

CONTENTS

From The Editor's Desk: *Slippery tongues and Smooth Fingers*...3

Do Faith and Love Go Hand in Hand?
 - Mons. Gianpaolo Dianin.....4

Feast of the Month: Lent: Words for the Time of Lent
 - Carlo Biscontin.....6

You Are Precious in His Eyes
 - Anastasia Dias.....8

The Salesians For You: St. Stephen and Beitgemal.....10

Witnesses In And For Our Times: St. Paul the Simple (March 7)
 - Ian Pinto, sdb.....13

Lectio Divina: Wheat and Weeds
 - Carlo Broccardo.....16

Quietspaces: Salvation is a Gift
 - Pope Francis.....18

Peace Tastes Like Chocolate
 Arianna Prevedello.....20

Fioretti of Don Bosco - 38
 - Michele Molineris23

Reflecting on Mary: The Annunciation
 - of the Lord - Enrico dal Covolo 26

Vocation Story: All-Maltese Zest
 - Clive Mifsud sdb.....30

In a Cheerful Mood.....32

7 Golden Rules to Raise a Child to Learn to Say No
 - Alberto Pellai.....32



*May we
 who confess
 our Redeemer
 to be God and man,
 merit to become
 partakers
 even in
 his divine nature.*

*(Adapted from the Opening Prayer
 of the Mass of the Annunciation)*

From The Editor's Desk
 SLIPPERY TONGUES AND SMOOTH FINGERS

The power of the spoken or (today) even the written word is a great gift. Yet, we use our tongues (and today even our pretty dextrous fingers) to speak or key in words of love, forgiveness, concern or recrimination, prejudice or faulty information. The faculty of communication is a very sublime faculty but for rather base reasons we not infrequently, misuse it. To gain followers on one or other social media platforms or some company at a pub or coffee shop. We love people to like us...and we've got that mistaken notion that if we proffer some 'saucy or unsound' information about someone, lo and behold, we will have ingratiated ourselves to them. St. James put it like this when speaking of the tongue: "We use it to bless the Lord and Father, but we also use it to curse people who are made in God's image" (James 3:9)

A Jewish Rabbi was once teaching some children the lessons of the Law of Moses. As a treat he brought his pupils on a picnic. Even though it was quite a windy day, he decided that they would climb a small mountain before having the picnic lunch. He gave each child a little box at the foot of the mountain, with strict instructions not to open the boxes until they had reached the top of the mountain.

When they had finished their picnic, the Rabbi announced: "Now you can open the boxes!" The children were full of excitement as they raced to remove the lids from the boxes. To their great surprise they found that the little boxes had been full of feathers. The wind whipped the feathers out of the boxes and they now danced about helter-skelter, like snowflakes, all around the mountain.

"Before we reach the bottom of the mountain, I want everyone to catch the feathers and put them back into each of the boxes!" said the Rabbi. "We cannot do that! It's impossible!" shouted the children. "So it is with your tongues, children." He spoke. "Our tongues often spread dangerous rumours about other people which we cannot catch again, just like these feathers." He had taught the children an important lesson.

Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, it is no longer possible to undo the damage once done. One can at least make every effort not to be a channel of gossip or rumours when talking with others. Never pass on what you know to be untrue, defamatory or in any way ill-founded. Let the gossip stop when it touches your own ears.

We all value esteem and need friendship. We need close friends with whom we can share an anxiety, worry, secret or doubt. We trust that this type of sharing is private and not for public broadcast. It is a nice thing to be able to say about a friend or neighbour: "I never heard a harsh word about another person pass his lips."

Silence, too, has its own eloquence. St Paul gives us good advice: "No foul word should ever cross your lips: let your words be for the improvement of others, as occasion offers, and do good to your listeners" (Eph. 4:28).

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

DO FAITH AND LOVE GO HAND IN HAND?

by Mons. Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

Let us examine the first years of marriage and one of the challenges that accompany those who are married in the Lord through the Sacrament of Matrimony. The faith of each one meets that of the other, and a new path opens up for the Christian life too, which, from a personal journey becomes a following of the Lord together. Faith and love illuminate each other: faith opens up new possibilities for love and love nourishes faith.

An inadequate concept of faith is one that regards it as an irrational attitude whereby statements that do not seem to have any rational or scientific plausibility are taken for true. Faith thus becomes an 'object' that one can have or lose for no specific reason. Some think that love is also something irrational, but this is not so. There may be love at first sight, but then true love grows and matures with reflection, confrontation and verification. Faith is like the story of a great love: it is born out of the joy of a special encounter, the one with Jesus; it becomes knowledge, acquaintance, and trust; it passes through discoveries, joys, struggles, conflicts, doubts, dialogue and silences, just like any sincere and informal relationship.

Faith feeds on intense moments and passes through the crucible of everyday life. Faith has ups and downs, serene and tiring mo-

ments. The same dynamics accompany the story of a love, which is why married couples can intuit essential aspects of faith precisely by reflecting on their experience. Faith is a gift from God, a gift given to all, equally educated and ignorant. Before the choice there is astonishment and fascination, desire and attraction, the search for something that we do not even know exists. Culture and theology may belong to some, but faith is a gift for all, and sometimes the simple experience it more keenly and they amaze us.

Even love is a gift before being a conquest; each person was fascinated by the other and only then struggled to win him/her over. Faith is not born by chance, but blossoms thanks to the presence of people, facts and experiences, within a community. It takes places like the Lake of Galilee, people like the Baptist, occasions and experiences sought and experienced. It is the places, the people, the occasions that brought two newlyweds together, a sign of providence, even if some speak of chance, luck or destiny. Faith is not blind abandonment, but trust that comes from knowing and being with Jesus. An adult faith knows the "You" to whom it turns and confides in.

Even mature love is not blind, but sees clearly the other and the possibility of a future together. Faith is an attitude of trust, but it

is also content. I believe in something specific: in the God of Jesus Christ and in the truths we express when we recite the creed. In order to say I believe in God, I must know him, not by hearsay nor by what is said around me. For many Christians, unfortunately, knowledge of religious things stops at catechism and has never grown into adulthood. Even love is always the love of two people with a name, a story, a face.



There is no such thing as faith, but faith in Jesus of Nazareth that is precise, historically concrete, just as there is no such thing as love, but love for you. In a couple, this means esteem for the person, his/her gifts and abilities. To believe in you, I have to know you and be with you. I love you for a number of reasons: you are worthy of esteem, you are cheerful, you make me feel good, we share certain values. Faith and love are attitudes, but also substance. Faith, precisely because it is encounter and a relationship, is an experience of freedom because God never constrains anyone, indeed faith always moves between certainty and doubt, light and darkness. God is not evident, but presents Himself through signs.

Faith makes us base life on a

future certainty. Love cannot be born in constraint; one can even insist or suffocate the other with attention to win him/her over, but in the end, there is a 'yes' that can only be pronounced in freedom, otherwise that bond does not exist. Faith is also an itinerary, it has stages, strong moments and crises, it is not a foregone experience. There are different ways of approaching faith: there is the unwavering believer and the one on a quest; there is the convert and the one who has always breathed the Christian life; there is the young person who for years has frequented the community and then in adult life has been absorbed by other things. Just as in the Bible we encounter the certainty of Abraham and the doubts of Thomas, the disappointment of the disciples of Emmaus and the strength of the sick who ask for healing.

Every love story also has its stages and seasons: there is falling in love and romance, marriage and early years, joys and crises. The story of every love has its beautiful pages and its difficult ones. Faith is the most appropriate name to define the relationship with God, just as falling in love, love, engagement and marriage are the appropriate names to describe the man-woman relationship. But the two experiences are mirrored in each other, love is also trust and surrender and faith is an encounter of love between the creature and the Creator, between the disciple and the master. Faith and love walk together and conjugal love is an incredible opportunity to bring them together. □

WORDS FOR THE TIME OF LENT

by Sister Marzia Ceschia

The Lenten itinerary (which began on Ash Wednesday) is marked by the liturgy, which progressively introduces us to the central mysteries of our faith: the Cross, Death and Resurrection of Christ, inexhaustible source of Mercy and Life for those who allow themselves to be drawn by Him (cf. Jn 12:32). In this journey that the Church annually guides us to make, we can identify some key words as pauses for reflection and consideration.

