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*Remember,
O most gracious
Virgin Mary,
that never was
it known
that anyone
who fled to thy
protection, implored
thy help,
or sought
thy intercession
was left unaided.
(St. Bernard)*

From The Editor's Desk

PICKING UP PATTERNS

I was speaking to group of parents who were teachers and I brought to them this observation: Have you noticed young children aged 4 – 6 or 7 and watch them talking to one another? Much of their body-language resembles that of their parents. If you watch them more closely you realise that they are often imitating you; the tilt of the head, the wag of the finger and the authoritative hand on the hip and to your embarrassment you realise you are in the presence of a smaller version of yourself.

Let me share a story about someone I know named Helen. Her parents had a silent marriage; her father drank excessively, and her mother was consistently negative. This had a profound effect on Helen, but she was determined to break the cycle. Unlike her father, she married Michael, who recognized her inner strength shaped by her childhood. Helen found joy in her children, especially her delicate second child, Dominic. She committed to ensuring her love for them always outweighed any necessary criticism.

Michael taught Helen the importance of physical touch. She cherished cuddling her first child, and although Dominic struggled with eczema and was less comfortable with hugs, she adapted to his needs over time. Helen often remembered a painting in her kitchen of Jesus with children. While the Apostles dismissed them, Jesus engaged with them, and the children responded positively. Although not everyone supported her parenting style, Helen remained dedicated to nurturing her children.

Helen's mother often visited and would criticize her for being too affectionate with Dominic, claiming, "You're spoiling that child rotten." She blamed his crankiness on Helen's parenting and suggested he needed "a good hiding." Helen knew that discipline wouldn't help Dominic; it would only make matters worse. Although she didn't want to argue with her mother, she was committed to her own approach.

After her father died, the topic arose of Granny moving in with Helen and her family. Helen felt pity for her mother, but her priority was her husband and children. When Granny spent a month with them, it wasn't a happy time. She took over the kitchen without invitation, often criticizing Helen's parenting and trying to discipline the children herself, which confused them. The family felt trapped; they had to be nice to Granny because she relied on them, which made it difficult for them to voice their frustration when she would take Helen's seat in front of the TV.

Many parents today, like Helen, break from traditional patterns and choose unique parenting styles. This shift retains core values like love and self-control while adapting communication and engagement. Although change can provoke conflict, each generation of Christians is called to question accepted routines and reinterpret the commandments of loving God and others within their families.

Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb

LIMITS...OF FORGIVENESS

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

To embrace the limits of others is to acknowledge the understanding that they, in turn, accept and welcome my own limits, weaknesses, and wounds.

The month of May is Vacation season in the Eastern Hemisphere and people are going on holiday here and there and I believe, this year this summer season takes on special significance in the context of the Jubilee—a time for mercy and conversion, beautifully complemented by the vibrant colours of spring, symbolizing new beginnings.

The Jubilee not only challenges individuals but also invites spouses and families to reflect on their shared journey of life and love, encouraging them to grow together in their ongoing pilgrimage.

In the final paragraph of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis writes, “No family is a perfect reality packaged once and for all; rather, it requires a gradual development of one’s capacity to love. We are all called to keep alive the tension toward something beyond ourselves and our limitations, and every family must live with this constant stimulus. Let us walk, families; let us keep walking! Let us not lose hope because of our limitations, but also let us not give up seeking the fullness of love and communion promised to us” (AL 325).

In these words, we find an invitation to walk in love, to recognize



and embrace each person's limitations, and to nourish our journey with hope. The ingredients of the Jubilee—pilgrimage, conversion, and hope—are not connected to sin but rather reflect the diverse and limited conditions of each married couple.

Forgiveness is often associated with evil; we forgive sins and wrongdoings, and even betrayals. However, it may seem unusual to connect forgiveness with diversity and limitations. Some might argue that it is better to use different, less ambiguous terms when discussing differences and boundaries, such as “Embrace diversity” or “Accept limitations.” Nevertheless, we can apply the concept of forgiveness to the reality of couples and families, which are communities of diverse individuals, as well as to love itself, which is possible between two beings who are perpetual learners in love.

The diversity of each partner attracts lovers from the very beginning, but it also leads to inevitable challenges and conflicts. The first and most fundamental diversity stems from the sexual difference between man and woman. Beyond that, each person has their own personality, relational limitations, and individual desires and expectations, which can often lead to disappointments.

Forgiveness serves as an energy and a welcoming supplement that embraces the problematic aspects of another person—those characteristics we wish weren't there but inevitably are. It involves accepting limitations, embracing them, and expressing love despite those limits, recognizing that we our-

*To forgive
is to embrace
our limits
with both
intelligence
and affection.*

selves are also marked by limitations. To embrace another's limitations is to acknowledge that they, in turn, embrace and accept our own limitations, frailties, and wounds.

I must once again quote Pope Francis: “Mercy asks us to enter the darkness, the night that so many of our brothers and sisters experience, without allowing ourselves to be conditioned and enveloped by that darkness [...]. God's mercy is a great light of love and tenderness, because God does not forgive with a decree, but with a caress. He caresses our wounds of sin” (*The Name of God is Mercy*, p. 79).

When we let go of the expectation that others should change, we can hold onto the hope that they will improve because of our love. Forgiving and embracing diversity and limitations with the spirit of forgiveness can work miracles, not by changing others to fit our preferences, but by helping them grow according to God's will. □

“MORE” MERCY

Jubilee is a time for spiritual renewal, conversion, and reconciliation, aided by the practice of plenary indulgence.

Pope Francis officially began the Jubilee Year by opening the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas night, marking a significant moment for the Catholic Church and its followers around the world. This sacred event provides believers with the opportunity to renew their faith through both spiritual and physical journeys, as well as to receive a plenary indulgence.

But what is a plenary indulgence? It is a special grace granted by the Catholic Church, allowing the faithful to obtain complete remission of the temporal punishments that result from sins. In other words, a plenary indulgence

fully erases the earthly consequences of sins, offering a type of spiritual “cleansing.” It is important to note that an indulgence does not equate to the forgiveness of sins; rather, it is an act of mercy that frees an individual from the penalties associated with their sins. A plenary indulgence can be requested for oneself or on behalf of others, whether they are living or deceased.

The origin of indulgences dates back to the early centuries of Christianity. Over time, the Church formalized the concept, establishing specific criteria for obtaining them. A significant milestone in the history of indulgences

occurred with the first Jubilee, called by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. During this event, pilgrims who visited Rome could receive a plenary indulgence through confession, communion, and prayer. Since then, various Popes have proclaimed additional Jubilees, providing the faithful with opportunities to receive plenary indulgences.

To obtain a plenary indulgence during these Jubilees, the faithful must meet specific conditions, which are outlined below.

Sacramental Confession: The faithful are required to confess all their sins to a priest and receive absolution. Confession must be sincere and complete, accompanied by true repentance.

Eucharistic Communion: After confession, the faithful must participate in Holy Mass and receive Communion, which symbolizes their union with Christ and the Church.

Prayer for the Pope's Intentions: This involves reciting the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be, or any other freely chosen prayers.

In addition to these three main conditions, one of the following actions must also be carried out:

1. Act of Charity: The faithful should show mercy to their neighbours by visiting the sick, volunteering for a charity, or performing other acts of kindness.

2. Pilgrimage to Holy Places: During the Jubilee year of 2025, the faithful are encouraged to make a pilgrimage to one of Rome's four holy sites: St. Peter's Basilica, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, or St. Paul Outside the Walls. Alternatively, a pilgrimage can be made to designated shrines around the world.

3. Rejection of Sin: It is essential to have a genuine detachment from sin, even venial sin, and a deep desire to live an authentic Christian life. □

WHAT IS THE JUBILEE

The Jubilee has its roots in the Jewish tradition, where every 50 years was observed as a year of rest for the land, the restitution of property, and the liberation of slaves. The term “Jubilee” comes from the Hebrew word “yobel,” meaning “ram's horn,” which was used to announce the beginning of this significant period.

In the Catholic Church, a Jubilee, or Holy Year, is a time for prayer, reflection, and grace. During this period, the Pope grants plenary indulgence to the faithful who travel to Rome or designated Jubilee sites and engage in specific religious practices.

The first Jubilee was proclaimed in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII, originally set to occur every 100 years. This interval was later reduced to 50 years and eventually established to occur every 25 years. There have been 27 ordinary Holy Years to date, including the one currently underway. In addition to these, there have been extraordinary Jubilees granted for special occasions, varying in duration and often local in scope.

