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*Mary, our model
and mother,
by your obedience
and patience
you have taught us
how to be true
children of God.
Please help us
by your powerful
assistance to
overcome all our
weaknesses, and
to fulfill perfectly
our tasks in life.*

From The Editor's Desk

LISTENING

If you throw a heavy stone into a still pond it makes a big splash and sinks. You see the ripples on the water spread out, until they eventually start bouncing against the banks of the pond. Very quickly, however, they die away, and the pond is just as it was. The bit of energy you used has dissipated and is no longer detectable. You made a brief splash but no there is no difference.

I have been around this place for some 20 years and I've seen our clients grow and age gracefully and many of them are still here.

I remember, Jordan, I guess, he lived alone and would come to church now and then. When I finished Mass I would quickly take off my vestments to try and meet him, but he always 'slipped away.' He seemed shy - rather an introvert. I hardly leave this campus, so I don't know where he came from or where he went after Mass. But one evening, I was standing by the main church steps and lo and behold, I saw Jordan come down the steps. In those days I never knew his name. He smiled a shy smile and he seemed to know that I was trying to meet him for some time. Rather apologetic he came down and we stood in the dim light, talking. I realized that he lived not too far from here and alone, in a flat left to him by his parents who had passed away.

Weeks passed and I realized that I hadn't seen Jordan for some time. From the only time we met, I could see he didn't look in 'the pink of health.' Maybe something was wrong, I feared. I asked a friend who I thought, lived nearby, if he could find out where Jordan lived and how he was.

Jordan was actually battling mental health issues and so was unable to work. He is on a lot of medication and was tense and edgy. A sensitive soul, he was not articulate but he expressed himself with painting. He is also very lonely. He had no one to share Christmas with, so he literally tried to shut out Christmas and its feelings of love, kindness and fellowship, by locking his front door on Christmas Eve and not venturing out until the following day.

Determined to find out more, one evening I visited Jordan; he was in very bad form. I had a bit more time than usual, so I went into his flat and listened to him for about half an hour. That's all I did. When I got up to go, Jordan thanked me sincerely. I could see he was in much better form, more relaxed, more optimistic. I had not changed his life.

However, I did make a difference to John for an evening. In a thousand years no one will know that I or Jordan ever existed nor affected each other. Any ripples that we had made would have disappeared. God will know that I made a difference to Jordan's life even if only for one night, and he to mine and he will always know the effect that you or I have had on other people. It is a marvelous power - just to make a difference.

Fr. Ian Douulton sdb

LISTENING TO THE FAMILY

by Don Giampaolo Dianin

What instructions does the Synod leave in the first part of the Final Report? Beneath the chilling description of a problematic era, there are hidden germs of goodness that can help us survive even exhausting winters.

At the conclusion of the Synod on the family, while the Church and the world waited for Pope Francis to summarize the results in order to offer some pastoral pointers that he deemed appropriate, people already had the *Final Report* in their hands: it was a long and articulated text of 94 paragraphs that ranged from an analysis of reality to the Gospel message and pastoral challenges. We would like to

pause here on the first part of that *Final Report*: entitled "The Church listening to the Family."

"The family is a magnificent and irreplaceable place of personal love that transmits life" (n. 4). A very direct opening that focuses on the beautiful aspects that make marriage and the family a precious gift that never grows old because it involves two essential dimensions of human existence: love and life.



Love that is not just a feeling and an emotion, but the gift of oneself to a person recognized as reliable and life that is the fruit of a love that is not enough in itself, but which opens up to becoming fruitful and generative beyond any manipulation or domination. The family is also a school of humanity (n. 2) and the foundation of society (n. 11).

The text does not fail to recall the difficult context in which the family experience takes place today: individualism that distorts ties, resistance in the face of definitive choices and the negative influence of the media that debases and deforms the reality of marriage. Then there are the economic challenges that condition choices and paths, the weakness of family policies that hinder the birth and development of families. And there is no lack of attention to forms of social exclusion that affect the elderly, widows, the sick and the disabled. For the first time, a paragraph has been dedicated to people who for various reasons do not marry (n. 22). The horizon also extends to the migratory phenomenon which is causing so much anxiety and which the Synod Fathers read from a Christian perspective: "The history of humanity is a history of migrants...we are all pilgrims" (n. 23).

The family that is examined by the Synod is not just an Italian family or a model proper to the West. How can we forget polygamy, arranged marriages, cohabitation, the exploitation of

children, various forms of humiliation of women and even forms of legislation that do not protect the family!

The text however does not take a tone of denunciation or accusation, but manages to find beneath the frigidity of a culture full of potential yet problematic, the seeds of goodness that knows how to make its way even in exhausting winters. I quote just a few expressions: "Today too, the Lord calls man and woman to marriage, accompanying them in their family life and offering himself to them as an ineffable gift" (n. 5). "How-ever wounded a family may be, it can always grow in love" (n. 10).

What instructions does the Synod leave in the first part of the *Final Report*? I will mention some that seem central to me: safeguarding the link between generations, a place where one hands on the witness of important values to another (n. 17); the challenge of helping young people and couples to mature in their emotional and affective dimensions, overcoming narcissism that seems to be a characteristic of our time (nos 30, 32).

And the great challenge of affective and sexual education which is a guarantee for the firmness of these bonds. The paths of social inclusion, so dear to the Pope because poverty also exists with the little universe of family ties. The social, cultural and economic contexts that is the milieu that can favour or retard the life of every family. □

BLESSED ARE YOU, JOSEPH

by Chino Biscontin

The “blessed are you who believed,” that Elizabeth addressed to Mary could equally have been addressed to Joseph. His faith in God was so total and transparent that all we can do is admire and acknowledge his extraordinary and gratuitous love.

In art Saint Joseph (whom we celebrate on 19 March) is represented as elderly. The reason is clear: to guarantee Mary’s virginity. As if this guarantee could not be assured by the moral righteousness of this man, called by God to be the spouse of the Mother of his Son! Some even went so far as to imagine, on the basis of apocryphal texts, that Joseph would have been an elderly widower who had already had sons and daughters from his first marriage. This was to resolve another question posed by Gospel accounts which speak of the brothers and sisters of Jesus; they would have probably been half-sisters and half-brothers. In reality they were consanguineous, close relatives of Jesus, but it was not necessary at all to imagine them as children of Joseph.

According to most authoritative exegetes, Our Lady, when she conceived Jesus, could have been fifteen years or so. Such was the age of first motherhood at that time, but we must take into account that personal maturation was much more advanced than our fifteen-year-olds today. Consequently, it can be assumed that Joseph could have been around twenty years old and

according to what we have said, he would have been validly mature.

If we are to grasp the true greatness of Joseph, we must stick to what the Gospels tell us. From a careful reading of them, Saint Joseph appears as the last of the great Patriarchs through whom God dialogued with us humans. The Gospels do not mention even a word uttered by Joseph. They say that he had been notified of God’s will a few times and that he promptly acted on it without questioning. That was his greatness!

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There is an important detail that must be grasped concerning the certainly difficult moment in which Mary, already betrothed, becomes pregnant by the action of the Holy Spirit. For Joseph, there were two problems, both of which were dramatic. First of all, having to renounce making this woman his own in whom God had acted in such an extraordinary way. Who was he, poor artisan from Nazareth, to claim a place beside her? And secondly, how should he dissolve the betrothal contract without serious consequences for Mary, given the culture of the time.

Well, the detail to be grasped is found in the angel’s first words to him in a dream: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your bride.” Do not be afraid! What the angel meant was: God’s love can call even a person like you, from such a humble background to become the spouse of the Mother of the Messiah! Joseph’s faith in God was total and transparent. This is also why Joseph was so great! The “blessed are you who believed” that Elizabeth addressed to Mary could equally have been addressed to Joseph.

One last consideration. When Jesus was little, he used to address Joseph as “abba,” which can be affectionately translated as “dad.” But “Abba” would be the word



with which Jesus would constantly address God. To me it seems clear that this was possible because in Jesus’ perception of God, there was absolutely no disharmony between Joseph his earthly “abba,” and his heavenly “Abba,” namely God. Joseph had the delicate and lofty task of representing, in the sense of making concretely and visibly present the love of God the Father for his Son who came as man to dwell among us. This was also why Joseph was great.

Joseph never appears in Jesus’ public life. The most likely explanation is that he was already dead, which was not unusual, given the average life span then. Devotion imagines him on his deathbed assisted by Mary and Jesus and that is an emotional image for us. □

THE PRICE OF REAL LOVE

Anastasia Dias

I decided to take on a job that summer, at the local library, to save up money for college. And that was how I came to know Sarah Moore.