The appeal with which the Lenten journey opens is that of conversion: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning" (Jl 2:12). Conversion demands a decision to reorient one's existence starting from the heart, from the most intimate space of our person, from the "affections" that in various ways determine our choices, our faithfulness and unfaithfulness. To convert is not only a moral attitude, but implies returning to the starting point of our life: the Love of the Father that asks us to belong to his Kingdom with authenticity, assuming its rationale, living as his children.

To convert means to start afresh from God, not from our self-centredness, our selfishness that shuts us up in the solitude of withdrawal into ourselves. In this context we can understand the value of the second word on which we dwell: penance. It is not just a matter of practising ascet-

icism (which is undoubtedly one aspect of it), nor is it reduced to 'doing penance'. The saintly Pope Paul VI pointed out in the Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini* (17 February 1966) that penance "is therefore, already in the Old Testament, a personal religious act, which has as its goal love and surrender to the Lord".

To convert is not only a moral attitude, but implies returning to the starting point of our life:

Francis of Assisi gives us a concrete and enlightening example of this at the beginning of his Will and Testament, narrating the fundamental circumstance of his conversion: "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And as I shrank from them, what seemed bitter to me was changed to sweetness of mind and body. And afterwards, I stayed a little while and went out of the world."

The memory of Francis allows us to perceive a special link between doing penance and being merciful, that is, lovingly taking on the wretchedness of others in the awareness that each of us is in dire need of receiving mercy from the Lord, of feeling that what is bitterness in ourselves is

converted into sweetness. Living reconciled with the struggle often to accept ourselves and, more often, to accept others is a grace that the Lord works in those who humbly ask forgiveness from Him, who implore patience and compassion from Him, the fruit of a heart that knows where to base its peace even in storms.

I truly experience reconciliation if I am capable of a look of hope: 'And here we are capable of surrendering to God that which assaults our heart: here is the source where we can find the freshness of momentum,' wrote Brother Roger of Taizé in one of his letters that remained unfinished. Almsgiving is also a form of reconciliation: it is not a mere act of pity towards those more disadvantaged than ourselves, but a tension to reform a balance between the protection of my dignity and the dignity of everyone else.

In this context, the words of



Don Primo Mazzolari in *Tempo di credere* (Time to Believe) resonate strongly and meaningfully: 'In front of the crib, as in the tavern of Emmaus, only one who has nothing is someone. Only one who has nothing can speak to him. If one pities those who die in the trenches or at sea, he has no right to speak. If one has no heart for those who have lost their home, their country, their church, he has no right to speak.'

If one does not hunger and thirst for justice for all the deprived and the oppressed, one has no right to speak. I have no right to speak. My comfort outrages me, my selfishness berates me, my comfort diminishes me to the point of taking away my right to speak. In this perspective even fasting makes sense - it really serves the spirit - when its outcome is sharing and growth in fraternity.

In these dimensions is concretely visible the work of transformation that prayer accomplishes in us and during this Lenten season, it forms in us an attitude of readiness to share Christ's passion for mankind, trying to live in whatever possible way, the "giving of one's life" with gratuitousness so that the sister or brother may experience, being loved and a greater freedom. □

YOU ARE PRECIOUS IN HIS EYES!

by Anastasia Dias

The children are in the Synagogue school; women are cooking and the men are at work. There would be no one at the well at this time," she thought to herself. She had gotten the water pots ready as she carried them to the well, on her head and one on her hip. It was a sunny day. She had finished all her chores and made lunch as well.

Usually, it was early in the morning that the women fetched water from the well. But she didn't like going there at that hour. They'd look at her, whispering or making faces. They would never smile back at her, let alone include her in their conversations. So, she decided that she would stop going at 'peak' times.

The well was not far, she could already see it. There was someone sitting at the well. "Oh no! I think I'll turn back," she thought to herself, "but there's no water at home. Wait...he's not someone I've seen around before and he's a Jew!"

He would never know who she was. She heaved a huge sigh of relief.

As she drew closer to the well the man smiled; this made her happy. It felt nice not to be known and this someone didn't know her! No one in the village ever smiled at her. And, here was a complete stranger, a Jew of all people, smiling at her. She smiled back, shyly.

"Please give me some water,"



the man asked her. She was taken aback. First of all, He was a Jew. Secondly, Jews looked down on Samaritans. They had nothing to do with Samaritans. It had been this way for generations. And here He was, asking her for water. "Sir, aren't you a Jew? And you're asking me, a Samaritan woman for water?"

We all know how the rest of the story goes. What we don't notice however, is that for the woman, on a personal level, this conversation with Jesus was life-changing.

She was an outsider, rejected in her own community. That was why she went to fill water at noon. She was looking for a fulfilling relationship but couldn't find any.

Jesus could have ignored her existence completely; but he chose not to. And, it is so touching that when Jesus tells her that He would give her water that would never make her thirsty again, she said, "Please, please give me this water, so that I don't have to come here again."

Most of us might have thought that she wanted to avoid coming down, again and again. But that was not so, she was reluctant to come down to the well because of the people who constantly judged her.

Aren't you and I familiar with this kind of scenario in our own lives? Often, without knowing a person we tend to judge them or their choices or lifestyle. We indulge in gossip or chatter about these people. And, when we

ourselves are judged, we immediately get defensive.

What you and I can learn from this story is acceptance.

We learn from this to accept every single person regardless of their race, religion, colour, caste, creed or nationality. Acceptance doesn't mean we agree with their opinions or follow their example but simply that we learn to respect them and their choices in life. The reason we see so many problems in our world today is simply because we differentiate between those whom we choose to accept and whom we don't. Accepting a person doesn't mean you become best of friends with him/her but simply that you treat the person with dignity and respect. Forget your ego and your preconceived notions and treat the person before you with the respect that any human being deserves.

Like Jesus, who sits at the well and smiles at this woman; he could have thought about the ancestral enmity between his people and hers or the way people judged her for who she was. But he chose to overlook all of that and look at her as for who she was: a human being, an equal. And in that encounter with Jesus, the woman found forgiveness and fulfilment.

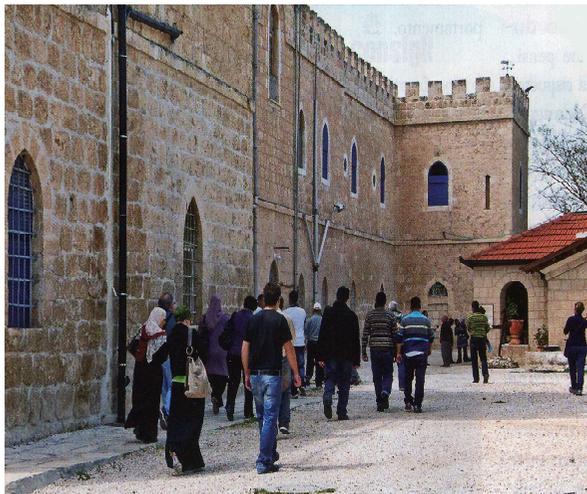
This year, let our motto be to accept each person we encounter; with all their similarities and differences; let us accept and respect them as human beings made in the image and likeness of God himself. □

ST. STEPHEN AND BEITGEMAL

An interesting symposium on Christian Art

Visitors come up to Beitgemal for a little relaxation, to admire the view or even to visit St Stephen's Church, which is very interesting for its murals. Precisely these were the subject of a symposium, which was attended by some 120 culturally qualified people, including university professors, experts and art lovers, on 7 April 2011.

The meeting had been preceded a few days earlier by an Israeli TV interview with Don Domenico Dezzuto. The symposium, promoted by the Institute of Yad Benzvi in Jerusalem with the advice and assistance of don Antonio Scudu, director of the Community, and don Domenico, had its first highlight in the report by Dr. Nirit Shalev-Khalifa, with the



The somewhat inconspicuous entrance of the Church of St. Stephen is never lost on visitors and pilgrims

presentation of her doctoral research, entitled "Mural Cycles in the Catholic Churches and Monasteries of the Holy Land (1917-1948)," with a specific focus on the Church of St. Stephen in Beitgemal.

The artist of the mosaics in this small but beautiful church built and embellished under the supervision of the Swiss Benedictine Father Maurizio Gisler, was the Maltese Carmelite Luigi Poggi, from the Haifa Monastery, who illustrated the story of Saint Stephen in the nave.

