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PRAYER TO OUR LADY OF SORROWS FOR OUR LOVED ONES

*Sorrowful Mother, you
who understand
our suffering please hear
our prayer. Mother, whose
heart was torn as a world of
hate crucified Your Son, have
pity on me and mine. Extend
your hand of love and
guidance on our loved ones,
so that the path they walk
together will lead to a fresh
awareness of faith found only
in the Eucharist.
Help us to continue to love
unconditionally, no matter the
circumstances. AMEN*

From The Editor's Desk NATURAL, HUMAN ARTIFICIAL... BUT INTELLIGENCE?

One evening as the monsoons were setting in and I couldn't go out for my regular afternoon walk around the lanes of leafy Koregaon Park, I chanced on a post that came into my mailbox and saw images created by AI - *Artificial Intelligence*. What met the eye were morphed into saccharine-like enhanced images of familiar people and animals which were certainly not real images...there was something truly *artificial* that I couldn't vibe with. It was then that I sought to find out what this whole phenomenon of AI was:

This topic is frequently discussed: intelligence once attributed only to humans is now also ascribed to machines, giving rise to the term "artificial intelligence" (AI). This addition of AI to biological intelligence has led to numerous jokes, perhaps as a way to confront a subconscious fear that could become a reality. Some of these quips include: "Artificial intelligence is superior because natural intelligence hasn't served us well," "Arguments in favour of artificial intelligence: natural imbecility," and "Human intelligence is so rare in the world that it's understandable why many are fascinated by artificial intelligence."

Technological advancement is relentless, providing us with useful tools for living and expanding our knowledge. The Creator has given humanity the capacity and potential to continue the work of creation: "Increase and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). So, where does the concern lie?

The reality we live in is incredibly complex. Many technologies are used to dominate, destroy, and subjugate, rather than to contribute to life, alleviate disease, or provide nourishment. With atomic energy, I can generate power, but I can also create a bomb. It is ultimately human intelligence that decides how innovations are utilized.

Hence, it is humans who bear the responsibility for these choices; technology serves as a means to support life. Artificial intelligence cannot replace human intelligence when it comes to understanding complex situations; it lacks self-awareness and does not possess a "conscience" to evaluate the consequences of decisions deemed to be optimal. While machines can present "choices," they cannot make "decisions"; that requires discernment, wisdom, and common sense. Each decision carries a moral obligation, accountability, and a capacity for evaluation that is unique to humans.

The late Pope Francis introduced the term "algorithic," a combination of "algorithm" and "ethics," and approved the document "*Antiqua et nova*," which emphasizes that AI will always lack "the richness of corporeality, relationality, and the openness of the human heart to truth and goodness."

This is real intelligence!

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

THE FIRST STEP: THE MEMORY

by Bishop Giampaolo Dianin

An inner pilgrimage can accompany the couple and family on the Jubilee journey. It is necessary to go back to the roots to remember the road travelled.

The Jubilee is a significant time — one of grace and a gift from the Lord. We should not overlook this occasion or approach it superficially. What does living the Jubilee mean for couples and families? Are there aspects that challenge us not only as believers but also as families?

We can view the Holy Year as a “course of spiritual exercises” designed for couples and families. It presents an opportunity to pause, reflect on our lives in light of the Gospel, and embark on a

genuine journey of conversion. This inner pilgrimage can guide couples and families throughout the Jubilee experience.

John Paul II wrote: “Every jubilee is an invitation to a wedding feast. Let us all gather for the feast that is being prepared. Let us bring with us what unites us, and may our gaze, focused solely on Christ, enable us to grow in the unity that is the fruit of the Spirit” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 4). Every journey of conversion begins from a distant place, starting with a



return to the origins of love between a man and a woman. Returning to these roots means recalling the journey taken together, bringing to mind the warm memories of initial encounters, the overwhelming joy of falling in love, and the embracing warmth of passion. It involves expressing gratitude for the years gone by and for the blessings of children, while also remembering the storms that did not discourage our hearts, the frost that did not put hope into hibernation, and the dryness that did not wither love.

Christian remembrance differs from merely flipping through a photo album. Instead, it becomes a celebration of God's interventions in each family's life, as the Risen One is present today and has always been with us, even during times when He seemed distant. Reflecting on our lives allows us to recognize a history of salvation and marvel at God's faithfulness to His promises. Through this process, we can rediscover the human and Christian foundations of our roots.

How can we forget the wedding feast at Cana, where wine was always present in the lives of the bride and groom? Sometimes it was obvious, while at other times, it went unnoticed as someone transformed our ordinary water into delightful wine. This is why a Jubilee should be marked by joy, as the term suggests — a special anniversary celebrating our marriage. A Jubilee is a time to express gratitude for the journey we have shared; it can bring us inner peace despite the complexities of life. It is also a gift we can share with our children, filling them with our

*Every path
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a woman*

joy. Thus, a Jubilee becomes a celebration among ourselves and with our children; it embodies optimism and, more importantly, offers a reliable hope for both today and tomorrow.

