

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*Through the intercession
of Blessed Mary,
the Mother of your Son,
may no petition
go unanswered,
no request be made
in vain.*

Through Christ our Lord.

*- From the Common
of the Bl. Virgin Mary*

From The Editor's Desk

LETTING GO, TO LET GOD

When the apostles asked Jesus: 'Teach us to pray,' he taught them the Our Father. That is the beginning for all of us. Do you know one teacher's advice on learning to pray? "Say the Lord's Prayer, and take an hour to say it." There is no word or phrase in it which does not repay you if you 'mine it for meaning,' and savour it: for instance, **Our** - not just my father, for sure 'You' with the human race. Is there anyone whom I feel uneasy to claim as a sister or brother? Relish it slowly as you are led into its depths. It sets the scene: each of us as a temple of the Holy Spirit reaching out to the Father through his Son. You have often gone beyond words to a sort of quiet presence.

The body has its own part to play in prayer. Here is one suggestion on how to arrange your body. Sit with your backbone straight, from the tip of your head to your bottom. Breathe slowly, deep and regular. Hands open, resting on your thighs, palms down. Come to God like that and know that I have no control over what will happen in prayer, where God will lead me, what will be the fruit. One dead-end in developing my spiritual life is to want to have someone else's spiritual life. If, for instance, I visit a convent one day, or see a monastery on TV, I may find myself thinking, 'I wish I could pray like them.' But if I am a schoolteacher, or a builder, or a full-time mother, then that rhythm of prayer may just not be suited to me. *Pray as you can, not as you can't* is an obvious maxim. Finding my own rhythm, a way of praying that suits me, may involve some experimentation with times and places and with different styles and approaches. At times I will need to persevere and not give up on something too easily, but also be prepared to say, 'This doesn't work for me.' Finding a way of praying can sustain my developing relationship with God.

When we turn to God in personal prayer centred on Jesus, the walls that divide the Christian churches melt away. We find we can pray together. The secret history of the Church is not in the councils, doctrines, crusades or bishops, still less in churches or cathedrals, but in the body of Christians who pray to the Father through Jesus Christ his Son: what you might call the contemplative tradition. In parishes and neighbourhoods, there are like-minded souls who want help in a personal search for God. In every parish there are mystics who do not know they are mystics, people whose prayer has reached a simplicity and intimacy beyond words. Many others pray at their computers, logging on to sites that help them raise their minds to God. A young millennial friend recently described this phenomenon thus: "I come onto this particular site in the evening; it is my time for quiet, reflection and prayer. Today has been a day of ups and downs and I feel as though I am in a tunnel, so coming here allows me to be quiet and hand things over to the Lord to deal with. I get so much from the fact that there are other people out there along with me."

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

TO GO FURTHER AFIELD

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

Today's challenges inevitably require us to start from further afield: the foundations of a good marriage are already laid during an in-depth journey of catechesis, first as children and later as engaged couples

The third part of the final report of the October 2015 Synod describes the task of the family, by virtue of baptism and marriage, to participate in the mission of the Church "in a unique and privileged way" (n. 56). In this sense, the family is also asked for that "pastoral and missionary conversion" that Pope Francis has proposed to the whole Church. The mandate dealt with in this last part of the Final Report is to be understood in a twofold sense: first of all, it is the Church's mission to the family to enable it,

and second, so that it becomes missionary in its turn.

From a missionary perspective, the Church feels challenged to take care, once more, of engaged couples, a task which challenges the entire Christian community in its remote and proximate preparation. The Christian community will welcome into its bosom those who have celebrated their spousal covenant in the Lord. The text places great emphasis on the community called to regenerate in faith and to accompany engaged couples. Today's challenges



require us to start from further afield, because the foundations for a good marriage are already laid during the catechesis of the Christian initiation of children and adolescents. "The formative itinerary should take on the features of a path oriented towards personal and couple vocational discernment" (n.58).

The Church also feels committed to nurture during the first five years of married life – a delicate and vital period in which every couple faces a series of 'normal' crossroads typical of all couples. This period is also decisive both for the birth of a mature bond and/or the possible failure that today, more than yesterday, finds a challenge during the first years. It is a delicate passage, never taken for granted and therefore decisive.

An important page in the life of the two spouses is fertility because "conjugal love and the transmission of life are ordered to each other" (n. 63). Conjugal love is realized within the free and responsible choice of two spouses who are aware that they are called to continue the work of creation and who must open themselves to the gift of life with generosity

and responsibility. This part of the text could not fail to include a call to respect life against the "culture of discarding" and a reference to other forms of fertility such as adoption and fostering.

Closely linked to generation is the educative task of the parents: "The first school of education is the family, and the Christian community is there to support and complement this irreplaceable formative role" (n. 67). The text recalls the struggle to be educators today and also the loneliness and, we would say, the impotence that many parents experience in the face of such a complex world of the media.

Finally, the Church's mission is particularly challenged by a multitude of complex situations that require discernment, care, accompaniment, solidarity and love. The text dwells on cohabiting couples and de facto unions, on the delicate matrimonial relationships between Christians and members of other religions, on families with homosexual children, on widows and single mothers, and finally on the thorny issue of marriage-breakdown, a subject to which we will return to address with care and depth. □



"The Bishops of Brazil emphasised that all of nature, besides manifesting God, is a place of his presence. In every creature dwells his life-giving Spirit that calls us to a relationship with Him. The discovery of this presence stimulates in us the development of the 'ecological virtues'."

But when we say this, let us remember that there is also an infinite distance, that the things of this world do not possess the fullness of God."

IT IS THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

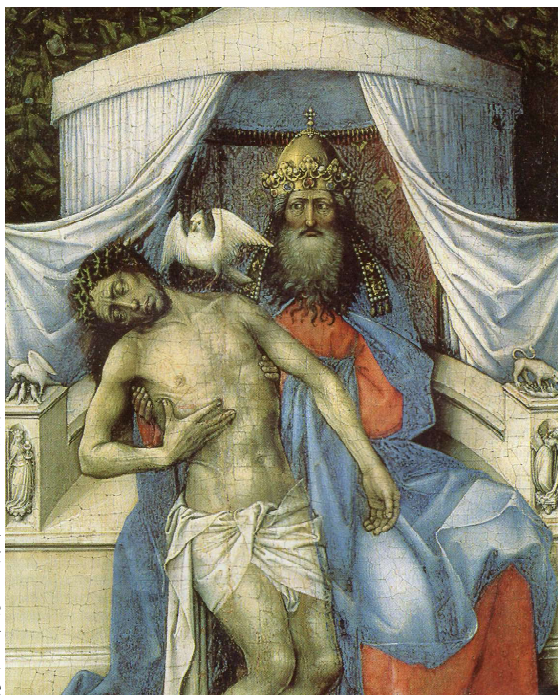
by Chino Biscontin

The Solemnity of the Holy Trinity offers us a gratifying look at the fulfilment of the mystery of salvation achieved by the Father through the Son

Our mind can intuit the existence of God and some of His characteristics. To intuit means to grasp, not to comprehend. How could our minds be bigger than Him and contain Him? But our mind must be trusted when it courageously reaches beyond the "Hercules Columns" of what is graspable, sufficient to be on its logical trajectory. Therefore, not only not betraying itself, but breathing fully, without illogical restrictions.

We intuit the existence of God when we ask ourselves about the beginning of all that exists. For, as Kant understood in philosophy and as Einstein established in cosmology, all that exists clings to the web of time. Hence the question: how and from what did the pulsing of time begin, when was there a time when there was nothing? It is a boundless horizon that opens up

when this question is asked. It is in the fascination that it provokes, that the mind can venture, or rather, demand to venture. As Dante so beautifully put it: "You were created not to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and



Robert Campin (1378-1444) called the master of Flemalle, Trinity, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

knowledge."

Before everything that makes up this world of ours and the astounding immense dance of the galaxies, different from everything we know, there is – because there must be – a creative Principle, which we call 'God' in our language.

In addition to the necessity of its existence, we understand that it cannot owe its existence to anything other than itself, otherwise it would not be a Principle. God exists because He wants to be, and He exists as He chooses to be. He is a being endowed with the capacity for self-decision and therefore also for self-understanding. He is not marked by necessity, but by supreme freedom. Here the mind understands that it can go no further: it can touch God, but not take over God's freedom.