In his work, the source of inspiration was the tradition of Byzantine-style mosaics and those of Ravenna.

Two other reports followed: one by Dr Einat Segai, on the Salesian Church of Nazareth, and finally that of Professor Nurith Kenaan-Kedar. This scholar, from the University of Tel Aviv, highlighted the two realities represented in the Church: the physical one, i.e., the architectural structure, and the symbolic one, with the reference to the Heavenly Jerusalem, towards which all of us, Jews and Christians, are headed.

Why was this Symposium so special?

Fr Antonio replied: "The idea came from Dr Nirit. On our part, there was all willingness to cooperate so that this symposium would be a success, as it is in keeping with the mission of our community. We don't always have young people running after a ball or praying in church

during the spiritual retreats held here, but we always have Jews who come up to Beitgemal out of curiosity, for a bit of peace and quiet, for culture, or because they are looking for something they don't find in their religion.

The success of the symposium with the participation of such qualified people made us realise how important our presence here is. There is much talk at high levels about the rapprochement that needs to take place between Christians and the Jewish world. Here with us it is our daily bread. It is done, it is true, modestly but everything is carried out by us Salesians who, despite our limitations, work enthusiastically and with conviction. I do not think it is presumptuous to say that the Community of Beitgemal is a place where, in some way, and for those who want to, Jews can meet Christ and 'read' the Gospel. Yes, 'read' also in the true sense of the world, because perhaps, only here can one receive a copy of the New Testa-



A moment of the Symposium that drew the attention of Jewish and Christian experts to the magnificent decoration of St. Stephen's Church in Beitgemal

ment in modern Hebrew without being constrained, and read it for one's own spiritual enrichment and cultural growth. And this is, thanks to Fr. Dominic's intuition, 25 years ago."

It was special symposium, therefore, and an important one. Not only for the consistency of the papers on Christian art in the Holy Land, given by Jewish scholars who approached the research with competence and congeniality, but also for the setting in which it was held: a Christian monastery-community. The collaboration by the Salesians was acknowledged and praised by all for the archival research and the organisation of the meeting.

The atmosphere was friendly, serene and of mutual esteem. The participants were all well received, respected, treated with cordiality. Quite a few of them said at the end that they felt at home. Like brothers among brothers. And that is no small thing. □

Form IV

Statement of ownership and other particulars about the newspaper:

Don Bosco's Madonna

1. Place of Publication: St. Paul's Press, 58.23rd Rd., TPS III,
Bandra, Mumbai - 400 050
2. Periodicity of Publication: 1st & 2nd of every month
3. Printer's name and nationality: For Bombay Salesian Society
Fr Edwin D'Souza sdb (trustee)
Indian
Don Bosco Shrine Office
Matunga, Mumbai 400 019
4. Publisher's name: - do -
5. Editor's name: Fr. Ian Douulton sdb
6. Name & address of individuals
who own the newspaper and
partners or shareholders
holding more than 1% of capital

The magazine is a non-profit publication

I, Fr. Ian Douulton, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated: March 1, 2023

Sd/-
Fr. Ian Douulton sdb

Witnesses in & for Our Times



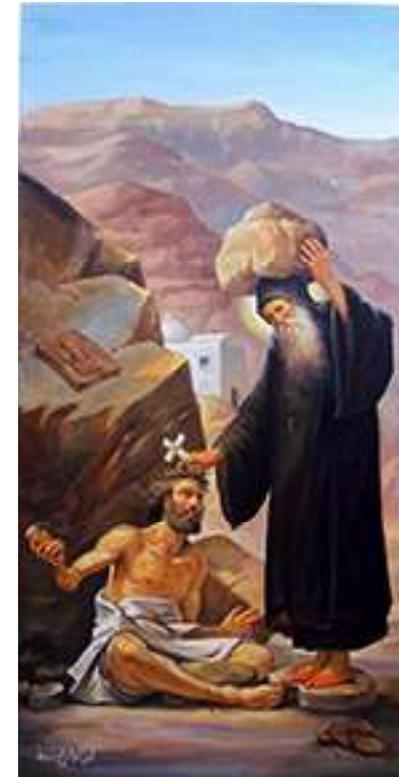
ST. PAUL THE SIMPLE (March 7)

You have probably heard about the desert fathers and mothers. They were individuals who sought a more ascetic way of life compared to the one lived by ordinary Catholics and recommended by the clergy of the day. Desert monasticism originated in the early centuries after Christianity came to be recognized as a religion. Many of them attained heights of sanctity and lived remarkably simple lives. Coincidentally, the saint for this month is titled - *The Simple*. All the desert monks and nuns were simple but the simplicity of Paul came to characterize him. Let us take a closer look into this early saint and draw inspiration from him.

A BROKEN MAN

Paul was born in the early third century BCE in Egypt. Since he lived so long ago, there is very little information about him. We are told he was a farmer by profession. He was married but we are unaware if he had children. Sadly, his wife didn't remain faithful to him and had an affair with someone

else. Discovering this infidelity shook Paul to his very core. He couldn't understand it and he



couldn't continue living the way he had up unto that point. He decided to leave everything behind and go to the desert.

Life is tough; it is full of surprises. You never know what comes and when. Just when you think you are in control, life has a way of upsetting your rhythm. Everyone has issues they are coping with. Some of us have bigger burdens than others but everyone is weighed down. Obstacles and struggles have a way of shaping us. Depending on how we respond to them, they could either file down our rough edges or sharpen them into blades. Paul lost all interest in life after losing his wife. This tells me how much he loved his wife. When you love someone with your whole being, you can never be the same after losing them.

What is the exact reason for Paul going to the desert, is hard to say. Was he escaping reality? Did he intend to punish himself for the guilt of losing his wife? Did the loss reveal to him an inner emptiness that he wanted to fill? As mentioned earlier, the desert monastics wished to attain sanctity by radically controlling the desires of the flesh. Paul went to the desert a broken man - his world had shattered; he felt empty and so to the desert he went.

There he met Anthony the Great, one of the foremost desert fathers. Legend has it that Anthony dismissed Paul saying that he would not manage to live in the desert.

Paul was well on in years; some biographies say he was 60 years old when he went to the desert! Paul refused to take no for an answer. He remained at the door of Anthony's dwelling for three days. He said, "I will rather die than leave the desert." One can sense the desperation behind the words. Paul had made up his mind - there was no going back to his former life. For fear that he might die due to the extreme conditions of the desert, Anthony finally took him in.

A POWERFUL ASCETIC

Anthony did not feel great sympathy for Paul and his condition. He believed that Paul was acting on instinct and was not fully conscious of his decision and its consequences. Hence, he subjected him to numerous tests. Anthony asked him to weave a rope out of palm leaves. Once he had finished, he had to undo it and start again. The first night they were together, Anthony divided up the food between them; he took one crust of bread and gave Paul three. Both ate a crust but Paul refused to touch the other two. When pressed, he told Anthony that he would eat the second one only if Anthony ate another crust too. Anthony declined saying that he had eaten enough for a monk. To this Paul replied, "Then one is enough for me, for I want to be a monk."

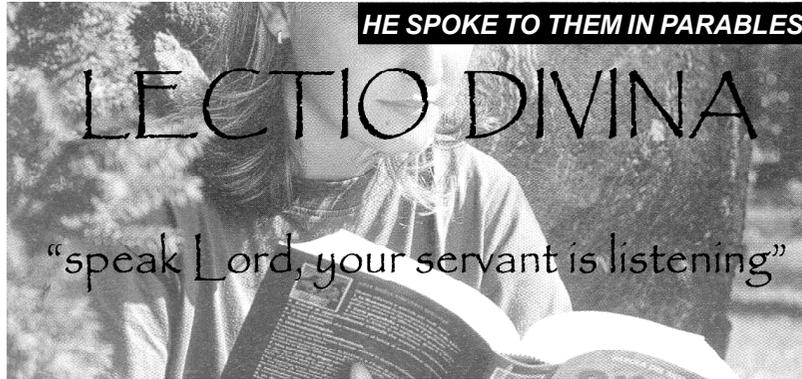
Anthony persisted in testing Paul's conviction by assigning him hard work, severe fasting

and long hours of prayer. But Paul seemed resigned to do whatever the master asked of him. His simplicity was being polished and he was entering deeper into the realms of spiritual maturity. After a while, Anthony was satisfied with Paul's obedience and felt that his motivations were pure. He allowed him to reside separately close to him. From then on, Paul began to develop a reputation for himself as a holy man and a powerful exorcist.