I first met Sarah at the library. She quickly briefed me about the work I needed to do and wished me luck. Sarah was close to my age and at first glance she could come off as an extremely shy person. But, as days that went by she and I quickly forged a friendship. We shared similar interests alongside our self-deprecating humour. By the end of the month, she had become my close confidant.

Sarah and I applied to college together and chose the same major. For the time being, the friendship we shared was enough.

Things began to change when Sarah had stopped coming to work for almost a week. I was worried. She hadn't left a message. I texted her more than once but didn't receive any reply.

Strange as it might sound, I didn't know where she lived. She had never told me much about her family and I had never volunteered to ask. I had done most of the talking; she had been the silent listener. It had never occurred to me that the girl who worked with me, with whom I shared everything, had a life beyond those dusty library books. I had always

thought of Sarah as a friend, nothing else; to me, that was her only identity.

I was mad at Sarah for walking out on me. I felt left out and all alone, even though, they had hired two other people in place of Sarah. I could never enjoy what I did anymore. It had become routine for me. I just wanted my horrendous summer to come to an end and college to start.

When college started, I became involved in many activities and made many new friends. Yet, there was no one to replace Sarah, even though I had never forgiven her for what she had done. She had disappeared, without any explanations.

It was almost a year since Sarah had mysteriously disappeared, when I came across an obituary in the newspapers of an elderly-looking man who had recently passed away. After reading a bit more, I discovered he had been Sarah's father.

The next day, I went to the funeral. I saw Sarah there. I walked up to her and offered my condolences. Despite the sombre occasion, I couldn't stop myself from calling her over for dinner the next day. She agreed.

The following morning I was waiting in anticipation for Sarah's

arrival. I had a long list of questions that remained unanswered. When Sarah came, I began telling her about the library, college, family and friends.

Suddenly, I turned the tables and made her do the talking. I coldly asked her, 'Do you think it was nice to walk out on me just like that? Don't you think I at least deserved to know what happened to you? Where have you been all this while? And couldn't you just let me know that you were alright? You walked out on me Sarah Moore when I needed you the most.'

With tears rolling down she whispered, 'Anne, I'm sorry for everything. I promise I never meant to hurt you or leave you alone. Please calm down and just listen to me, for once, will you?' I kept quiet and nodded.

Sarah said, 'I was 5 when my mother left home. My father was a very cruel man. He hammered mum and drove her out. I was an only child. And, as I grew older, he started thrashing me too. I never walked out like my mother did. I stayed, never uttering a word of complaint. But, after high school, I wanted out. I wanted to go to college. So I started working and living on my own.'

'One day, I received a letter from my mother. I hadn't seen her for 15 years. I wondered why she had bothered after all this time. The letter said that dad had taken seriously ill and she had come back to take care of him. She called me back to see him.'

'I left the library and went home. I saw my mother after 15 years and in her embrace all the anger I had bottled-up for all these years seemed to vanish. She asked

me for forgiveness for leaving me alone at such a young age.'

'She had begun taking care of Dad after coming to know that he had been sick after I left. Dad's health kept deteriorating. He no longer looked like his original sadistic self. He had become frail after his illness. He was dying. But mom and I were getting closer than ever. We were making up for the years lost.'

'I started volunteering at a homeless shelter nearby. After a few days, that was all I had ever wanted. All my dreams of going to college and starting work were nothing compared to this: the joy I felt in giving was more than anything I had ever felt. I was finally at peace now, with myself and everyone around me.'

By the time, Sarah finished I was sobbing. I asked her to forgive me for all the accusations I had made. Here was a woman, right before my eyes, who had suffered so much at the hands of her father. Nevertheless, she had had the power to love and forgive him. She had been so kind to me throughout the ordeal and hid her pain behind a smile; gently listening to me rant about unimportant things. She had given up on her dreams to serve a bigger purpose which she felt was more important than going to college. She had had the courage to stand up and work for a cause that she truly believed in.

Sarah Moore had been my friend. But, today I see her in a new light. Her identity was that of a woman who had experienced pain and anguish but had never given up on who she truly was and firmly rooted for what she believed in. □



SPECIAL MISSION: ARCHBISHOP OF MOROCCO

Bp. Cristóbal López Romero

In 2018, the Spanish Salesian Fr Cristóbal López was appointed by the Holy Father as Archbishop of Rabat, in Morocco. He has only one priority in his new position: "Love people." The mission that for him consists in living a "brotherhood between Christians and Muslims and taking care of the poorest and the most needy who, at the moment, are migrants."

What was your first thought when you heard that you were appointed Archbishop of Rabat?

"My God, what has just happened to me!" More than my thoughts, I had a feeling of fear and trembling, of adequacy and unworthiness...but also of trust in the Lord because he said to me: "Don't be afraid, I am with you." There was also a certain joy, because for me to return to Morocco was also to return home and because I love the Church, that made me fall in love with it. I sensed a dilemma between saying yes or no to the call that God gave me through the Church. I also felt the weight of responsibility and delirium of being incompetent. In those days, the Word of God that kept coming to me several times was: "Do not fear, I am with you." That helped me to give the only answer consistent with my choice of life to the God who loves me.

In your personal Magnificat: "the Almighty has done great things in me" what do you hear yourself saying?

In the list of the great things that the Lord has done in me, I do not put the appointment as bishop,

nor the priesthood, nor the call to religious life. The greatest marvel that God does in us is the call into existence and not just any existence, but as children of God.

We are children of God! Can there be anything greater or more sublime? This is why those who speak of "promotion" or "elevation" make me laugh.

In your Salesian life you have had sufficient experience for seven lives. Which of them has been the most enriching?

First, I would put the work I was able to do for the ethnic gypsies in a very deprived neighbourhood of Barcelona; then there was the opportunity to encounter popular religiosity in Latin America and then the discovery of the Church of Morocco, small and devoid of any power but very significant, because it truly is a sign, a light and a presence of the Kingdom and finally the work of accompanying young people in the Salesian Youth Movement and my Salesian confreres when I was provincial.

How was your vocation born?

When I entered the Salesian

College of Badalona (Barcelona), I thought of becoming a teacher, but I was captivated by the Salesians' manner of teaching.

I accepted all the proposals that the Salesians made me; among them was that of becoming a Salesian myself...and I said "yes," for the first time at the age of 12.

Why only a "Salesian"?

Being and growing as a person. I feel that being a Christian and a Salesian for me is a strongly integrated whole: it all forms a solid "I." Christian and Salesian are like two sides of the same coin: they can't be separated.

What is your future for the archdiocese of Rabat? Do you know?

I lived there for almost eight years. I was parish priest there and a member of the Presbyterial Council and the Council for Catholic Education. I know half the priests and religious under 40 in total and a good number of religious, about a hundred of them.

Geographically, it's almost as large as Spain. Its population is over 30 million. Catholic Christians... maybe 30,000, all foreigners, European or sub-Saharan, there are some Asians too.

The archdiocese runs 15 Catholic schools with about 15,000 students practically all Muslims and numerous social work projects, in particular

through Caritas. We take great care of migrants trying to get to Europe...

Furthermore, we carry out an important evangelizing and catechetical mission among the numerous sub-Saharan university students and in the many small Christian communities scattered throughout the enormous diocesan territory.

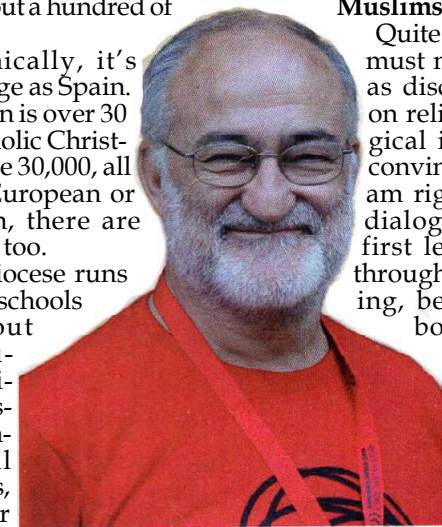
Interreligious dialogue takes place at all levels, but especially in daily life, through our friendship and when we encounter people.

And together with Protestant Christians, the archdiocese promotes an Ecumenical Institute of Theological and Pastoral Formation called "Al Muwafaka" (Together) which specializes in interreligious dialogue and an understanding of Islam; I believe that in the Church, this is an original and unprecedented experience.

Can you dialogue with the Muslims?