The Jubilee of 2025, dedicated to the theological virtue of hope, officially began on December 24, 2024, with the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica and will conclude on January 6, 2026.



REASONS TO BELIEVE - 5

by Franco Molinari

He took a bit out of every hand

Malcolm Muggeridge was one of the most caustic and witty English essayists since Bernard Shaw. One newspaper captured his sharp and vitriolic character by stating: "To all the hands that grasped at him, he took a bite."

He was also one of television's most brilliant conversationalists. On November 27, 1982, just before his 80th birthday, he and his wife, Kitty, converted to Catholicism.

In the 1930s, he lived in Moscow as a Marxist sympathizer, but he quickly changed his views and his residence.

Many of his admirers questioned why the satirical writer, who had been sceptical for so long, chose to take out life insurance at the age of 80.

His response, published in the Times and shared by hundreds of news and television channels, was: "You admit children to baptism before they understand the meaning of baptism, why not admit octogenarians to a church just before they enter the coffin?"

After a light-hearted discussion about his wrinkled face, he presented three practical reasons for his conversion to Catholicism with characteristic British straightforwardness.

He got his first nudge from a renowned nun. He wrote, "Mother Teresa gave me a completely new vision of what it means to be a Christian, highlighting the extraordinary power of love and how, in a devout soul, it can flourish to the point of understanding the entire world. In the past, in Calcutta, Mother Teresa had told me that it was daily communion that gave her the strength to persevere; without it, she would falter and stray from her path.

"How, then, could I refuse such spiritual nourishment?" She paid little attention to my complaints about the dissident priests and prelates in her Church. "Jesus," she replied, "had personally chosen twelve disciples, of whom one turned out to be infamous, while the others, when the moment arrived, had abandoned Him. Why should we expect popes and



church leaders to behave any better?"

The second reason for that extraordinary conversion was the historical endurance of the Church. "Through the turbulent events of two thousand years, despite falls and confusions of purpose, someone, every day and perhaps every hour, somewhere in the world, continues to distribute at the altar, in sacramental form, the body and blood of Christ. And then there are the saints."

"My favourite saint is St. Augustine. In his work, *Confessions*," he combines artistry with deep conviction, illustrating how worldly and carnal passions can be transformed into a life dedicated to the service of God.

When Augustine received the news that barbarians had sacked Rome, he advised his followers not to focus on cities like Rome, which could be both built and destroyed by man. Instead, he urged them to concentrate on the City of God — a city not constructed by humans and not subject to their destruction.

Additionally, St. Augustine reflected on the truth defended by the Catholic Church: that love and life are paramount. He observed that legalized abortion results in the murder of an unborn child every three minutes and inevitably leads to the acceptance of euthanasia. Therefore, we have reached a kind of holocaust that surpasses the Holocaust of Hitler, in both the number of victims and the corruption of youth. This situation transforms the traditional image of the Christian family into an industrialized farm, where the only concerns are the welfare of livestock and the profits of the company.

His conversion garnered more praise than criticism: "One of the few benefits of my notoriety on television is that, since it became known that I aspired to become a Christian, several people often sought me out or wrote to me to express that they were also Christians.

"Additionally, I described my conversion to Catholicism as a solitary experience; however, my wife, who has been by my side for fifty-four years, joined me on this journey. We didn't need to discuss it; we simply moved forward together."

God in lower case

Oriana Fallaci, the controversial bestselling novelist, persistently used a lowercase "g" when mentioning God. Even a famous surgeon from the last century famously exclaimed to his assistants, "Under this scalpel, I have never seen a soul." A Sunday school child might have responded that the soul cannot be perceived with the eyes.

A century has passed, and atheistic and positivistic science, which once promised mankind heaven on earth, betrayed that promise by introducing Hitler's concentration camps, the inhumane Holocaust of the Jews, Stalin's massacres in Siberia, and drugs that kill young people, along with the looming threat of nuclear catastrophe.

Today's scientists are not as constrained by these ideas. Italian scientist Carlo Rubbia had great faith in God, a belief that did not prevent him from earning the Nobel Prize. Men like Rubbia, Antonino Zichichi, and Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei acknowledged

the mystery of life and recognized that the harmony of the universe, even when calculated with probabilities, could not simply result from chance. Barbiellini Amidei noted that it takes more faith to be an atheist than to be a believer.

In a playful and ironic statement, French scientist Jérôme Lejeune, a prominent genetics scholar known for discovering Down syndrome (formerly referred to as Mongolism), remarked, "For the purpose of study, I have travelled extensively around the world and generally visited both universities and zoos. In universities, I observed serious scientists debating whether they were descendants of apes, while at the zoos, I have never seen a single chimpanzee congress discussing whether they are humans or not."

How does life originate?

One answer is that life resulted from a vast explosion in the universe, known as the *Big Bang*. However, one must consider what existed before the Big Bang.

One Catholic scientist who contributed significantly to save millions was the Frenchman Louis Pasteur, who discovered the serum for rabies. He stated, "Life arises from life. I experimented for about twenty years in the laboratory and ultimately concluded that spontaneous generation is a pure chimera."

If spontaneous generation is indeed a pure chimera, we must ask ourselves: what then is the cradle of life?

Man cannot create himself. To create, one must already exist; to be made implies not existing, leading to a contradiction. This brings to mind the thoughts of the novelist and poet Victor Hugo, the

well-known author of *Les Misérables*. Hugo had a complicated relationship with Catholicism and even questioned the divinity of Christ, placing him on the same level as Muhammad and Buddha. Nevertheless, for Hugo, God was an absolute truth.

One day, he confided to a guest, "I am more certain of God's existence than I am of my own. As for me, I don't go four hours without praying. If I wake up at night, I pray. What do I ask God for? I ask Him to grant me His strength. I know well what good and evil are, but I don't have the strength to do good."

So, what is good? God is Love. This is the essence of a pure and immaculate religion — caring for and rescuing widows and orphans.

A century ago, believers were considered "different" jerks or superstitious.

Today, science is respectful. Atheists are much rarer than wackos, although there is no shortage of bigoted unbelievers who recite this blasphemous ejaculatory: "I will have no God but me." And this time, they spell God with a capital letter. But perhaps the confirmed atheist does not exist.

Anyone who has a selfless purpose in life and feels himself to be a brother of the poor; anyone who prefers his sacrifice to the sacrifice of others; anyone who does good and flees evil; anyone who admires a flower, the innocence of a child, harmony, light, a woman; anyone who loves and feels the infinite in his love; this one, whether he admits it or not, believes in God. □

CARMEN LAVAL

TIME FOR THE SPIRIT

THE TEN QUALITIES OF A TRUE FRIEND

How can one become a reliable person that loved ones can always count on? According to current psychology, there are certain personality traits that define the "perfect friend."

Friendship is essential for our emotional and social well-being. However, being a good friend involves more than just being present for those we care about. So, how does one become the ideal friend? Psychologist Barbara Greenberg, in an article published in *"Psychology Today,"* outlines specific traits that can strengthen and nurture personal relationships. Developing these qualities can enhance existing friendships and attract new, positive, and rewarding ones. From honesty to empathy, each quality plays a crucial role in creating strong and lasting bonds. By cultivating these traits, we can all strive to be the perfect friend and support to the people we care about. Here are the ten qualities that science suggests make the ideal friend.

1. The Importance of Honesty

Honesty is often considered the



most crucial quality in a friend. It builds trust, which is an essential component of any strong friendship. Being honest means being authentic and transparent, without hiding your thoughts or feelings. A sincere friend will tell you what you need to hear, even if it may be difficult to accept, because their goal is to see you grow and improve. This openness creates a foundation of trust and mutual respect, making the relationship deeper and more lasting.

2. Kindness and Courtesy

Being kind and polite is essential in friendship. Pleasant friends are positive, smiling, and well-meaning. Their presence is comforting, and they know how to bring happiness to others effortlessly, making every interaction enjoyable and memorable. Their kindness strengthens friendships and promotes a harmonious environment.

3. Availability

An ideal friend is distinguished by their constant availability. They are physically and emotionally present, attentive to the needs of their loved ones. Active and empathetic listening is at the core of this quality. Offering our time and resources demonstrates our commitment to others. Providing constant emotional support creates a sense of security and stability in the relationship. A good friend

shows those close to them that they can always count on them, no matter the circumstances.