A husband once shared with me, “After ten years of marriage, I am discovering the joy of still falling in love with my wife. How wonderful it would be to recognize this as our Jubilee! Over the years, you have enriched my life, and I have grown as a person. While there may have been times you disappointed me, that does not mean our love has failed. We have journeyed together, but along the way, we may have found ourselves sitting still, growing accustomed to a repetitive life. Life's distractions may have caused our relationship to become more functional, focused only on work, raising children, and managing the home. Although we are good together, we have neglected to explore the depths of our connection. □

FROM SMALL SHRUBS TO STURDY OAKS

Elide Siverio

It can be refreshing to read a beloved text, to exercise after an injury, to drink a cool drink of water... Anything that supports and comforts

I have a strong appreciation for the verb “corroborate.” The summer heat exhausts me, and I need to find inner strength. I’m also fascinated by the etymology of this term, which means to fortify, invigorate, and strengthen. It originates from the Latin verb “roborare,” meaning to maintain, which in turn comes from “robur,” referring to strength and oak, combined with the prefix “co.”

The word in question resonates profoundly with ancient imagery, particularly the strength associated with the oak tree. Linguists debate whether the egg or the hen came first, or whether the tree or the concept of strength is the original reference. However, recent studies tend to favour the oak tree

as the primary reference.

To corroborate means to fortify. This does not imply an absolute strengthening but rather a concrete reinforcement applicable to specific situations. For instance, a cup of hot tea is invigorating in winter, while a glass of cool water serves the same purpose in summer. Similarly, reading a beloved text can be rejuvenating, just as engaging in physical exercise can help after an injury. In the same way, anything that refreshes my thoughts or decisions is invigorating. Everything that sustains and comforts me invigorates my spirit.

It’s like witnessing a tender and fragile shrub withering away.



This imagery reminds me of verses from some psalms that celebrate the power of God. One psalm opens with a profound statement: “I love you, Lord, my strength.” It goes on to describe the many qualities of this support: “Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield, my mighty salvation, and my stronghold” (Psalm 18). This text serves as a royal *Te Deum*, a triumphant ode that blends a prayer of thanksgiving with a royal song of victory. The title indicates that this psalm was allegedly composed by David when the Lord delivered him from the power of all his enemies, including Saul. It is a psalm that celebrates God and His victory on behalf of the oppressed.

Life is a battle for everyone; we are all called to confront evil and the Adversary who seeks to obstruct the path of grace. However, every Christian understands that the coming of Christ has already secured our victory, for in Jesus, everyone is free and saved!

Psalm 29 contains similar expressions: “The voice of the Lord is strength; the voice of the Lord is power. The voice of the Lord crashes the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.” This passage serves as a hymn of praise to the Lord of the storm. It is interesting to observe how the

typical response of primitive humans — astonishment and dismay at the forces of nature — transforms into prayer in Scripture. This text can be seen as a celebration of God’s power, symbolized by thunder, lightning, and the destruction wrought upon creation.

The psalmist reflects on an apocalyptic hurricane that arises from the sea, enveloping the mountains and shattering the mighty cedars of Lebanon — a grand cataclysm that disrupts creation. However, the Lord reigns over these forces of nature and governs history. People are invited to place their trust in Him, for even the seemingly indomitable hurricane acts as a willing agent of God, serving as His messenger.

One of the most uplifting statements comes from St. Paul: “I will gladly boast in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I rejoice in my weaknesses, in the insults, in the hardships, in the persecutions, and in the anguish, I endure for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, it is then that I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). It is a remarkable truth that while we may feel like small and weak bushes, we can become sturdy oaks because Christ dwells in us, sustains us, and strengthens us. □

*There’s more to life
than measuring its speed.
Let me look upward unto
the branches of
the towering oak
and know that it grew great*

*and strong because it grew
slowly and well
Slow me down Lord,
and inspire me.
To send my roots
deep into the soil
of life’s enduring values.*

REASONS TO BELIEVE - 9

by Franco Molinari

The Jesus Hypothesis

At the National Library in Paris, anyone who opens the file cabinet will discover that around one hundred thousand books are dedicated to "Christ," which is second only to the name "God."

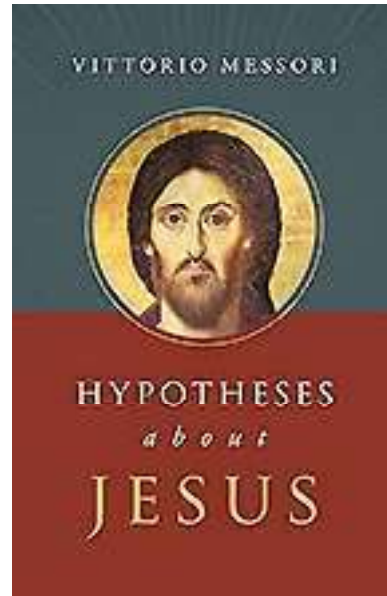
No text has been as thoroughly examined, dissected, and scrutinized as the Gospel.

From this vast body of work, three hypotheses have emerged, as explained by Vittorio Messori in his well-known book.

1. *Historical Hypothesis*: Jesus is regarded as the most outstanding teacher of wisdom and an exceptional leader of active love. However, he does not possess divine stature; he is not God but rather a man like Socrates, though greater than him.

2. *Mythical Hypothesis*: In the gospels, Jesus is depicted as God, but this portrayal is considered a myth developed in certain Eastern and Anglo-Portuguese contexts. The figure of Christ represents the hopes of the oppressed and enslaved people, who create a saviour for themselves through collective imagination.

3. *Faith Hypothesis*: Jesus is recognized as a historical figure



who is both man and God. He was crucified, resurrected, ascended to heaven, and currently serves as the invisible head of the Church.

The faith hypothesis, supported by various rational arguments; it gains strength from the collapse of the other two hypotheses, which are mutually exclusive.