Quite a bit. But dialogue must not be understood as discussion or debate on religious and theological issues that try to convince the other that I am right. Interreligious dialogue grows on the first level in daily life: through friendship, sharing, being good neighbours, eating and having fun together, esteeming and appreciating communion and mutual help.

At the second level, we are



working together for the greater issues of humanity (we would call it the Kingdom of God): dignity, human rights, the struggle for justice and equality, education and health for all; the battle against hunger and discrimination of all kinds, against slavery, the death penalty and against child exploitation...

The third level is theological. It is about sharing the faith which one believes, explaining it, trying to understand the other and mutually enriching each other. Finally, the highest level is the mystical and religious level. This consists above all in praying together, even if each of us does it in his own language and in his own way.

The first two levels are already widely practiced in Morocco. The third level is more widely for scholars, but even the simplest and most sensitive people can appreciate it. The mystical level is the most important, but it is also the most delicate. Perhaps, that's why few people like it.

What can the Salesians do in the North African Arab world?

Everything a Salesian can and



ought to do in any other place: love the young, educate by evangelizing and evangelize by educating, always bearing in mind that witness is the first and main instrument of evangelization: training honest citizens and some good Christians and many good Muslims.

Who will be the first believers? How do Moroccan Catholics live "being a minority"?

There are no Moroccan Catholics, with some exceptions. The Church in Morocco is made up of foreigners who feel welcomed by the Moroccans. Being a very small minority leads us to be more united, to live the faith in a more communal and less anonymous or individual way, to become more aware that the faith is not a simple cultural or sociological element. Being a minority helps us to be more coherent, more convinced, more committed and more fraternal.

My first believers? Can you ask who is a mother's favourite child? In any case, the poor, the young, the sick and the needy (Christians or not...) And they are the "treasure of the Church." □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. BALBINA (MARCH 31)

Ian Pinto, sdb

THE LEGEND

Balbina was the daughter of a tribunal serving in the Roman Army named Quirinus. At a certain moment in time, Quirinus was charged with the welfare of some prisoners who were on death row. He happened to get into conversation with the prisoners who were condemned on account of their faith in Christ. He challenged one of them, Hermes, saying that he would become a Christian if he could prove to him the existence of an afterlife.

Hermes confessed that he was not sufficiently educated to make such a presentation and suggested that if Quirinus met the Pope he would surely make a good case. A few days later, Quirinus entered the Hermes' cell and to his surprise found another man seated with him. This man introduced himself as Pope Alexander. At that moment in time, the Pope was actually held prisoner in another place across town. Angels had brought him from his prison to this one. Quirinus was at his wits end and decided to hear their incredible story.

Hermes began by telling him that the Pope had raised his son from



the dead with the power of God. On hearing this, Quirinus asked the Pope if he could heal his daughter, Balbina who was seriously sick. The Pope told him to bring his daughter to the prison in which he was initially held. Quirinus was sceptical and questioned the Pope saying it was foolish to go to the other prison when he was held here. The Pope convinced him to have faith and do as told. Quirinus went



*Basilica of St. Balbina
Rome*

home and brought Balbina to the prison where the Pope was held and to their surprise he was shackled as he was before. Balbina could not contain herself and threw herself at his feet while kissing the chains that bound him. Seeing this the Pope said to her, "You shall not kiss these chains, but go out and find St. Peter's chains. Once you've found them, kiss them with devotion and you will soon be well." Peter had been martyred about 50 years earlier and Quirinus could easily find out where he was last held. He was visibly moved and rushed with his daughter on a quest to find those chains.

With the help of his contacts, he discovered the chains and Balbina reverently kissed them. A little while later, she experienced a total healing. Quirinus was ecstatic. He used his influence and had the Pope as well as the other prisoner released. He made it a point to take his wife and daughter to the Pope

and ask for baptism.

Pope Alexander had a church built to commemorate this great finding as well as the miracle. He called it the Church of St. Peter in Chains. This Church holds the relics of Balbina and Quirinus as well as the chains of St. Peter.

MARTYRDOM

There is hardly any information about the life of Balbina. The legend narrated earlier was recorded in the Acts of Martyrs, an ancient account written in the first few centuries that documented briefly the lives and martyrdoms of those who chose to lay down their lives for the faith.

As you might have noticed, the account is more about Quirinus, her father than about her. Regarding Balbina, this much is known, she was found guilty of being a Christian and sentenced to death by the Roman emperor in the year 130 A.D. Historians debate the cause of her death. Some say she was drowned others say she was buried alive. There is an account narrating that she was captured along with her father in 116 and beheaded in the same manner he was. Her cause of death might not be certain but it is certain that she died heroically for her faith. She knew the Lord and Saviour and had tasted firsthand the power that lay in the objects sanctified by His name. Just as the cross which was an instrument of torture became a source of salvation so also did the chains of Peter become for her a source of healing.

Balbina's martyrdom is recognized by the Church and she is honoured in a special way with a statue that is placed in a prominent position. If you have visited or seen pictures of St. Peter's

square in the Vatican, you will know that there are statues of saints placed atop the massive colonnade. Balbina is one among the 140 saints honoured with a statue. Her statue stands on the 13th position between the statues of Lucy and Apollonia on the right colonnade.

SHINING FAITH

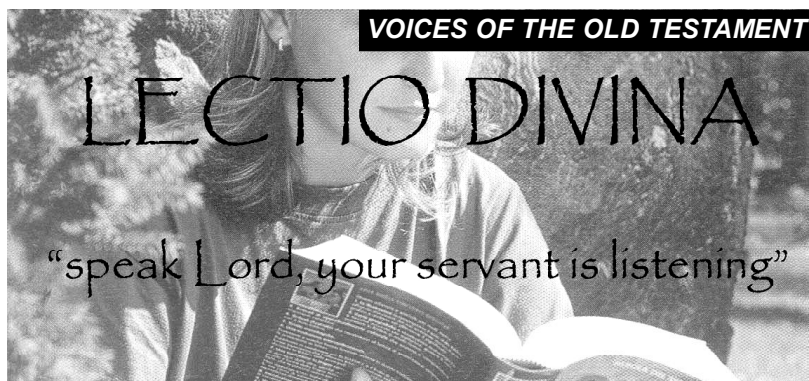
Since there is no historical evidence, it is extremely hard to know who Balbina was and what she was like. However, the tradition of the Church venerates her as a virgin and martyr. Regarding her virginity there seems to be a debate but her martyrdom is quite evident. Frankly, it doesn't really matter if she was a virgin or not. Virginity or sexual continence is by no means a criteria for sainthood. The Church recognizes so many people who were married and who did not exercise perfect sexual continence as saints too. So debating on a matter as trivial is that was fruitless. What instead should draw our attention is her martyrdom.

I find Balbina's story very interesting. It was her father's faith that opened the door for her healing. If her father had not been open to Hermes he might never have had the fortune of meeting the Pope and finding a healing that would subsequently save his daughter's life. I think this is a wonderful and powerful example to parents. Monica gives us a similar example. Faith works in varied and mysterious ways. The faith of parents can bring about miracles in the life of their children. Quirinus can testify to the miracle he saw in Balbina while Monica can speak of the conversion of Augustine!

Children feed off the energy, beliefs and actions of their parents. If a child perceives their parent/s to be people who value their faith and who express it in authentic worship and sincere service, they are influenced either overtly or covertly to emulate similar behaviour. The Church is wise to believe that the family is the first parish where the child encounters the faith and is nurtured to grow spiritually. The onus of spiritual growth lies with the parents. They are primarily responsible for their child's faith at least in the initial stages. While at some point the child has to make the leap of faith and begin to believe by themselves, not simply because their parents have told them or because their parents believe, the role of the parents in the initial stage is vital and cannot be emphasized enough.

If we hope to see a revival in the Church then we will need to begin a revival in our families. The role of parents in their child's faith life does not end when the child grows into a teen and then into an adult, it carries on throughout life. The faith of the parent inspires and spurs faith in the child. This may not happen immediately or obviously, sometimes it takes time for the child to realize. The case of Augustine is a case in point.

The faith and prayer of parents has such power that it can positively affect the life of a child even though they might show resistance. It's very important that parents spend time praying with and for their child. Prayers, when made with a sincere heart, never go unanswered. They might not show immediate results but they will bear fruit in the right season according to God's time. □



A NEW COVENANT

by Don Carlo Broccardo

Behold, the days are coming," it is the Lord who speaks, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah." That is how the **first reading begins for the fifth Sunday of Lent**; with a solemn affirmation of God (this is what "it is the Lord who speaks" means) who promises: "I will make a new covenant."