One day a young boy possessed by a demon was brought to Anthony for exorcism. No sooner did he come in the presence of Anthony, he began to scream curses and blasphemies. Anthony was blessed with spiritual insight and he intuited that this was a powerful demon. He told those who had brought the boy, "This is not a task for me. I have not yet been given the grace to deal with this very powerful type of demon. Paul the Simple has the gift of dealing with this one." Paul began to pray and rebuked the demon to leave saying, "Abba Anthony says, depart from this man." But the invocation had no effect. On the contrary, the demon began mocking Paul and abusing Anthony. Repeatedly Paul tried but the demon kept discouraging and humiliating him. Paul grew frustrated with the demon and threatened it in the name of Christ. But the demon abused the holy name of Christ and refused to leave. Paul left his dwelling and went out into the

hot desert sun and stood on a rock. There he prayed, "O Jesus Christ, you were crucified under Pontius Pilate, take note that I will not come down from this rock, nor will I eat or drink even if I die, until you hear me and cast out this demon from this man and liberate him from the unclean spirit." As he prayed the demon began to cry, "I'm going, I'm going, driven out by force, overcome by tyranny. I'm getting out of this man and won't come back any more. It is the simplicity and humility of Paul which has driven me out and I don't know where to go."

Paul lived in simplicity and obedience. Despite his age, he didn't ask for any concessions nor did he become conceited. He submitted to Anthony completely even though at times, what he was asked to do made no sense. He believed that God's will was revealed through the words of Anthony and so he made every effort to follow them to the dot. Such was his devotion and fastidiousness that even Anthony, his own teacher, began to admire him. Anthony would use Paul as an example in his sermons. Paul achieved sanctity through his obedience and simplicity. Being a saint does not require that we leave our lives and enter a monastery or convent. It requires of us to practice the teachings of Christ in simplicity and obedience. Jesus said: "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). □



WHEAT AND WEEDS

by Carlo Broccardo

In this magazine, we've spent quite some issues reading some of the parables in the Gospel according to Luke; we first met the Good Samaritan, then the importunate friend, the rich fool, the merciful father, the shrewd steward, and many other very fascinating characters in the Gospel accounts. It must be said that in the parables, Luke demonstrated his great narrative ability. In the Gospel according to Luke, there are also other parables that we have not considered; we have focused on those that are found exclusively in this Gospel, leaving out those that are also found in Mark and Matthew.

Turning now to Matthew, chapter 13 comes immediately to mind, in which the evangelist collects no less than seven of Jesus' parables. The first is the famous one of the sower who went out to sow: we will read it later, in Mark's version. The one we read now is no less famous; the one of the tares. It has also

entered the vernacular, when we say, for example, "to sow wild tares," which means "to put discord, to deliberately and maliciously provoke dissensions and disagreements, quarrels and conflicts." We are so used to using this word figuratively, that we almost risk forgetting that it is a plant, a weed (scientific name *Lolium temulentum*), which is widespread in nature.

It is a weed, known since ancient times and still present

"The Kingdom of God is a reality that is contrasted, contorted and ambivalent in its results, and those who expect a regular, homogeneous, rectilinear, triumphal development are mistaken."

Card. Carlo Maria Martini

today in all regions of our subcontinent as well as in most of the planet; perhaps without knowing it, we have certainly seen it too. The fact that someone would take the trouble to collect seeds of a weed to damage a neighbour's harvest may seem strange to us but in the ancient world, it was not so rare, so much so that Roman law provided for such a case. However, it is useful to note that in our parable this detail is not mentioned in passing, but is well highlighted. It is mentioned at the beginning of the story by the narrator and is then repeated by the master, in the first part of the dialogue with his servants: "An enemy has done this." No mistake on the part of the servants (the seed was of good quality); no misfortune; it is the evil action of someone who wants to ruin our harvest.

Botanical experts explain to us,



that weeds and wheat are very similar in the first phase of growth, so that one realises late that the field is infested, only by the time that the roots of the bad plants and those of the good ones are intertwined: uprooting one means compromising the other. "So," says the master, "it is better to wait; the reapers will sort out the good wheat from the weeds." This parable encourages us to be realistic: if God is working to spread the kingdom of heaven, certainly the evil one is not sleeping. "The Kingdom of God," wrote Card. Martini, "is a reality that is contrasted, contorted and ambivalent in its results, and those who expect a regular, homogeneous, rectilinear, triumphal development are mistaken."

This was the great expectation, and it is still ours: why does the Kingdom not triumph? Simply because the Word, the preaching, the mission, the life according to the Sermon on the Mount, is not necessarily ineffective. God does not destroy evil'. Jesus' parable urges me to be aware that in the world, in the church and in me there are both wheat and dandel; that is why every ounce of good, every good word, every pure thought is important. □

Quiet Spaces

SALVATION IS A GIFT

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, March 25, 2014

In his homily on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Pope Francis invited those present at Holy Mass to “celebrate and give thanks to God” because “today we commemorate a definitive step along the journey” of salvation “since man first departed the garden of paradise”.

“Today marks the celebration of the journey from one mother to another mother, from one father to another father”, the Pope explained. He therefore invited those present to contemplate “the image of Eve and Adam, the image of Mary and Jesus”, to survey salvation history, and to contemplate God who continually journeys together with his people. “Today”, the Pope said, “we can embrace the Father who, through the Blood of his Son ... has saved us”.

Pope Francis then reflected on God’s command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it, and on his promise of redemption after they had sinned. “With this commandment and with this promise”, he said, our first parents “began their journey, a long road travelled over the course of many centuries” that began “through their disobedience”. Indeed, Adam and Eve “were deceived and seduced; they were seduced by Satan, who suggested: you will be like God’s!”. “Pride and haughtiness” prevailed in them, the Pope said. “They fell into sin: they sought to take the place of God through self-sufficient pride”. The Pope added that “this is precisely the attitude that Satan himself embodies completely”.

Our first parents “did not make this journey alone”, the Pope explained. “The Lord was with them”, and has accompanied mankind on the long road that “began with disobedience yet ended in an act of obedience”. By way of explanation, and citing the famous words of a second century Bishop and Church Father, Pope Francis noted that “the Second Vatican Council takes up a beautiful expression of St Irenaeus who said: ‘the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by Mary’s obedience’”.

God always abides “with his people along their journey”, the Pope added. “He sends the prophets and sends others to explain the Law”. But “why has the Lord walked with his people with such tenderness?”, the Pope asked. “To soften our hearts”. In fact, he said, through the Scriptures God tells us explicitly: “I will take the stony

heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh”.

The Lord desires “to soften our hearts” so that we might receive “the promise which he made in paradise: as sin came into the world through one man, so also through another Man salvation has come”. “This long journey” has helped “us all to have a more human heart, closer to God; not so proud, not so self-sufficient”.

“Today the liturgy speaks to us about this journey of restoration ... and it speaks to us about obedience, about docility to God’s word”. The day’s second Reading taken from the Letter to the Hebrews (10:4-10) “is very clear”: “Brothers, it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins”.

Therefore, Pope Francis said, “salvation cannot be bought and sold; it is given as a gift, it is free”. “We cannot save ourselves, salvation is a totally free gift”. As St Paul affirms in his Letter to the Hebrews, it cannot be bought “with the blood of bulls and goats”. The Pope continued: “since it cannot be bought, in order for this salvation to enter into us we need a humble heart, a docile heart, an obedient heart like Mary’s”. Moreover, “the model on this journey of salvation is God himself, his Son, who did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, and was obedient unto death, even death on a cross”.



In conclusion, Pope Francis asked: what does “the path of humility, of humiliation” mean? Simply put, he said, it means saying: “I am a man, I am a woman, and you are God! And going forward in God’s presence, as a man, as a woman, in obedience and docility of heart.” □

PEACE TASTES LIKE CHOCOLATE

By Arianna Prevedello Tr. Ian Douulton, sdb

It's sad that war is not just a fantasy." That was how dinner started. For a year now, there were words and food in abundance. It might have fed one and one half of us, I mean, me and my little daughter.

