas left Alexandria and moved elsewhere. Among them were John and Germanus. They went to Constantinople and placed themselves under the protection of the Patriarch there, John Chrysostom.

While in Constantinople, John was ordained a deacon and continued his studies. The controversy kept snowballing and even sucked John Chrysostom into it. He was accused of harbouring Origenist heretics and was illegally deposed from his position. John Cassian committed himself to recovering the good name of his patron and even went to Rome to meet the Pope about it. Pope Innocent I heard John Cassian's petitions but even his efforts proved fruitless in rescuing Chrysostom from persecution and exile. A little while later, Chrysostom died and John Cassian had to find a place to settle down after his ordination to the priesthood.

FATHER OF WESTERN MONASTICISM

He received an invitation to set

up a monastery in southern France, near Marseilles. In 415, he established the Abbey of St. Victor which had monasteries for both men and women. It was the first institute of its kind in the West and became the model for later monasticism.

John put all that he had learnt from numerous experiences and years at various monasteries to good use in the setting up of the Abbey. During this time, he came up with two foundational works that would go on to become the bedrock of monasticism and would highly influence all those who sought to adopt a monastic life. The two books were *Institutes of the Monastic Life* and *Conferences on the Egyptian Monks*. These books were praised and proved to be highly influential on St. Benedict when he was coming up with his now-famous Rule of monastic life.

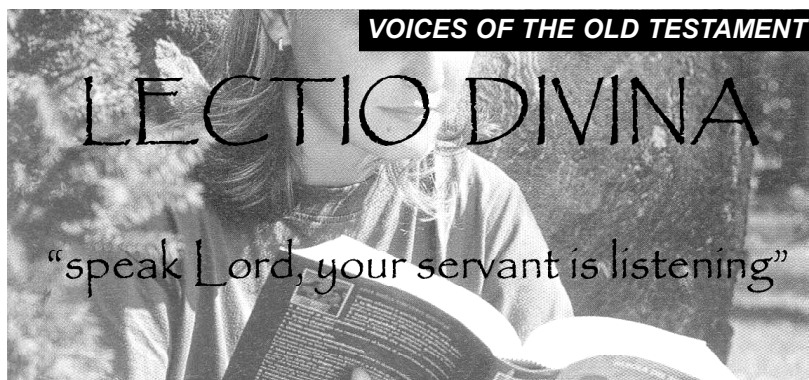
This is another striking feature of John Cassian: he spent many years learning and when the time came he was prepared to put his knowledge to good use. Education is a privilege that all of us have received. It is much more than a passing certificate; it is a toolkit for life! Education ought to equip us to deal with the various situations that life throws up at us. John was fortunate to have received a good education and later when his patron, Chrysostom needed his help, he was able to offer it thanks to his knowledge of Latin. Despite his seemingly itinerant life in Egypt, John picked up the basics of ascetic life and engaged in a serious study of theology. This equipped him to deal with the Origenist controversy and emerge as an erudite scholar and systematic theologian.

VENERATION

There are mixed views regarding the legacy of John Cassian. There were some Roman Catholics who accused him of espousing the heresy of Semi-pelagianism. It is a doctrine that gives human will and effort more importance than the grace of God in the quest for salvation. It is not that the doctrine denies grace entirely but makes it subordinate to effort. Cassian valued the grace of God in spiritual life and recognized the fact that without God we can do nothing but on the other hand, he was also aware that the spiritual life required the individual to make effort to cooperate with God's grace. Thus, Cassian concluded that salvation necessarily involves both free human consent and the grace of God. The Roman Church condemned Semi-pelagianism in the Council of Orange in 529 CE but recognized John Cassian as a saint. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Cassian is held in high regard. His teachings and writings are valued as being orthodox and insightful.

John Cassian has left an indelible mark on the Church's theology, spirituality and religious practice. His writings have influenced many great saints and have even served as sources for many of the Church's doctrines. His teachings helped the Church grow firm roots and has bolstered spiritual life and theology besides becoming the locus for learning, culture and charitable ministries.

John Cassian was never canonized since he lived and died long before the process came to be regularized; however, his sanctity of life as well as his contributions to the life of the Church are unforgettable. □



“I AM NOT THE SON OF A PROPHET”

by Carlo Broccardo

Amos warns us that nothing that happens to us, should make us unfit to proclaim the Gospel; there is no excuse. Each of us will do it in our own way as we are able.

A bit of history? We must, if we are to understand what happened that day between Amos and Amaziah. In fact, on **11 July this year** we will hear a first reading in which there is a squabble between a priest (*Amaziah*) and a prophet (*Amos*). Why? What had happened?

Let's therefore go into the history of Israel. Not from the beginning, for goodness sake. Let us begin with the great king David, who defeated the Philistines, freed his people from all their other enemies around, secured the borders and made Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom. His son Solomon found things already done: he had no enemies to fight and could use the years of his reign to consolidate the power he had received (especially through political alliances with the neighbouring peoples) and to “embellish” the land with many buildings - the most important of which was undoubtedly the temple in Jerusalem.

Solomon spent a lot, and the peo-

ple complained because - in order to have liquidity - he raised the taxes. So, when he died, the northern tribes rebelled and declared their independence; they were rich, they had a powerful army, they no longer wanted to pay taxes to Jerusalem. Jeroboam proclaimed himself king of the North and, to prevent people from going to Jerusalem to pray, he had a temple built in Dan and one in Bethel. The year was 930 BC.

We are about two hundred years



later when the prophet Amos enters the scene. The political situation had not changed, the two king-

doms were still divided: the northern kingdom with its capital in Samaria (often referred to in the Bible as the “land of Israel”); the southern kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem (referred to as the “land of Judah”). The northern kingdom was large and rich; it was also going through a particularly happy period, because international politics had weakened its enemies. Unfortunately, all the wealth was in the hands of a few people, and while the majority of the people lived in hardship, the few rich people lived the good life: they ate, drank, traded and became richer and richer. It is against this social injustice that the prophet Amos rages; it is against the falsehood of these rich people that he thunders in his oracles: they go to the temple to take part in solemn liturgies, but at home they oppress the poor! Amos was indeed one who thundered against injustice, in no uncertain terms, as when he prophesied that “the orgy of the dissolute shall cease” (Am 6:1, 7).