The axe of criticism ruthlessly dismantles the hypothesis of Jesus as merely a simple man, a master



of purely natural solidarity. This argument is compelling for those familiar with biblical history. In a Jewish context, the deification of a human being would have been unthinkable, just as it is impossible today to confuse an atom with Mont Blanc.

A profound chasm separates humanity from God, rendering the name of the thrice-holy virtually untouchable. For devout Jews, attributing divine qualities to even the most virtuous person is considered the height of blasphemy, a belief that led to Jesus being crucified for claiming divinity. Critics face a striking contradiction: they recognize Jesus as an extraordinary figure while simultaneously condemning him as a blasphemer for asserting his divine nature. This dilemma challenges our understanding of divinity and truth.

The mythical hypothesis suggests that some historians believe Jesus of Nazareth never actually existed. They argue that he represents a culmination of the desires of the oppressed who yearn for liberation. However, this idea is countered by the historical hypothesis, which presents strong evidence supporting the existence and character of Jesus.

Historically, it takes at least a century and a half for a myth to develop. Yet, we have Paul's letters and the Gospels from the first century, indicating that the framework of the Christian story was already established with such clarity that the Church firmly rejected apocryphal gospels.

The competing hypotheses contradict each other: critics argue, based on the evidence, that Jesus is not a myth but rather a real historical figure, albeit on a human

level. On the other hand, mythologists criticize the critics for their inconsistency in accepting the Gospel texts while failing to draw logical conclusions from them. Meanwhile, the hypothesis of faith remains intact.

The Test of History

The first page of John's Gospel offers us a profound insight. As is typical of the Gospel, it uses simple language to convey significant truths. A particularly striking phrase is: "The Word was God."

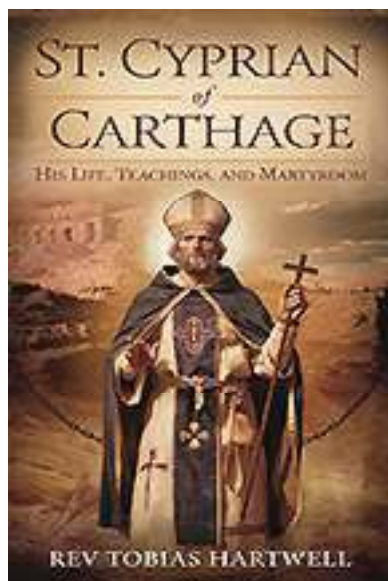
The child born in a stable, who had no room at the inn, was with God in the beginning and was, indeed, God.

There is compelling evidence for the divinity of Christ, including centuries of expectations and the fulfillment of prophecies. His hidden miracles and the miraculous resurrection from a sealed tomb are pivotal events. The transformation of the apostles from fearful individuals to courageous leaders, despite the defeat at Calvary, highlights Christ's profound impact. Additionally, Christianity's rapid spread in a hostile environment, the resilience of its followers, and the noble doctrine of love he preached further strengthen the case for his divinity. Each element contributes to a powerful testament of Christ's life and message.

Let us highlight *three key points*.

Firstly, the ethics of love is acknowledged as exceptional even by non-believers. The philosopher Piero Martinetti critiques the Gospel line by line, yet he admits, "It is necessary to recognize in Jesus the most eminent of religious personalities, from whom even today descends a spiritual force in history."

The rationalist scholar Joseph



Ernest Renan even claims that “anything attempted outside the great and pure Christian tradition will remain sterile.” Another scholar, who questions the historical existence of Christ, concedes that his message represents “an inner strength that the centuries have not exhausted, the generous wine that is always able to inebriate, the supreme law before which everything has bowed down.”

However, these distinguished, albeit non-believing historians face a deep contradiction: on one hand, they assert that Christ is merely a man (and thus a fraud for presenting himself as God); on the other hand, they maintain that his teachings are unmatched in dignity, impact, and universality.

Secondly, Jesus’ personality is a remarkable example of balance and completeness. He is gentle with everyone, especially the weak, yet he is unyielding toward the arrogant Pharisees who pre-

tend to be honest. He is a friend to sinners, while being an unwavering enemy of sin, which ultimately leads him to allow himself to be crucified.

Jesus is prepared for sacrifice and embraces an ascetic life in the desert, but he also joyfully participates in feasts and wedding celebrations, to the point that his adversaries label him a glutton and a drunkard. Always in touch with the people, he remains attentive to their physical needs while maintaining his connection with the Father, communicating with Him as if on a direct line.

Faithful to Jewish tradition, he attends the Temple and transcends legalism through love. He goes against the current by showing compassion towards children, women, and lepers. As a modern writer aptly stated, “Christ is the insomnia of the world.”

Thirdly: Let’s first consider the fruits of Christianity. Two thousand years of history demonstrate that Christ is not a mere fraud. No other religion can claim the same number of saints – over thirty thousand – as Catholicism can. For instance, the bishop Saint Cyprian of Carthage, before facing execution, expressed gratitude to his executioner in a heartfelt manner and even offered him two gold coins, referring to him as the “doorkeeper of paradise.” You cannot produce sweet grapes from thorns or figs from thistles.” The Church, as the family of the saved and the mother of the saints, serves as a testament to Christ’s divinity. Christianity has triumphed throughout history.

This is why Pope John Paul II encapsulated his message with the phrase: “Christ is the centre of the world.” □

CARMEN LAVAL

TIME FOR THE SPIRIT

THE FIVE PILLARS OF MASAI SPIRITUALITY

They all have something to teach us. All we know of them is the long, proud figure draped in red. What few know is that they pass on from generation to generation a rich spirituality, lived daily, universal in scope and conceiving man as the creator of the universe.