It took me quite a while to realise that statement was aimed at me. We had never gotten that far. The war had now entered her life and she was unable to stop it. We would talk about it over her favourite dish: red lentils.

"I was sad!" I was able to tell her right away. Then came the silence, long enough for me to realise that I had no answer. She had not asked me a question. She already had all the information she needed. In her voice I already sensed the profundity that only children can elicit. I realised and was certain that evil existed. I had no idea where she had discovered it. For now, I decided not to ask. I concentrated on the present - that seemed to be the drift of her words.

It was a knowing that went beyond Israel and the Philistine of David and Goliath, of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Cain and Abel and the other stories from the Bible that she had devoured daily like candy bars. From the big book or from the tablet it was always the same, a kind of magnetic pull. After the third reading she would repeat them from memory, drawing insights from life for the small things of every day. She knew more about the sacred texts than I did. She was neither good nor bad, neither clever nor strange. It was hap-

pening gradually like she had learnt to walk. I would let myself be lulled between the irony and the amazement of her theological ramblings. I would later recall that at the age of four she was more interested in the patriarchs than in God, perhaps because her father had died in the meantime. "Your husband," she would tell me softly, so as not to confuse the mourners. She too was fighting her war against a respectable giant. The two of us felt like a page from the Bible.

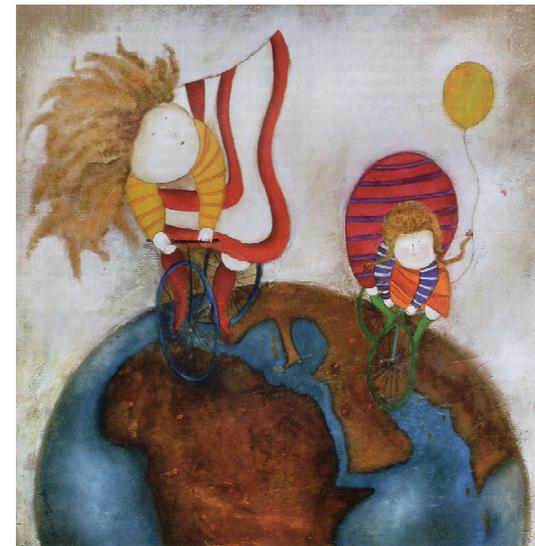
"In Africa," I added, almost without realising it, "there's more than one war going on." She immediately took the bait and said: "There are children, trees and animals who are suffering very much." She was right; in war the weak are pounded like herbs in a mortar.

The inexorable nursery rhyme: "*Pipi, a little toothpaste, mind you; the organic one you like costs as much as gold lined pyjamas,*" came as a respite from the topic. That evening she chose a story by Satoe Tone, one of our favourite cartoonists, and so the truce became an armistice. Reading *This I Can Do Again*, we felt that we did not have to be a family like any other. If anything, there were others. We would cause ourselves pain, to sin against God and his patriarchs. We had to seek our own path like the little bird in the story, without being stubborn if we couldn't fly immediately. To love that path, which was more earth than heaven and which had become like a graveyard.

When I opened my eyes again,

it was still the same day. I had fallen into an exhausted sleep next to her. It was like playing *who collapses first* after the ritual 'Good night, Jesus, good night daddy, good night dinosaurs. Have a good night's sleep like us.' In their own way they had all gone extinct, but each had departed in a rather mysterious way. She had started this daily leave-taking ritual and I agreed with her on this.

I got up from her bed and went straight to the study. I took a sheet of wrapping paper and spread it out on the warm wooden floor. With a black felt-tip pen I began to copy from the screen the outline of the five continents. There was war not only in Africa. I felt guilty: it did not deserve to be the only country at war. In the children's minds there were so many wars: against hunger, draught and disease.



With craftsman-like passion, I had just produced a map of on-going conflicts. Incidentally, I also had the definition of conflict ready, which I was sure she would use to flatter me in our next squabble. It was a bit lopsided but well stocked with information borrowed from some specialised sites on the net. In the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and something even in Europe in addition to the endless list of Africa: a flag for every open war, that finally buried the candour of the booklet inspired by the nations we had learned the alphabet with, at the age of two.

Around midnight, with my work completed, I started feeling guilty. "Am I opening my eyes too soon?" it was fair to ask. The therapist had also recommended to me with respect to her dad's death. "Remember that children," she explained, "are champions of resilience and the ability to cope with life's traumatic

difficulties. What they cannot cope with are the responsibilities that are not theirs to bear but which adults unwisely thrust on them." Those words had become like an imperative since our last session. However, I was not asking her to take the blame for humanity: in kindergarten they had already explained to her that Jesus was there for that! Nor any macabre details: sympathy for children, trees and animals would have been enough.

We would have eaten a small piece of dark chocolate every time we heard of a sliver of improvement in the confrontation. Rejoicing in peace seemed like a good responsibility, wise even for her age. We would keep counting so that we could set up new flags. And that, God willing, we would remove at least one by the age of six. I had many plans around that sheet of wrapping paper that also held our pain. We felt we had

been at war for 18 months; such was the time that had elapsed since her father's death.

I had the drowsy doubt that it was she who opened my eyes. That blessed fate that approaches me day after day like a charm. Interested in the world's crises, I was ready to sleep. I felt strangely like Simeon holding the child Jesus in the temple, ready also to whisper to my heart: "Now let your servant go in peace." □

WHERE HEAVEN AND EARTH MEET

On the pages of an old book in the monastery library, two monks had read that there was a place at the boundaries of the world where heaven and earth touched each other. They decided to go and look for it and promised themselves not to return until they had found it.

They traversed the entire world, overcame several the dangers, they endured the terrible hardships and sacrifices along their pilgrimage to all corners of the immense land. They even overcame a thousand seductive temptations that could distract a person from achieving his goal. They had overcome everything.

They knew that the place they were looking for would have a door: it would be enough to knock and they would meet God face to face.

They found the door.

Wasting no time, with their hearts in their mouths, they knocked.

Gently the door swung open. With much trepidation the two monks entered...and they found themselves in their cells, in their monastery.

One day, Rabbi Mendel of Kozk received some erudite scholars and point blank, he asked them: "Where does God live?" They laughed at him: "What's the matter with you? Is not the world filled with his glory?"

The Rabbi himself answered his own question: "God lives where you let him in."

That's what matters most of all: Let God in. But you can only let him enter where you are, and where you really find yourself, where you live an authentic life.

"I stand at the door and knock," God says, in the Bible; will you open your door today? □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 38

by Michele Molineris

183. Tender indulgence (1870)

Young Pietro Marchino was doing his second year of secondary school at the Oratory, and in May 1870, he was assailed by a violent fever, so that on the Sunday before the Feast of the Ascension, he could hardly stay in church until the end. He took to his bed; in the evening, the doctor ordered a sedation; but the illness, weakening for a moment, soon regained its strength.

On the day of the Ascension, the young man, seeing that he was not getting any better, without saying anything to anyone, got out of bed, got dressed and left the infirmary and went to the sacristy of the church, where Don Bosco was about to put on the sacred vestments and go to celebrate Mass. Marchino approached him and said: "Don Bosco, I have a fever, bless me."

Don Bosco looked at him affectionately and said: "I'm going to celebrate Mass and, when it's over, I'll give you the blessing you're asking for."

Marchino took the missal ready to serve Mass. Don Bosco put on the amice, but then, took it off: "No," he said, "dear Marchino, I'll give you the blessing right now, kneel down."

Marchino knelt down, Don Bosco, blessed him and soon the young man felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his chest; he served mass and no longer had the fever. That was what the blessed youngster testified to. He would become a priest (MB IX, 871).

184. None of the three will fight the pope (1870)

"In 1870, when the government was preparing to take possession of Rome, since I had three sons in the army, I was afraid, that one or the other of them would be destined to be called up to fight against the Holy Father.

"So, I ran to see Don Bosco, to confide my anguish to him. At that moment, he was in the courtyard, in the midst of a large crowd of his boys. I went up to him and begged him to advise me as to what I should do to avert this misfortune that had befallen me. Don Bosco remained somewhat thoughtful and then, with his usual smile, said to me: "You must pray; but be of good cheer; none of your sons will take part in the war against the Pope, or enter Rome on this occasion.