4. Loyalty

Loyalty is a cornerstone of a strong friendship. A loyal friend consistently defends your interests, even when you are not present. As the guardian of your secrets, they ensure discretion and trust. In difficult times, their support remains steadfast, and they refuse to abandon you when faced with challenges. This loyalty forges unbreakable bonds and ensures a lasting relationship. Loyalty is not just a virtue; it reflects a deep and sincere commitment to one another.

5. Respect

A respectful friend values your opinions, feelings, and time. They do not try to change you; instead, they accept you as you are. This unconditional acceptance creates an atmosphere of trust and security, enabling everyone to realize their potential. Mutual respect strengthens friendships.

6. Generosity

Generosity extends beyond material goods; it encompasses sharing knowledge, time, and experiences. A generous friend is one who shares their insights and helps those around them grow and learn. By sharing both positive and negative experiences, friends provide unique life lessons and perspectives that enrich their bond. This form of generosity – intellectual as well as emotional – nurtures and strengthens friendships, creating deep and lasting connections built on mutual support.

7. Patience

Patience is a vital virtue in friendships. It allows conflicts to be managed without bitterness, promoting peaceful and constructive resolutions. By accepting differences without judgment, patience fosters an environment where everyone feels free to be themselves. The ability to wait and understand without rushing or criticizing is essential for overcoming challenges and maintaining a lasting, balanced friendship.

8. Flexibility

Flexibility involves adapting to changing situations and making compromises. It reflects a willingness to maintain harmony and stability within the friendship. A flexible friend can easily adjust to unexpected events, demonstrating understanding and acceptance of each other's limitations.

9. Communication

Openly expressing thoughts and feelings, along with active listening, enhances understanding and strengthens bonds. Effective communication fosters deeper connections and facilitates conflict resolution.

10. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, which significantly strengthens emotional bonds. An empathetic friend recognizes the emotions of others and provides appropriate support. By being attuned to emotional needs, empathy enhances and deepens the friendship, making the connections stronger and more meaningful. □

ST. TERESA DE LOS ANDES

April 12

Ian Pinto, sdb

FINDING GOD

"The word 'vocation' can be understood in a broad sense as a calling from God, including the call to life, the call to friendship with him, the call to holiness, and so forth. This is helpful, since it situates our whole life in relation to the God who loves us. It makes us realize that nothing is the result of pure chance but that everything in our lives can become a way of responding to the Lord, who has a wonderful plan for us" (*Christus Vivit* #248).

Juana Enriqueta Josefina de Los Sagrados Corazones Fernández Solar was born into a pious Catholic family in Santiago, Chile, on July 13, 1900. Her family were well-to-do and they wanted to give their six children (three boys and three girls) the best that life could offer. While wealth opens many doors of opportunity, it is also "the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10). I cannot say for certain that riches were the cause of Juana's unpleasant behaviour, but biographers note that she had an unpredictable temperament, was prone to anger and vanity. It is quite often the case that children who are aware of their affluence act like entitled brats and take advantage of others. There is no dearth of cases to support this observation. In India, about a year ago, a rich young man killed a young couple while driving at a high speed under the influence of alcohol. The punishment given to



him by the court was to write an essay on the importance of road safety! Later it came out in the press that his family were extremely rich and had high connections, and therefore, he got away scot-free. The Church in her wisdom continuously reminds her people that attachment to money is undesirable. Detachment from wealth is necessary for one to inherit the kingdom of heaven (Mt

19:24). While there is nothing wrong with being wealthy, indiscriminate accumulation and spending need to be avoided. Children of affluent parents have to learn the value of wealth and how to use it prudently.

The turning point in Juana's life came when she read *The Story of a Soul*, the autobiography of Thérèse of Child Jesus, who was not yet a saint. At that time, she was studying with French nuns belonging to the Congregation of the Sacred Heart. Since she was a resident student, she must have had the opportunity to witness the nun's lives and become exposed to devotional literature. This experience coupled with the experiences narrated in the book made a deep impression on her. Juana, who was hitherto, easily provoked and prone to outbursts of emotion resolved to learn to control her anger. The life of prayer that the nun's encouraged assisted her in her struggle to control her demons. Not only did the book transform her attitude, but it also sprouted the seed of vocation in her. Juana, earnestly felt that God was calling her to an intimate relationship; the kind of relationship that Thérèse of Child Jesus had.

As she explored her Carmelite calling, she took up the spiritual writings of another saintly French Carmelite nun, Elizabeth of the Trinity, who had only died in 1906. The experience of reading Elizabeth's writings, spurred in her the desire to become a Carmelite and confirmed her initial calling. And so, Juana reached out to the Carmelite convent at Los Andes in 1917. However, she visited them for the first time only

"The soul that has his hope in God has nothing to fear, for all obstacles and difficulties he overpowers."

two years later. The community welcomed her and she joined their ranks after obtaining the permission of her father. She began her novitiate on May 7, 1919 and took the name Teresa of Jesus, after her model.

EMBRACING GOD

From a young age, Juana never enjoyed very good health. There always seemed to be some illness or another that troubled her. Though she had come to terms with her condition, she was keenly aware that her delicate health would not allow her to practice any rigorous mortification, and would therefore, lead to an early death. But this foreboding did not hinder her fervour nor did it dampen her optimism. Teresa lived in the convent for all of eleven months before her health declined to the point of death; she was a few months shy of her 20th birthday when she died. Before she passed, she received special permission to make her vows before the stipulated period. In March she was diagnosed with Typhus; on April 7, she made her profession and by April 12, she was dead. It seemed as if her life had ended far too early but Teresa had lived a beautiful life. Alas, the beauty of life does not lie in its length but in its passion. Teresa

compensated for the brevity of her life with the intense zeal and love that she practiced. At the time of her death, many people had begun to look at her as someone blessed and special. Her funeral was heavily attended; the great outpouring of appreciation and adulation led to the promotion of her cause for sainthood. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Chile in 1987; six years later, he canonized her a saint. She is the first canonized saint of Chile and the first Discalced Carmelite saint not belonging to the European continent.

LIVING FOR GOD

In her diary, she notes that the genesis of her spiritual journey is an experience of God at the tender age of six. She writes, "Jesus began to take my heart for himself, shortly after the earthquake in the year 1906." God inspired her to perform acts of love as a sign of her devotion. Despite her unruly temper, Juana was known to have a kind heart. Already as a young girl, she understood that love has to be demonstrated by action rather than mere words. While this would definitely mean that she would have to become a charitable and compassionate person, she allowed this inspiration to challenge her at her core. Not only would she 'do' charitable work, she would 'become' a loving person, and this would mean growing in emotional maturity. This she did primarily through sheer willpower, intense dedication to prayer and appropriate guidance from her superiors. Her biographers proudly declare that she achieved her transformation before her First Holy

Communion at the age of 10!

According to the Vatican's source, Juana received the gift of mystical meetings with Jesus after her First Holy Communion. Jesus would converse with her and tell her things, including that she was to become a Carmelite. These mystical conversations supported her throughout her life. "God took over her natural inclinations, transforming them from that day into friendship and a life of prayer" (*Vatican News*, vatican.va).

Juana was a transformed person. She moved from self-centredness to selflessness. She dedicated her time and efforts to bringing the love of God to whomever she met. Despite being an ordinary and young, though intelligent and attractive girl, Juana's companions considered her to be mature beyond her years and looked to her as a model and guide. While still an adolescent, Juana achieved a level of maturity that could only be the result of an ascetic and deeply prayerful life. Her face proclaimed that she was aware of God's presence in her life.

Teresa says: "Remember that the Heart of Jesus is your spiritual cradle. There is your nest. There Jesus sings lullabies of peace and love to you." Hope can be found in the Heart of Jesus; in fact, it is that Heart that is the fountain of hope. Resting in the heart of Jesus means cultivating a sincere relationship with Him. Our spiritual practices ought to transform us; devotion to the Heart of Jesus ought to make our hearts like His. This is the sign of true devotion, and a sign of hope for the world. □



JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

John 10: 27-30

In this passage, Jesus describes His relationship with His followers as His sheep, who hear His voice and follow Him. He emphasizes the security of this relationship, stating that no one can snatch them out of His hand, and that He and the Father are one.

Meditation:

Every year, a passage from John's Gospel, chapter 10, is read as the gospel on the fourth Sunday of Easter, which is devoted to the person of Jesus the Shepherd. To understand these texts in their paschal meaning, we must place them within the liturgical context of this season. Jesus is portrayed as a shepherd in connection to His Passover, rather than as a shepherd in general.