The problem was that Amos went through the northern kingdom and railed against all this injustice, but he was from the south! As it is said at the beginning of the book, he “was a shepherd of sheep, of Tekoa” (Am 1:1), a town located a few kilometres from Bethlehem, therefore also very close to Jerusalem. Amaziah was a priest of the Temple of Bethel, one of the two temples of the Northern Kingdom. He did not like Amos' harsh words and chased him away with the simplest of insults: mind your own business! “Go away, seer; retire to the land of Judah”; that is to say, go back to your home and no longer meddle in things that do not concern you. Who are you to teach us what is right and what is wrong?

Amos' answer is beautiful, because it is disarming; he says: I did not decide to be a prophet! I have never been a prophet in my life, I have never belonged to any group of prophets (we could translate the expression “I am not the son of a prophet” in this way, knowing that at that time every court had its “official” prophets). I am a simple farmer, I grow sycamores; I am a shepherd, I am a herdsman. This is my background; this is my home. I did not decide to go around the cities and bring the word of God. But “the Lord took me and called me as I followed the flock. The Lord said to me: Go, prophesy.” And I could not say no. “He roars the lion, who will not tremble? The Lord has spoken, who will not prophesy?”; so, he himself had said in Amos 3:8.

It is curious, because Amos is not the only one; even Jeremiah did not feel suitable, because he was too young; Moses because he could not speak; Isaiah because he was impure. David was the youngest of his brothers, yet God said to him: “I took you from the pasture, while you were following the flock, that you might be the leader of my people Israel” (2 Sam 7:8). It seems that this is God's style: he does not look for professional heralds and even less for careerists.

No personal history, no past, no matter what may happen to us, makes us unsuitable to proclaim the Gospel: there are no excuses: as Pope Francis says in *Evangelii Gaudium*, proclaiming the Gospel is the task of all God's people. Each of us will do it in his own way, as he is able to; Amos, for example, certainly does not have the evocative power of Isaiah or Hosea. It matters little. What matters is to bring the gospel. □

Quiet Spaces

CALLED TO BE SERVANTS

Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae - June 12, 2017

Peter, conscious of being “the greatest sinner among the Apostles” — going so far as to have “denied the Lord” — but also aware of being chosen “to feed the people with love,” asked to be crucified “upside-down.” This was one of the images to which Pope Francis referred in his homily on Friday morning, 2 June, inspired by the dialogue between Jesus and Peter as recounted in the day’s passage from the Gospel of John (21:15-19).

“This dialogue between the Lord and Peter,” Pope Francis pointed out, “is a calm dialogue, between friends, a peaceful, subtle dialogue on the shore of the lake where Peter had been called at the beginning.” As the conversation unfolds, the Pope explained, Jesus uses words like “love, feed my sheep, follow me: peaceful words, words arising from the atmosphere of the resurrection” that “the Lord is carrying forth.” It is “a dialogue of friends and service, since it is taking place after the breakfast which Jesus himself prepared.” And it is a dialogue, the Pope continued, “in which Jesus, who is the Good Shepherd, entrusts his sheep to Peter.”

Thus, “a dialogue between friends.” And in fact Jesus asks Peter: “Do you love me? Love. And do you want to be my friend? Are you my friend?” This, the Pope continued, “is the atmosphere of this dialogue, of this page of the Gospel so clearly peaceful, so clearly subtle.”

Francis chose to “point out three things” about “this dialogue”. The first was the phrase, “follow me.” Jesus, the Holy Father explained, “chose the greatest sinner of the Apostles: the others had also run away, but this one denied him,” saying: “I do not know him.” And yet “Jesus asks him: ‘Do you love me more than these?’” Thus, the Pope affirmed, “Jesus chose the greatest of sinners.” In this regard, the Pope recalled, “there comes to my mind a dialogue between Jesus and a 17th century saint, a saint for whom Jesus had done many, many favours. It was a woman, a holy woman: ‘But Lord, to me who am so small, and so great a sinner.’ And the Lord said: ‘Had I found a greater sinner than you, I would have given it to him.’” Thus, the Pope continued, “the great sinner was chosen to tend the People of God, to ‘feed’ the People of God: it makes us think.”

The second point suggested by the Pope is “the word ‘love’” being used in this dialogue: “‘feed,’ because you love me, ‘feed,’ because you are my friend, ‘feed.’” And thus, “feed with love.” And “Peter takes this up in his first Letter: he has learned.” We should not “feed with our head held high, as a great dictator, no: feed with humility, with love, just as Jesus did.” And “this is the mission that Jesus gives to Peter: yes, with his sins, with his mistakes,” such that “right after this dialogue, Peter slips, makes a mistake: he is tempted by curiosity and

he says to the Lord: ‘But this other disciple, where will he go, what will he do?’” It is “with love, amid his mistakes, his sins, but with love.” Because “these sheep are not your sheep, they are my sheep,” says the Lord.” Thus, “love: if you are my friend, you must be their friend.”

The third point that springs from the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is exemplified by “two images.” There is the one “from Holy Thursday,” the Pope explained, “when Peter, sure of himself, with that same self-assurance with which he had said: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,’ then says to the servant of the High Priest: ‘I don’t know the man, I am not from his group.’” In other words, the Holy Father pointed out, “Peter denies Jesus and then their eyes meet: when Jesus goes out, He looks at him, and Peter, courageous, even courageous in his denial, is capable of weeping bitterly.” And “then after all of his life in service to the Lord,” Pope Francis added, “he ends up exactly like the Lord: on the cross. But he doesn’t boast,” saying: “I shall meet the same end as my Lord!” No, he asks: “please, hang me on the cross upside-down, because at least in this way all can see that I am not the Lord; I am his servant.”