1. ILMAO: accepting duality

The Maasai believe that all aspects of life are interconnected and consist of complementary pairs. This duality is evident in contrasts like day and night or rain and drought, as well as within individuals, where altruism often clashes with selfishness, and courage with fear. Ignoring these dualities can lead to suffering and conflict. Embracing them with patience and kindness is essential for fostering understanding and harmony in our lives.

In practice, identify the “twin qualities” within yourself. List your characteristics and correlate each one with a defect or behaviour that

may have contributed to your failures or conflicts. Look for consistency and balance; examine yourself and others with a nuanced and forgiving perspective.

2. ENCIPAI: being joyful

“My whole family is fine. However, the drought continues, and we have nothing to eat. Tomorrow, I will go to the side of Red Mountain to look for water. I have not heard any bad news recently. In Maasai culture, when they need to share bad news, they surround it with two pieces of positive news. For them, joy is not the goal but rather the starting point. It reflects the living bond that connects them to the supreme Divinity, the source of all life. Gratitude fuels joy, which in turn strengthens the feeling of thankfulness. We are grateful for being alive, for having food, and for being able to share both trials and celebrations. Sharing moments and rejoicing together, while emphasizing what is going well and incorporating humour, are all practices that help maintain joy in life each day. Experiencing joy is also a form of courtesy we owe to others; it creates relational comfort that benefits everyone.”

In practice, cultivate gratitude daily by becoming aware of the gifts you receive, no matter how small. Offer your time, compliments, and advice – these little gestures can soften and beautify the





days of those around you. Always strive to maintain a positive mindset by surrounding a negative thought or fact with two positive thoughts or facts, as the Masai do.

Reconnect with the energy of nature and feel a part of the great chain of life. There's nothing quite like leaning against a tree and losing yourself in the foliage until you feel a sense of oneness with it; this is a powerful way to find serenity and inner strength—two essential elements for achieving happiness.

3. OSINA KISHON: suffering is an opportunity

Without suffering, there is no awakening. This is the profound belief of the Maasai, who view pain as an opportunity for growth. One of their sacred proverbs expresses this idea: "Flesh that is not painful feels nothing." With this understanding, they thank the mother goddess for presenting

them with trials and opportunities along their journey.

In practice, the Maasai visualize their emotions—such as fear, sadness, anger, discouragement, and the desire for revenge—transforming them into knots in a rope that they then burn.

4. EUNOTO: become a sower

The Maasai people favour the mindset of a sower over that of a builder. While a builder focuses solely on reaching their goals, a sower plants a tree, nurtures it, and embraces the risks involved. Being a planter means staying present in the moment, adapting, and maintaining a balance between vigilance and trust, as well as willingness and humility. This flexibility fosters serenity and patience, serving as a buffer against anger and disappointment.

In practice, plant a tree or care for a plant. This practice encourages you to set aside immediate desires and helps you cope with whatever challenges arise.

5. AINGORU ENKITOO: search for the right order

To be right, in word and deed, means for the Maasai to be connected to the supreme Deity. Problems, conflicts, turmoil are signs that we have strayed from our "mission". For the Masai, to be in search of order is also to seek what one has come to do on Earth.

In practice. Listen to your body's messages when you have made a choice, made a decision. If they are right, underneath superficial emotions (apprehension, excitement), you should feel a wave of calm, a sense of inner peace, which can be translated into words like 'it is not easy, but it is right'. □

ST ROSALIA September 4

Ian Pinto, sdb

My Life for God

Rosalia was born into a noble family in Sicily, Italy, in 1130 and grew up in the court of the King. Sicily, until a little before the birth of Rosalia was ruled by the Arabs of the Byzantine empire. They, with their advanced science and engineering, brought about a transformation not just of the Sicilian landscape but also of life-style. The structures they erected including the palaces and courts, were unlike anything the Europeans had ever seen. Even in terms of organization, they were far more systematic and methodical.

In the early 11th century, Byzantine influence weakened due to infighting. This paved the way for the Christian Normans of France to usurp power. Unlike the Norman conquest of England in 1066 which happened in one fell swoop, the conquest of southern Italy extended over decades and comprised of many battles. A number of territories were conquered independently and only much later (somewhere in 1870) were they unified into the one nation-state that we know as Italy.

Although the Normans were Christian, they became highly influenced by Byzantine culture. They began to wear Arab clothes, ate Arab food, and Norman aristocrats and rulers even began to have harems in their palaces. Such was the cultural appropriation that one would not be



able to distinguish a Norman from a Muslim. Perhaps the only distinguishing factor was their religion, but even that was not free from Arabic influence. They appropriated the cultural practices of the Byzantines, to the extent of forcing women to cover their heads in public among other things.

Since she was a girl from a noble family, Rosalia lived in the harem at the King's court. This meant

that she was at the service of the King who would in turn look after her. The legend goes that one day, the king went out hunting with a group of men from the Royal Court, among whom was a guest—a prince by the name, Baldwin. As they hunted, they came across a wild lion who attacked them. Prince Baldwin bravely faced the lion and prevented it from bringing any harm to the king. In gratitude, the king offered him anything he wanted as a reward. Baldwin requested to have Rosalia as his wife. At the time, Rosalia was about 12 or 13 years old, she had beautiful luscious blonde hair and blue eyes. The fact that she was allowed to show her hair meant that she had not yet had her first period. The beginning of menstruation marked the progress into womanhood, at which time she would have had to cover her hair in public, as was the custom.