We would not know much about God if He himself had not deigned, to our fascinated amazement, opened God's self to us, to confide in us "as does a friend to a friend," the Bible boldly affirms. The whole of Sacred Scripture is nothing other than the story of God confiding in a people, "His" people, and through them to all humankind. And we Christians recognize in Jesus the supreme confidence of God, for He is the Word by which God says not something about Himself, but all of Himself: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" with what follows in the first chapter of the Gospel according to John.

And it is in the First Letter of John that we find the striking

phrase that sums up everything about God that we have understood from Jesus: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God: everyone who loves has been begotten by God and knows God. Whoever does not love has not known God, for God is love" (1 Jn 4:7-8). Note well: not only does God have love, but God is love. God has love for us because he himself is love: this is the form he has freely given to himself.

This is the heart of the feast of the Holy Trinity (30 May). We use three names, given to us since baptism, one for the one divine reality: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. With these names, we significantly begin and end our liturgical assemblies. We know that in the heart of the Father a Love, the Holy Spirit, to whom the Father has placed no limitations and who has allowed himself, is totally filled by the Spirit. This is why we say that not only is the Father, God, but so is the Holy Spirit. And it is in the impulse of this Love that the Father generates the Son: A Love which, being without measure, makes the Son who must be recognized as God like the Father and, in turn is filled with the same Love.

Words become utter babble. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the three names of the three divine Subjects, but the divinity is not divided into three parts. When Love is infinite, it does not measure only giving a part, nor by giving is it deprived of a part, but without measure, totally. And it gives everything without losing anything. Whoever loves knows that in love all this is true. □

THE SECRET OF PERFECT PEACE

by Anastasia Dias

It had been a tiring day; I was exhausted. As I lay my head on my pillow from where I peeked out of my window, I heard a neighbour singing out loudly. The lyrics of the song were dark and depressing; the song perfectly suited my mood.

I worked so hard each day. I gave my all to each and every task that was assigned to me. I was absolutely dedicated to my work. So, what exactly was wrong with me? When I think about it now, it seemed completely ridiculous. I was giving up because I felt that I wasn't appreciated. I had put in a lot of effort into the things that I did, but I wasn't given any credit or appreciation.

Of course, I was looking for validation. I was searching for approval. And, I couldn't find it anywhere. That was the reason for my sadness; the reason I wanted to quit. Sounds frivolous, doesn't it?

I was given money for my work. I knew that I was passionate about my job. I knew that I was very hard-working. Then, why did I still seek the approval of people? Couldn't I just do without it? Why did it affect me so much? Why was it taking a toll on my

mental and physical health? When I asked myself these questions, I got answers: the answers were simple and I could understand them.

But acceptance was tough. Ever since I was a child, I had always been showered with praise; even for the smallest of things. My mind had been conditioned to expect validation. Then, I grew up and had similar expectations from people. Clearly, they weren't living up to my expectations. They weren't giving me due praise. This was what made me unhappy.

Most of us feel this way at some point in our lives. Some parents work hard all day long to feed and support their families. Sadly, they are not appreciated by their families. I know little children who say, 'Look at me, Daddy. I'm swimming. I'm dancing, Mummy. I'm flying.' But their fathers and mothers do not have the time or patience to cast even glance at their children. This is what leads us to seek approval from others. We want our teachers, colleagues and bosses to validate us. We want them to say, 'Well done!' And, when they don't say anything or just nod

their heads or worse ignore what we've done... we get depressed.

I felt dejected until I heard His story. That changed the way I felt about all of this. He wasn't like any other person I knew. He was from a small town, some 30 years of age, living with his mother. His father had passed away a few years earlier and He had looked after His business. He had learnt his father's trade but wasn't interested in pursuing it. He had bigger plans. He wanted to do something for the people around Him, so, He moved out. He left that small town and started visiting the neighbouring towns and villages. He wasn't a teacher, but he was very wise. He could solve any disputes or arguments among people. He wasn't a certified doctor or a scientist, but people said that He healed them of all their ailments. His popularity grew with every passing day which gained hundreds of followers. He wasn't a magician either, but He got food out of nowhere to feed the hundreds that followed Him.

The thing that surprised me was that He spent 3 years as He had planned, moving around, to help people. He cured them, taught them, fed them, but he took nothing in return. What bothered me was that no one thanked him for what He had done, ever. They didn't care to come back after their friends and relatives were healed, after He had solved their disputes or after He had fed them. Most of those closest to Him even abandoned Him. Very few stayed with Him. Didn't He feel dejected? Was He never

unhappy? Did He ever regret leaving His father's carpenter's shop? Did He ever want to return to His mother? At least, she would've loved and appreciated Him.

He had spent three years of his life serving people. He had left the warmth and comfort of His home to help them out. He was living like a nomad, doing all of this for free. Not only did these ungrateful people take Him for granted: they even took his life away. They killed Him, crucified Him. He was Jesus the Christ. The man whose cruel death spoke so much more than anyone else's life did. Jesus Christ, the man whose life and death altered the entire world.



And, here I was yearning for people to appreciate me. As I read His story, my perspective changed. I reclaimed my joy. I didn't allow people's approval or opinions to control me or my happiness. Sometimes, I was praised for my work but most of the time, I wasn't. So what? It didn't matter anymore. So now I could lay my head on my pillow in perfect peace and contentment knowing that I had done my best. And, the rest wasn't in my hands or in my control. Perfect peace descended on me and I slept peacefully from then on. □



FATHER MARIO PEREZ and the Witches' Children

"I'm at risk everyday but I'm not afraid because I believe that the in fight for the rights of the weakest, one should not hesitate to risk even one's life."

Father Mario Pérez, a Venezuelan Salesian currently works in Mbuji Mayi, a city with serious problems in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In particular, he is at the service of children and youngsters accused of witchcraft. These very young children between the ages of 8 and 14 are orphans, disabled or albinos. But according to popular beliefs, they cast curses and are blamed for causing a general malaise, poverty and unemployment. Often these accusations come from their parents themselves and the children are forced to leave their homes and take to the streets. The truth however, is that for many families today, the obsession with black magic is just a pretext to feed fewer mouths at home. Before settling down in Mbuji Mayi, Fr. Pérez worked at several other locations: first on the Colombia-Venezuela border, a place to look after displaced

people; then, after his studies in Turin, he was in Lubumbashi, where he worked with street children. In 1997 he was sent to Burundi and later he became the rector of Don Bosco Centre in Goma-Mgangi, where he stayed for 13 years, during which time, in 2009, UNICEF awarded the Centre the "CHILD FIRST" International prize: a way to make the voices of so many suffering children, heard.

In April 2010, immediately after the terrible earthquake, Fr. Pérez was sent to Haiti. His service consisted not only to bring aid but also to nurture a mentality of commitment, bringing hope to many displaced people who had populated the refugee camps in Thorland, Carrefour. This Salesian involved people in the running of the camp: everyone had to make themselves useful for the good of their neighbours, even though the situation was very complicated.

How and when was your vocation born?

From the time I was very young, I had a keen sensitivity for children who were orphaned or suffering injustice; for the enslaved and margin-

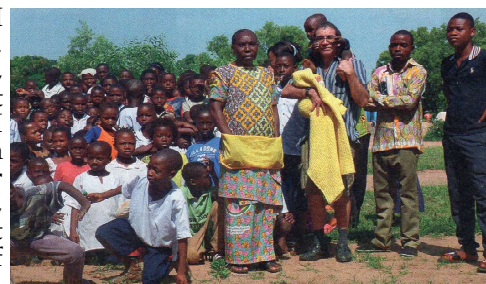


alized adults and I knew I had to do something. When I became a teenager, I got involved in a socialist movement thinking I would find a solution there. I decided to enter the diocesan seminary, even though I did not believe in the existence of God. It was at the semi-

nary that I found Don Bosco and God, and the following year I was accepted as an aspirant at the Salesian aspirantate in Los Teques, Venezuela. After my novitiate, I felt a restlessness in my heart although I was happy and certain that I wanted to embrace the Salesian way of life. One day I volunteered to go to the missions of Africa. At that moment it seemed to me that my heart was set free and since then I have never had any doubts about my decision to share the Salesian life with my brothers in Africa, especially with children and youngsters in difficulty.

Why did you decide to go to the missions?