“This is what we can take from this dialogue, so beautiful, so peaceful, so friendly, so subtle,” the Pope said. He then concluded by asking “that the Lord give us all the grace to go about in life with our ‘head down’; with our head held high, with the dignity God gives us, but with our head down, knowing that we are sinners and that Jesus alone is Lord: we are servants.” □

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 27, 23 June 2017)



HIS MOTHER'S PORTRAIT

By Pierluigi Menato (TA/ID)

A widow spoke to her 18-year-old son, who was looking at her with much affection and yet very sad.

"Now, son, we both need to accept this with courage and resignation. I'm sure we'll find that in God, like when we lost your dear dad. If he were still alive, you would not be forced to go searching for work outside the village. But you see, here we live in a village; there are no factories, no businesses, no shops, where you can make a start. With your aunt and uncle's help, I found a place for you in town with an honest businessman who will love you, if you know how to earn it; and I hope you do because I know you. The day will come when you will be able to earn enough money for yourself and for me, then we will no longer be separated. Don't cry, it's useless. You know that I love you, that this separation pains me, and yet, you see? I'm not crying. I would weep and be very restless and worried if I knew that you were not being your best self."

As she said this, the poor widow placed in her son's hand a little box wrapped in thin tissue paper.

"What is it?"

"It contains a portrait of me. It's my gift to you before you leave."

The boy unwrapped the package and saw a shining pendant with his mother's portrait.

He brought it to his lips and kissed it.

"Mum, I promise to always keep

it on my heart and to be as good as you taught me.

Henry was very satisfied with his new position in Louie's shop. He was an honest man who knew how to make himself well liked and appreciated. For his part, the young man immediately showed good qualities as a skilful, active and trustworthy employee, so much so that he earned his master's absolute trust.

Mother and son often wrote to each other, and from time to time the mother went into town to visit her Henry and spend a few hours with him.

Things went well for a long time. Henry was very cautious about making friends; without being called out for being snobbish or overly serious, he managed to keep away from his workmates and places where youngsters his age hung out. When he realised this, Louie, his boss did not keep a keen eye on him as he had done in the early days, and now, trusting him completely, he gave him full freedom in the evenings after the shop closed.

But it was during this time that Henry made friends with some youngsters who gradually convinced him to spend his evenings at the café or playing pool or attending parties.

Every evening, as he reached home, before falling asleep, Henry would look at his mother's portrait and kiss it, repeating:

"I won't go with that company

ever again."

But the next evening, unaware to even himself he would be drawn to that company again. And so it happened that one unfortunate day he ran up a huge gambling debt.

He found himself penniless: he didn't know how to pay. He asked a friend of his who he thought he could trust. Sadly, he was unable to help.

"I must pay this debt, absolutely" Henry repeated to himself. "Asking my boss for the money would be like confessing that I have let him down, and I don't have that kind of courage...."

The friend, after a long conversation, in a kind of round-

about way, suggested to him: "You could take that amount from the boss's till."

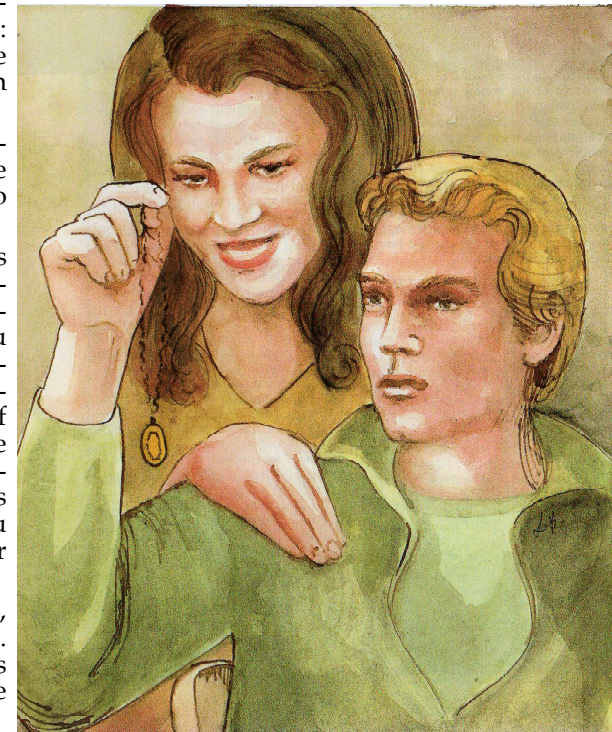
Henry was indignant. "You're asking me to steal?"

"For heaven's sake, let me explain! I was saying that you could take the amount without telling anyone, of course, with the intention of putting it back as soon as you receive your salary."

"No, I can't, absolutely no... What if the boss notices the shortfall?"

"He won't notice it. In any case, I'm always here! You know me by now. Haven't I done you favours in the past?"

Confused by these false claims of friendship, and for a long time, toying with those horrid suggestions, strangely, those deceptions seemed rather innocent. Henry did not have the strength to resist the bad advice, also because his friend kept reminding him that it was necessary to pay off the debt as soon as possible and that, by not paying up he was going to make a bad impression before his friends and the boss, should the creditor come to the shop to complain about him.



It was evening; the shop had just closed.

Henry was sitting at his desk, counting the money. The drawer was open, full of uncounted money. The boss has gone off on his own business.

Certain that no one would see him, Henry put his hand in the drawer and took what was kindly termed as a "tacit loan," but which in itself constituted a real theft.

In his haste to put the handful of coins into his pocket, some of them fell on the floor. At that moment, he heard the boss' footsteps coming in from the adjoining room...

Henry, his face on fire, bends down to hurriedly pick up the coins; in the sudden movement the pendant containing his mother's portrait slipped out of his jacket pocket.

A small bump: the faint crunch of broken glass.

"Oh, my poor mother!"

Henry looked at his mother's face, it was so sad, filled with pain and reproach! In a single moment, the glass cover over portrait had shattered like the boy's honour and the promise made one distant day could be shattered...