In fact, the regiments, where my Vincenzo and Cesare were, were not assigned to march. But shortly afterwards we read in the newspapers that the regiment in which my youngest son, Lieutenant Theophilus was, had arrived in Frosinone and was preparing to capture Rome.

That same evening, while I was trembling, my lieutenant son arrived home. For no unpleasant reason and without having requested it, he had been put on leave for a few months. What aroused our amazement was that, immediately after the capture of Rome, he was called back to the same regiment. The words of the servant of God had been prophetic" (From a letter from Countess Felicita Cravosio Anfossi of Caramagna to Don Rua) (M.B., IX, 907).

185. Don Bosco throwing stones (1870)

In 1912, Giuseppe Freilino, chancellor of the Pavia court section, "confirming the tradition that Don Bosco always had his children in mind, and invisibly distracted them from doing evil, sometimes sensitively", recounted this fact, which occurred to him during his stay at the Oratory in 1870.

"On the last Saturday of the Carnival, with my companions Boeri and perhaps Ciriò Enrico and I arranged to leave the Oratory during the evening confession time, in order to go to the Carnival. The space between the Coriasco house and the church, where work was in progress, was chosen as the way out. We easily passed through the first fence, through the gap left by a loose plank. My two companions had already passed the second hurdle but I was unable to climb it even though it was so easy.

At that moment, I don't know how, I found myself almost in the centre of the open space, faced with a window that looked into the church below the stairs. I heard numerous stones falling all around me. They hit the pavement and shattered, none of them touched me. My companions were calling out to me but I shouted back to them that I was unable to pass because *they* were throwing stones. I had not been able to find out whether they too heard the falling stones, but they did not speak of it later; but it was certain that they too turned back and there was no further thought of attempting to escape.

No one knew of our plan, no one had seen us cross the fence,

none of us went to confession to Don Bosco, yet the next day, as we were going to Mass, I approached Don Bosco, and he, speaking in my ear as he used to, asked me if I had gone out. I answered no and he left me. (M.B., X, 109).

186. If I win, half is for the Oratory (1870)

A most unusual offer was made to Don Bosco one day, in unusual circumstances.

A gentleman told him: "I would like to do something for your work, but I cannot do so now. A credit of twenty thousand lire, on which I relied, was judged irretrievable; there is no more hope. I have not received this good news.

"The one who's giving it could be mistaken," observed Don Bosco.

"It's not possible; my agent is very astute and he writes to me that I can't count on it anymore."

"And if you recovered this sum, what would you do with it?"

"On my word of honour, I would give you half of what I recover, but that's impossible!"

"Who knows?" Don Bosco ended by saying: "What you promise is for my boys, and I'm going to make them pray."

The gentleman wrote to the debtor and, after a few days, received from his agent, five thousand lira, which he said had been collected in an unexpected way; then, another five thousand finally his fortune. He was a man of his word and, sending to thank Don Bosco for the prayers he had said, he accompanied his thanks with ten thousand lire.

Fr Reviglio, having heard this fact for the first time from some Salesians, met Chevalier Michele

d'Agiono and told him what he had heard, as if it was news.

The Chevalier listened to him smiling and then added: "I know something more; I know that the creditor was my son Charles" (M.B., IX, 953).

187. Greek grammar (1870)

In 1870, Ch. Giovanni Garino was to join Fr Cerruti at the college in Alassio, where he was assigned the role of catechist. He was at the Oratory, indisposed with a sore throat, which had returned after quite a while to torment him.

"One day," he recounted, "before leaving for my new destination, I was walking with Don Bosco and telling him that I regretted not being able to attend school any more. He replied:

"Well, when you can no longer attend school, you will write!" At that time, I did not pay much attention to this last word, but it came true, and when I had recovered a little from teaching, I found myself writing and publishing some operettas, to which Don Bosco seemed to have alluded when he said to me: you will write."

Among other things he wrote and printed in 1883 a Greek grammar that is still available today, after revision by Prof. P. Ubaldi. Don Bosco had instructed him to draft it, but he wanted it to be small, and he indicated this by the tips of his thumb and forefinger together, as one usually does when one wants to emphasise something subtle.

Fr Garino set about it with all his good will and compiled a voluminous text; but when he joyfully brought the manuscript

to Don Bosco, he took it in his hand and said to him, smiling and cocking his head: "*nen parei Garin, nen parei. Cita, i l'ai dite, cita, cita.* (Not like that, Garino, not like that. Very small, I said, small, tiny).

A mortified Fr Garino remained stunned. Don Bosco then, while praising the work, explained his thinking better. Returning to the work, Fr Garino, without touching the work that had already been published in its entirety, extracted from it his grammar text, which still has its admirers today. Don Ceria relates that he heard Don Ubaldi say that Prof. Puntoni would not have published his if he had known of Don Garino's work beforehand (MB, IX, 932)

189. The cane of... Adam! (1870)

One day in 1870 Don Bosco was travelling from Varazze to Sampierdarena in the company of a relative. Also in the carriage was Monsignor Bianchi, sitting right opposite Don Bosco. He was holding a gnarled stick in his hands.

Suddenly Don Bosco said smiling to Monsignor: "This is Adam's staff!"

"Gosh!" Monsignor replied, expressing his surprise; "it must be very moth-eaten if it is that old."

"This staff," replied Don Bosco, getting serious, "belongs to my servant named Adam, here present."

They all laughed and introductions were made. Adam Giovanni Battista, a native of Fariogliano (Cuneo), had been accepted as a family member in the Oratory and was then at the boarding school in Alassio (M.B., X, 1258).□



MARCH 25

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

Following Mary's Example

by Enrico dal Covolo

In its first stirrings, the Incarnation was realised in Mary's womb, when the humble handmaiden of the Lord freely expressed her assent before the mysterious plan of God, which was being revealed to her.

Thanks to that *fiat* of Mary, writes St Leo the Great, 'the Son of God makes his entrance into the wretchedness of this world, descending from his heavenly throne, but without leaving the glory of the Father. He enters into a new condition. He is born in a new way'. It was with that *fiat* that the new history of humanity began. That was the two thousandth anniversary we celebrated some twenty odd years ago.

With the story of the Annunciation, Luke effectively illustrates the entire story of Mary's vocation, using a five-point scheme (which indeed usually reappears in practically all the biblical vocation stories). The five points are as follows:

— the call-election on the part of God;

- Mary's response;
- the mission which God himself entrusts to her;
- Mary's confusion;
- finally, the reassuring confirmation by God.

By reflecting on each of these moments we will be able to undertake a useful comparison between the story of Mary's vocation and the story of our own vocation, so as to make us ever more available and generous to the Lord's call and conform our lives more decisively to Christ.

A famous monk, St Isaac, abbot of the Stella Monastery, wrote in the 12th century: "What the Bible says about Mary should be applied individually to every believing soul."

It is therefore not a presumption to compare our vocation story with that of Mary: it is instead a precise requirement of the spiritual life of every Christian.

God's call-election

"The angel Gabriel was sent by

God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin called Mary".

Here is the first part of this wonderful story, the story of Mary's vocation: it is God's call.

He is the true protagonist of the story. On closer inspection, the story of Mary's vocation, like every vocation story, is first and foremost a gift and a mystery (to use a suggestive expression of the Pope St. John Paul II when, on the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination as a priest, he wished to reread his own vocation story with a touch of faith).

It is God who sends Gabriel, it is God who fills her with grace... Thus, the humble handmaid, empty of self, is full of grace, and in her the 'great things' of God are

fulfilled.

It is a lesson for all of us. Only in the light of grace, only by affirming the primacy of God in our lives can we understand ourselves, and decipher the story of our vocation. "That I may know you, that I may know me," pleaded St Augustine in the *Soliloquies*, on the eve of his Baptism.

Mary's response

Faced with God's free intervention, Mary concludes her discernment with a word of total availability: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May God do with me as you have said.*" She has known God and recognised herself, the humble servant in whom grace comes to do great things.



THE ANNUNCIATION

Henry Ossawa Tanner (American (active France), 1859–1937)

Here is the second feature of the biblical accounts of vocation: the response of the one called.