I considered it a way of expressing and living the mission entrusted to Don Bosco. I carry this thought in my heart and consider it a way to live justly for my African sisters and brothers and to express my gratitude to Jesus Christ. God's plan in Jesus is for all humanity to form one family. Every Christian should therefore carry this desire of Jesus in his heart and try to fulfil it. I feel like one of the family with my brothers and sisters in Mbuji Mayi, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where I now live and I have the same feeling for all the



people I have lived with in Goma, in Lubumbashi, in Haiti and wherever I have been.

Who gives you the strength to go on?

The faith that God himself works in the Church, the body of Jesus Christ and desires the happiness of all His children, as well as infinite gratitude to the Father who entrusts me with what is most dear to Him.

What's your life like in Mbuji Mayi?

Mbuji Mayi is the capital of eastern Kasai, the region known worldwide for its diamonds. In the Congo, however, it is known for its violation of children's rights. Seventy percent of the street children in the main cities, such as Lubumbashi and Kinshasa, come from this region and many have had to fight against accusations of witchcraft, violence and trafficking of various kinds. Don Bosco's work in Mbuji Mayi has experienced a difficult time due to a lack of economic means and personnel to operate the schools and the parish. After working in Haiti, I was sent here as vicar and bursar.

Here, I am committed to the smooth running of the entire work and of the community: we



have a reception centre for children in problematic situations (orphans, the abandoned...), an elementary school, a literacy centre, a vocational training centre that offers various opportunities for training (lasting from 6 months up to 3 years respectively), a technical institute, a parish, an oratory and a boarding for children at risk. We don't have any stable income to cover the expenses of the staff, the operation of the workshops, the parish, the food programme, the medical care of the children and the community. Every day we have to look out for help, identify jobs and do them to earn some money. At the same time, we have to follow the administration, because the state services come up with taxes and fines every week. In particular, we have to take care of the community, the children at the Don Bosco boarding and the staff.

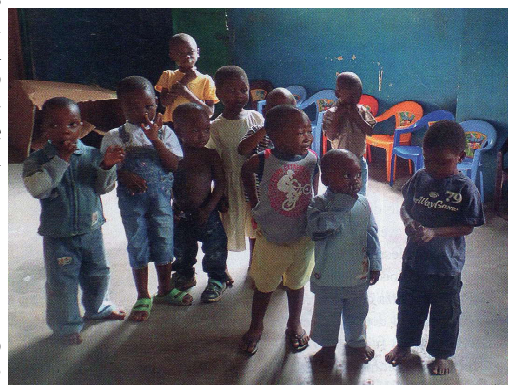
What are the young people like in the reality in which you live?

The youngsters who attend our centres are

wonderful, open and honest. They speak their minds. They are sensitive to the Church and willing. Most of the activities are organized and carried out through a group of youngsters, even the service on behalf of the street-children, thanks to the collaboration of everyone, by the youth themselves. Among the great challenges that many must overcome are the weight of adult traditions, which limits their freedom and hinders the truth, the interest in easy money, and the mentality created by exploitation and the diamond trade. Another great challenge is solidarity and commitment to justice and the ability to create other sources of work.

Are you ever afraid?

No. The mission we carry out, especially what we do to save victims of trafficking and children accused of witchcraft, exposes us to risks every day, but I'm not afraid, because I believe that in the fight for the rights of the weakest, we should not hesitate to risk even our lives. □



Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. JOHN OF AVILA (May 10)

Ian Pinto, sdb

MATCHSTICKS OF FAITH

John is probably the lesser known personality from Ávila but his contribution to the Church is no less than the more famous Teresa of Ávila. In fact, he was Teresa's model. The example of his life and passion of his priestly ministry not only won many souls for God but inspired many saints like John of God, John of the Cross, Francis Borgia and Ignatius of Loyola.

John was born on January 6, 1500 near Toledo in Spain into a wealthy family. His parents were pious Christians and perhaps we can say that John learned to love God from his parents. It is surprising that his parents aren't canonized saints because they created an environment of sanctity wherein John learned to do what pleased God. While living with his parents, he began to practice austerities like one would commonly find among monks and hermits!

He had enrolled himself at the University of Salamanca to study law but discontinued his studies for some reason. Sometime later, a Franciscan friar who came in contact with him and was impressed by his austere lifestyle convinced him to return to the University. This time however, John chose to study philosophy and theology. While he was studying, his parents passed away. John decided to become a priest and was ordained in the spring of 1526. He celebrated his first mass in the Church where his parents were laid to rest.



FIRE OF PRIESTLY ZEAL

A little after ordination, he began to sense the stirrings of a missionary vocation. He felt called to go as a missionary and spread Christ to those who had not received Him yet. He set his sights on the missions of Mexico. He travelled to Seville and awaited departure for the Indies with the Dominican bishop, Julián Garcés who was appointed as the first Bishop of Tlaxcala, which is Mexico's oldest diocese.

While he waited to go, his devotion to the Eucharist and his skills of catechesis and preaching caught the eye of Father Hernando de Contreras, a local priest who spoke highly of him to the Archbishop. The Archbishop saw in John a powerful instrument to stir up the faith in Andalusia and urged him to stay. John was reluctant to give up his desire for the missions but finally gave in to the Archbishops pleas.

John was passionate about the priesthood and wanted to reform it so as to align it more closely to the example set by Christ. He linked the priesthood closely to the Eucharist and believed that holiness ought to be the pre-eminent quality of a priest. The role of a priest was to serve as mediator between God and human beings. Somebody described the role of a priest beautifully when they said that 'a priest brings God to the people and takes the people to God.' In all probability, the author of that quote was highly influenced by John of Ávila.

Since priests had such an important role, he found it necessary that there be a careful screening of candidates before admitting

them to Holy Orders. He recommended that candidates be assisted with a rigorous spiritual and intellectual formation within a community. He found such an environment to be the most suitable for formation. It was these ideas that led him to reform the seminary and the formation of priests. His ideas led to a massive change in the system of formation of priests. A number of seminaries were set up to form priests in the way that John delineated. His writings on the priesthood were so influential that they not only formed the basis for priestly training but also influenced the ministry of bishops.

When the Council of Trent was convened in 1545, he was invited but due to his poor health he could not be present for it. However, he contributed by way of submitting two important treatises that guided the deliberations of the Council Fathers and proved very useful in drawing up the final documents.

BLAZING HOMELAND MISSIONARY

John brought his missionary fervour with him to Andalusia. The sermon he preached there in July 1529 established his powerful presence and singled him out as something out of the ordinary. Crowds would gather at the Church in which he celebrated mass. John had a brilliant mind and a convincing way of speaking but it was his charisma that really pulled crowds.

Some of his ideas particularly those regarding reform brought him under the scanner of the Inquisitor. In 1532, he was charged with severe bias against the rich

*A single
'Blessed be God!'
When things go wrong
is of more value
than a thousand
acts of thanksgiving
when things
are to our liking.
St. John of Avila*

and preaching that heaven would not welcome them. He was placed in custody until the trial. The judge dismissed all charges against him and set him free in July 1533.

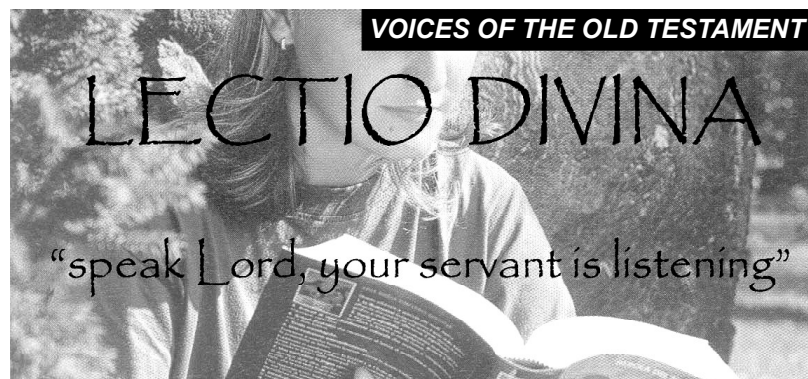
The diocese of Córdoba accepted him and supported him with a small burse. With the support he received from the diocese, he was able to ground his presence and establish his ministry. The city of Córdoba became the base for his work of guiding those who wanted to follow him as disciples. It also served as the centre from which he would go out to preach and serve. Seeing the need, he began establishing schools and colleges in cities like Granada, Baeza, Montilla and Zafra. During this period, he received the title of 'Master of Sacred Theology.'