Baldwin was among a long list of admirers whom she kept at bay with her modesty. But this time, she would have to give in as the request was made through the intervention of the king. However, Rosalia had other plans. All the while, she had been nurturing a desire to offer herself in the service of the King of Kings. The day after the proposal, she appeared in court with her golden locks cut off. The gesture sent shockwaves throughout the court. To top it off, she declared that she desired to be a nun and to leave aside the ways and relationships of the world.

She sought admission with the Basilian nuns in Palermo. Though she was too young to become

an aspirant, they kept her with them. For a while, a very brief while, things were good but then her parents and Prince Baldwin would often call on her. The latter pestered her to marry him while the former tried to talk sense into her. Rosalia stood her ground; she had decided to follow Jesus and was not going to turn back. Fed up with the regular visits and disturbance to her desire for contemplative life, Rosalia left the convent and hid in a cave on Mount Quisquina. Since she could not be found, her parents and admirer were thrown into a state of panic. They searched the city and the neighbouring towns for her to no avail. Rosalia had succeeded in having her way and was finally able to focus her energies on spiritual things without any concerns or anxieties. For 12 years, she lived in this cave, alone and undisturbed. Later, she moved to another cave on Mount Pellegrino. Legend has it that she was led to this cave by two angels. On the cave wall she wrote, "I, Rosalia, daughter of Sinibald, Lord of Monte delle Rose, and Quisquina, have taken the resolution to live in this cave for the love of my Lord, Jesus Christ." She lived there till the age of 30, when she passed away quietly and obscurely.

Patroness of Pandemics

Rosalia lived and died an unknown. Hers was a hidden life; a life devoted to God. But her story didn't end with her death. In fact, if it wasn't for what happened after her death, Rosalia would probably never have attained the title of saint nor would it ever be known just how powerful an ins-

*O God, our Father,
mercifully look upon
your people who come
to You and grant
through the intercession
of St. Rosalia,
who turned away
from earthly
delights to the joys
of contemplation,
that we may be delivered
from all harm here
on earth and one day be
welcomed into the
Kingdom of Heaven.*

trument of God she was. Her cult gained prominence due to a special occurrence in Palermo during an outbreak of plague.

Over 4 centuries after her death, on May 7, 1624, a trade ship coming from Tunis docked at Palermo. At an earlier stop, the crew were not given permission to disembark since they were suspected of having the plague which was not only extremely contagious but was also fatal. But at Palermo, notwithstanding the danger, the Viceroy allowed the ship to be unloaded. The captain along with the harbourmaster, first visited the Viceroy at his palace and presented him with gifts of camels, lions, jewels and tanned hides, courtesy of the King of Tunis. Incidentally, the Viceroy was the first to die of the plague in the region. Gradually, the plague ravaged the region and within 2 months there were thousands of fatalities. Palermo

was placed under strict quarantine, no one was allowed to enter or leave the city. Interestingly, the word 'quarantine' or in the original Italian, *quaranta*, meaning forty but used in the Biblical sense to refer to a long time, was coined to indicate the situation of control imposed on Palermo.

During this critical period, Rosalia appeared to a man who was hunting to satisfy his hunger. She guided him to a cave on top of the mountain, where he found some bones. She indicated that these were her remains and that if she were given a proper burial in the town of Palermo, the plague would cease. The man gathered up the bones and took them to the Archbishop to deliver the message. The prelate dismissed him as a madman. Finally, after much persistent pleading and many more casualties, the wishes of Rosalia were fulfilled. No sooner were her bones interred than the plague subsided. This led to a frenetic rise in devotion to 'saint' Rosalia. Her remains began to attract many pilgrims and devotees and soon her fame led to chapels, churches, and shrines being erected in various parts of Sicily and beyond in her honour.

Saint Rosalia brought hope to the people during the dark time of the plague. While there was fear and death all around, she reminded people that God has not abandoned them and that faith can overcome every fear. She is a model of renunciation, simplicity and is a witness to the power of surrender. Her life shows us that if we surrender to God, He can make use of us in wonderful and mysterious ways to carry out 'His will on earth as it is in heaven.' □



THE CROSS, THE TREE OF LIFE!

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

In his Angelus address on September 4, 2014, Pope Francis powerfully highlights the significance of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. He encourages us to examine a common question: Why do we exalt the Cross?

We do not exalt any cross, but specifically the Cross of Jesus, which reveals God's immense love for humanity. As the Gospel of John states, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (3:16). This act of love led to Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross, which was necessary to address the gravity of evil.

The Cross signifies both the relentless forces against us and the gentle power of God's mercy. What may seem like defeat is, in reality, Christ's ultimate victory. Despite mockery from others, Jesus remained on the Cross, faithful to the Father's loving plan. In return for His commitment, God "exalted" Jesus (Phil 2:9), granting Him universal kingship.

Thus, the Cross becomes a powerful symbol of love and redemption, reminding us of the extra-

ordinary grace offered to us through Christ.

When we contemplate the Cross where Jesus was crucified, we are reminded of God's profound love for each of us and the source of our salvation. The mercy that flows from the Cross vanquishes evil, conquers death, and revives our hope. This is why the Church honours the Holy Cross and why we make the sign of the Cross—we exalt the glorious Cross of Christ as our true hope.

As we reflect on the Holy Cross, let us also remember those suffering persecution for their faith around the world, especially in places lacking religious freedom. We unite in prayer for these courageous individuals.