The second reading, drawn from the Book of Revelation, is key to understanding the Gospel passage in light of Easter. The comparison between the Shepherd and the Lamb is significant. Jesus is the Shepherd because He is the Lamb; by giving His life for humanity, He became a shepherd and a guide. Through enduring great tribulation, many saved

people, who have washed their garments in His blood, have claimed the gift of life that the Lamb Jesus has already experienced, defeating death once and for all. The backdrop for the gospel verses is this final vision of history, ending with the beautiful image of God wiping away every tear from humanity's eyes. One of the fruits of Easter that radiates new light from history is Jesus' constitution as Shepherd.

"This fruit of Easter is contemplated in the events of the nascent Church, which, despite the contradictions of human experiences marked by closures and contrasts, followed its Pastor, who opened unexpected paths and filled the disciples' hearts with joy and the Holy Spirit," as described in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

"My sheep hear my voice... follow me."

First, the sheep listen to the voice of the Shepherd. The phrase "my voice" indicates that it is Jesus speaking in the first person. The second verb associated with the sheep is "to follow." Thus, the sheep that listen to Jesus' voice also follow Him. In other instances in chapter 10, where the verbs "listen" and "voice" appear, the verb "follow" is also present.

The connection between listening to Jesus' voice and following Him is based on how the sheep are known by the Shepherd. He knows the sheep and gives them eternal life. These expressions are also found throughout chapter ten's discourse on the Good Shepherd. In verse 14, we read that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep, and His sheep know Him. In verse 15, it states that the Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep—this is a different expression, but it holds similarities and connections with verse 28a.

The text creates a connection between listening and following, and between knowing and laying down one's life for Jesus. In the Bible, knowledge is not merely a rational concept; it is 'relational' and refers to an experience. You truly know something when you have experienced it and have been touched by that encounter. Therefore, the reciprocal knowledge between the Shepherd and the sheep is a relationship founded on Jesus' love for His disciples, even to the extent of giving His life. For Jesus, knowing the sheep means giving them His

life so that they may have eternal life (cf. Jn 10:10).

This is one of the fruits of Jesus' Passover: mutual knowledge based on love. In the Gospel of John, an episode from Easter morning further illustrates this reality when Mary Magdalene recognizes the Risen Lord only when she hears Him call her name: "Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' Then she turned to Him and said in Hebrew, 'Rabbi!' which means 'Master!'" (Jn 20:16).

Through His Passover, Jesus became a Pastor. This investiture comes from the Father through His life given, an event definitively sealed by the resurrection. Jesus' Passover established a reciprocal relationship that can never be erased between Him and His sheep: He is the Shepherd because He is the Lamb who gave His life.

But what makes the 'life' that Jesus can now give to the sheep indelible and definitive? It draws us into the relationship between Him and the Father. Because we have become participants in that relationship, because we live in Jesus, our connection with God already reflects the face of eternity. Let us explore how closely linked this relationship is. ▢



Quiet Spaces

HIS CONSOLATION IS CLOSE, TRUE AND OPENS DOORS OF HOPE

Pope Francis' Homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Friday 8 May 2020

Introduction

Today is the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day. Let us pray for those people who work in these meritorious institutions. May the Lord bless their work that does so much good.

Homily

This conversation between Jesus and the disciples again takes place at the table, during Supper (see Jn 14:1-6). Jesus is sad, and all His followers are sad: Jesus said that He would be betrayed by one of them (see Jn 13:21) and they all perceive that something bad would happen. Jesus begins to console them, because one of the tasks, the jobs of the Lord is to console. The Lord consoles His disciples and here we see Jesus's way of consoling. We have many ways of consoling, from the most authentic, from the closest, to the most formal, such as telegrams of condolences: Profoundly saddened by... That does not console anyone, it is false, the consolation of formality. But how does the Lord console? It is important to know this, because when we go through sad moments in our life, we too learn to perceive what is the true consolation of the Lord.

And in this Gospel passage we see that the Lord always consoles with His closeness, through truth and hope. They are the three paths of the consolation of the Lord.

In closeness, never distant: I am here. These beautiful words: I am here. I am here, with you. And very often, in silence. But we know that He is there. He is always there. That closeness that is God's style, even in the Incarnation, making Himself close to us. The Lord consoles in closeness. And He does not use empty words; on the contrary, He prefers silence. The strength of closeness, in presence. He speaks little, but He is close.

A second path of Jesus's closeness, of Jesus's way of consoling, is the truth: Jesus is truthful. He does not say formal things that are lies: No, be calm, everything will pass, nothing will happen, it will pass, things come to an end... No. He tells the truth. He does not hide the truth. Because He Himself in this passage says, I am the truth (see Jn 14:6). And the truth is, I will go, that is, I will die (see vv. 2-3). We are faced with death. It is the truth. And He says it so simply and gently, without causing harm. But we are right before His death. He does not hide the truth.

And this is the third way. Jesus consoles with hope. Yes, this is a bad moment, but do not let your hearts be troubled. ... Have faith also in me (v. 1). I will tell you something, Jesus says, in my Father's

house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? (v. 2). He is the first to go and open the doors, the doors to that place, through which we will all pass, at least we

hope. I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be (v. 3). The Lord returns every time that one of us is departing from this world. I will come, I will take you with me: hope. He will come and take us by the hand, and bring us with Him. He does not say, No, you will not suffer, it's nothing... No. He tells the truth: I am near you. This is the truth: it is a bad moment, of danger, of death. But do not let your heart be troubled, stay in that peace, that peace that is the basis of every consolation. Because I will come and I will take you by hand when I will be.

It is not easy to allow ourselves to be comforted by the Lord. Very often, in bad moments, we get angry with the Lord and we do not allow Him to come to speak to us like this, with this tenderness, with this closeness, with this gentleness, with this truth and with this hope.

Let us ask the grace to learn to let ourselves be comforted by the Lord. The consolation of the Lord is true, it does not deceive. It is not anaesthesia, no. But He is close, He is true, and He opens the doors to hope.

Spiritual Communion

Those who cannot receive Communion can now make a spiritual communion:

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if you were already there, and I unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. □



THE THREE SISTERS

By Pierluigi Menato, TA/ID

Bianca, Rosa, and Celeste are three sisters named after colours, and they are all blondes. Celeste, the youngest, has a radiant golden hue that shines like sunlight with fiery reflections. Rosa, the middle sister, has a warm, golden-blond colour reminiscent of ripe wheat. Bianca, the eldest, has an ash-blond shade that appears slightly duller. All three sisters have blue eyes: Celeste's eyes are the bright blue of a spring sky, Rosa's are a periwinkle hue, and Bianca's are a muted blue with a hint of pale violet.

Each sister is beautiful in her own way: Celeste resembles a budding flower, Rosa looks like a newly unfurled blossom, and Bianca gives the impression of a somewhat faded bloom.

In the quiet of their solitary house, located just outside the city limits, the sound of their footsteps fills the air — Bianca's plush step, Rosa's quick and lively stride, and Celeste's slightly prancing walk. Occasionally, the sound of slippers can be heard from the kitchen, where the eldest family member, Cesira, reigns as the absolute mistress of the household.

Their mother had been dead for a few years, and their father had passed away when Celeste was just beginning to crawl. She does

not remember him, while the two eldest siblings have vague and confused memories of him. The three of them work in different capacities on the farm that their father left them, located outside Verona. Life in that lonely house was monotonous; each day felt the same. When the sun shone brightly, however, the house took on a different atmosphere. The usual chores were completed with agility and enthusiasm, as if they were preparing for some celebration. Sometimes, they even smiled, imagining what a party might be like.