His passion attracted a small group of followers who shared his desire to defend and spread the Catholic faith. They were a group of around 20 diocesan priests who began to live together in community just like religious. They hoped to form a religious society

under John or 'Master Ávila' as they called him but that did not materialize. Ignatius of Loyola was impressed with the religious fervour and missionary drive of John and tried to get him to join the Jesuits but he could not succeed. However, many of John's disciples opted to join the Jesuits and Carmelites. Those who remained as diocesan priests carried the torch of faith with missionary zeal to every place they went. He was very supportive of the Jesuits and their mission and helped them establish themselves in Spain.

The University of Baeza held a special place in his heart. Not only was he instrumental in setting it up but also directed it with the vision of a pioneer. It was the first of several colleges that would be run by diocesan priests who dedicated themselves to teaching and giving spiritual direction to young people.

John left for his eternal reward on May 10, 1569. He was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1894 and was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1970. He is known as the 'Apostle of Andalusia' because of his pioneering work in that region of Spain. Pope Paul VI declared him to be a model for modern priests suffering from an identity crisis. In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI declared him a Doctor of the Church. He recognized in him a man who had spent his life guiding souls to a deeper and more intimate relationship with God and to conversion of life. He was a pioneer of the idea that all human beings are called to holiness and above all, he was an outstanding model of the diocesan priesthood. ▣



VOICES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

LECTIO DIVINA

“speak Lord, your servant is listening”

UNCONTAINED JOY

by Carlo Broccardo

Whenever we experience God's help in our lives, from the littlest things to the greatest experiences, it would be wonderful to simply burst out in exultation with our entire being

The book of Exodus, in one of its most famous pages, recounts the crossing of the Red Sea: the people of Israel passed through on dry land, while the Egyptians who were pursuing them were swept into the depths of the sea. “On that day,” we read at the end of the passage, “Israel saw the mighty hand with which the Lord had acted against Egypt, and the people feared the Lord who acted against Egypt, and the people feared the Lord and believed in him and in Moses his servant. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord and said, “I want to sing in honour of the Lord, for he has gloriously triumphed...” (Ex 14, 30-15, 1).

Those were the first words of a song with which all the people praised the Lord; and then, after no less than 18 verses of the song, the account goes on to say that “Miriam, the prophetess sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her

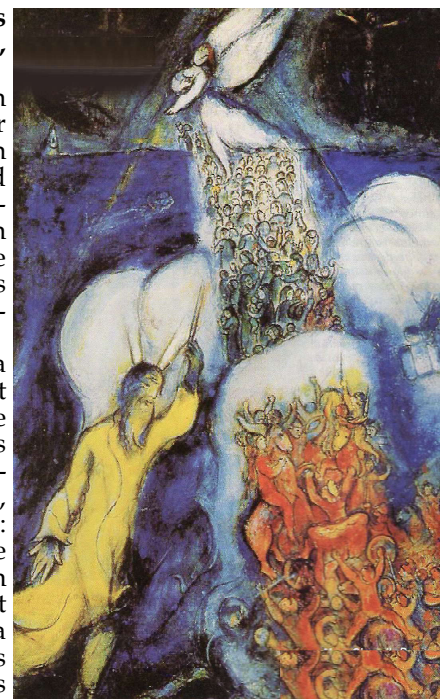
hand and behind her came out all the women with tambourines and with dances. Miriam sang for them the refrain, “Sing to the Lord, for he has gloriously triumphed” (Ex 15:20-21). And so, they began to sing again. It is precisely part of the spirituality, the style, the way of life of the people of Israel (which is witnessed to us in the Bible): when they see God's work in their favour, they celebrate by singing his praises. They don't just say “Thank you,” but they sing a song, they weave God's praises, accompanying their words with stringed instruments, tambourines and dances... It is a feast, a great feast! Like when David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem: The Bible writes that “David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the City of David, with joy (...); David danced with all his might before the Lord” (2 Sam 6, 12-14).

On May 9th, 2021, the liturgy offers us as our responsorial

psalm, Psalm 98/97, which is an invitation to sing to God, to celebrate in his honour.

Many passages in the Psalm recall the book of Exodus. For example, it says that the reason for so much joy is that the Lord has done wonders, he has overcome (our enemies) with his arm and his right hand, he has made known his salvation, he has remembered his love, his faithfulness to the house of Israel.

To be honest, the Psalm is a bit generic, in the sense that it does not specify what these wonders are or how God's powerful salvation was manifested this time. It matters little, or perhaps it is better this way: every time we experience God's help in our lives, from the littlest things to the greatest experiences, we can intone a song with the words of this psalm. Psalm 98/97 is therefore one of the many songs sung to God (and recorded in the Bible) to thank him for his goodness; however, it has a particular characteristic: in these few lines everything is very big, great indeed. It is not enough to repeat the words of a well-known song: a new song must be sung; it is not enough for believers to intone it: the whole earth must acclaim the Lord; the profound words of a beautiful prayer are not enough; we must sing, acclaim, shout and exult with the zither, with string instruments, with trumpets and with the sound of the horn; it is not even enough for all human beings to join in praise; the sea, the world, the rivers and the mountains are invited to acclaim the Lord. Can a greater celebration be



imagined?

I don't know if the rules of the liturgy allow us to express joy in such an exuberant and involved manner; perhaps the idea of dancing with all our strength before the Lord is not even part of our sensitivity. However, we must not forget that young people are watching us: what would happen if, by participating in one of our liturgies, perhaps by chance or out of necessity, they perceived that we adults were truly happy? What if, talking to us or even just seeing how we behave, they get the idea that we are people who find it hard to contain their exultation because of how great is the joy we carry within, because the Lord works wonders in our lives? □

Quiet Spaces

GIVE JOY TO THE PEOPLE

To "obey and give joy to the people" is an essential part of "Christian mission," which Pope Francis focused on during the Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday, May 18, 2017

During his homily, the Pope recounted the story of a priest who, when he was appointed bishop, "went to his elderly father to give him the news." The father, a "humble man", who had "worked his whole life" and was now retired, did not have a university education but the "wisdom of life", and gave his son this advice: "obey, and give joy to the people." Pope Francis noted that "this man had understood" the teaching of the day's liturgy: "be obedient to the Father's love, not to other loves; be obedient to this gift and then give joy to the people." Thus, the Pontiff explained, we too, "Christians, lay people, priests, consecrated religious, bishops, must give joy to the people."

Francis began the day's reflection, with a particular passage from the Gospel of John (15:9-11). Describing the scene, he noted that "Jesus returns to reflect once again on the commandment of love," and "says something very powerful: 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.'" Hence "the love with which Jesus loves us is the same as that with which the Father loved him: the same. We are loved with this great love. It is a great gift of love!" For this very reason, Francis continued, Jesus "admonishes us: 'Please, abide in my love because it is the love of the Father.' It is a great love." Recognizing the likely objection: "But, Lord, how can we abide in your love?" the Lord himself offers a concrete response: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." In substance, the Pope clarified, "Jesus abides in the Father's love and asks us to abide in the love he has for us."

But "how does one abide" in this love? The response is: "observe the commandments" — those 10 rules which form "the base," which are "the foundation." These are the precepts, Jesus clarifies, "that I have taught you," that is, the "commandments of daily life, the little commandments" which, "more than commandments, are a Christian way of life." The Pope thus advised that we abide "in this way of living the Christian life." How do we do so? Examples can be found "in the works of mercy or in the Beatitudes." In fact, the Pontiff observed, "although the list of Jesus' commandments may be very, very, very long", in reality, there is one core: "the Father's love for him and his love for us."

For this reason, the Lord "asks us to abide in his love," and also,

Francis warned, because in life "there are other loves. The world too proposes other loves to us: love of money, for example, love of vanity, of showing off; love of pride; love of power, and of doing many unjust things in order to have even more power." However, such cases "are other loves;" they "are not of Jesus and are not of the Father. Christ asks us to abide in his love, which is the Father's love."

The Holy Father thus invited his listeners to think about "those other loves which distance us from Jesus' love," and also to reflect upon the existence of "other measures of loving:" such as "half-hearted loving," which, however, "is not loving. It is one thing to wish someone well, and another thing entirely to love someone. Loving is more than wishing someone well." At this point we must ask ourselves what the measure of love is. Paradoxically, the response is that "the measure of love is to love without measure." Only thus, suggested the Pope, with "these commandments that Jesus has given us, will we abide in Jesus' love, which is the Father's love. Without measure." Thus, this love of Christ is not like every other type of love, which can often be "lukewarm or self-absorbed."