The whole Bible speaks of God's covenant, that is, in fact, the Lord who is God-with-us not a distant God, but the Lord who is close to us and walks with us. There has been talk of a covenant from the time of Noah when, after the flood – the Lord promises: "Behold I will establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you ..." (Gen 9, 9-10). Then comes the covenant with Abraham; then one with Moses on Mount Sinai, renewed by Joshua after entering the Promised Land; and now the announcement of a New Covenant.

In fact, in 597 and 587 BC, something devastating happened:



Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and then destroyed it, deporting part of the population to Babylon and leaving the other in a state of abandonment. It was in those years that Jeremiah pronounced some of his oracles, including the one we read this Sunday. When the people, utterly exhausted, realized that the mistake was theirs: they had abandoned God and had gone after other gods, the Lord no longer would be there to help him. In that context of death, destruction and sadness, the prophet took the word and said: "do not be afraid, God will make a

covenant with you again, he will still be God-with-us."

It is quite impressive to hear God saying that he had been betrayed... The language used by Jeremiah was not simply descriptive; he sounds like an offended parent speaking. He does not simply say: "It is I who freed my people from slavery," but he recounts those events like a father remembering how he taught his children to walk: "I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt," says the Lord. And then he adds: "they broke the covenant although I was their God." God's words through the oracle of Jeremiah are those that evoke an entire story; a story of love and fidelity, unfortunately betrayed.

This covenant ended badly. Here then is God who says: "I will draw up a new covenant." New because "deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts." Therefore the content of the Law of God has not changed, but the place where it is written has: it is no longer written on stone (think of Moses receiving the tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai), now the law is written deep "in the seat of their attitudes and root of their actions; which is the heart" (the definition, too beautiful not to be mentioned, comes from Luis Alonso Schökel).

In other words, God does not change his law, but the heart of man! After all, if we remember the disconsolate gaze of God before and after the flood, we realize that the problem was right there: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6,5) and that "the imagination of man's heart is evil

from his youth" (8,21). There lies the problem, in the heart of man, in the intimate part of him; and then from there God starts again his healing. As he will say through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart, I will put a new spirit within you" (Ez 36, 26).

On Mount Sinai God revealed his name only to Moses: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex 34, 6-7); now this name will be revealed to every man: everything forgiven by the Lord, you will know his name is "the Merciful," "He who forgives sin." Through the experience of forgiveness everyone will know God. We could say combining the two images, that forgiveness is the pen that God uses to write the covenant (the Law) on the hearts of men.

The masters of spirituality teach us that the most difficult thing is not to resist temptation, but to get up when they have fallen; because after a fall, we get discouraged, and are tempted to say: "I'm useless, I'll still fall, I'll never make it." During his visit to Peru, Pope Francis told young people that God does not ask them to have a perfect heart, but a heart that is capable of loving him above all else, even with its limitations and despite their sins (January 21, 2018). Thinking once again of our young people, we realize that we adults have precisely this task towards them: to encourage them, help them so that they don't fear the mistakes they have made, but accompany them to trust in God who always forgives and after they have sinned builds a new covenant with them. □

Quiet Spaces

SHAME AND MERCY

*The Pope's morning meditation at the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae
on March 2, 2015*

Feeling shame and blaming oneself, instead of assigning fault to others, judging and condemning them. This is the first step on the path of Christian life which leads us to ask the Lord for the gift of mercy. The Pope suggested this examination of conscience at Mass in the chapel of Casa Santa Marta on Monday morning.

Francis began his reflection from the day's First Reading from the Book of Daniel (9:4-10). He explained that the People of God "ask for forgiveness, but not a forgiveness with words: this request for forgiveness is for a forgiveness that comes from the heart because the people feel they are sinners." The people "do not feel they are sinners in theory — because all of us can say 'we are all sinners,' it's true, it's the truth: everyone here! — but before the Lord they tell of the bad things they have done and the good things they have not done." Indeed, the Scripture reads: "We have sinned, been wicked and done evil; we have rebelled and departed from your commandments and your laws. We have not obeyed your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land."

In substance, Francis noted, in the words of the people there is a "description of all the evil they have done." Thus, "the People of God, in this moment, blame themselves." They look at themselves and say: "I blame myself before you, Lord, and I am ashamed." Such clear words also appear in the passage from Daniel: "O Lord, we are shamefaced".

The Pope indicated that this passage "makes us reflect on a Christian virtue, indeed more than one virtue." In fact "the capacity to blame oneself, self-blame" is "the first step to walking as a Christian." However, "we are all masters, we are all experts" when it comes to "justifying ourselves." We use expressions such as: "It wasn't me; no, it isn't my fault; yes, but not very much.... That's not how things are..."

In short, Francis said, "we all have an alibi" to justify "our shortcomings, our sins." What's more, he added, we so often respond with an "I don't know!" face," or with an "I didn't do it, it must have been someone else!" face." The Pope warned, however, that like this, "we don't go forward in the Christian life."

Thus, he reiterated, the capacity for self-blame is "the first step." Surely it is good to do so in confession with a priest. However, Francis asked, "before and after confession, in your life, in your prayer, are you able to blame yourself? Or is it easier to blame others?"

This experience, Francis pointed out, gives rise to something a bit odd but which, in the end, gives us peace and health." Indeed, "when we begin to look at what we are capable of, we feel bad, we feel disgust," and we ask ourselves: "Am I capable of doing this?" For example, "when I find envy in my heart and I know this envy is capable of

speaking ill of another and morally killing him", I have to ask myself: "Am I capable of it? Yes, I am capable!" This is precisely "how this knowledge begins, this wisdom to blame oneself."

Therefore, Francis said, "if we do not learn this first step of life, we will never make progress on the path of Christian life, of spiritual life." This is because "the first step" is "blaming oneself," even if unsaid and kept between "my conscience and me."

To illustrate, the Pope gave a practical example. When we pass by a prison, he said, we might think that the inmates "deserve it." But, he asked: "do you know that were it not for the grace of God, you would be there? Have you thought that you too are capable of doing the things that they did, even worse?" This "is to blame ourselves, not to hide from ourselves the roots of sin that are in us, the many things we are capable of doing, even if they aren't visible."

This attitude, Francis continued, "leads us to feel shame before God, and this is a virtue: shame before God." In order to feel ashamed, we must say: "Look, Lord, I am disgusted with myself, but You are great: to me belongs shame, to you — and I ask for it — mercy." We can also say, "because we are capable of sinning and of doing so many bad things: "But yours, O Lord, our God, are compassion and forgiveness! Shame is mine, and mercy and forgiveness are yours." It is a "dialogue with the Lord" that will "do us good during this Lenten season: self-blame."

"Let us ask for mercy," the Pope said then, referring to the day's Gospel Reading from Luke (6:36-38). Jesus "is clear: be merciful as your Father is merciful." After all, Francis explained, "when one learns to blame himself he is merciful with others." And he is able to say: "Who am I to judge him, if I am capable of doing worse things?" This is an important phrase: "Who am I to judge another?" This is understood in the light of Jesus' words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," and with his call "not to judge." The Lord is clear: "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned." It is certainly not an easy road, which "begins with blaming oneself, it begins from that shame before God and from asking forgiveness from Him: ask forgiveness."

From this perspective, the Pope prayed that "the Lord, in this Lenten season, give us the grace to learn to blame ourselves, each in his solitude," asking ourselves: "Am I capable of doing this? Am I capable of doing this, with this attitude? With this feeling that I have inside, am I capable of doing worse things?" He also invited this prayer: "Have compassion for me, Lord, help me to feel shame and give me mercy, so that I may be merciful with others."

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 10, 6 March 2015)

GRANDFATHER'S FIRE

by Pierluigi Menato (TA by ID)*

They were all around the hearth. Old Francesco – his back bent forward, his hands folded on his knees, his feet close to his walking stick – as he watched his niece Martina going from room to room, always busy. Although a little deaf with age – he was now eighty – he recognized it was her step more than if he heard it. In his heart the thought of his wife came to mind. She had died a few years earlier. She had the same name, the same face, the same footfall and she filled the house, blessing it with her serene and lively presence like the fire that lit up the old man's face that evening making him feel so warm.

In the light of the flames, if he hadn't seen his hands tremble, his beard reach halfway down his chest; if he hadn't counted the years of toil one by one; that evening he could almost believe that he had gone back to the days of his youth when he had met Martina.

It felt so good to stare into the embers and see her reflected there vividly, between the ash and the grate; her gaze, as he had seen her some sixty years ago, framed between the ash tree and shadows that the sunshine through the trees made on the ground, or in the church square before vespers on a Sunday in summer. Not for nothing did people say that Martina was the most beautiful girl in town.