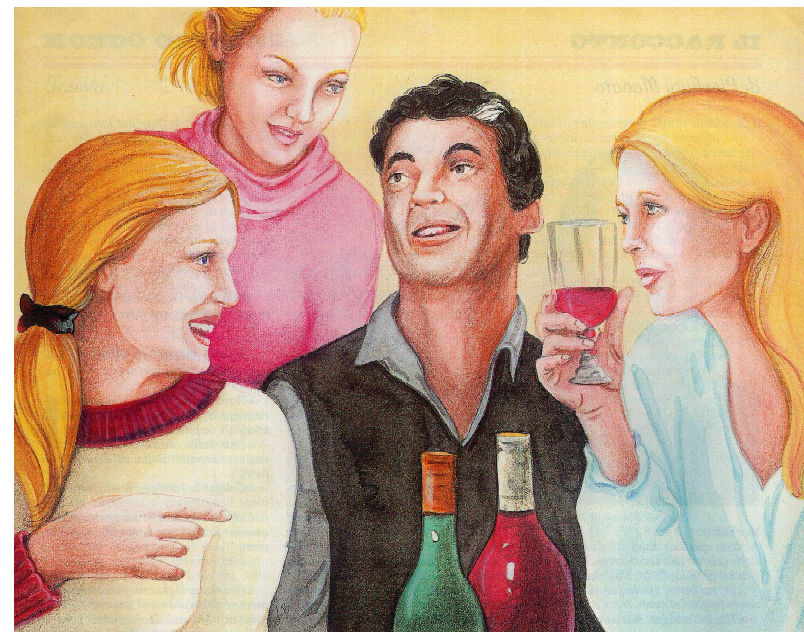
"What if an uncle came from America?"

"Why an uncle? If anyone, it should be a cousin!" laughed Celeste.

Rosa looked at Bianca, who blushed slightly and responded with a nervous giggle, "And... what if Celeste gets married?"

"Why me, of all people? You should be the one first!"

"Well, we — we!" the other two



replied in unison.

Someone did arrive: a cousin of Mother's whom they did not even know. He had returned from France to reestablish himself in Verona, his actual city. After settling into some suburban accommodation, he inquired about where his deceased cousin's daughters lived because he was curious to see them.

A sonorous, confident, almost masterful peal announced his arrival. The three sisters gathered in the dining room and gasped. Those who usually visited had a completely different way of introducing themselves.

A solid, masculine step accompanied the sound of Cesira's slippers. A woman's shrill voice warned, almost resentfully, "It's a gentleman looking for them. I

don't know who he is..." This was followed by another cheerful, loud voice announcing, "A relative of theirs, ladies!"

A man appeared at the threshold, greeting them with a friendly smile. The three sisters stared at him for a moment, speechless. Celeste was the first to break the silence:

"Please, come in and sit down! And... tell us who you are!" she added with a giggle.

The man stepped inside and introduced himself:

"Fabio Lamberti, your cousin."

"But yes, yes!" Bianca interrupted. "Mom was telling us about you."

"What a coincidence!" Rosa added. "We didn't even know we had any relatives!"

She dared not continue. Her cousin's lively black eyes, fixed intently on her, were awe-inspiring.

Fabio Lamberti was still young – tall and stocky, with features that were both sympathetic and irregular. His hair was thick and black, apart from a white lock at his left temple, which seemed almost playful. He was certainly not over forty.

He noticed his cousins' awkwardness and explained, "I was looking for a resemblance to their mother." All three of them looked very similar to each other. He gallantly added, "Like three buds on the same branch."

The three girls laughed, but only Celeste remained unflustered. She replied, "No one has said that to us so far."

The conversation waned. Then Bianca mentioned their mother, wanting to bring her into the discussion to know the real reason for this unexpected visit. With that, the awkwardness faded, and a sense of intimacy formed, warming the hearts of the three women, who were accustomed to the cold, monotonous solitude of their overly large house.

From that moment of intimacy, the idea for a lunch invitation emerged. Since the cousin could not stay that evening due to business commitments, it was agreed they meet the following Sunday. Their cousin's house was about two hours' drive away from Verona.

"So, see you Sunday!" Bianca said, looking him in the face.

"See you Sunday!" echoed Rosa.

"Goodbye!" trilled Celeste, almost mischievously.

The three girls lingered on the landing until their cousin left.

On Sunday, an hour before lunch, Fabio Lamberti arrived,

and Celeste welcomed him. The sisters were still busy in the kitchen and appeared later, dressed as if for a party. First came Bianca, wearing a black taffeta dress with thick ruffles and wavy hair. Then, Rosa entered in her purple satin dress, which was tight at the waist and had a curled-up skirt. They exchanged serious looks, which suddenly lit up their faces. Each sister was unaware of the other's thoughts.

At the restaurant, they spoke competitively: while one shared her own ideas, the other pondered, seemingly searching for something new or interesting to say. When one sister tried to express herself, she would often cut the others off mid-sentence.

Their cousin, with somewhat droopy eyelashes, made an effort to grasp the connection between the sisters' alternating words. Celeste enjoyed following the peculiar conversation; occasionally, she would interject with a monosyllable, her eyes glinting with a hint of mockery. Fabio often glanced at her, trying to understand why she remained silent, but eventually gave up on figuring it out.

After dinner, when he took his leave, Bianca looked at Rosa with a certain air of superiority and said, "And come back soon – next Sunday, maybe."

"I can't come back next Sunday," he replied.

"Then hurry for the one after that. You wouldn't want to miss it."

They giggled as he left and they asked each other nervously.

"What did he say? Those were delightful hours!"

Celeste's eyes gleamed with a

hint of mockery. "To prove he's telling the truth, he has to come back."

"Of course, I'll certainly come back," retorted Fabio, glaring at her.

The impression left on the three sisters by the visit was quite different. Celeste, unable to shake off her sleepiness, threw herself between the sheets and promptly fell asleep. In contrast, Bianca and Rosa lingered while undressing, their dreamy eyes lost in thought. Their rooms were connected; they heard each other's slow movements, as if they were in sync. From her room, each sister could guess the thoughts of the other.

Bianca spoke first:

"Are you already in bed, Rosa?"

"No," came Rosa's somewhat harsh reply.

"May I come in?"

"Of course!" Rosa's tone softened.

Rosa opened the partition door, and the two sisters faced each other.

"You look pale, Rosa. Are you feeling unwell?"

"Yes, I'm fine. But what about you? Your eyes look sunken. Are you tired?"

"No, no, my dear. Let's talk openly. We're both grieving for the same reason. We love each other, and one can't make the other suffer."

"That's true, Bianca!"

"What was on my mind tonight? But you understand me, Rosa..."

"It was a surprise to me, too. It's a shame, isn't it? With these wrinkles on your face..."

"What are you talking about, Bianca?"

"Yes, yes! Can't you see the wrinkles here, thick and close to my eyes and the corners of my mouth? When I laugh, they become more pronounced... A warning: we must be strict, and we still have to maintain our appearance."

"It's the heart, Bianca. That won't develop wrinkles."

"You are younger, Rosa!"

"After a certain age, Bianca, the years seem to get shorter; they don't stretch apart as much anymore... We're almost the same age now. Celeste, on the other hand! She does!"

"She does!"

"So, listen! When Fabio comes back, he'll have to watch out for Celeste. It's her turn!"

"It's her turn! We mustn't let her reach our age, like we did –"

"No, no, we must not! Not at any cost!"

There was a brief silence.

"And now, Rosa, let's go to bed too... And make sure you sleep."

"Yes, Bianca! And you too!"

At the doorway, Bianca added once more:

"I'm sure Mother will be pleased with us."

And each soothed the last restlessness in prayer. Then, sleep swaddled their souls in oblivion, mercifully.

When their cousin Fabio returned, Celeste welcomed him once again. The sisters, however, hesitated before entering. Celeste wore a slight mocking smile at the corner of her mouth as she waited for them all to arrive, dressed up as they had the first time. To her surprise, they appeared in their everyday clothes, with their hair pulled over their foreheads.



"She was a beautiful woman, truly! Beautiful inside and out!"

"Celeste resembles her a lot, even in the face," the other sister added.

Celeste felt uncertain about what to believe, and when she was alone with her sisters, she wanted to hear what more they had to say.

"Celeste, let him sit... No, wait: right here!"

"Here," Celeste replied. "But yes, next to me!" she added mischievously. "Mind you, though, I'm quite distracted. You take care when filling your glass."

The two sisters exchanged amused glances. During dinner, they did their best to draw Celeste out, wanting her to respond to their playful teasing.

"Celeste, come on, why aren't you talking? Where has your spirit gone?"

Turning to her cousin, Bianca added with a hint of sympathy, "Poor little sister! So lively, with so many beautiful talents, and yet she's stuck in the suburbs."

Celeste looked at her. "But I'm perfectly fine with that!"

"If only you could see how she embroiders and paints!" Rosa chimed in. "It's such a shame her talents are not appreciated."

"What do you mean? If I have any talent at all, it serves me well, and that's all that matters!"

"Our mother, bless her soul," Bianca interrupted, "adored music and painting. Remember?"

"Now you're going to explain why you've been leading me on as if in the palm of your hand."

"Us? But no! We love you!" I wanted Rosa to notice.

"But you never did!"