Henry then burst

into tears and collapsed on the ground next to the remains of the portrait.

"Mamma, mamma, forgive me! I let you down; I was about to steal!... I have broken the trust of uncle Louie! ...".

Mr Louie appeared in the doorway. Henry had not noticed him, he only realized when he had come closer and spoken to him.

"Don't cry: can I help you?"

Henry confessed everything to his boss, who, without reproaching him, because he had understood that he had come to his senses, told him:

"I will settle your debt. You can pay me back little by little from your salary. That way you won't even



notice the sacrifice."

"What about my mother?"

"We will say nothing to your mother for now, so as not to displease her."

Henry did as the good gentleman had advised him.

But when he had grown up into

an adult and was about to start a new family, he admitted everything to his mother one day. From then on, his heart brimmed over with an inexpressible joy.

And later, when his mother had already died, she seemed to always look at him from her faded portrait with infinite tenderness. □

WHEN GOD CREATED THE MOTHER

The good Lord had decided to create...the Mother. He'd been around for six days already when an angel appeared and asked him, "This is going to be a waste of time, isn't it?"

And he replied: "Yes, but have you read the requirements for use? They must be completely washable, not plastic...have 180 moving parts all replaceable...running on coffee and leftovers from the day before...have a kiss capable of healing everything, from a broken leg to a disappointment in love...and six pairs of hands."

The angel shook his head and said incredulously: "Six pairs?" "It's not the hands that are difficult," said the good Lord, "but the three pairs of eyes that the mother must have." "So many?"

God nodded: "A pair to see through closed doors when she asks: 'Children, what are you doing in there?' even if she already knows. Another pair behind her head to see what she shouldn't see, but needs to know. Another pair to tacitly say to the son who got into trouble: 'I understand, and I love you.'"

"Lord," said the angel gently touching his arm, "go to sleep, tomorrow is another..." "I can't," replied the Lord. "I'm almost done now. I already have one who can heal herself if she gets sick, who can prepare a lunch for six with half a kilo of minced meat and who can push a nineyear-old boy to take a shower."

The angel went around the model-mother slowly examining it curiously. "It's too tender," he said with a sigh. "But resistant!" replied the Lord fervently. "You have no idea what a mom can do or endure. Can you imagine?"

"Not only that, but she also knows how to make good use of reason and compromise," replied the Creator.

"Then the angel bent over the mother's model and ran a finger over her cheek. "There's a leak here," he said.

"It's not a leak," corrected the Lord. "It's a tear." "Of what use is it?"

"It expresses joy, sadness, disappointment, pain, loneliness and pride." "But you're a genius!" exclaimed the angel.

With subtle melancholy, God added, "To tell you the truth, I didn't put it there, it *was* there." (Erma Bombeck).

It was not God who created tears. Why do we? □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 30

by Michele Molineris

100. Don Bosco reads faces (1861)

In Don Bosco's case, his wisdom opened to him an even greater field of vision. Knowing the past and the future of many youths, he used his knowledge to guide them or to forewarn them of the dangers to come. To support this statement, we shall quote Father John Turchi, Lit.D., a shrewd, prudent and severe critic: "During the ten years I have already spent at the Oratory, I have countless times heard Don Bosco say: 'Bring me a boy I have never known or met before; after a look at his face, I will tell him all the sins he committed since his early years.'"

Occasionally he would say, "Many times – especially on solemn feasts and spiritual retreats – while hearing confessions, I see boys' consciences wide open before me like a book. Fortunate indeed are those boys who follow my advice, particularly when given in the sacrament of Penance. But at other times I see nothing. This phenomenon occurs intermittently for longer or shorter periods." It came – we believe – whenever the good of souls required it.

Generally, Don Bosco toned down the impression his words would leave by trying to make it appear that there was nothing supernatural about this gift. He would smile and say, "When I hear confessions at night, I prefer to have the lamp so placed that I can see the boys' faces; in daytime I like to have them face me; it speeds the confessions."

It is obvious then that Don Bosco saw his pupils; consciences as in a mirror. Of this I am most certain because I have witnessed it hundreds of times. The boys used to call this

"reading the countenance." I make no pronouncement on the matter. I merely state what I and all the Oratory boys know." (EBM VI, 257) ***

"Someone may think," asserts Fr Rua, "that, in manifesting his pupils' conduct and personal secrets, Don Bosco was availing himself of information he had received from the boys themselves or from the young clerics supervising them. I can state with absolute certainty that, throughout the many years I lived with him, neither I nor any of my companions ever noticed any such thing. Furthermore, boys can hardly keep a secret, and since all of us were then young and always with them, we would easily have found out whether he had received private information. The belief that Don Bosco could read our sins on our foreheads was so common that, when anyone committed a sin, he shied away from Don Bosco until he had gone to confession. This happened particularly whenever Don Bosco narrated a dream. This conviction arose in the pupils especially what they saw that in confession – even when they were perfect strangers to him – he told them sins they had forgotten or were trying to conceal.

Besides showing them their state of conscience as he had seen it in his dreams, Don Bosco used to announce things one could not humanly know, such as future deaths and other events. As I grow older, the more deeply am I convinced that God had endowed him with the gift of prophecy. (EBM VI, 482-483)

101. Who are you? (1861)

It was Sunday February 17. Don Bosco narrated a fact that had just taken place that day. He said: "One

boy was still afraid to make his general confession. I sent for him with the message that, even if he did not want to make his confession to me, he should come because I had something to tell him for the good of his soul. He still refused, until a good friend tactfully took him by the hand and led him to my room. Breaking through the crowd of boys waiting for confession, he asked me, 'Do you want me?' 'Who are you?' I asked in reply. 'I am so and so.'

'Good! Listen now! Since you do not want to make your confession to me, I'll tell you what you have to confess. I don't mind in the least if you go to some other priest. In your mind now, go back to such and such a year, and recall this sin and that!' I told him everything. The poor boy was stunned. 'I might as well make my confession to you right now,' he said, 'I don't want to tell these things to anyone else.'