It is a response that in Mary is totally positive: empty of self, the virgin is full of grace. But the response of the one called can also be negative: think of the rich young man. He did not want to empty himself of his riches; he left no room for grace, and went away sad.

Each of us, each day of our lives, is given the opportunity to respond like Mary or like the rich young man.

And I, what do I still have to leave behind, to follow Jesus?

The Mission

- **"You have found favour with God,"** the Angel continues. **"You will bear a son, and you will name him Jesus."**

And this is the third feature of the biblical vocation stories: the mission. Mary is called to be mother, mother of that Son, and in him of all people. But it is a mission that she will gradually discover in the course of her life, until she fully grasps its meaning only at the foot of Jesus' cross.

Herein lies an important lesson for our lives: we too will expand the spaces of our mission and discover its most fruitful implications, if we dispose ourselves - like Mary - to a pilgrimage of faith, which is at the same time the way of the cross.

Only if we are willing to embrace the cross every day and follow Jesus, will we deeply discover the mission entrusted to us.

Mary's Confusion

"Mary was disturbed by these words..." "How is all this poss-

ible?"

We come to the fourth feature of vocation narratives: the resistances, the perplexities and the temptations of the one called. The fact that perplexity and questioning recur as a rule in biblical vocation narratives means that doubt in itself is not a faulty deviation, but a necessary stage of discernment.

The fact is that God calls us to freedom, and responsible freedom at that. However, doubt must not be our last word: permanent doubt ends up clipping the wings of faith and paralyses the possibilities of a generous response to the Lord.

God's confirmation

"Fear not, Mary!" And here finally is the last act of the story: the reassuring confirmation by God.

Only, ordinarily, this confirmation of the vocation story cannot be experienced in advance, as a guarantee, a kind of preliminary assurance, while we stand with our arms folded and looking on.

God's confirmation is experienced within the journey of an existence surrendered to Jesus and to others.

Then, in an existence designed in this way, there will be no lack of signs from God, and, looking back, we will discover in the end, that everything is grace.

"Fear not, Mary..." Fear not, you who heed the call of the Lord! He is with you.

The story is finished... But it is a story that presents itself to us every day of our lives.

We will relate Mary's story to our story: and if we know how to empty ourselves of ourselves and our selfishness, we too will discover ourselves 'full of grace.' □



AN ALL-MALTESE ZEST

Clive Mifsud sdb

Clive Mifsud is a young Salesian coadjutor who has temporarily left the sun and sea of Malta to study theology in Valdocco.

What does being Salesian and Maltese mean to you?

Joy. Being and being in the Lord together with my community! Joy and coming together are part of the Maltese culture, to which is added the typically Salesian family atmosphere, with so much personal interaction and enthusiastic brothers for Christ, Don Bosco and life.

What's the name of your town?

My town is Birzebbuga, eight thousand inhabitants, which is located on the seashore in the south-eastern part of Malta. Being in the 'mouth of the fish' (Malta is shaped like a fish) it is a port that provides container services.

What is your family like?

We are four at home and I am the eldest of two brothers. Dad and mum work in our print shop and my brother is a teacher.

Who first told you the story of Jesus?

Mum, she was always attentive to these details and also to religious things. I clearly remember the Mass every morning, and her emphasising the important moments of the Mass, explaining to me the love we must have for Jesus.



Clive with Fr. Fabio Attard, Ex-Councillor for Youth Pastoral

What religious traditions on your island do you particularly remember?

Many religious traditions do endure in Malta, from the 'Sermon of the Child' at Christmas, to the Good Friday processions and, for those who know Malta, festivals in every village during the summer in honour of the village's patron saint. But the tradition that is closest to my heart is the Holy Week Triduum. I cannot spell out all the details but it seems that the whole of Malta comes to a standstill, to experience this special moment, all together, as one community. From the celebration of the liturgy, in which a large part of the faithful participate, to more traditional things such as processions, relig-

ious events and Passion plays.

How did you get to know the Salesians?

One day a bulletin arrived at my house advertising a youth meeting at Savio College (one of our Salesian schools in Malta), it seemed interesting and Mum encouraged me to go. There I fell in love with the place, which is beautiful, with the Salesians, who played with us, sang, and listened to you. Re-turning home, having to choose a new school a few months later, I told mum: "It was either Savio College or nothing!"

How did your vocation come about?

I attribute my vocation to Fr Frank Clifton, an English Salesian from Malta. During my school years at Savio, in one way or another, he managed to bring out the best in me. I admired the dedication and steadfastness of his work, prayer and apostolate. The example of other Salesians then continued to fortify my choice. And the process goes on!

Your studies?

Before joining the Salesians, I completed a bachelor's degree in Computer Science and Business Management. As a Salesian I did two years of philosophy and psychology, now I have started studying theology.

Your favourite hobby?

Graphic Design and Computer Science, although today I have little time to devote to them.

Why a Salesian coadjutor?

I have been used to seeing vocation as God's will for the person. Being a Salesian priest or lay per-



Clive in the centre with two Maltese Novices

son is a vocation within a vocation. After a long reflection, enhanced by prayer and discernment, I feel that this is the vocation God wants from me.

What are the young people of Malta like?

They are full of life, with a lot of enthusiasm and desire to meet each other (the sea and the sun help in this), looking for a life that has meaning, and many times in a Christian way.

How do you see the future of the Congregation in Europe and the world?

A beautiful, albeit difficult future. New technologies, globalisation, emerging economies, the exchange of cultures, along with other realities, are all things that we, as Salesians and the Church, have to face. What is really important for the person is missing; and this is the area where the Salesians must work. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

A Real Appetite

"Ladies and gentlemen," shouted a street performer, "in a few moments I will astonish you by eating coal, stones and nails. I will also swallow a sword. Then I will come around with a hat hoping to get enough for a piece of bread."

"What!" came a voice from the crowd, "Still hungry?"

Frightened

A member of a bomb-clearing squad was calmly sitting on an unexploded bomb and removing its fuse. Suddenly he yelled and began to run for his life. So did his colleagues. When they were at a safe distance from the bomb, one by one they began to question him about the commotion caused. As he was wiping the sweat from his brow, he gasped: "Never seen such a big rat in my life."

A bit startled

Little Mary had been told that thunder was nothing to be afraid of; it was only the noise the angels made when they were making their beds.

One morning after a storm, she remarked "I didn't mind the angels making their beds, but it made me nervous when they couldn't decide whether to turn their lights off or on."

It always works

He: With patience you can do anything.

She: What about carrying water in a sieve?

He: Have patience and wait till the water freezes.

Let's wait and see

Tommy: "Mother, the little boy to whom I gave a black eye yesterday said his mother told him to love his enemies, and so he gave me an apple today."

Mother: "That was kind of him. I suppose you are friends now."

Tommy: "I don't know yet. I gave him another black eye today and told him to bring an orange tomorrow."

So simple

Master: "John, put 'fascinate' into a sentence."

John: "A fat man had a coat with nine buttons but he could only fasten eight."

Punishment

Tommy: "What would you do, mummy, if somebody broke a big jar in the dining room?"

Mother: "Somebody would get a sound thrashing."

Tommy: "Well, mummy, you'd better get your muscles up, 'cos it's daddy."

Unbelievable

Teacher: "Where's your report card?"

Johnny: "I can't get my report card back. You gave me an A in something and they're still mailing it around to the relatives."

Sad experience

Rich man: "Don't you know, my man, that fortune knocks only once at everybody's door?"

Poor man: "Yes, she knocked at mine. I was out. Ever since's she's been sending her daughter."

Rich man: "Her daughter?"

Poor man: "That's Miss fortune." □

7 GOLDEN RULES TO RAISE A CHILD TO LEARN TO SAY 'NO'

Alberto Pellai

Have you ever talked to your child about the importance of being able to say 'no' without feeling excluded, marginalised by a group that does not have this competence? Have you ever discussed with him/her the need to resist peer pressure when it tempts them away from what they would like to be? Prevention needs a long and adequate time, effective relationships and communication, it is never a last-minute intervention: here is a blueprint of educational tips and rules to avoid being the parent who gives "advice on the doorstep."

Stay close to them.

Love him constantly and always provide him with presence, affection and time, because the prevention of risky behaviour starts early in life. Many parents

hear alarm bells ringing when their children go to high school and begin to display typical pre-adolescent behaviour.