Bianca made up her mind to tell the truth. "Because... because... we wanted Fabio to take an interest in you."

Celeste looked at her, wide-eyed, and then laughed. "In me? In me?" she stammered, still laughing. "But no! What are you saying? You mean, Bianca, or maybe you, Rosa. But me? Not really. I've already gained a bit of flab, didn't you notice?"

A sudden discouragement seemed to sag the pale faces of the two older sisters. Then Bianca said again, "You mean us? No! Celeste! She is too young. When you get to our age, a man who's not really old always feels very young and spritely. Think about it, Celeste!"

Her voice trembled with regret.

"But no, no, no! What are you saying?" retorted Celeste, though her sisters noticed that her voice was filled with hope. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 65

by Michele Molineris

288. Don Bosco, the Madonna's almoner (1882)

Don Bosco often spoke of a remarkable act of delicacy that took place in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Olive, who were good supporters of his work. One day, the lady, out of a generous impulse, removed a valuable ring from her finger and offered it to him. However, Don Bosco deemed it unwise to accept such a gift. He opened his right hand, palm facing her, and said, "Look, madam, this is a cherished family keepsake; therefore, you must keep it."

However, the other insisted, wanting him to accept it wholeheartedly. The servant of God then replied, "If I take this from you, will you be satisfied knowing that I will use it as I see fit? I will only accept it on that condition."

When the lady agreed, Don Bosco extended his hand, took the ring with two fingers, and said, "Look, I gladly accept it. And now that it belongs to me, I gift it to your ladyship."

Touched by this gesture, the lady felt she could not refuse. Today, that ring is cherished by the family as a precious relic of the saint. (*M.B.*, XV, 490).

289. The obligation of almsgiving (1882)

In 1882, while traveling to Rome, Don Bosco stopped in Sampierdarena, where he was visited by a Capuchin friar. This meeting highlighted the topic of almsgiving, which Don Bosco had previously discussed in a lecture, and it had

significant implications for the friar.

Don Bosco knew that this good father was the confessor of a wealthy, elderly, childless gentleman from Genoa who had amassed a fortune. Don Bosco asked the friar, "How is it that this gentleman does not give alms in proportion to his wealth?"

The friar responded, "He gives twenty thousand liras each year to those in need."

"Twenty thousand liras? If he wishes to follow Jesus Christ's example, he should be giving at least a hundred thousand liras a year," Don Bosco replied. "What does he plan to do with all that money?"

"I understand your concern, but it is impossible to persuade him to give more," the friar explained.

"He needs to recognize his obligation to fulfil his duty."

"I wouldn't know how to persuade him. How would you cope in my situation?"

"I would tell him that I don't want to go to hell because of him. If he wants to go there, he should go alone. I would insist that he give to charity according to his means; otherwise, I would make it clear that I no longer feel responsible for his soul."

"Well, I will tell him," promised the good religious.

As he promised, he followed through. Having known this person for over twenty years, he felt comfortable discussing the matter. However, the man pretended to be deaf and dismissed the confessor, appearing offended by his frankness. (*M.B.*, XV, 520).

290. While Berta was spinning (1882)

"It was 1882, and I was 12 years

old," Maddalena Cantoni recounts. "I remember very well that everyone in the house was busy with chores related to raising silk-worms. The work, though excessive and heavy, felt light to us because we hoped for a good profit. We were already anticipating the joy of rest, as the beautiful, sturdy worms were beginning to rise to the cocoon stage. However, not all of them remained healthy; many would fall, stunned, and die.

"Alarmed but full of faith, Mother sent my older brother Paolo, who was two years my senior, to Valdocco to inform Don Bosco about the serious issue threatening to waste our hard work and to ask him for a blessing.

The brother hurried to the Oratory, and as soon as he could enter, he spoke to Don Bosco: "Father," he said, "Mother asks you to bless our worms, as they are about to reach the cocoon stage, but instead, they are falling and dying."

At my brother's account, Don Bosco laughed, and, admiring our faith, placed his hand on Paul's head and promptly said to him: "Be quiet! Go home, for they no longer fall!"

At that same instant the worms ceased to fall! In the house they immediately noticed the fact and said: "Behold, Don Bosco has blessed them, so that they are no longer falling!"

In fact, a little later, my brother returned and confirmed the news to us. And it was indeed so. As Don Bosco had said, the worms no longer fell and there was a fine crop of cocoons (*Torino, 25 June 1923. Maddalena Cantoni B.S., February 1924, 52*).

291. Even Protestants had

recourse to Don Bosco (1882)

In 1882, following a conference in Cannes, a young English lady in her twenties approached Don Bosco and said, "I have heard that you perform many healings." She explained that her father, a doctor, had sought treatment for her from the most renowned physicians in England and Paris, but their cures had been ineffective.

Don Bosco responded that he himself did not perform healings nor did he possess any medical knowledge. He explained that the graces and miraculous healings were the work of Our Lady Help of Christians, the mother of Jesus.

The young lady insisted, expressing her desire to receive grace from Mary Help of Christians, but she feared that being a Protestant might prevent her from being granted this favour. She asked Don Bosco to pray for her.

Encouraging her, Don Bosco said, "Although you are a Protestant, have faith and hope in the mother of God. To support you, I will give you some medals. Here is one for you: pray to Mary Help of Christians for nine days, and you will be cured."

A few days later, the young lady's father visited Don Bosco in Nice to express his gratitude. He told Don Bosco that his daughter had been perfectly healed and offered to pay any amount he desired. Don Bosco responded that he wanted nothing for himself, emphasizing that it was Mary Most Holy who had healed his daughter. He mentioned that if the father wished to contribute to the poor children supported by public charity in his colleges, he would gladly accept it, but only for the sake of those experiencing poverty

and abandoned youth, not for his own benefit. The Englishman then donated five thousand francs in gold. (*M.B., XV, 507*).

292. The nightcap (1883)

In the *Biographical Memoirs*, it is noted that Don Bosco would invite youngsters who had demonstrated exemplary conduct to lunch at his refectory every Sunday. He arranged it so that the students from each class, followed by the artisans from each workshop, were invited in succession. As a result, almost three times a year, representatives from each class or workshop had the opportunity to dine with the superiors. After lunch, the youngsters would spend time with Don Bosco, who would treat them to sweet pastries.

This practice dates back to 1860, but Msgr. Lino Cassani, who passed away in his nineties a few years ago and was a student at the Oratory from 1882 to 1886, recalled being honoured with such an invitation again in the first two months of his second year of college, specifically in December 1883. His good fortune did not stop there. Don Lorenzo Saluzzo, his teacher and also Don Berto's assistant, had arranged for three or four of his best pupils to not only enjoy lunch at Don Bosco's but also to visit his rooms during common recreation. Additionally, they had the privilege of attending Mass when Don Bosco celebrated it at his small altar, which was initially placed in a closet and later moved to the altar that can still be seen today.

Blessed with exceptional intelligence that often placed him among the select few pupils deserving of special recognition, Lino

Cassani took advantage of this privilege to frequently meet with Don Bosco and deepen his understanding of their relationship. At times, these interactions bordered on genuine mischief, though he always maintained a deep respect for Don Bosco, which was an unwavering principle for him. In his memoirs, Don Cassani sought to recount one such incident, perhaps the most memorable of all.

Hear it from Cassani himself: "Next to Don Bosco's little bed, there was still a stool with three steps. One day, I tried to climb up those steps, imitating Don Bosco as he went to bed, putting in as much reflection, slowness, and seriousness as I could. A certain boy from Albani wanted to outdo me; he took his nightcap from under his pillow and put it on his head. To me, that felt like a profanation, so I rushed over and tore it off him. He reacted, and a scuffle ensued, causing us both to tumble against the little door of Don Bosco's study.

Don Bosco looked out at us serenely.

"What's happening?" he asked. I held up my 'victory trophy' while the other boy, embarrassed, showed by his demeanour that he knew he was in the wrong.

"He put it on his head!" I said. "Let him try it on; I want to see it too," Don Bosco said, sketching a smile.

Everyone laughed, and Albani laughed too. I did not laugh, as I felt it was more appropriate to disobey and returned the nightcap to its rightful place." (from *San Giovanni Bosco nel ricordo degli exallievi*). □



MAY, MARY'S MONTH

by A.B. Bosco

The month of May holds a special place in the hearts of Catholics worldwide as a time dedicated to honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary. This tradition, rich in history and devotion, is expressed through various practices that draw the faithful closer to Mary, the Mother of God.