'In that case,' I said, 'come tomorrow evening. I have much to do now because it's Saturday and I have no time. Come tomorrow between five and eight and we will clear up everything.' He did so and went away so happy that it was a joy to see him.' Don Bosco told this to three or four only, not to all. (EBM VI, 498)

102. Strenna of the Madonna (1861)

On the last day of the year Don Bosco gave his youngsters a strenna (a motto or a slogan) to practise throughout the new year. In addition to this general strenna, known to all and to be practised by all, Don Bosco suggested a secret one for each one, adapted to the spiritual needs of the individual, made especially to overcome some reluctance or to encourage the practice of some particular virtue.

On 31 December 1861 Don Bosco also gave the general strenna, which was that they promise to hear and benefit profitably from Holy Mass. As for the particular strenna, he promised for that year there would be a "singular and extraordinary thing" which "had never yet happened at the Oratory." But for that evening he said no more; he spoke of it again on the evening of January 1st in these terms: "The strenna I am giving you is not mine. What would you say if Our Lady herself were to come in person to say a word to you one by one? Well, that's exactly how it is: Our Lady is giving each of you a gift."

So, what had happened? What had happened was that for several years Don Bosco had been begging Our Lady to take his place in the allocation of private 'gifts,' and that year Our Lady, in view of the greater good that could come out of it, had agreed, suggesting a gift or gifts for each youngster and superior in the house. How this came about is not precisely known. It is supposed that Our Lady surprised him, by her appearance or her inspiration, at a moment in the night, while he was awake at his desk, and dictated to him all those maxims and exhortations which appeared later on, accompanied by the name of each one.

The handwriting was Don Bosco's and the names of the persons, not in alphabetical order, were written in a ledger-like register which already contained accounts and reminders of another nature. You mean then that Don Bosco, suddenly seized by inspiration or apparition, took the first register that came to hand and wrote as if under dictation? On that occasion he took care to write only on the right side of the paper, that is always on an odd numbered page,

because this would have made it easier for him to distribute the *fioretti*; and when he came across some page that had already been used, he skipped it, respecting the previous entry.

It was a register two centimetres thick, twenty centimetres wide and thirty centimetres tall, like an open notebook. The names of the 600 or so youngsters of the time can still be read in it, and of thirteen of them the *fioretti* can also be read. Those were the names of those who had not dared to collect them. Among the others was that of Joseph Buzzetti who was urged to make up his mind ("... Why delays?"), as he had not yet felt, after twenty years living with Don Bosco, to become a Salesian. In fact he did not become one until another 15 years later, in 1877.

Some of the youngsters who, had heard about the mysterious register and having identified it from the description they were given by those who had seen it when they went to receive their *fioretto*, had temporarily taken it to look inside, during Don Bosco's absence; to them the pages seemed miraculously blank, so that the secrecy promised by Don Bosco would be respected. But they did not escape the chastisement with which God met them later on, for having tried to violate the expected secrecy.

Another one, a 22-year-old carpenter who had just arrived, having been exhorted to "put his conscience in order" publicly protested that he had no need of this exhortation, that he had always lived well and that he was willing to ask the parish priest for as many certificates as Don Bosco wanted. He was new to the environment and did not yet know Don Bosco; but having thought it over, the next day he gave in to Our Lady's invitation, decla-

red to Don Bosco that that advice was just what he needed, and fell at his feet in pain, for confession. That was the first conquest of that singular heavenly illustration (from M.B., VII, 2).

103. A little late! (1861)

"On the evening of November 10, 1861," wrote Fr Provera, "I felt so weak that I had to go to bed. I had pneumonia and indigestion, and my phlegm was tinged with blood. The doctor tried bleeding me several times, but to no avail. In fact, my condition worsened, so that by noon of the next day he listed me as critical and suggested that I receive the Last Sacraments. Father Rua was attending me. He again applied leeches and then went to call Don Bosco, who came to see me for the fourth time that day. It was about six in the evening. 'Poor Francis!' he said jokingly. 'Shall we recommend you to our Lady and to Dominic Savio?'"

When I answered in agreement, he suggested that I say an *Our Father* with all my heart. He knelt for a few moments in prayer, stood up, placed his hand over me, and blessed me. Then he said, "Look, you can either go to heaven or be cured. Which do you choose? Would you tarry a little longer in this world and increase your merits by suffering, or would you rather have us issue you a passport for heaven? Which will it be?"

For a moment I was silent because I needed time to think. Then calmly I replied, "I have to think this over! Please give me two hours and kindly see me again tonight before you go to bed. By then I'll have made my decision."

At this Don Bosco remarked, "I see that you are not too keen on leaving your body and the Oratory. Very well, we will hold the passport

up this time. Are you happy now?"

"I didn't make up my mind yet," I rejoined. "I only asked you to be kind enough to come for my answer tonight."

"What need is there to think it over?" Father Rua remarked, surprised at my not opting at once for heaven. But Don Bosco continued, "Well, life is always desirable. Anyway, let's leave everything in God's hands. Then bending down, he whispered, 'Don't worry! And then he concluded aloud, 'Think it over, and let me know your decision.'"

I immediately began to think that presently my conscience was tranquil and I had the opportunity of receiving the Last Sacraments and all the comforts of our faith with Don Bosco's assistance. If I chose to die at some other time, would I have all these advantages? What would my spiritual condition be then? But the scales were tipped by this thought: "If Don Bosco promises me heaven, I am sure to get there!" I decided to ask for heaven.

While I was deliberating, Ch. Oreglia walked in, and Father Rua told him what had just occurred between Don Bosco and me. Hearing of my hesitation, he remarked smilingly, "Had I been in your place, I would not only have prepared for death but have jumped out of bed to meet it." "I still can't understand," Father Rua remarked, "why you didn't choose heaven at once! Why hesitate?" "Now I know better," I replied. "I can't wait for Don Bosco to tell him my decision. In fact, I wish you would let him know I accept the passport."