At Calvary, the Virgin Mary stood by the Cross (cf. Jn 19:25-27). As Our Lady of Sorrows, she embodies the call to embrace the message of love and salvation that the Cross brings. Let us confidently carry this hope into the world!

- The Symbol of the Cross: The cross, an instrument of death, be-

comes a symbol of salvation and life. Reflect on how the cross represents both suffering and redemption in your own faith journey. How does this duality affect your understanding of suffering in the world?

- Lifted Up: Jesus' reference to being "lifted up" signifies both His crucifixion and His exaltation. Contemplate the significance of being lifted up in your life. How can you embrace moments of suffering or challenge as opportunities for growth and deeper faith?

- God's Love and Salvation: John 3:16 emphasizes God's profound love for humanity. Reflect on the implications of this love for your own life. How does knowing that God desires your salvation influence your relationship with Him and with others?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of the cross and for the love You have shown through Your sacrifice. Help me to embrace the challenges I face, knowing that they can lead to deeper faith and understanding. May I always remember Your love and strive to share that love with others. Amen.

Contemplation

Spend a few moments in silence, visualizing the cross and reflecting on its significance in your life. Consider how the cross represents not only Jesus' suffering but also His victory over sin and death. What emotions arise as you contemplate this powerful symbol of faith?

Action:

Reflect on how you can live out the message of the Exaltation of

the Holy Cross this week. Consider actions such as:

- Finding a way to serve someone in need, reflecting Christ's love and sacrifice.
- Taking time for prayer and meditation on the significance of the cross in your life.
- Sharing your faith story with someone, emphasizing how the cross has transformed your understanding of suffering and redemption.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you reconcile suffering with the salvation offered by the cross? What insights have you gained from your experiences of suffering?

2. What does the cross mean to you, and how has your understanding evolved?

3. Share a moment when you felt lifted by God during a tough time. How did it shape your faith?

4. How can you deepen your acceptance of God's love? How might this affect your interactions with others?

5. How can you embody the message of John 3:16 in your daily life? What specific actions will demonstrate God's love to those around you?

Conclusion

As we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, let us remember the profound love and sacrifice of Jesus, who was lifted up for our salvation. May we embrace the cross in our own lives, recognizing it as a source of hope, redemption, and transformation. Let us be inspired to share this message of love and salvation with the world around us. □

Quiet Spaces

KEY WORDS OF LEO XIV

Riccardo Benotti

I have been chosen without any merit, and with fear and trembling, I come to you as a brother who wants to be a servant of your faith and joy, walking with you on the path of God's love. I desire that we all be united as one family." This is how Leo XIV inaugurated his Petrine ministry on May 18, offering a clear and thoughtful declaration of his intentions: to walk together. In the first month of his pontificate, this choice became evident. The official texts—homilies, speeches, messages, and audiences—exhibit a coherent and profound vocabulary: God, life, Church, love, world, peace, hope, and journey. These words are repeated and contemplated; they are not mere slogans. This reflects the mindset of a Church that aims to engage with the world without isolating itself from it, listening, accompanying, and sharing.

The Pope has consistently emphasized the "service of joy" as an essential ecclesial task, highlighting that it is not a fleeting emotion, but rather a mature outcome of a faith lived in communion.

At the centre of Leo XIV's language is God. References to "*God*," "*Jesus*," and "*Lord*" appear over 350 times, serving as a constant reminder of the source of Christian hope and the reality of the Incarnation. Leo XIV emphasized that "Christ is present" and "always accompanies us on our journey," reiterating that the Gospel is not merely a theory but a person. Jesus is portrayed as a traveling companion rather than a distant judge.

Within this context, the *concept of life*, which appears 102 times, becomes profoundly central. It is described as a gift, a right, and a vocation that must be protected. Leo XIV's writings strongly emphasize the dignity of human life, from conception to natural death, while also addressing the struggles of daily life, marked by precariousness and loneliness.

The Church, mentioned 98 times in the text, is described as a mother, a community, and a home. It is not a closed entity but rather a community that continuously renews itself by listening to the Word

and serving its neighbours. "Crossing borders to meet different people and cultures," the Pope stated in one of his early audiences, urging us to rethink roles, languages, and relationships through the lens of the Gospel.

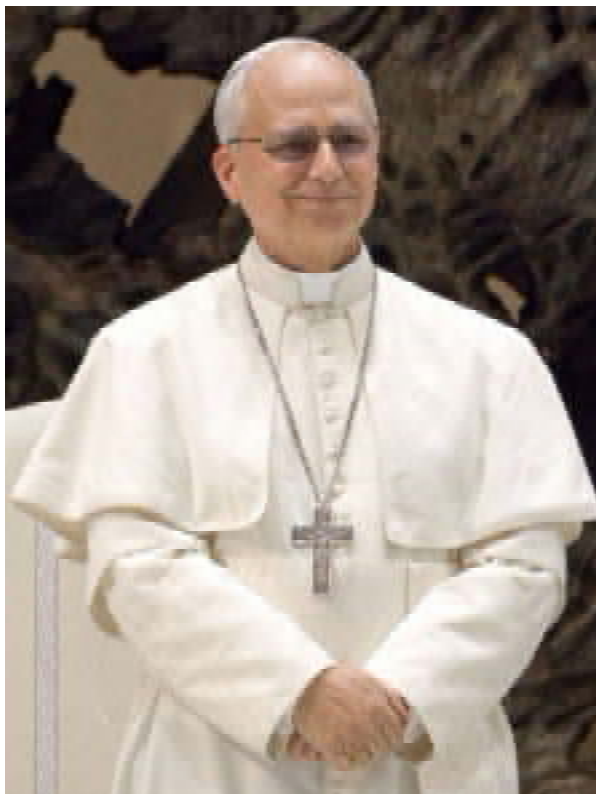
Love is highlighted 91 times as the bond that connects and transforms—love for God, love for our neighbours, and love as a criterion for judgment and a form of witness.