Continuing with the Gospel passage, Francis then asked why the Lord feels the need to remind us of these things. The response is found in the text: "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." In fact, "if the Father's love comes from Jesus, Jesus teaches us the way of love: an open heart, to love without measure, to love by leaving aside all other types of love. The great love for him is to abide in this love, and there one finds joy, great joy, which is a gift." Indeed, both "love and joy are a gift."

A reference to this sense can also be found "in the opening prayer of the Mass," the Pope reminded us, when "we asked: 'Lord, take care of this gift which you have given us,' the gift of love, the gift of joy." It was in this regard that the Pope shared the advice of the father of the newly appointed bishop: "give joy to the people." Francis urged all Christians to do so "by way of love, without ulterior motives, only by way of love. Our Christian mission is to give joy to the people." Thus, the Pope concluded his homily with a prayer that "the Lord protect this gift," that we may "abide in Jesus' love so as to give joy to the people." □

EASTER FRIENDS

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doullton sdb

It was early spring and the weather was changing. Green shoots were appearing on shrubs along the pathways leading up the mountain. There was a gentle breeze in the air. The afternoon sun was not really warm as the two boys made their way a path up a steep sloop; ahead of them were their sheep.

Each had a flock and they're leading them up the mountain to pasture, because it was time to lead them from their pens up to the mountainsides where the green shoots were tasty and fresh.

They both maintained a steady pace, one beside the other, but they were not friends or acquaintances. They just walk silently as if they were walking alone.

Each of them wrapped in their own thoughts; missing the village they had left behind on the eve of Easter. Here they were with only the sheep for company.

Though both of them shared the same thought, their daydreams were very different.

Gus was a pious youngster; he was thinking of his mother and his younger brothers and sisters sitting around the table eating the sweet blessed bread as they prepared themselves for the midnight service.

Joe on the other hand, lived alone with his father, a woodcutter and was used to being left on his own. He was thinking of the village feast and all the fun that was going on there.

At one moment, Joe stopped and Gus too. Both looked back. The woods were already far behind them and the river beyond which

the sun had not yet set...and settled among the fields was the village already settling down for the night.

"And while we're here, tomorrow over there..." said Joe.

"That's right!" replied Gus, glad that one of them had broken the ice. "I know, I wonder if we'll be able to hear the bells ringing out the Easter service. They're pretty loud and can be heard pretty far away."

"I don't care about those bells." Joe started walking up again.

Behind him Gus, followed, mortified.

Joe seemed to be really angry: he strode determinedly, his long legs striding beneath him over the streams and the bushes, letting stones fly between his feet.

All of a sudden, he said: "Do you know how much those sheep would fetch, if they were sold?"

"A lot," Gus said, "a lot, for sure."

"I know exactly. And I also know where the market is. It's far from the village and I know how to get there; along the foot of the mountains."

"But," said Gus, "your master doesn't want to sell them."

Joe shook his head and off they went more furiously than before.

Finally, they had arrived.

This was the shed around which the sheep would spend the night; this was that sheep pen. There were so many meadows each one like the other.

But Joe didn't look around; he was only staring at the sheep.

"I want to sell them," he said suddenly.

"How come?" murmured Gus. But he knew what was going on in

Joe's head and though it seemed impossible, he was afraid that Joe might actually do it.

And of all the thoughts that disturbed him he could only think of one: "He would leave me alone..."

Because this was the first time Gus had taken the sheep to the mountain to pasture and up here, when it got dark, it wasn't like the village. It was so quiet.

But where would Joe go next? What would happen to him?

"I'm going to make a lot of money," Joe said in a hoarse whisper. "And the world is too big

for the boss to run after me."

"But that's not right!" Gus pleaded. "You can't do this..."

"What do you know?" replied Joe. "You're just afraid."

In the shed, one along this wall and the other there, Joe and Gus lay down on the hay: darkness came quickly, like the daylight: the first shadows and then the first rays of dawn light.

But it was the middle of the night, really dark, when the door of the cabin began to rattle vigorously. Joe wasn't asleep and neither was Gus. They hadn't said



a word all that time: Joe was locked in his purpose; Gus, had so much to tell Joe but didn't know how.

The door kept shaking with a deafening rattle. The trees of the wood too were souging furiously outside with the wind that was howling. Now even the dog was barking and whining. Then, all of a sudden everything fell silent. The only sound was the whining of the wolf. The sheep had woken up and some of them were bleating; there seemed to be a lot of confusion outside.

Joe and Gus got up and sat in the hay. They heard each other holding their breath.

Should they go outside and see what was going on?

Maybe someone had come to steal the sheep and was now trying to open the shed door.

The door was locked from the inside with a heavy wooden crossbeam. It couldn't be opened; but with a shovel it could be shattered to pieces in one blow.

In fact, the rattling of the door seemed to make even the walls tremble.

Gus then got up from the hay and went looking for Joe in the dark. Finding him, the boys clung to each other. Silently in that moment they heard each other's heartbeat.

"What are they going to do?" asked Gus in a whisper, because now they were both sure there were thieves behind the door.

It was dark in the shed, but every time the clouds revealed the moon, a bit of light shone into the room through a little window in the roof.

Joe and Gus looked up: the window faced the forest side: whoever escaped in that direction would be safe.

Gus opened his eyes wide and seemed revived but Joe immediately lowered his head again; he realized that he wouldn't fit through that narrow opening; only Gus who was small and lean would fit.

He was waiting for Gus to make his way to the window. But Gus said: "I don't care, I'm staying with you."

Joe didn't reply, but a moment later he himself took Gus' hand and shook it. That was enough for both of them.

The beams creaked in the wind and the door shook. And the boys just stood there hugging each other.

The night passed but no thieves came in.

Hours later, it seemed like eternity, the dog started barking again, but it didn't sound like the same dog that had barked the previous night: its bark greeted the day and it moaned and growled in celebration, running into the fence. Gus and Joe slowly pulled back the crossbeam and opened the door. The ground before them was covered with leaves and branches torn from the trees in the nearby woods.

The sheep, they were all together, pressing against the gate, stretching out their snouts waiting to be let out to graze. No one had stolen them; in fact, no one had been there.

But as they looked up at the sky, they saw that a huge storm had indeed passed during the night and now there was not a single cloud left.

"We need to reinforce the door," said Joe, "so the wind doesn't rattle it again. I'll work at it tomorrow."

And Gus understood what Joe had wanted to tell him: that he wasn't going anywhere; that he wasn't going to sell his master's sheep."

"For sure, that was some wind last night," he said. The boys both looked at each other and burst out laughing.

But then they heard echoes: they heard the bells! They heard singing and laughing because it was already noon, Easter afternoon. The special sound that the bells made brought joy after a terribly dark night.

"The sound was all the more cheerful because we've become

friends," said Joe.

And as he looked down at his companion, he realized he could go on.

"Let's go over there from where we might even see the belfry. The sound from there reaches you better. It's almost like you're in church."

Gus took Joe's hand and Joe, big and tall let himself be led meekly as they ran across the meadow.

It seemed like Gus was going to meet Someone who was waiting for them both, and he would be able to tell Him his secret: "Jesus, this is my friend!" □

UPGRADED

by Vincent Travers OP

The hold-up at immigration in Miami was unprecedented. Each person was being finger printed and photographed. When I reached the departure lounge, the flight to London was already called. I heard talk that the flight was overbooked. Now I am standing before the hassled ticket agent pouring out what little charm I have. "Are there any seats left?" I'm giving her my best smile, but she isn't noticing. She just looks at the computer as if hypnotised, sighs, looks up, and says, "I'm afraid..." "Afraid? Afraid of what?" "Afraid that there are no seats left." I can't believe what I'm hearing. "I'm afraid there are no seats left in the economy section! We are going to upgrade you to first class. Do you mind if we do that?" "Mind? I was overjoyed.