At supper time Father Rua gave Don Bosco my message, but he replied, "It's a trifle too late! He missed his chance. Now he will have to suffer for several more years."

Then I began to worry, thinking, "Don Bosco did not come to hear my confession as he promised he would do. Perhaps, seeing me so hesitant, he went to his room and arranged with Our Lord that I should get well and live. That would be terrible! What a blunder I made in not seizing my chance at once!" I remained on edge until ten, when Don Bosco came to see me. Immediately I exclaimed, "Don Bosco, I want to go to heaven!"

"It's too late, my dear boy," he replied. "Now you'll have to be patient. You will get well again and will live a little longer. Brace yourself for a good deal of suffering." "Poor me," I groaned, saddened by those words. "I had already made other plans, but now they are all wrecked. Is there no way to grant my wish?" "We would have to undo what has been done, and I wouldn't go along with that. Nevertheless, you must not worry. I have asked Our Lord to let you live so that you may win souls for Him. Let us now leave things entirely in His hands."

The next morning, I received Holy Communion with devotion. I felt better and was out of danger. When the doctor arrived at the Oratory, he asked Father Alasonatti: "At what time did he die?" "Whom do you mean?" Father Alasonatti replied, for two of us were gravely ill. "The cleric," the doctor added. "He feels better." "You mean—in heaven!" the doctor exclaimed. "No! Go and see for yourself. We might say that he is convalescing." "Impossible! He was sick enough to die ten times over."

A week after I had taken to bed, the same doctor declared me completely cured. All I needed was to regain my strength, and I soon did. Then I went back to work. (EBM VII, 623) □



HIS TENDER LOVE FOR THE MOTHER OF JESUS

by Teresio Bosco

The Count's Wonder

God filled Dominic's heart richly with many gifts. One of the greatest was the ability to pray intensely. His spirit was so accustomed to talking to God that wherever he was, even in the midst of the loudest noise, he could collect his thoughts and lift his heart to God affectionately. He really looked like a little angel: motionless, composed in his whole person, only on his knees, his face smiling, his head slightly reclined, his eyes downcast. He looked like another St Aloysius. It was enough to see him to be tempted to pray.

In 1854 Count Cays was elected 'leader' of the Sodality of St Aloysius (a group of committed Christians founded in the Oratory). The first time he attended Mass with us, he saw a boy praying so well that he was amazed. At the end of Mass, he asked for his name, and learned that it was Dominic Savio.

He almost always divided his recreation in two. In church, read a page from a Christian book, or recite some prayer for the dead or in honour of Our Lady. He went to church alone or with friends.

"What do you do with your eyes?"

Dominic's tender affection for Mary Most Holy, Mother of Jesus, was very great. In her honour he made a sacrifice every day. He kept his eyes downcast both when he met girls and when he walked the streets to school. Sometimes, along those streets, there were carnival stalls. His classmates would look at everything curiously, they would light up with enthusiasm. Someone asked Dominic if he liked these shows. He replied that he had seen nothing. Once, almost irritated, one of his companions reproached him: - "What do you do with your eyes if you don't look at these things?"

- "I will need them to look at Our Lady's face in Paradise", he replied, "if the Lord will help me to go there".

He had a special devotion to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Every time he entered church, he would go to Our Lady's altar and beg her to keep his heart pure. "Mary," he would say to her, "I always want to be your son. Obtain for me the grace to die before committing a sin against contrary to purity."

A pair of gloves to pray

Every Friday, during recreation, he would go into church with some of his friends and recite the chaplet or litany to Our Lady of Sorrows.

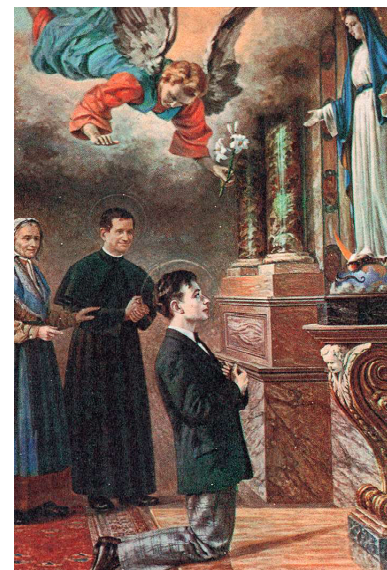
He loved the Blessed Virgin Mary and was happy when he was able to bring someone to pray before her altar. On a Saturday afternoon, he invited a companion to accompany him to church to say a prayer before Our Lady. He replied that his hands were too cold to stand still in church. Dominic took off the gloves from his hands and gave them to him, and so they both went to the altar of Our Lady. Another time he took his cloak off his shoulders and lent it to a friend to accompany him to pray in the cold church. One is awed by such gestures.

At no time did Dominic show greater enthusiasm for Our Lady than in the month of May. He would get together with other youngsters, and every day of this month they would do a kind deed, a prayer, a sacrifice in honour of Our Lady. He would narrate interesting facts about Our Lady that he had read earlier.

The book and the altar

He talked about this especially during recreation: he encouraged everyone to go to confession and to receive Holy Communion especially during that month. He led by example: receiving the Eucharist every day with exceptional reverence.