Talk about everything.

Create opportunities for conversation with him even on topics that are difficult to deal with from a young age. Drugs, sex on the Internet, alcohol and dangerous driving: on these topics parents often have no experience in talking to their children. It is crucial that mums and dads know that it is of paramount importance to address these topics early on without waiting until adolescence (when they are sometimes proposed in the form of unwelcome sermons). As early as primary school, children live in the world, absorb its issues, problems, words and controversial aspects. They



listen to the news, they perceive the emotional intensity with which certain issues are discussed, perhaps in whispers, by parents during the news. That is why they must be the ones, with the joint action of the teachers at school, to take their children by the hand and talk about uncomfortable topics, that the mums and dads of yesterday could not find the words.

Get your facts straight.

Don't be afraid to communicate your values and witness to them consistently, even when you think they are unfashionable or too distant. The authoritative and responsible role of parents, (in the vain pursuit of an illusory situation of parity), must never be diminished: descending to the level of children takes away a parent's ability to speak up, to preside from the heights of his role over an adolescent's opportunities for experimentation. Fathers who say "I am my son's best friend," or mothers who go shopping to their daughter's shops to buy the same clothes - "so we look like two sisters" - generate a lot of confusion in the minds of teenagers.

Always listen to him/her

Always listen to what s/he wants to tell you, even when s/he does not have the words to tell you. For this to happen, however, we need to spend quality time with him/her, but quantity also has its importance. Entering into the world of a child's emotions, making oneself available to become his or her main coach, means learning to feel what he or she feels, knowing how to welcome, embrace, offer him or her a range of complementary emotions to

complement his or her own, especially when those emotions make him or her feel bad or create discomfort.

Be patient.

Do not be distressed; give him/her time to correct his/her faults. Education is never a quick or instantaneous process. It requires patience, tolerance, goodwill, affection and firmness. And it brings with it an effort that many parents do not expect to have to endure. It is interesting to see how young parents find it very challenging to live with a baby who does not sleep at night, struggles to feed and disrupts the rhythms of their daily lives. But it is even more interesting to see how parents of teenagers smile at these difficulties, aware of how far there is still to go and how impervious is the path of raising a child. A phrase that has always been a classic on parenting handed down from generation to generation is: "Small children, small thoughts; big children, big thoughts."

Be proud of him/her.

Don't be afraid to say nice things to him/her, value his/her strengths and help him/her to accept his/her limitations.

Work as a team.

As a couple, agree among yourselves on educational interventions and do not pass on messages that may confuse them (Your child). Fully sharing all aspects of the education project with your spouse is absolutely essential, and this is even more so if mum and dad do not live together because they are separated or divorced. □

B.F.

TWO BLOCKS OF ICE

Once upon a time, in the middle of a forest, on the slopes of a mountain, there were two blocks of ice that had formed inside a cave of logs, rocks and brushwood during the long winter.

They faced each other with ostentatious indifference. Their relations had a certain coldness about them. A few 'good mornings,' a few 'good evenings.' Nothing more. That is, they could not 'break the ice.'

Each thought of the other: "He might as well approach me." But as ice blocks that stood alone; they could neither come nor go.

But nothing happened and each ice block closed in on itself even more.

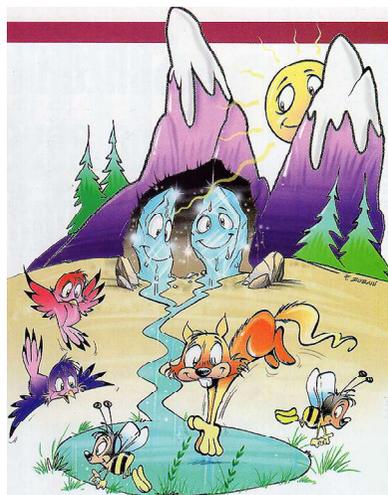
In the cave there lived a badger. One day he blurted out: "Too bad, you have to stay inside here. It's a wonderful sunny day outside!"

The two ice blocks cracked painfully. From the time they were children they were taught that that the sun was very dangerous.

Surprisingly, one of the ice blocks asked, "What's the sun like?"

"It's wonderful... It's life," the badger replied bashfully. "You can open a hole in the roof of the den.... should you like to see the sun..." said the other. The badger did not wait to repeat himself. He opened a chink in the tangle of roots and the warm, gentle sunlight came in like a golden stream.

A few months later, one afternoon as the sun warmed the air, one of the blocks realised it could melt a little into a clear trickle of water. He began feeling



different, no longer the same block of ice as before.

The other made the same delightful discovery.

Day after day, two streams of water flowed from the ice blocks at the mouth of the cave and, after a while they merged together to form a crystal-clear pond, reflecting the colour of the sky.

The two ice blocks still felt their frigidity, but also their fragility and loneliness, their common worry and insecurity. They discovered that they were made alike and that they actually needed each other.

Two goldfinches and a lark arrived and quenched their thirst at the newly formed pond. Insects came buzzing around the pond, a squirrel with a long soft tail bathed in it.

And in the happiness that the two blocks of ice reflected, they found a new heart.

Sometimes it takes a greeting, a hug, a smile. It takes so little to make those around us happy.

Why don't we do it? □

BEST OF LIFE

Vincent Travers OP

A young couple came to see me. They were both in their early twenties. I thought they wanted to get married. We were sitting around a table exchanging pleasantries when the young woman - we'll call her Maria - dropped a bombshell. She said, "I have just been diagnosed with terminal cancer and the doctor says I probably have six months to live." I was shocked. I didn't know what to say. I had never met anyone so young with her particular diagnosis of cancer. I said nothing. I listened. She ended by saying; "I would like you to do something for me. I would like to have a Mass said for my family and friends before I die, so that I can tell them how much I love them, how much they have been part of my life, and how much they have meant to me, so that when the time comes, there will be joy on their faces knowing where I am."

The night before the Mass I was a wreck. I was up half the night wondering what I was going to say. I don't know what prompted me, but after the gospel, and when I had said a few words, I invited Maria to the lectern to tell her story. She told her family and friends all they needed to be told. There wasn't a dry eye in the Church, including my own. What was so powerful in the story was that there wasn't a hint or word of anger against God. Now if that were me I'm not so sure I would not have said, "God, how could you possibly let this happen to me and I so young?" Yet here was this young woman, in her early twenties, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus, and the cost of being his disciple. I will never forget Maria. She died four months later. In that short space of time, she lived life as fully as she could, without ever feeling sorry for herself.

She was a living example of St. Irenaeus' definition of a Christian, The glory of God. □



LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Thanks to my devotion of Three Hail Mary's I received a negative report of my stomach of CT scan and my lost keys. *Pedru Lobo*

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

MARCH 2023

For victims of abuse

We pray for those who have suffered harm from members of the Church; may they find within the Church herself a concrete response to their pain and suffering.

Regd RNI no. 9360/57;
Postal Regn. MNE/89/2021-23
WPP License no. MR/Tech/WPP-72/NE/2021-23
License to post without prepayment
posted at Mumbai Patrika Channel Sorting Office
on 1st & 2nd of every month
Date of Publication: 1st of every month

Subs: (one copy Rs. 20/-); **Inland Rs. 200p.a;** **Airmail: Rs 500 p.a.**

MARY WAS THERE

With no proper finances but a dream to make our son a computer engineer, we prayed to our Mother for her help. Our prayers were answered and secured an admission in St. John's College of Engineering and Management, Palghar under the TFWS scheme. It was by God's grace that, Vidyalkar had a tie up with the college and they started their classes only for that year with minimal fees which was the reason that my son could attend. All this was possible because Mother Mary stood by us. My son has successfully completed his computer engineering. We thank our Mother Mary for interceding for us to her Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Joseph Ferrao & Ann Ferrao

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.

To help a poor lad to reach the priesthood, is a privilege

You can help by establishing a Perpetual Burse with:

Rs 5000/-, 10,000/-, 15,000/- for a boy studying for the priesthood;

But any amount, however small, will be gratefully received.

Send your offerings by Payee cheque or Draft on Mumbai banks; MO/PO/INTL MO/BPO/Bequests, Wills, Perpetual Burses, all favouring Don Bosco's Madonna or Bombay Salesian Society or Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, (Trustee). 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