So I boarded the flight and settled comfortably in the wider

seat with the extra leg space. I was purring! Not only was I going home for my niece's wedding, I was going home in style. I leaned back, closed my eyes and sipped the complimentary drink. I was jolted out of my reverie by an angry voice shouting, "I want service, lady." My eyes opened. It was a middle-aged man in the next row. "I want a blanket," he demanded, and in a louder voice, "I want my drink. I paid extra to fly first-class, and I expect first-class service." It was not as if the flight attendants had nothing to do. They were busy making final preparations for take-off. At least he could have waited until the flight was airborne. Not him. After all, he had paid to fly first-class. Not so me. My behaviour was exemplary. I was just happy to be on board. He had a first-class ticket. Mine was a free gift. This wasn't the first free upgrade I have received. God gave me one, long before the airlines did, and God's will last forever. Easter reminds me of that. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 28

by Michele Molineris

IV. THE SIXTIES (1860-69)

92. The Raids (1860)

"Don Bosco, in prison, a penny a copy!" was a cry that Don Bosco heard on the corner of Via Santa Teresa, on May 28th 1860. He gave two pennies to the youngster called Garino who accompanied him. The young fellow was to distinguish himself later by teaching Greek; he also left us a Greej grammar and two copies for a laugh. He (Don Bosco) had been to Fr Cafasso to tell him that the police were expected at his place at any moment, because from the indiscretions of the commissioner of public security who had come with his bloodhounds to search the Oratory a day earlier, he managed to learn that he was on the black list; but not just him.

He was therefore returning from seeing Fr. Cafasso, after having warned him, suggesting precautions so that he should not be taken unawares, when he certainly felt that he was associated with the senatorial prisons. As I said, he had a good laugh about it, but he had not laughed two days earlier when the commissioner Gatti had appeared at the Oratory gate with a search warrant. Among other things they laid their hands on and in such a delicate manner that Don Bosco let slip a phrase which, caught on the fly, by those concerned and translated into the vernacular on the spot, threw some water on what was simmering. The phrase was this: *Et com iniquis reputatus est*; and

the translation made at the request of the other: You do me the service that was once done to the Saviour.

On the other hand, Fr. Cafasso, forewarned by Don Bosco, on hearing the precise terms of the ministerial order, exclaimed: They placed Jesus on the cross and why should they spare us?

Both were accused of subversion: one gathered young people to incite them against the government and the other prepared proclamations of a clerical revolt, weaving a web of intrigue together with the Jesuits, the Vatican and Bishop Fransonì, who in the mean time was already paying the price for his wickedness in a state prison. In fact, a letter had arrived from the Bishop addressed to Don Bosco and had been withheld by the censors, who finally believed that they had the cipher of the plots hatched against the Monarchy; instead they were only urging him to redouble his zeal so that the absence of a shepherd would not, in the end, cause the flock to stray.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco, on the eve of Pentecost, was confined to his room, the youngsters quietly interrogated, the superiors intimidated, the house searched from the attics to the basements. All this and more had led to the rumour that he had been suddenly taken to the nearby police station following the discovery of highly compromised document. The left-wing newspapers could not believe it when they saw their camp liberated from one of its fiercest and proudest opponents, and were already singing victory, without bothering to check the

reliability of the astonishing news.

The fact was that the matter was believed and Valdocco began to receive people and correspondence, words of comfort and condolences, so much so that, even in the following month, public opinion still uneasy and the news had to be officially denied in the *Armonia* of June 3 in these terms: "Rumours have spread that the excellent priest Don Bosco has been arrested. We can assure you that so far, this is not true. We say 'so far' because it could well happen that, while our clients read what we have reported, Don Bosco could still be arrested. Not that there is the slightest reason or pretext, since everyone knows who Don Bosco is; but nowadays a priest is outside the law; therefore, anything against him is permissible."

But poor Father Cafasso suddenly felt like a different person after that visit. It seemed that the only thing missing from the vase of his frailty and his worries was the drop of that search before it overflowed. In fact, he never felt well again after that visit; he even told several people that he had to prepare for a great journey and an even greater account. He cancelled some of his commitments, accelerated others and then prepared to leave the place, being occupied by a lot of commitments that he had brought forward through prayer, the apostolate and penance" (from EBM., VI, 316ff).

93. Father, send me to this school (1860)

In 1860, a feisty youngster was



The balcony in front of Don Bosco's room. From there, he could watch his boys at their noisy games whenever he wanted.

attending a public school. He struggled with discipline and was negligent in his studies. One evening his father, talking to some friends about his son's behaviour – that he was not very inclined to study and that his financial condition did not permit him to complete his education at some boarding school, learned of a certain priest who had opened a boarding at Valdocco, where the pupils succeeded with very little expense.

The father did not think that the son would adapt himself to such a decision, but he jumped up and said: "Dad send me to that place and you will see that I'll stay there."

Later though, before going to bed, the boy felt some misgivings

at the thought of soon losing his freedom. During the night he had a dream. He thought he was in a courtyard with papers in his hand. He saw many youngsters cheering a priest standing on the balcony of a house. He climbed the stairs and went to kiss the priest's hand.

A few months later he entered the Oratory, having totally forgotten his dream and adapted himself not very easily to the life at the boarding. He had not yet seen Don Bosco who was not in Turin but had been away for several weeks. One day during recreation in school, he was called by a teacher to carry a bundle of papers to one of the superiors. As he went down the stairs, he heard lively and prolonged cheering so he ran into the courtyard. Don Bosco had returned from his long trip and was standing on the balcony. The dream had come true.

It was the same courtyard, the same crowd of youngsters, the same house, the same priest who had appeared to him; and he was standing with sheets of paper in his hand. He remembered all the details of the dream and wishing it had come true in its entirety, he went up to the balcony and kissed Don Bosco's hand (EBM VI, 449).

94. The multiplication of the loaves (1860)

The young Francis Dalmazzo aged 15, a native of Cavour, having studied at the school at Pinerolo, in the year 1860 was promoted to the rhetoric year.

"At the start of my rhetoric year, I read some issues of Don Bosco's *Catholic Readings*. On

inquiry I learned that the writer was a holy priest who had opened a boys' boarding school in Turin. Then and there I decided to leave my school and go to Don Bosco's.

I entered the Oratory on October 22, 1860. My schoolmates called Don Bosco a saint and told of extraordinary, wondrous things he had done. Among others, the cleric Ruffino told me that Don Bosco had called back to life a festive oratory boy in order to hear his confession, that he had multiplied consecrated Hosts and chestnuts, and that once, when he had taken his boys on a pilgrimage to the Madonna di Campagna, the bells had rung on their own accord on his arrival. I became more and more convinced of Don Bosco's holiness, and this belief deepened all the more as I came to know him personally and witnessed his saintliness and the extraordinary deeds God wrought through him. Let me give you an example:

Having been brought up on a rather choice diet, after a few days I could not easily adjust to the far too frugal meals and the Oratory's new way of life, and so I wrote to my mother to come and bring me home. I refused to stay. On the morning of my departure however, I decided to go to confession once more to Don Bosco. He was seated in the apse of the church behind the main altar, surrounded by a crowd of penitents. At that time meditation was made before Mass, usually said by Fr [Victor] Alasonatti. After Mass, each boy received a bun for his breakfast.

While I was awaiting my turn for confession during meditation, the two kitchen helpers came in

and told Don Bosco, "Father, there is no bread in the house."

"Well," Don Bosco replied, "go to the baker and get some."

"He won't give us any more. He says he won't deliver bread unless he is paid and he really means it!"

"We'll see," Don Bosco replied.

I heard this whispered dialogue and sensed that something extraordinary was about to happen. The two kitchen helpers left. When my turn came, I began my confession. The Mass had already reached the Elevation. One of the helpers returned and told Don Bosco, "Mass is half over already. What shall we give the boys for breakfast?"

"Are you here again?" exclaimed Don Bosco. "Let me hear confessions." Then he added, "Look in the pantry and the dining rooms and collect all the bread you find."

The boy left and I continued my confession, unconcerned about breakfast since I would be going home after Mass. I was just through telling my sins when the same fellow came back a third time and said to Don Bosco, "Mass is nearly over and all we have is a few buns!" Don Bosco calmly went on with confessions, while the youth kept pestering him for an answer. After telling him not to worry, Don Bosco concluded, "Put all the buns you have in a basket. In a few moments I'll come and give them out."

In fact, when he was through with the boy kneeling at his side, he got up and strode past Our Lady's altar to the door opening upon the playground. Here the boys usually got their breakfast

as they filed out of the church. The bread basket was standing there. Recalling the great things I had heard of Don Bosco and curious to see the outcome, I went out ahead of him and picked a spot where I'd have no trouble seeing everything. At the door I met my mother, who was waiting to take me home.