He remembered her and seemed to see her again as she was then, with that same joy that made his heart go into a flutter: her fresh face, a mixture of milk white and

pink; her long black hair almost reaching her waist hanging loosely behind her. Her eyes – oh, those eyes! He couldn't bear to look into them, they were so blue; he didn't know if they were as blue as the gentians in the meadow or the night sky in April. And she dressed so regally; like a queen: her tightly pleated skirt with the bottom hem the colour of the embers that were just petering out; her slippers made that tick-tock, tick-tock almost keeping pace with the beat of his heart and in her ears, two golden teardrops.

Nowadays, fashions have changed – thought the old man. Yet, in that floral dress and those curls falling down her forehead, Martina, his niece was his Martina of yore. Just looking at her, the old man could hear his heart beat in his throat: every time she called out to him, that voice came from the distant past, among the ash trees that trembled in the breeze along that wonderful path of sunlight and shadows.

That evening grandfather hardly cared about the others who sat around him as they put their feet on the hearthstones: there was Anna, his daughter-in-law, knitting, her knitting needles making the only sound above the crackle of the cinders; there was Giovanni, his son, mumbling softly about a letter from his elder boy, a soldier in the infantry battalion.

In the meantime, the chain holding the copper cauldron in the fireplace began to sway. The sweet potatoes were cooking. It was Christmas Eve. Outside the moonlight was beautiful, it was

almost as bright as the day when you could see each other in the light of that silvery orb. The branches of the trees were powdered with snowflakes, and the mountains stood tall in the background, like iron sentinels in a silvery shadowed veil.

Giovanni went on: "No one likes the army. We're always living in suspense but Enrico isn't afraid of anyone or of any dangers because he likes them. He's everyone's brave mascot. Anna, do you remember when he was that tall? How he would sled down the most dangerous slopes almost breaking his collarbone?"

"And even at home," grandfather added, "bumps on his

head and his feet scratched and bloody. Is the boy okay?"

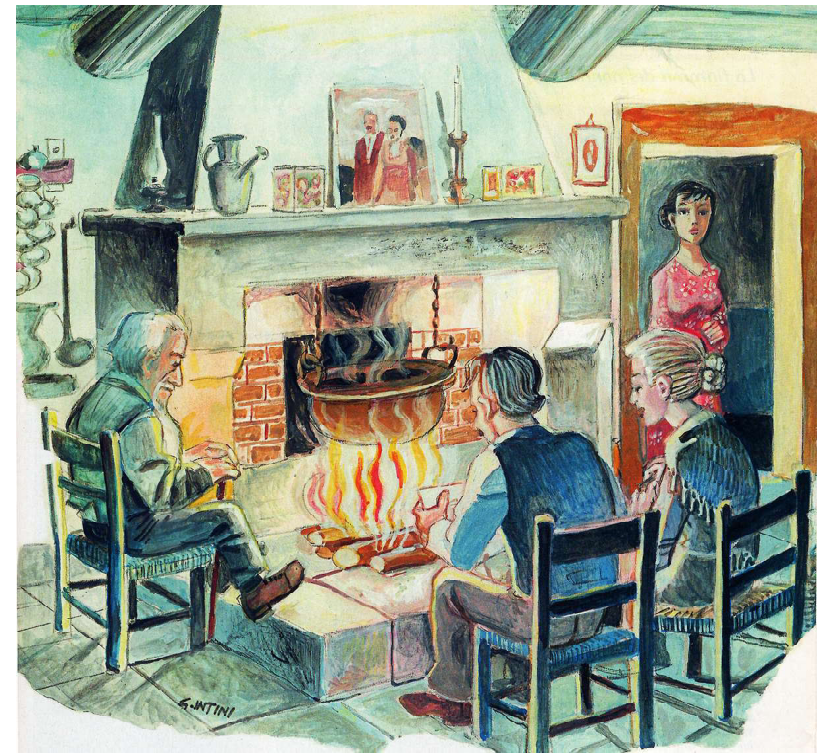
"He's ok father, he writes that they sent him upstream by boat and he was able to see many ships and sailors along the route."

"Be careful, do your duty but keep your head on your shoulders."

"Our boys are not reckless. Even Verna and Lorenzo, are both level headed. But out there...instead..."

Giovanni pointed to Martina who bent towards the fire to put another beech log on the embers.

The girl didn't raise her head nor did she reply. Grandpa stared intently at her and once more his heart began pounding in his throat. Why did they humiliate



Martina so? What had she done? Martina, still silent, unhooked the buckets from the rack and put on her ankle boots getting ready to go out.

"Oh, where are you going at this hour?" said her mother, leaving the stocking on her lap. "Put down the buckets and stay indoors; keep Grandpa company. We're going to midnight Mass and we'll pray for you too so that you keep your head on your shoulders."

And she stood up. Her father also dusted the ash off his trousers and went to get his hat.

The daughter said timidly: "There isn't any water."

"The water is just an excuse" the mother went on. "You've asked your 'beau' to come to meet you at the fountain since he won't come to the house. He won't show up. We'd still like him to have the courage to come and sit with us at the hearth now that he's set his eyes on you. That's right, Giovanni? Isn't it?"

Giovanni mumbled something and shrugged. Then he went on: "Get that nonsense out of your head Martina, or I'll shake it out of you."

He raised his voice, a little hoarse. Martina dropped the buckets on the hook. The copper banged against the wall and chimed like the toll of a bell.

Grandfather understood. He got up as if suddenly rejuvenated: against the backdrop of the wall his gaunt face, framed in his white beard, he looked like that of a patriarch. But he didn't say a word.

Anna and Giovanni left, closing the door behind them. Martina had not moved from where she stood and was drying her tears on the back of her hand in the dark.

"Come here Martina, come to Grandpa." Martina sat down, leaning her head against the wall. She had a great desire to cry but she didn't want even her grandfather to see her tears. She bit her lip and pushed back the lump in her throat, already in her chest.

The flickering flame lit up her face and her beautiful black hair kept together with shiny braids, which when untied reached her waist just like that other Martina: his beloved wife.

"Who's your boyfriend?" asked Grandpa. "Tell me, I'm your Grandpa. I'm old and I understand some things that your mother and father don't."

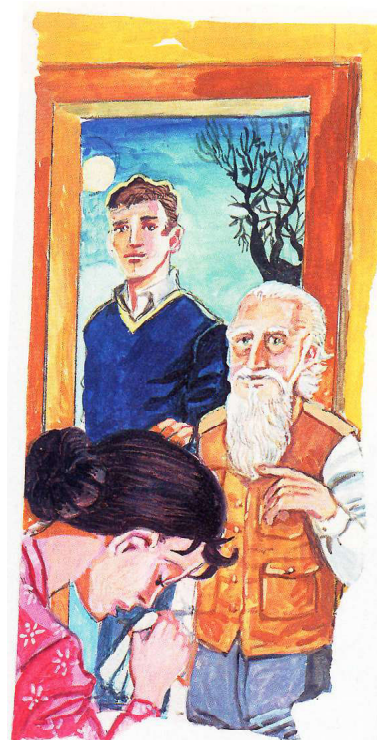
"Oh Grandpa, you won't like my boyfriend for sure, if I tell you who he is... But I love him."

"I don't have to like your boyfriend. Don't say anything: Grandpa knows. It is Andrew, Anselm's son. Anselm has always bothered us because of the boundary dispute but Andrew isn't to blame. We're old and we're stubborn. Come on, don't cry Martina..."

The girl with her head on her knees wept silently.

She hadn't stopped crying when grandfather got up. He put on his thick boots with some difficulty and without even covering himself went downstairs. Martina asked from the doorway, her face all stained with tears:

"Where are you going, Grandpa? Come back please. You'll catch a cold and then you'll get sick." Her grandfather did not reply; she followed him down the path. She came and stood beside him, but he commanded her, in a voice she had never heard before:



"Wait for me upstairs..."

She obeyed: she went up and sat down once more by the hearth and to pass the time, she put some more wood on the fire. Shortly

afterwards, familiar footsteps were heard on the staircase. It was grandfather and someone else...

She seemed breathless as she stared at the door. It was Andrew, only Andrew.

Grandfather said slowly and calmly, as if swearing: "Andrea is coming to ask Grandpa for Martina's hand and you're crying? How silly you are? Why are you crying? Sit here: warm yourselves by the fire and love each other, like I do... I wanted some of it for my Martina." His voice broke and he was in tears too.