Peace, occurring 68 times, is a recurring theme every Sunday and was the very first message chosen by the Pope to mark the beginning of his pontificate. "Peace be with you all!" he declared, extending that greeting of the Risen One to families, all people, and every nation on Earth. He emphasized that peace is "disarming and disarming"; it comes from God and is created collectively. In the days that followed, he consistently called for peace, particularly for regions like Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and Haiti, framing it as the result of justice, dialogue, and reconciliation.

The Pope has urged Christian communities to become spaces of peace that welcome fragility without judgment and keep open the lines of communication, even amid closures. In this context, **hope**—mentioned 58 times—is more than just a sentiment; it is a responsibility. This Christian hope paves the way for new possibilities as we approach the Jubilee of 2025. It invites us all to seek hope and to be symbols of hope for others.

The concept of a **journey**, referenced 55 times, encapsulates this message. Synodality, accompaniment, and presence describe a Church that is dynamic and ever-moving, one that is unafraid to question itself while walking with God and humanity, without fear or nostalgia.

It is no coincidence that the first month of Pope Leo XIV's pontificate concluded with Pentecost Sunday—not as an ending, but as a new beginning. The Spirit compels the Church to reach out. This is a time for mission, for sharing the word, and for transforming joy into service. □



SHE WALKED TALL AND STRAIGHT

By Pierluigi Menato, T.A. by I.D.

When the accident took place, Andrew was away on business. Gisella did not want them to call him.

"Poor dear," she said, "why cause him such a shock? We'll write to him, or better, I'll write to him, as soon as can. I'll prepare him little by little. Before he comes back, he'll know. But for now, he's far away, and because he can't come, he'll suffer too much."

Her mother shook her head saying quietly to herself: "My poor deluded girl believed in the hollow and erratic love of that young man!" But she didn't say anything to her daughter...so as not to cause her more pain... Both she and her husband and done all they could to try and prevent Gisella from getting engaged to him, but their wise warnings and advice had no effect on her. They gave up, trusting that time would set things straight; what else could they hope for? Probably as time went by, thanks to the intense and fervent love of their daughter, they hoped that Andrew would strengthen his character and make up his mind to be a little more steadfast and committed.

In the clinic where she had been taken immediately after the accident, Gisella lay in bed. Her leg was fractured; x-rays had been taken; the surgeon and his assistant had consulted at length and would soon put her in a cast, but before the operation,

the surgeon asked to speak to Gisella's father.

"Hopefully, this might not happen, but it's my duty to warn you... the bone is broken in several places... I can't assure you that her leg will be as good as it was before."

"Meaning?" asked the poor man alarmed by the doctor's reticent speech.

"It may be that your daughter will have a persistent limp, oh, it's a trifling thing, an insignificant imperfection. But I felt it my duty to warn you. But I assure you, it will be very minor... or, in the best-case scenario, it could be nothing at all, and the leg could be perfectly normal again."

Gisella's father sighed and had to force himself out of the chair he was sitting in. To him, the doctor's last statement seemed like little encouragement; he considered them pathetic lies. His daughter would remain lame! Gisella had left the house with her beautiful, slender and agile gait, and she would have to come limping back.

He would say nothing to her, poor girl!

"Doctor," he recommended, "I think Gisella should not know, she should learn of this sad reality as late as possible!"

"Of course, I understand!" exclaimed the doctor. "On the other hand, I told you that it's

possible that bad predictions might not come true. I just wanted to warn you, just in case..."

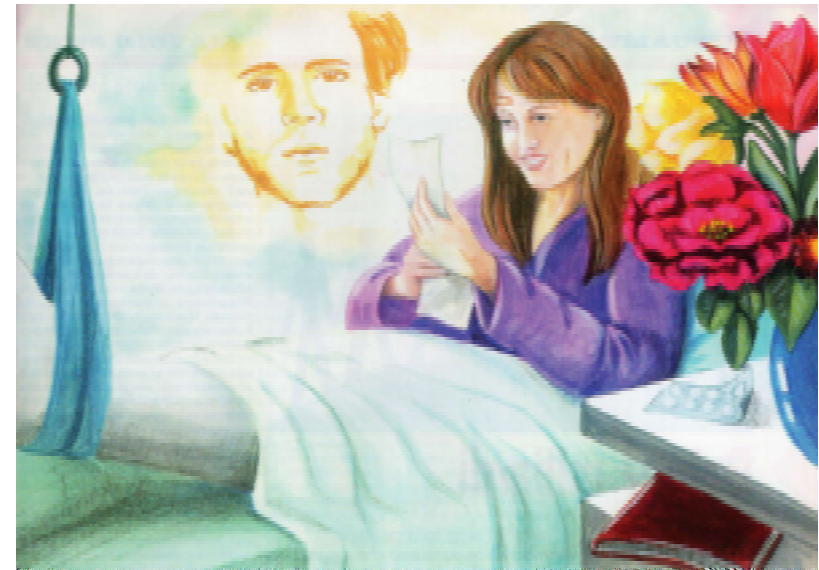
"Yes, yes, I understand, thank you, Doctor!" Gisella's father left and lingered before going to his daughter's bed, so that she would not see the anguished expression on his face.