Origins of May Devotions

May is connected to the Blessed Virgin Mary since medieval times. In the thirteenth century, Alfonso X of Castile wrote about honouring Mary on specific days in May. By the seventeenth century, dedicating the whole month to Mary became common, starting in Italy and spreading throughout Europe, becoming an important Catholic tradition.

Traditional Practices

May devotions encompass a variety of expressions of love and reverence for Mary, including:

May Altars – Families and churches set up altars adorned with images or statues of Mary, surrounded by flowers and candles. These altars serve as focal points for pra-



yer and reflection throughout the month.

May Crownings – A ceremonial crowning of a Marian statue with a wreath of flowers symbolizes Mary's queenship and maternal care. This rite often includes hymns, prayers, and processions, fostering a communal expression of devotion.

Recitation of the Rosary – The Rosary, a powerful meditative prayer, is recited more fervently during May, reflecting on the mysteries of Christ's life through the eyes of Mary.

Marian Feasts in May

Significant Marian feasts enrich the month of May, deepening the faithful's connection to Mary:

May 13 – Our Lady of Fatima: This feast commemorates the 1917 apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal. Her message emphasized prayer, penance, and peace, urging the daily recitation of the Rosary.

May 24 – Mary Help of Christians: This feast honours Mary under the title *Help of Christians*, a devotion deeply propagated by St. John Bosco. He recognized Mary's guidance and protection in his mission to care for the youth.

St. John Bosco's Devotion to Mary

St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesian Society, had a profound devotion to Mary Help of Christians. He viewed her as a guiding mother, especially in his work with young people. His Marian devotion was not merely personal but a cornerstone of his educational approach:

Daily Practices – He encouraged the youth to engage in daily prayers, particularly the *Three Hail Marys*, seeking Mary's intercession for purity and guidance.

Monthly Devotions – The month of May was marked by special activities, including sermons on Mary's virtues, communal prayers, and acts of charity performed in her honor.

Feast of Mary Help of Christians – Celebrated with great solemnity on May 24, this feast included processions, special prayers, and festive gatherings, highlighting Mary's role as a helper and protector.

Marian Devotion in Daily Life

Inspired by these traditions, the faithful are encouraged to deepen their relationship with Mary during May by:

Establishing a May Altar – Create a dedicated space in your home with an image of Mary, adorned with flowers and candles, serving as a daily reminder of her presence.

Participating in May Crownings – Engage in or organize a crowning ceremony, reflecting on Mary's queenship and her role in guiding us toward Christ.

Praying the Rosary – Dedicate time each day to recite the Rosary, meditating on the mysteries of Christ's life and seeking Mary's intercession.

Acts of Charity – Honour Mary by emulating her virtues through acts of kindness and service to others, embodying the love she exemplifies.

Illustration: "Forget Me Not"

Source: *Don Bosco's Madonna*, 1956.

The western sky was ablaze with the fiery rays of the setting sun. It was a bright and warm evening on the 31st of May.

The members of the *Stella Maris Youth Club* were filled with excitement. The long-awaited evening had arrived at last. A month earlier, Fr. S., the director of the club, had suggested that during May, each member should try to practice a particular virtue in honour of Mary. On the 31st, they could present Our Lady with bouquets of flowers, symbolizing the virtues they had striven to attain.

The girls were now assembled at the grotto of Our Lady, each carrying bunches of beautiful flo-

wers. Every garden in the neighbourhood had been searched for the most appropriate blooms.

"Where's Dorothy?" one of the girls asked.

"I bet *Forget-me-not* has forgotten to come," another said, laughing.

Dorothy, the club's mischievous member, had earned the nickname *Forget-me-not* due to her forgetful nature. She frequently missed appointments and club meetings and rarely remembered to fulfill her assigned duties. Her absence was dismissed with a chuckle, and the evening's celebrations commenced.

The grotto was resplendent with flowers and lights. Our Lady looked down lovingly at her children, gathered to praise and honor her. As the Marian devotions concluded, Fr. S. preached a short sermon. Dressed in white, the girls formed a procession to the altar.

One by one, they placed their offerings:

- Patricia laid a bouquet of red roses, symbolizing her abiding love for Our Lady.

- Margaret carried white lilies, representing purity.

- Sheila offered a nosegay of violets, signifying modesty.

- Marjorie presented daisies, representing humility.

- Others followed with carnations, gladioli, and a host of other flowers, each symbolizing a virtue practiced in honour of Our Lady.

The altar was soon a vibrant display of colors and fragrances. As the choir sang, "*O Mary, we crown Thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels and Queen of May*," the club president crowned Our Lady with a wreath of exquisite white blossoms. After Solemn Benediction, the girls joyfully

gathered for a small celebration.

Silence fell over the now-empty grotto. A shadow emerged from a nearby thicket and slowly approached the altar – it was Dorothy.

She placed a spray of drooping forget-me-nots at Our Lady's feet, bowed her head, and whispered,

"Forgive me, Mother dear, for my poor, lowly offering. True to my forgetful nature, I failed to practice even one virtue. But these flowers are a symbol of the Three Hail Mary's I have unfailingly recited every night at bedtime."

With these words, she turned and walked away.

Days later, passing by the grotto, Dorothy stopped to pay a visit. The once-vibrant bouquets of roses, lilies, and carnations had withered. Yet, amidst the faded blooms, a gentle fragrance lingered. She stepped closer and saw, still fresh and lovely, her tiny posy of forget-me-nots.

Looking up at Our Lady's statue, Dorothy noticed a gentle smile illuminating her face. It seemed as if her lips moved, whispering,

"My child, your offering is far more precious to me than all the rest. I shall remember you before my Son in Heaven, for you have never forgotten me on earth."

Conclusion

May, as Mary's month, offers a beautiful opportunity to renew and deepen our devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Through traditional practices, reflection on her virtues, and emulation of her love, we draw closer to Mary, who unfailingly leads us to her Son, Jesus Christ. Embracing these devotions enriches our faith journey, fostering a profound connection with our Heavenly Mother. □



MY VOCATION STORY

THE LEGENDARY FATHER PEPPE

a missionary for 44 years in Central America

by Romano Modugno Gugliotta

How did you discover your vocation?

As a child, I often saw the Passionist Missionaries from Ceccano Abbey visiting our village. One missionary who worked in Brazil inspired my desire to become a priest. In August 1961, a boy dressed as a Salesian cleric walked by. I shared my dream with him, and he decided to help me. On September 24, I was accepted into the Salesian aspirant programme at age 12, starting my journey.

I studied in Gaeta, Lanuvio, and Genzano until I finished high school. After graduation, I did three years of internships: first at Villa Sora in Frascati, then at Arborea in Sardinia, and finally at Pio XI in Rome. I studied theology for three years in Rome, starting at *Sacro Cuore*, then *Santa Maria Liberatrice*, and lastly *Santa Maria della Speranza*. I was 28 when I was ordained a priest in my hometown, *Villa S. Stefano*.

When did my missionary vocation emerge?

I kept my feelings to myself for a long time. After my ordination, I spoke with the Rector Major, Fr. Egidio Viganò, about going on a mission to Brazil. However, he said they needed two priests in Managua due to the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. I agreed to take on the challenge.

Those years were tough. After



three years, the Nicaraguan government made us leave the capital, so we moved to Masaya, an indigenous area, where we stayed for six years.

What happened next?

After my time in Central America, I was sent to Panama. My first task was to renovate a Salesian school in the capital. After three years, I received a new assignment. A fellow confrere and I were tasked with exploring the country to establish a Salesian presence outside the capital. We chose the Darién region, which is the most remote and wild part of the Panamanian diocese. From 1993 to 1997, I lived in the forest and was often on the move.

Other assignments?

During a visit from a superior, I shared my desire to take a course in anthropology, specifically fo-

cusing on liturgy and church history. About a month later, I learned that a liturgical fellowship had become available in Barcelona.

After completing my studies, I returned to Rome to serve as the director of the youth center at the Oratory of Hope. However, I soon realized that this role wasn't a good fit for me. A colleague from my mission visited and suggested I return with him to Central America, specifically to Honduras. I discussed this opportunity with the then provincial, Fr. Pussino, and decided to accept it. I spent 14 years in Honduras, where we built a large church from the ground up in a community affected by youth gang violence. The church became the focal point of the community.