When they got back from midnight Mass Anna and Giovanni were shocked to see those two with their hands entwined in front of the fire. They would have liked to say something scathing but were unable to do so because, standing up between the hearth and the wall was the grandfather standing tall and large as if rising from the sunset and walking into the light. He said: "You've no right to obstruct Martina's right to happiness. As long as I'm alive I'm the master. What did you go to Mass for if you don't know how to love? What is Christmas if you can't love each other?" □

THE THREE PIPES

An old Red Indian sage gave this advice to the impetuous young men of his tribe: "When you're really angry with someone who has mortally offended you and you decide to kill him. But to get rid of the rage, before leaving, sit down, fill a pipe well with tobacco and smoke it."

After finishing the "first pipe," you will realize that death, after all, is too serious a punishment for the sin committed. It will then occur to you to go and inflict on him a solemn beating.

Before grabbing a big club, sit down, fill up a "second pipe" and smoke it all the way through. Eventually you will think that strong and colourful insults could very well replace the beating.

Good! When you are about to insult those who have offended you, sit down, load the "third pipe," smoke it and when you're done you will just want to be reconciled with that person."

(from: *The Song of the Cricket* - Bruno Ferrero)

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 26

by Michele Molineris sdb

81. A presumptuous embarrassment (1858)

The count of Camburzano, a great friend and benefactor of Don Bosco, spoke often and willingly about him and his work, not concealing the admiration he felt, no less for the supernatural gifts with which God had endowed him, than for his ever-expanding work. While praising him he made no distinction concerning the audience he spoke to so, sometimes he found in his audience people not really willing to listen to him or at least to share his admiration.

This was what happened to him one day on vacation at Nice when he had occasion to speak of Don Bosco to some of the members of the upper-set nobility whose religious background was very poor. His stirring account of Don Bosco raised more than a sceptical smile among his listeners.

A lady who wanted by all means to drag the count's statements into ridicule about the gifts he proclaimed Don Bosco possessed because of the goodness of God, at a certain point jumped up to say: "I'd be interested in finding out if this revered gentleman can really read my conscience. If he can, I promise, I'll believe all you say about him."

The challenge, needless to say, was met with a general ovation. So, the lady wrote to Don Bosco immediately and sealed the letter. The count enclosed it in one of his own, in which he requested a prompt reply from Don Bosco.

With customary punctuality, Don Bosco replied in these terms: "Tell the lady that if she wants peace of mind, she must return to her husband from whom she is separated." To the lady herself, he wrote: "Your Ladyship can again enjoy tranquillity of conscience by remedying the confessions of the last twenty years and atoning for past failings."

The reference to light and to tranquillity, was due to the fact that the Count of Camburzano, in the accompanying letter, had permitted himself to report that the challenger was usually in the throes of "profound affliction," despite the fact that she led a cheerful and flirtatious life.

How did Don Bosco know these things and in that manner? It was a question that his Salesians asked him more than once, astonished as they were as often were the protagonists because of those revelations. Most of the time, Don Bosco shielded himself by having recourse to a joke or the magical *Otis botis para tutis*, which was (for him) the same as "open sesame," good for everything; but it was clear that the magic words had nothing much to do with it. They only served to divert the attention of those present from his person.

The truth is that God came down to his rescue in that manner, summoned by the arrogance of some folk and the manifestations of zeal made him second to none in the battles for the good of souls and the triumph of the Church.

Once he inadvertently let slip something, when a question of that kind was asked of him in the presence of Fr. Francesia and he replied: "If you only knew how much it costs me to foresee the future

of others!"

So, it means that at the basis of those revelations, there was a kind of contract and that the underlying condition was his personal sacrifice and renunciation because of his discretion. This is the only way to explain his many health issues, vigils, misunderstandings, failures and the delays that punctuated his not-so-brief existence (from EBM., VI, 13-14).

82. Peace at Villafranca (1859)

This is a testimony that the Countess Cravosio gave at that time concerning the Italian character of Don Bosco. In those days full of passion, when unfortunately no other alternative was available to the abrogated law than the use of force, which was so easy to abuse, Don Bosco entered as a moderator, convinced as he was that the destinies of the peoples were in the hands of the Lord and that prayer was as good as a cannon, if prayed with a pure heart and an upright conscience. Here even the Lord who anticipates the resolution of the conflict to console the anguish of a mother too upset with the events of the ongoing war.

The countess mentions in her *Memoirs*: "During the 1859 war raging in Lombardy, my mother had a son and a brother in the army. The latter had been wounded. Heartbroken and fearful of their fate, she asked me to go to Don Bosco with her. To our surprise Don Bosco received us in the dining room. Supper had just ended, and priests and clerics were still around, others on a rough bench - rehearsed a song, scores in hand. Now and then some little fellow would go up to Don Bosco, whisper into his ear, and in the same fashion

get the good Father's reply."

After greeting us, Don Bosco made us sit by him and made small talk, now and then glancing knowingly at my mother. After all the priests had excused themselves, Don Bosco said to her: "Countess, I know what you want to tell me. Cheer up!" Then, lovingly lowering his voice, he added, (*tonight itself, Napoleon will make pace and the war will be over.*)

"Impossible!" my mother replied. "You are only saying this to console me. There is nothing to support your statement."

Next morning, however, at about seven, as my mother and I were crossing Via Garibaldi - then Via Dora Grossa - on our way to Mass, we heard the news vendors shouting: "Peace at Villafranca! Napoleon, Victor Emmanuel and Francis II met in night session!"

After Mass we hastened to the Oratory and found Don Bosco in the playground. He came to us and said: "Let us thank God." He then took us to the chapel where we remained briefly in prayer.

What had happened? Countess Cravosio had called Don Bosco on July 6 at about 8 PM. Napoleon was then at his headquarters in Villafranca. Shocked by Solferino's terrible carnage and disturbed by news from Germany that several powers were ready to aid Austria, he sent for General [Emile Felix] Fleury that same night about 9 o'clock and instructed him to deliver a letter to the Austrian emperor requesting an armistice. The general arrived at Verona at about 10.30, and the emperor was roused. Surprised and impressed by Napoleon's letter and the general's further clarifications, he accepted Napoleon's terms. On

July 11, both emperors met at Villafranca and formally signed the treaty. On July 15, the king and the emperor Napoleon III entered Turin welcomed with a great array of celebrations. Napoleon soon left for Paris accompanied by the king as far as Susa (*from EBM., VI, 133-134*).

83. Little Rose, dressed in white (1859)

"On August 30, 1859 – the feast of St. Rose of Lima and my name day" wrote Sister Philomena Cravasio, "my mother gave me, among other things, a lovely statuette of Mary Immaculate; then, at nine that morning, she took me to visit Don Bosco. He promised to have dinner with us at six and kept his word. During the meal he spoke briefly to me, kindly wishing me good health. After dinner I asked him to bless the statuette which I had placed on a corner shelf in my room and to pray for a special grace I needed but did not disclose – the grace of following my religious vocation. Don Bosco joined his hands and silently traced the Sign of the Cross over the statue. After a few moments in prayer, hands still joined, he gazed intently at the statue and said, "Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin, bless and console little Rose whom I see clothed in white."

"But, Don Bosco," I interrupted, "I am not dressed in white. I don't like white dresses. (I was then nineteen). They're for little girls." (Inwardly I felt disinclined to join the Dominican Order because of its white habit). But Don Bosco repeated, "Yes, little Rose, clothed in white!" later as he had coffee with my father, he repeated the same words in prophetic tones.

Two years later, on August 16,

1861, I entered the Dominican Convent at Mondovì-Crassone. The Immaculate Virgin had thus granted my wish and answered Don Bosco's prayer. His words had been truly prophetic.

But there is more. I had been at Mondovì for a few years and all went well until the devil stirred up trouble in our dear community and made us lose quite a number of pupils. In this sad plight, our good mother superior – Mother Manfredini – suggested that I send Don Bosco a small donation and ask him to make a novena that our community would regain its former success. As was his wont, Don Bosco replied in a few days to thank us and offer advice and encouragement. Not long after, over twenty pupils applied for admission, order was smoothly re-established, and our community regained its calm, joy and religious fervour" (*EBM., VI, 143*).

84. Mother and sister (1859)

Don Bosco predicted the future of even Philomena De Maistre, the last daughter of the famous writer in 1859. She felt called by God to the religious life and having no obstacles in her path from relatives to follow her desires, she spoke to Don Bosco of it.

"Yes," he replied, "you will become a religious but only after a long wait and events you cannot foresee now."