"Come Frankie," she said. I motioned to her to stand aside for a moment. "Mom, I just want to see something," I whispered. "I'll be right with you."

She walked off to the porticoes. I bent over the basket and picked up a bun. There were some fifteen buns in the basket – certainly no more than twenty. Unobserved, I placed myself on a step right behind Don Bosco and alertly watched his every move as he began to distribute the bread. The boys kept filing past to get their buns from him and kissed his hand as he smiled and said a kind word to each. Each lad – some four hundred – received a bun. When the distribution was over, I again peered into the basket. To my great astonishment, I saw as many buns in it as there had been before, though, no other bread and no other basket had been brought up. Dumbfounded I ran to my mother. "Let's go," she said.

"Mom," I replied, "I've changed my mind. I'm staying! I'm sorry I bothered you!" Then I told her what I had seen with my own eyes. "I can't leave this place," I exclaimed. "It is blessed by God! Don Bosco is such a holy man!"

This was my one reason for remaining at the Oratory and later becoming a Salesian (E.B.M VI, 453-455). □



THE HELP OF CHRISTIANS

by Gianni Sangalli

One may ask: "But isn't Our Lady, the mother of everyone? Is it not selfish to invoke her as 'Help of Christians?' And don't others have an equal right to her protection, since her Son Jesus is the Redeemer of all humankind?"

Of course! Since Mary is intimately united with her Son, she continues, through her intercession, to cooperate maternally in Christ's work of the salvation of all humankind.

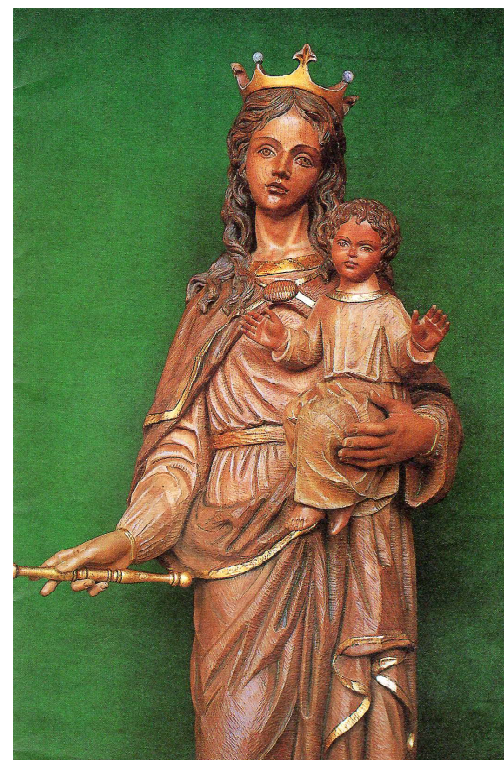
Just as every mother cares for all her children, even if they are far from home, so Mary's maternal role extends also to those who do not know her and do not invoke her.

And yet, if we invoke and celebrate Mary under the title of "Help of Christians," it is to emphasize the special need we have for her precisely because we are Christians.

Don Bosco, who was a preeminent apostle of this title, explains its meaning as follows: "The need to invoke Mary today is universally felt, not in particular, but in general; there

are no longer lukewarm people to be aroused, sinners to be converted, innocents to be protected. These concerns are always useful in every place and with every person. But it is the Catholic Church herself that is under attack. She is assailed in her functions, her sacred institutions, her Head, her doctrine, her discipline. She is assailed as the Catholic Church, as the centre of truth, as the teacher of all the faithful.

And it is precisely in order to merit her special protection from Heaven that we have recourse to Mary as our common Mother, as our special Help of Christians. May the Blessed Virgin help us to live attached to the doctrine and the faith of which the Roman Pontiff, the vicar of Christ, is the head and obtain for us the grace to persevere in her holy divine service on earth so that one day we may join her in the kingdom of glory in heaven." (Don Bosco: *Miracles of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians* - Preface, Turin, 1868)



We therefore call Mary "Help of Christians," because she is a special guardian for the defence and the preservation of the faith in difficult times. Today, the ways in which the Catholic Church is threatened are no longer violent and obvious as they were in the previous centuries, but they are no less devious and dangerous.

In 1992, in his address to the Permanent Council of the Italian Bishops, Cardinal Ruini said: "We have had to note with regret how, even after the collapse of Communism, cultural and political tendencies persist and even seem to be growing stronger around the world. While

appealing to a false concept of freedom, it tends to marginalize itself from social reality and from institutions without any reference to Christian ethics and to the most genuine traditions of our people."

The election campaign in April that year also highlighted this attempt to delegitimize the presence of Catholics in the ethical orientation of society. It had been suggested that, after the end of Communism, Catholics no longer needed to build a victorious buttress of resistance.

But this was all the more necessary, since there were now new problems concerning ways of controlling birth, conception and death for

which all that Catholic ethics could do was to put a spanner in the works.

Therefore, what Don Bosco confided to the cleric Cagliero in 1862 is still totally relevant: "Our Lady wants us to venerate her under the title of Mary Help of Christians: times are so sad that we really need the Blessed Virgin to help us preserve and defend the Christian faith" (MB VII, 334).

Our absolute trust in this good Mother of ours will never diminish because we know that she continues to collaborate actively in the mission of the Church, just as she collaborated actively in the mission of her Son. □



MY VOCATION STORY

'YOU ARE NOT ALONE'

Fr. Nelson Mudaliar, sdb

T*o act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with God'* is what He really wants from us. (Micah 6:8) All that He intends is that we remain happy and share that happiness to everyone around us. As a help, he gifts us all with a vocation, to make a difference in the world, to reach out to those in need and to be true to our very own selves. Once we realize our calling, we truly bear fruit as God's children on earth.

I was born to my loving parents (Victor and Paulin) in Tamil Nadu (as per the custom: the first to be born is born at the mother's house. We settled in Thane, where I grew up. Amidst all the mischief and fun during my school days, what I strongly remember from those years is the daily family prayer and Rosary that we prayed at home. The faith of my dad and the strong devotion of my mom nourished my growth in the spiritual life. It is there at home, that I learnt to be open to the voice of God. Some time later joined the Altar Servers and the Legion of Mary at the parish of *Our Lady of Mercy, Pokhran*. These associations indeed, turned out to be the springboard for my whole journey. The thought of doing something good for others was strongly inculcated in these pious associations. That later blossom-



ed into what I now have, the Salesian calling.

Through the gentle words of our Uncle Sacristan (Sebastian Vareed), I came into contact with the Salesians of Don Bosco. I met Fr. Brian Moras at Don Bosco, Borivali. He was then the Vocation Promoter. To have a taste of what I was asking for, he helped me sign up for a Mission Camp in Gujarat. That camp was life changing for me. I saw Salesians working in rural areas with poor food, water and housing facilities and yet they had a smile on their faces. The light in their eyes was

otherworldly. Seeing their works, the joy in their lives, their contribution to this world, was what made me strongly feel that this was where God was calling me to be.

In the ninth standard, I entered Don Bosco Lonavla. Leaving home for the first time and at that age was difficult yet with the support of the Salesians and the good company of friends formed there, I was helped a lot. Don Bosco's words – *'Every boy who comes to a Salesian house is brought there by Mary'* – became true in my life too. I have truly felt Mary's hand guiding me all through the years. At each stage of formation, with its different challenges, I have grown with the strong presence of Mamma Mary in my life. She has gracefully led me to Jesus. Through prayer and spending time with Him, I realized that it was not enough that I do some good in the world. There the focus was on me. I realized that I was called to respond to the gifts that God has blessed me with, the lessons He has helped me learn, the many people He brought into my life to really learn to love. That makes the mission work more meaningful for me. That helps me to get out of myself to reach out to others especially those who need it the most.

I chose the first line (mentioned above) as my Ordination motto, to continually remind me that all my interactions with others should come from the conviction that all of us are God's children; that ultimately we are called to

love everyone especially those who are neglected. This may sound cliché but it challenges us and at the same time helps us grow indeed. It stands as a reminder that as a Religious, I am called to walk humbly with God.