A curious episode shows the tenderness of his heart for the Mother of God. The boys of the dormitory where Dominic slept decided to pool their small savings to build a beautiful altar to Our Lady. Dominic put all his efforts into making it a success. But when it came to getting the money out, he had to say:



"Now I'm really in a fix! I don't have a single cent! But I want to do something too." He went to his study table to get a book that had been given to him as a prize, and with Don Bosco's permission he took it to his friends saying with joy: "Here is my contribution. I hope it will be useful in some way." This spontaneous and generous gesture made an impression on his companions. A small lottery was organised, and the money raised covered the costs of the small altar. The work was practically finished. Only a few ornaments needed to be completed, and someone was prepared to work during the night. Dominic offered to stay up too, but the others did not allow him. He had been ill earlier, and they forced him to go to bed. He regretted it, but he obeyed. As he was leaving, he said to a friend: "As soon as everything is finished, come and wake me up. I would like to be among the first to see our altar for Our Lady completed." □



MY VOCATION STORY

I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME...

by Fr Ranson D'Souza, SDB

When I was one, my dad underwent a back surgery. After having recovered and going back to work he started suffering from spells of dizziness frequently throughout the day. The medication he was taking did not seem to be very effective. My parents had heard about the 'Divine Retreat Centre' in Kerala and both, my mother and father decided to go there. On their return from there my dad was completely healed and my mother promised God that she would take her whole family there.

Few years later our entire family went to Kerala. It was during a session of praise and worship that I raised my hands in praise and I felt the presence of God as if he was holding my hands. The preacher called out a few names and one of them was mine. He said that the Lord was holding my hand and leading me. It was from that day onward that I had a strong desire to become a priest. I expressed



this desire to my parents.

When I was in the tenth standard, Fr Franco Pinto SDB, the then vocation promoter of the Salesian province of Bombay, visited my school, 'St. Pius X High School' and met the Catholic students during the Catechism class. He asked us what we would like to become. I told him that I wanted to be a priest. Few days later I received a call from him. To receive a call from a priest 15 years back was something special. I felt very glad. For an entire year we kept in touch. Finally I went to a vocation camp to Don Bosco Lonavla where I was selected. When Fr Franco came to meet my parents, it was my father who told him that I

was too young to be able to make

a decision. Hearing this Fr Franco did not insist. But I felt uneasy and I insisted with my parents, requesting them to allow me to go to Lonavla. They finally consented and there was no turning back after that. On my journey there were difficult moments as there always are but God was always there for me. God has met me through so many people he sent me on my journey towards the priesthood and I am sure he will continue to be there till the end. During the years of formation all the Salesians I met had encouraged me and helped me grow. Today I have already completed 3 years as a priest and I thank God for always being at my side.

If today you are wondering whether God is calling you and you are looking for an answer have 'FAITH'... for it is only through our deep faith in God that we will be able to see our life as a vocation and a call from God we will hear from within. The answers are not out there but

Rejoice with Jesus in the Spirit doing the will of the Father
- cf. Lk 10:21

MY MISSION

God created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life but I shall be told it in the next. ... He has not created me for nothing. I shall be a preacher of truth in my own place while not intending it - If I do but keep His commandments.

CARDINAL NEWMAN

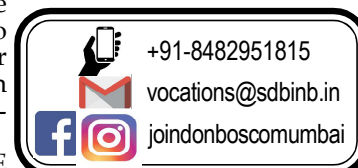
BUILDERS OF ETERNITY

"Isn't it strange that princes and kinds and clowns that caper in sawdust rings, and ordinary folks like you and me are builders of eternity. To each is given a bag of tools, an hour glass and a book of rules, and each must build ere time is flown. A stumbling block or a stepping stone."

R. L. SHARPE



*When God
calls you,
know that
He will
be with you.*



SHANTOU, CHINA

The Holy See's much desired reconciliation between Chinese Catholic communities is now tangible in the diocese of Shantou. In that ecclesiastical circumscription, two bishops - the first until recently not-recognized by the government, and the other with a past as "illegitimate" bishop, who has even been excommunicated by the Holy See - participated in a public ceremony in a church for the first time.

The protagonists of the event are 88-year-old Peter Zhuang Jianjian and 52-year-old Joseph Huang Bingzhang. The first was ordained bishop of Shantou in 2006 outside the procedures imposed by government religious policy. The second, instead, in 2011 had accepted to be ordained bishop of the same diocese without the consent of the Pope. For this reason, right after his ordination, the Holy See had explicitly invoked the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae*, which automatically affects bishops ordained in an illegitimate manner.

During the last phase of the negotiations that on 22 September last led to the agreement between the Holy See and Beijing on the procedures for the appointment of Chinese Catholic bishops, the Vatican negotiators, on behalf of the Pope, had asked Bishop Zhuang to leave, at the age of 87, the leadership of his diocese, in view of entrusting it to the younger Joseph Huang Bingzhang (who in the meantime had expressed his repentance for having accepted to be ordained without pontifical mandate). Before the signing of the agreement, Huang himself, along



with the other illegitimate Chinese bishops (for they were ordained without the Pope's *placet*), after asking forgiveness had been readmitted by the same Pontiff in full communion with the Church. And during the last working session of the bilateral Commission for dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Holy See - held in Beijing in the second week of December - Elder Peter Zhuang and the young Joseph Huang were also given the letters of communion containing the Holy See's dispositions regarding their new tasks. On the basis of these dispositions, Peter Zhuang became bishop emeritus of Shantou, while the task of leading the diocese was conferred on Joseph Huang.

On Tuesday 22 January, the new season of the Chinese Catholic diocese of Shantou experienced an emblematic event: in the church of Jiexi county, where Zhuang usually resides, Bishop Paul Su Yongda (diocese of Zhanjiang) led a celebratory ceremony in honour of the now "emeritus" bishop of Shantou, about to leave the leadership of the diocese, which ended with Zhuang's thanksgiving to all those present. □ Gianni Valente

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Two Feet

A teenager was always asking his father if he could borrow the family car. Pushed to the limit, the father asked his son why he thought God had given him two feet.

Without hesitation, the son replied, "That's easy, one for the clutch and one for the brake and accelerator."

Gold Watch

A boss to a retiree:

"As a symbol of our gratitude, we have created this special gold watch to serve as a reminder of your many years with the company. It needs a lot of winding up, is always a little late, and every day at a quarter to five, it stops working."

Doctor's Orders

Doctor: "I see you're over a month late for your appointment. Don't you know that nervous disorders require prompt and regular attention? What's your excuse?"

Patient: "I was just following your orders, Doc."