And so it was, after some time, her sister Benedetta died leaving an infant child because of which she had to marry her sister's husband, a mother's heart being necessary for little Stanislaw, the future Catholic economist. His father died of cholera soon after and the good stepmother took care of her

stepson's moral and intellectual education and prudently administered his large inheritance. And only when she had accomplished this holy mission did she retire among the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, taking the name of Maria Theresa. She died in Rome in 1924 (*EBM., VI, 142*).

85. You saved me a walk (1859)

One day in 1859, Don Bosco came into the dining room at noon wearing hat and cloak. "Well, Don Bosco," the confreres said, "aren't you going to eat with us today?"

"Today I can't," he replied, "On the contrary, I need you, from the moment I leave the refectory until three, someone of you need to be chosen, the best ones for both piety and fervour, to stay before the Blessed Sacrament. Tonight, if I get the grace I need, I'll tell you the reason for this prayer." They carried out his order until three.

Toward evening, Don Bosco returned, as undisturbed and calm as when he had gone out. He answered our importune questions, saying: "Today was the deadline to pay ten thousand lire to the Paravia Press. If I failed to do so, both the printer and the Oratory would have suffered serious consequences. There were also other urgent debts long overdue whose payment could no longer be delayed. These too totalled another ten thousand lire. I went downtown with trust in Divine Providence but with no place to go. When I reached our Lady of Consolation Church, I walked in and begged the Most Blessed Virgin to come to my aid. Then I left and walked the streets till two o'clock when I found myself near St. Thomas Church in an alley leading



The column of the "Consolata" erected when Turin was visited by the cholera epidemic in 1854. Six out of every ten cases were fatal.

into Via dell'Arsenale. Here, a well-dressed gentleman came up to me and asked, "You are Don Bosco, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"What a coincidence," he went on. "I was just on my way to Valdocco to bring this little package from my master."

"I don't know!" he replied. I opened it and found it full of government bonds. "Who is your master?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell. Please excuse me." So saying, he left. I immediately went to Paravia's. There I made an accurate count of the bonds: they totalled ten thousand lire – just what I needed to print *Catholic Readings* and to meet other very pressing debts! (*EBM., VI, 95-96*). □



VOCATION DISCERNMENT

A TEENAGER GUIDES HIS COMPANIONS IN VOCATION DISCERNMENT

Gianni Asti

Ten years is worth a lifetime and I would like to draw your attention to the touching vocational discernment that Don Bosco went through between the ages of 16 to 26 in Chieri. We believe that Don Bosco, because of the gifts he received from the Lord, continues to be an invaluable guide to many youngsters, teenagers and young adults even as he was during his lifetime, especially as he accompanied thousands of vocations to the consecrated life and to the priesthood. The precious Synodal document that the Pope, the bishops together with young people have given us, contains some precious suggestions on accompaniment that we want to offer our teenagers to sustain their faith during this vocational journey.

We see this reflected in Don Bosco's own personal vocational quest; in the difficulties he encountered; the help he received from those who supported him in his mission and his priestly ministry that was especially directed towards the poorest and most abandoned youngsters.

Little Johnny who, already at the age of two lost his father, felt a strong desire for paternal affection that he imagined could come from a priest. He confided: "I greeted them from afar and as I got closer I bowed toward them. But they returned the greeting in a serious but courteous manner as they went on their way.

Several times I wept and said to myself and to others: 'If I were to become a priest, I would be very different.'

Even when he was in the Seminary he would yearn to open his heart to a priest "but they were too austere and distant. All this more fuelled my desire to be a priest as soon as possible so I could be in the midst of young people to help them and be with them in all their needs." We know how this yearning became a reality in his priestly vocation. He was always attentive to youngsters, being always concerned about them. He would truly be a spiritual father to them.

The Role of Parents in the Vocation of their Children

Before a priest, youngsters need the paternal presence and attention of a father in order to live out their vocation fully. The deep root of John's vocation and his spirituality was already present in the educative activity of Mamma Margaret who, being widowed already at the age of 29 took on the role of both mother and father to her children thus confirming what is stated in the Synodal document in article 72: "The family is the first community of faith in which, despite its limitations and shortcomings, the young person experiences the love of God as he begins to discern his own vocation."

Of course, little Johnny, already

at the age of 9 received a sign from heaven for his life through a dream that he had in the Becchi house during which he was visited by Jesus the Good Shepherd and Mary. Here is the first vocational comment from his family: *I wasted no time in telling all about my dream. [...] My mother commented, "Who knows, you may become a priest." Anthony merely grunted, "Perhaps you'll become a robber chief" But my grandmother, though she could not read or write, knew enough theology and made the final judgment, saying, "Pay no attention to dreams." I agreed with my grandmother. However, I was unable to cast that dream out of my mind.*

We think of the dreams and desires that parents have about the vocation of their children; they rarely consider and desire what God has destined for their happiness from all eternity.

The Vocation passes through the heart of the mother

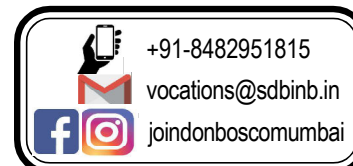
It has been said that a vocation passes through a mother's heart, especially when this mother has God in her heart, as was the case with Mamma Margaret. And that was precisely how this mother prepared the heart of her son John for the sacramental encounters of his First Confession and Communion. We find in the Memoirs of the Oratory written by Don Bosco himself: "Amongst the many things that my mother repented to me many times was this: 'My dear son, this is a great day for you. I am convinced that God has really taken possession of your heart. Now promise him to be good as long as you live. Go to communion frequently in the future, but beware of sacrilege. Always be frank in confession, be obedient

always, go willingly to catechism and sermons. But for the love of God, avoid like the plague those who indulge in bad talk.'"

For those who know little of Don Bosco's life and his spirituality, one finds that these are the tips that he would later teach his boys. They seem to be useful directives for Christian parents who want to accompany their children in that vocation to holiness that they have been initiated in, when they asked for their child to be baptized.

These tendencies already manifest themselves in little Johnny as he strives to help his companions when they are having fun and his mother courageously goes along with him. That was how little Johnny improvises as a juggler, having learned some simple tricks at the village fairs, entertaining his friends and even repeating the parish priest's sermon in the courtyard of his house.

And later on, when he would need help, he would seek out his mother who, instead of enjoying the quieter life of the countryside, would give the last ten years of her life in the service of the poorest youngsters in Turin, eventually dying in extreme poverty. What lessons parents can learn from this mother who favoured her son's priestly vocation at the cost of great sacrifice! How can parents on their part renounce their dreams for the future of their children in order to support God's plan for them from all eternity? □





WAITING FOR THE HOUR

by Gianni Sangalli

God was waiting for that "yes" of Mary, because it is God's style to offer God's gifts and propose God's plan, not to impose it; the "yes" rises from the earth and the Word descends from heaven.

Mary is virgin soil from which the kingdom begins. Keeping this in mind, it is no longer surprising that several calendars, in the middle ages, began the year on March 25: as if to say that Mary's "yes" inaugurated the new era.

The Annunciation is Mary's hour: but now, at the house of Nazareth, she lives in expectation of God's hour, together with Jesus and Joseph. All three of them have in their hearts the great desire for that hour to come soon.

And this is the spirit of Nazareth. We usually picture life in Nazareth as a hidden life and take it as a model of the contemplative life, a model of the interior life, a life concealed in darkness, poverty and obedience.

Certainly, in Nazareth there was no dearth of these virtues, but they represent its passive aspect, so to speak. Actually, the life of Jesus,

Mary and Joseph in Nazareth is presented in a more complex manner.

On entering the world, the Word of God also said his "yes": "Father, behold I come to do your will" (Heb 10:7). Now he awaits "his" hour.

Life at Nazareth

Let us think of the boy Jesus, Jesus, the young artisan who is aware of his divine personality, of his mission of salvation, who knows he has a message to offer the world, who has in his heart the love of the Father and an infinite love for his sisters and brothers whom he has come to save; yet, he is voluntarily silent, hiding the essentials of his interior life as Messiah, of his mission as the Redeemer. He hides it to some extent even from Mary and Joseph.

When Joseph "the just man" said his "yes" he let himself be involved in the mystery of the Incarnation, without making any claims; he gave up trying to understand anything and resolved to believe. Now, looking at him whom everyone calls 'his'

son, he awaits God's hour.

But even more than Joseph, it was Mary who was "on her pilgrimage in faith with a particular effort of her heart" (Redemptoris Mater, 17). After the angel's announcement, many things became obscure to her too: Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the loss of her son in Jerusalem and now the silence of Nazareth which would go on year after year without any news, while his cousin John was already gathering crowds at the Jordan for a baptism of repentance.