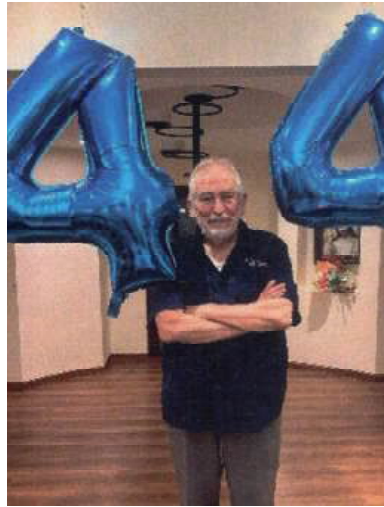
In 2018, I found myself in Guatemala, specifically in the country's poorest mountainous region. For over five years, I traveled to around 70 villages, evangelizing among the local *Q'eqchi* people, who are the ancient descendants of the Maya. Eventually, I returned to Panama. Starting in February 2024, I will be relocating to the capital, where I currently reside.

What advice would you give to a Salesian who aspires to be a missionary?

I would encourage them to travel light, without large suit-cases or a vast entourage, as the true essence of missionary work should be simple and humble.

If you could go back in time, would you choose to live the life of a missionary again?

Absolutely. Giving to others brings a sense of fulfillment. After all, this is a vocation.

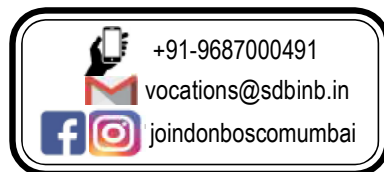


What are your thoughts on working with young people after so many years?

They are truly amazing! They challenge you and encourage you to rethink your views. They often create more excitement than those who seem uninterested. I believe in Don Bosco's vision, which aligns with my beliefs about practicing Christianity. He taught that every young person has the potential for goodness, even the difficult ones, and that no child is born flawed. Unfortunately, life circumstances can lead to poor choices.

What are your plans for the future?

My dream is to create a spiritual community in our homes within the Panamanian capital. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

True to Life

She: "I'm delighted you have a part in the dramatic society's next show. Have you much to say?"

He: "Practically nothing. I'm playing the husband."

Heathens only!

The collector approached a parishioner and held out the box.

"I never give to the Missions," whispered the man."

"Then take something out of the box, sir," suggested the collector, "the money is for the heathens."

Hair-raising Story

There was a break-in at the local hair-dresser's shop in the early hours of this morning. The police are said to be combing the area looking for possible clues.

A Kid's Prayer

Prayer of a little boy: "And dear God, see you look after yourself, because should anything happen to you, what would happen to me?"

And another, whose mother was sick before going to bed, prayed: "Dear God make mummy well!"

In the morning he asked mummy whether she was well. "Just half well she smiled."

So in the evening the boy prayed: "Thank you Lord, for curing one half of mummy. Please cure the other half too."

The doctor and his wife were down with the flu and the little daughter prayed for them: "Jesus cure daddy," "And what about mummy," suggested grandmother. "Jesus, mummy too!"

"And what about all the sick

people?"

"Jesus, cure all, well...not all really, otherwise daddy would have no more clients..."

True believers

A buddhist monk was trying to convert two hard-core Spanish anarchists. "Spare your breath, sir," they answered him. "We do not believe in our religion which we know is the true one, how can we believe yours?"

Too Short

"So you're lost, little man," said the sympathetic passerby. "Why didn't you hang on to your mother's skirt?"

"Couldn't reach it!" answered the youngster.

Last: the Firing Squad

Politics is in the air, and politicians can be seen in all sectors these days, seeking votes, ringing phrases. I like the story of the state representative in Ohio who received the following letter from a local American Legion post:

"You are invited to be one of the speakers at our Memorial Day meeting. The programme will include a talk by the mayor, the recitation of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address by a high-school pupil, your talk and then the firing squad."

Spit it Out

Professor: "What is HNO³?"

Student: *After considerable hemming and hawing:* "Just a minute, Sir. It's on the tip of my tongue."

Professor: "Then you'd better spit it out quickly. It's nitric acid." □

WHAT WAS THE HAPPIEST MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE?

What was the happiest moment in life?

During a TV interview, the host asked his billionaire guest, "What has made you happiest in life?" The man responded, "I went through four stages of happiness before I discovered true happiness.

The first stage was about owning things. The second stage involved acquiring the most expensive and rare items, but I found their effect was only temporary. The third stage was about owning large projects, like buying soccer teams or resorts, yet I did not find the happiness I had envisioned.

The fourth stage occurred when a friend asked me to help purchase wheelchairs for a group of children with mobility difficulties. I immediately donated the necessary funds to buy the wheelchairs, but my friend insisted that I accompany him to deliver the gift to the children.

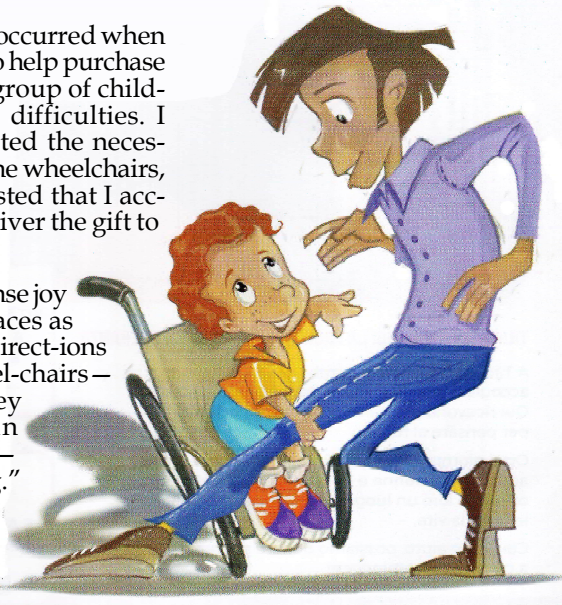
Seeing the immense joy on the children's faces as they moved in all directions on the simple wheel-chairs — laughing as if they were in an amusement park — was truly fulfilling."

"What cheered me up was when one of the children

grabbed onto my leg just as I was about to leave. I tried to gently free myself from his grip, but he continued holding on, his eyes gazing intensely into my face. I leaned down and asked him, "Is there anything else you want from me before I go, child?" His response changed my entire perspective on life and made me realize the true meaning of happiness.

"I want to remember your features so I can recognize you when I see you in heaven and thank you once again when we're with God."

And you, what has brought you the most happiness in life? □



God chooses broken people... Being broken is a gift, because only when we are broken, we recognize the need for a Saviour to make us whole. Even though that plate will inevitably crack again, it has been my experience that where there is brokenness, there is also an abundance of grace. Though you may feel defeated and broken right now, God is closer than you realise. He is always with you and can mend your heart.

God chooses broken people to create masterpieces. Your brokenness is not the end, it's a beginning of a new person. He is sculpting you to become.

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to God and Mother Mary for the countless graces and favors I have received through the devotion of saying three Hail Marys.

During a particularly stressful time at work, I began reciting the three Hail Marys for each of my two most demanding and troublesome clients. I also prayed for a safe and secure exit from my job, as well as to maintain a clean record in my company, especially since my boss was known for finding reasons to tarnish my reputation. Miraculously, all three of my petitions were answered, and Mother Mary helped me overcome these challenges.

Elvis Pink, Bengaluru

Thanks to Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for all the blessings and favours received through their intercession. *Clara C. UK*

My Son was gone with cough for nearly 10 days and it was not getting any better with medication, soon he began to get fever reaching 103 degrees. We saw this the doctor who suggested we do tests for dengue malaria etc.

While going to collect the report I prayed the powerful 3 Mary's and with the assurance of Mama Mary was with us. I collected the report which the doctor said were are negative and it was just a viral infection. My Mama Mary has always been there for me immediately whenever I prayed to her.

- Pereira, A faithful Devotee, Mumbai

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK MAY 2025

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ATTENTIVE TO THE NEEDS OF THE BRETHREN

Mary embodies a caring spirit, always aware of her brothers' and sisters' spiritual and material needs. The Gospel showcases her concern for elderly Elizabeth, her decisive role at the wedding in Cana, and her unwavering support at the foot of the Cross. She continues to mediate for the exiled children of Eve from Heaven. As a true disciple, Mary fully embraces the Gospel and endures the pain foretold by Simeon. She aligns her destiny with her Son's sacrifice. Faced with God's proposal, she boldly affirms her "Yes," becoming a powerful testament of faith for herself and all humanity.

Pope St. John Paul II

L'Osservatore Romano, March 1984

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.

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