Doctor: "Following my orders? What are you talking about? I gave no such order."

Patient: "You told me to avoid people who irritate me."

Coach Call

As a high school football coach, I'm aware that student athletes tend to focus too much on sports. Bob, a fellow coach, was talking about one such player, who called

him at home one night.

When his wife informed the kid that Bob wasn't home, he became frantic and said he had to speak to the coach right away.

"Just calm down, and I'll have him call you as soon as he gets home," the coach's wife told him.

"What's your number?"

The flustered kid replied, "Three."

Apology Letter

Lisa, my co-worker at the travel agency, needed to send a letter of apology to a customer whose trip was a complete fiasco from start to finish. I reminded her of a similar situation a year earlier and dug out the letter I'd written then.

"All you have to do," I told her, "is to change the details, the date, and the name."

She looked it over and smiled wryly. "We won't even need to change the name."

Live to 100

When a grandmother was in her late eighties, she decided to move to Israel. As part of the preparations, she went to see her doctor and get all her charts. The doctor asked her how she was doing, so she gave him the litany of complaints - this hurts, that's stiff, I'm tired and slower, etc.

He responded with, "Mrs. Siegel, you have to expect things to start deteriorating. After all who wants to live to 100?"

The grandmother looked him straight in the eye and replied, "Anyone who's 99." □

CLEVER AS A FOX

I was due to offer Mass to an audience of mainly university students. When sermon time came, I began to focus on an area that has been much in my mind of late. What effect has this constant drip-drip of negative publicity been having on the faith lives of our students? Have they been able to look at the effects - in faith terms - on their lives, and if so, what have they noticed? I knew these questions would be difficult for them and, in return, I promised to share what effect these last months have had on me - insofar as I could work that out. The experience was revealing.

As students talked, one after another said they felt reasonably secure in their faith. They valued what they had been given and were going to stick with their beliefs. They nearly all added that they hoped to have children in the future and intended to bring them up as Catholics, but were unsure whether this would happen or not. Younger people today, they feared - without the secure faith foundations they themselves had been given - may well abandon membership of any type of institutional church.

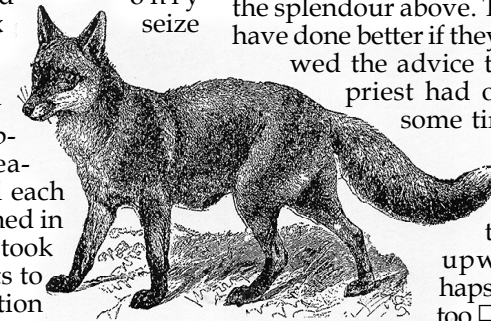
When my turn came to speak, I talked about having to get up, time after time, before congregation after congregation. Insofar as I knew what I felt and could articulate it, my reactions to the seedy revelations about what had been going on within our Church seemed

to induce feelings of shame and embarrassment. To this mix I added words of apology and remorse towards those who had suffered and expressed a good measure of rage towards those who had sullied the good name of the Church.

As I did so, I called to mind excellent ambassadors of Christ that I had known myself. Many of them are now dead but I feel certain that they would be turning in their graves if they knew how their memory had been sullied and dragged through the dirt by recent revelations. I suspected many of those listening, were probably feeling confused and dejected. Probably many Catholics are at the moment. I did, however, have two images to cling to and hoped that one or the other might help those who find themselves in a dark place. They might help you too.

Firstly, when I spoke about the scandals and their effects some little time ago at a church meeting, one woman came up to me afterwards and said gently that she was afraid I was looking for answers in the wrong direction. She suggested that if one worries about the Church as an institution, and places too much hope in the individuals that make up that Church and how well they may act, one leaves oneself open to major disappointment. Much wiser, she suggested, to keep your eyes on Christ and His goodness and see where that leads you.

The second contribution was equally helpful to me. At the end of that same church assembly, another individual came forward to tell me how she came from a country place and how her family kept peacocks on their farm. She recounted how these birds were terrified of the local fox and high-tailed it into the nearest trees whenever it made its nightly rounds. The peacocks were given some warning of the visits, however, because the fox usually barked a warning as it approached and stayed away if it heard an answering call from the farm dog. For a short period, however, their dog had suffered from some sickness and had to be left with the vet. Then, and then, did the fox seize his opportunity. As he made his nightly rounds and approached the peacocks, he found each one safely perched in its own tree. It took him some nights to work out a solution



but on his third or fourth visit he finally did. He settled on one victim and settled under its tree. When he had its full attention as it fearfully glanced down at the perils below, the fox slowly began to circle around the base of its tree. The foolish bird, fixated by this potential danger, swivelled its head round and round to keep the fox in view. After a few minutes it became disorientated, fell out of the tree and was quickly consumed.

On subsequent nights, the other peacocks were fooled by exactly the same trick. They also perished. They had allowed themselves to become fixated by the catastrophe below them rather than looking at the splendour above. They might have done better if they had followed the advice that an old priest had offered me some time earlier. They should have kept their gaze upward. Perhaps we should too. □

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MARY WAS THERE

My spouse and I were longing for the gift of a child for almost 10 years of our married life. We had attended many retreats, prayer services and they deepened our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It was one of my relatives who happened to inspire me to pray to Saint Dominic Savio for the gift of a child and gave me the scapular along with the prayer leaflet. Along with my other personal prayers, I religiously recited the prayer to Dominic Savio and keeping the scapular near my pillow at bedtime. All glory and honour be to our Lord Jesus Christ as he is an awesome, prayer-answering God. Yes indeed I got to know the news of my concept-ion and continued reciting the prayer for expectant mothers through the intercession of Saint Dominic Savio and I was blessed with a baby boy in September 2020.

Follower of Christ

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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Please address all correspondence to:

Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, sdb.,
SHRINE OF DON BOSCO'S MADONNA,
Matunga - MUMBAI - 400 019 - INDIA
Phone/Fax: 91-22- 2414 6320, email: dbmshrine@gmail.com