He is here, living quite a common life, a life like the other inhabitants of the town a simple artisan, the son of Joseph. Yet the angel had said: "Your son will be great, he will be called the son of the Most High and God will give him the throne of David his father" (Lk 1,

32).

Jesus, Mary and Joseph stand together before the mystery of God. They await the hour of God in faith, humility, industry, prayer and respect for the mystery of which each of them is a bearer, with an ardent and constant desire to cooperate in the work of salvation.

"Nothing is impossible to God," the angel said to Mary and Mary responded: "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1,38).

At Nazareth she did not want to hasten its fulfillment, but at Cana she asked and obtained it from Jesus but he also said: "My hour has not yet come." (Jn 2,4).

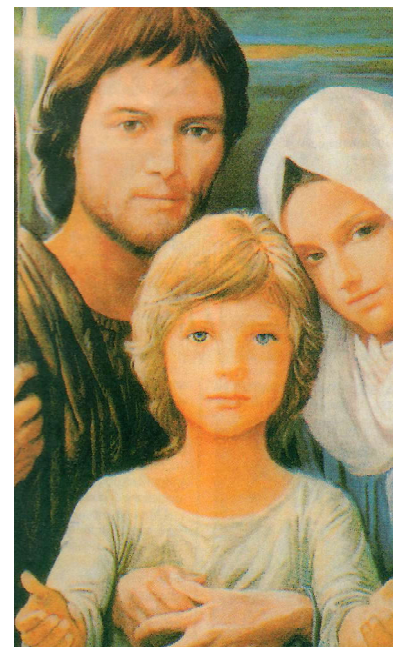
Now she repeats to us those words which come to us as her legacy: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2,5)

For us who are waiting for the hour of God in our lives and the life of the world, there are no other resources other than her words.

Mary, who listens to the word of God and places all her trust in it, is a model for us. She is our sister who teaches us to welcome it: she listened to it and welcomed it with faith "which was the gateway and path to divine motherhood" (Marialis Cultus 17).

This word of God is a creative force; arousing life; generating the Son of God in Mary; overcoming boundaries between heaven and earth; announcing peace on earth and the exalting of the poor, the hungry and the humble.

May this word of God prove to be a creative force for us too! May she create us as new creatures so that we can all be sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Mary and Jesus! □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Milk Switch

To help a friend lose weight, I told her that she should switch to lower-fat foods including skimmed milk. When she said her family would drink only whole milk, I suggested that she keep their regular container and refill it with skim milk. This worked for a while, until her daughter asked one morning whether the milk was okay.

"Sure, it's fine," my friend answered fearing she had been found out. "Why do you ask?" The daughter explained, "Well according to the expiration date, this milk expired two years ago!"

Leak Repair

My husband's skills with do-it-yourself home repairs are at best mediocre. After spending several evenings trying to fix a leak in the bathroom, he finally admitted defeat and called a plumber, who finished the job in ten minutes.

Watching him put away his equipment, my son asked what had been the problem.

"Well," the plumber replied, "seems that your father got hold of some tools..."

Treasure Hint

A customs official was examining a suitcase in which a traveller had hidden an undeclared bottle of perfume. As his hand roamed to the danger zone, the woman's small daughter clapped her hands in great excitement and squealed. "Oh, mummy, he's getting warm,

isn't he?"

Hide and Seek

My five year old son went with me to see a young couple's new baby. He gazed at the small red, wrinkled face a long time, then, murmured solemnly: "So *that's* why she hid him under her coat for so long."

Naught and Cross

A motorist, charged with driving over a crossing without due caution, explained: "I always hurry through to get out of the way of reckless drivers."

Professional Perspectives

Two English schoolboys took a dislike to each other, and the hatred grew more intense as the years passed. One entered the Royal Navy and finally became an admiral; the other went into the Church and eventually was made a bishop.

Years later they met on a London Railway station platform. They had changed of course, and the bishop had grown very plump, but they recognized each other. The bishop swept up to the admiral, who was standing there resplendent in his uniform with medals and gold braid glittering all over him, and said: "Stationmaster, from which platform does the ten-five train leave for Oxford?"

The admiral promptly retaliated: "Platform 5 madam. But in your condition, should you be travelling?" □

Form IV

Statement of ownership and other particulars about the newspaper:

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Dated: March 1, 2021

Sd/-
Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

THE TEMPTATIONS OF CHRIST

Fr. John Walker

Following his baptism by John in the Jordan, Our Lord was 'led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.' This was the time he set aside to prepare himself for what lay ahead.

In all probability it was a time of intense prayer and meditation in which he was confronted by the alternatives he might choose, as the son of God, to bring about his Kingdom, without having to endure the sacrifice of self which would probably be its inevitable conclusion.

What were the alternatives? Each temptation was to question whether or not he was the son of God, and each temptation suggested a different way by which he might proceed.

If you are the Son of God command these stones to become loaves of bread. Throughout history from before Jesus down to the present time many great leaders and countless tyrants have gained the ascendancy to rule by providing the people, especially the poor, with food. It is an immediate response to the problem of poverty but it is not the answer. The poverty will soon return if not in the want of food then in some other, perhaps even worse, deprivation. Our Lord responded with a wise answer. Man cannot live by bread alone; there has to be something else, a spiritual dimension that will indeed 'feed' him and sustain him through life.

If you are the Son of God throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple so that the angels might fly to your rescue. This would indeed be a spectacle to behold but it would



have about it all the show of a circus. Throughout his ministry Our Lord was conscious that his miracles might have too much of the draw of a magic show, that people would be drawn to him for all the wrong reasons. This was why he so often cautioned those he had healed to tell no one what had taken place. Jesus replied to his tempter that we should not put God to the test like this, He is not an animal tamed and trained to jump through hoops at our bidding.

'Bow down before me'

If you are the Son of God bow down before me and I will give you all the kingdoms of this world. So many men have built great empires down the years of time by 'bowing' before the devil, by actions of great violence and cruelty, by causing suffering to countless innocent people. Every one of these kingdoms and empires have fallen and passed away. There is only one kingdom that will not pass

away - the Kingdom of God founded on love, truth and justice and that is the only kingdom worth seeking. Jesus told Satan to go from him, God alone is to be worshipped and served.

It may seem strange to think about this story which actually belongs at the beginning of Our Lord's ministry at this point just before the end of his earthly life but it is strangely effective here. The perspective which Jesus gained during his forty days in the wilderness is a perspective, an understanding, that we might well take as our example and guide for our Lenten preparation for Easter. Very few things matter in this world or are of any lasting consequence;

certainly not popularity gained by 'buying' the mob with bread or with anything else and not the following achieved by doing public stunts or any other action done solely to bring popularity or the admiration of others. All earthly glory fades, and every human being will eventually become dust be he an emperor or a peasant, rich or poor. One thing only is of any lasting consequence, the Kingdom of God; it is the dwelling of all those who serve God; it is the dwelling of all those who love and serve and who seek truth and justice for all God's children in this world, and that, of course is what Easter is all about. □

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My husband Lloyd and I celebrated our Diamond Wedding Anniversary (60 years) on September 3, 2020. In spite of Covid-19 we were able to zoom in with family and friends and celebrate. We thank our heavenly family for all the graces and blessings they have showered on us and for looking after us for these 60 years.

Mrs. Arlene deSouza, Melbourne, Australia

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

My grateful thanks to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mother Mary and St. Joseph for my husband Lloyd's miraculous recovery. He was diagnosed with complications and was admitted to emergency. My family, Prayer Group, friends and myself were continuously praying for him. After 4 days there was a complete change and he was on the road to recovery. It was a real miracle and we cannot stop Praising and Thanking our heavenly family for this.

Mrs. Arlene deSouza, Melbourne, Australia

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER MARCH 2021

**Intention for evangelization
- Sacrament of reconciliation**

Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God.

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MARY WAS THERE

During these trying times I had lost my job and funds were low. Wanting to invest the little I had, I found I had been fraudulently advised. I lost not just my interest, but even my capital shrunk significantly. There was no way to retrieve what was lost. Being so discouraged I didn't bother to look at updates of the market. But I ceaselessly continued praying to the Infant Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Anthony and St. Dominic Savio. I began thanking them in advance for the graces I was to receive and gradually began following up on the market only to find that even during this pandemic and the severe economic crisis, I got back the capital I had invested and for that I'm immensely grateful to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady and saints.

Lloyd Daniel Parakh - Solapur

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.

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