Amidst all the work that goes on, the time spent in personal prayer, a casual chat with Him recharges, motivates and gives me the strong reassurance that I am never alone, that He is there with me. And of course, with the Salesians there is never a chance of feeling lonely, sad or depressed, for we have the gift and the company of fellow Salesians who help us along the way to be better religious, to be better Christians, to be fantastic human beings. This is what the world needs today. This is what Salesian life offers us now. And I am glad to be a Salesian Priest today giving my time, my talents and my life in service, carrying a blazing torch that shouts loudly that our lives are indeed meaningful, that all of us are God's children, that we are all loved. We may not understand what His plans are for us. But once we move out of ourselves and reach out to someone else in need and generously give, we will hear what He has to say and follow Him in our lives. Do you hear His voice calling out to you? ☐



NEWSBITS

ROME

In May 2020, the faithful of different religious traditions were invited to prayer and fasting for the end of the pandemic. Here is part of an interview with **Msgr. Yoannis Lahzi Gaid**, Secretary of Pope Francis and member of the High Committee for Human Fraternity, created after the historic Abu Dhabi meeting between the Holy Father and the Grand Imam Al-Tayyeb.



Dhabi to realize the value of fraternity and respect for divergences and differences. Faith in God must unite and not divide or even justify violence.

Msgr. Yoannis Lahzi Gaid, how did this idea of a day of joint prayer and fasting on May 14, 2020 for Christians and Muslims, come about?

The initiative was born from the question: how can we give shared witness before a shared danger? The answer was “praying together as brothers and sisters”.

How is the High Committee progressing one year on from the Abu Dhabi meeting and what are your future plans?

The High Committee continues with enthusiasm and great good will to carry out its mission, that is to strengthen fraternity and to spread the values mentioned in the Document on Human Fraternity, through concrete initiatives, such as, for example, the invitation to prayer, fasting and charitable works as well as the promotion of the “Human Fraternity” award which will be given each year to personalities recognized as promoters of fraternity, and also the construction of the “House of Abraham” in Abu

Some would speak of syncretism and give way to polemics when it comes to prayer with an interreligious dimension. Why is it not syncretism and how can we help make this aspect better understood?

Prayer is a universal value inherent in man in every age and time. This is a fact. Inviting everyone to pray together, each according to his or her own faith and belief, does not syncretize but reinforces the value of prayer and fraternity. As a priest I can see in this invitation only the hand of God that unites all the siblings and children in an act of prayer. We cannot forget that God brings his rain down on the good and the bad, makes His sun rise on it all.

Covid-19 has brought us all to our knees but being on our knees is the best position to pray. The virus made us understand our fragility and the need to unite as brothers. We cannot emerge from this separately: either united, together or nobody. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Razor Request

Ronnie goes down to the barber shop. He gets his hair cut and then he is getting a shave. After being nicked by the barber several times, Ronnie says: “Hey Buddy, have you got an extra razor?” The barber replies, “Well, yes sir, I do, would you prefer shaving yourself?” Ronnie said: “Well, not exactly, but I thought I might defend myself.”

Boat Compromise

My friend wanted a boat more than anything. His wife kept refusing, but he bought one anyway. “I’ll tell you what,” he told her, “In the spirit of compromise, why don’t you name the boat?”

Being a good sport, she accepted. When her husband went to the dock for his maiden voyage, this is the name he saw painted on the side: “For Sale.”

Cute Baby

When we brought our new-born son to the pediatrician for his first checkup, the doctor said, “You have a cute baby.”

Smiling, I said, “I’ll bet you say that to all the new parents.”

“No,” he replied. “just to those whose babies are really cute.”

“So, what do you say to the others?” I asked.

“He looks just like you.”

Bedtime Suggestion

I’d had a pretty hectic day with my four-year-old. When bed-time finally came, I laid down the law:

“We’re putting on your pjs, brushing your teeth, and reading ONE book. Then it’s lights out!” Her arms went around my neck in a gentle embrace, and she said, “We learned in Sunday school about little boys and girls who don’t have mommies and daddies.”

Even after I’d been such a grouch, I thought, she was still grateful to have me. I felt tears begin to well up in my eyes, and then she whispered, “Maybe you could go to be THEIR mom?”

Chute Error

While being transported to basic training as a new enlistee of the Air Force Academy, I accidentally opened a parachute in the rear of the C-47. The plane was piloted by a major and a captain, and I felt intimidated as I opened the cockpit door to confess what I had done.

Expecting to be severely chastised, I was surprised by the captain’s calm response. “Well, son,” he said, “if this plane goes down, that chute is yours.”

Biggest Lie

Two boys were arguing when the teacher entered the room. The teacher says, “Why are yo arguing?” One boy answers, “We found a ten dollar bill and decided to give it to whoever tells the biggest lie.”

You should be ashamed of yourselves,” said the teacher, “When I was your age I didn’t even know what a lie was.”

The boys gave the ten dollars to the teacher. □

ONE LAST THOUGHT

YOUR NATURE

Donagh O'Shea OP

Two monks were washing their bowls in the river when they noticed a scorpion that was drowning. One monk immediately scooped it up and set it on the bank. In the process he was stung. He went back to washing his bowl and again the scorpion fell in. The monk saved the scorpion and was stung again. The other monk asked him, "Friend, why do you continue to save the scorpion when you know that it's nature is to sting?"

"Because," the monk replied, "to save it is my nature." I asked a group of people to give their reactions to this story. Here are some examples of what they wrote:

- "The monk was living the life of meditation. It might appear more 'reasonable' to let the scorpion drown (or even to ensure that it did!), but that kind of reasoning is a big blockage in the way of meditation. In meditation you learn that you have a soft spot, a heart."

- "This is an important story for me to hear just now. My life is very painful at present, and it was good to be reminded of the 'Nature of Things'. I have to take these

times for what they are even if they sting... To honour their nature is to honour mine, and to honour mine is to honour theirs."

- "The monk acted that way because he had been practising compassion for many years; compassion had become his nature. He loved to rescue and to help living beings who are in danger, without thinking of himself. He had become that kind of person."

- "To live a deep life, we need to have great respect for God's creatures. We share this world with them; our fate is bound up with theirs. We are the most dangerous species on the planet; we have destroyed many species of animals, and we threaten even our own survival. Our survival now depends on learning, like the monk, to be better neighbours to other creatures."

- "The monk did not hate the scorpion for acting according to its nature. He didn't attribute human characteristics to it. The scorpion



was not being ungrateful or wicked in any way; it was just being true to its scorpion nature."

A friend of mine once took a gun and shot a pigeon that had been making a daily visit to his garden. It was his first time to discharge a firearm. When he went to admire his handiwork, he saw the dying pigeon lying there looking at him "with not a hint of reproach or anger - just pure innocence, vulnerable, and dying at my hands." He was deeply affected and he vowed, there and then, never to use a gun again as long as he lived.

The people who wrote comments on the story understood well that it is a story about us, and not just about scorpions and strangely-behaving monks. Other creatures have no doubts about their own identity, but

what is a human being? A more dangerous animal than any other? Yes! But surely more. We have proved that we are braver than rabbits and chickens, and cleverer even than any of the other primates. Why go on proving it? Let's go on to the next point! Our nature is very mysterious. We are an amazing mixture of cruelty and compassion, reason and madness, love and hate.... Other creatures are at our mercy, for better and for worse. We owe it to them, and to the Creator of us all, to be true to our own best nature (like that monk).

How hard it is! But the wisest can teach us. A man who had been badly insulted and made a very mild reply, said to me (when I asked him about it), "I waited till the next day, so that I could reply as I am, not as he is." □

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

We are sincerely thankful and grateful to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and our Blessed Mother Mary for granting the grace of receiving the Holy Eucharist to my daughter Mary Christina Xavier after 10 years and for showering on us and our family numerous blessings. Please continue to keep us all in good health.

Mary Jacintha Xavier, Bangalore

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Apostleship of Prayer

MAY 2021

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MARY WAS THERE

When as “heirs of the promise” (cf. *Gal 4:28, 31*) we find ourselves in the aura of Mary’s motherhood, and when we feel its holy depth and fullness, we think then that it was St Anne who first taught Mary, her daughter, how to be a Mother.

“Anna,” in Hebrew, means: “God (subject implied) has given grace”. Reflecting on this meaning of St. Anne’s name, St. John Damascene exclaimed: “Since it was to be that the Virgin Mother of God was born of Anna, nature did not dare to precede the seed of grace; but remained without its own fruit so that grace might produce its own. For there was to be born that firstborn, from whom would be born the Firstborn of every creature.” (Pope Saint John Paul II)

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Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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