Gisella had Andrew's last letters brought to her and was reading them again one by one. What beautiful expressions! Her heart was overwhelmed with his words and promises, the ardent phrases of commitment and affirmations of an infinite love.

"All my life..." said the young man's letters. "Always close to you. Through sunshine and storms... Nothing and no one will ever tear me away from you... My love is stronger than any adversity and I'll overcome

every obstacle to reach you... I'll always be close to you!" Gisella repeated the beautiful words and her heart beat in trusting abandonment to her fiancé's promises. "Always close to you... My love is stronger than any adversity..."

Forced to be confined to her bed in the clinic, her leg in plaster and the apparatus that held it firm and taut, the girl's mind went off into sweet dreams. Her mother and father stayed long hours by her side; a few friends and relatives also dropped by, but when she was alone, her thoughts went far away, to her Andrew who must have, by now, received the letter mentioning her misfortune... It was just a veiled phrase that her mother had written, as Gisella had instructed her: "Lina (her pet name) was slightly injured, but nothing serious."



What would Andrew have done?

Oh, he would have rushed at once to her side and at that painful news he would have taken the first train to come to her.

Gisella was moved by that thought, and hour after hour, expecting him to enter her room.

He did not come. He wrote a letter, a letter full of beautiful words. "Gisella, I hope you by now you are well..." he said, among other things.

When her mother, who was by her side read the letter, she saw the girl turn pale, almost as white as the pillow on which she lay her head. That was when the mother decided to write to the young man to tell him to come at once. "Gisella is in hospital and wants to see you. I hope you can come."

That was when Andrew took the train and reached his fiancée's side. He was able to say those beautiful exclamations to her, able to dispel with a stream of words the painful impression left by his last letter. A sense of confidence returned to the girl's heart and in her eyes, there flickered a flame that burned boldly within her.

Andrew left the clinic together with the girl's father.

"Walk with me," he said, "I've got something to tell you."

There was a frown on the young man's face:

"Of course!"

And off they went together. Gisella's father was sad:

"Andrew, dear boy, I must tell you something painful: the surgeon told me that our dear Gisella... maybe..." and he hesitated, clearing his throat, he went on. "It's possible... that she might be maimed for life."

The older man sighed; he had gotten this news off his chest but he dared not look into the face of this handsome young man. Hearing no reply, he turned to face him: he saw Andrew's face grow dark.

The girl's father nodded, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder: "Ok, I understand... poor Andrew. This is not what you expected to hear. Our Gisella... so tall, so beautiful... looking like a flower."

The young man mumbled something:

"So... so..." he murmured. He said nothing more. Then, at the first tram stop, he held out his hand to Gisella's father.

"I've got to go. I'll take this tram. I'll see you tomorrow at the clinic."

The next day, at the clinic, he reached late: he apologized, giving some excuse, but in his fiancée's attentive eye and sensitive heart he appeared very distracted, worried and disheveled. Gisella was saddened and pleaded with him to tell her what was worrying him, what secret thoughts were tormenting him. He gave only vague and elusive answers. After he had gone, she was very pensive for a long time. Now a new sorrow lingered in her heart and accompanied her during the long lonely hours of immobility and solitude.

In the days that followed, the young man appeared cold and distant, until one day he blurted out that he could not remain with her any longer; that the duties of his office called him away. With that he left, leaving a shadowy trace in Gisella's mind, like an aching memory.

Gisella's stay in the hospital and her immobility were long. Then one day the surgeon announced that the cast would be removed. Hours of trepidation weighed heavily on the sick girl. Her parents waited distressed and anxious: to them, it seemed this was not to be the beginning of her recovery but a time of greater suffering.

Gisella was the only one who was happy, or at least she tried to be happy. But within her there weighed the shadow of a secret thought: she was certain that Andrew did not love her anymore. His letters, few and far between were brief and cold!

The cast had come off. The doctor looked closely at the leg and finally said that everything was going very well. Movement would come later and slowly. "One step, or two at a time, like children," he said. "You will feel like a child again."

Gisella headed home. Then, according to the doctor's instructions, she gradually began walk-ing...

Until, one bright sunny day, she went out into the bright sunshine. And she walked tall and straight. Looking at her

injured leg she saw not a single blemish. Her parents were overjoyed.

Even she seemed happy, forgetting her painful last: she didn't speak of Andrew.

One morning walking into town she enjoyed her new-found mobility; it was as if she was reborn. She saw him; he had returned but had not been seen.

"Gisella!" he called to her. He came towards her, beaming.

"You're looking agile and spritely..., like before. I'm so very happy. So, it wasn't true... that you would be lame after all, as your father feared, and as the doctor said."

Gisella understood in a flash. It was as if the sun had suddenly gone behind the clouds. But not for long. She smiled, disdainfully.

"No. I can walk pretty well. But there's someone else who's limping: and that is my poor, sickly love, my very dear Andrew."

"Gisella, I assure you that..." protested the young man.

She would not let him continue.

"What a poor kind of love, that should have been so strong against every obstacle! And you fell at the first hospital bed you saw."

She turned to walk away.

She walked, into the sun on the sidewalk, tall and straight. Andrew stood motionless, watching her. Then he attempted to move and join her. But it was useless. It was then that he understood that he had lost her forever. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 68

by Michele Molineris

308. Jean Courtois (1883)

One day, going to say Mass in a little church whose name we do not know, he had an encounter which reminded him of an event that had occurred in Cannes several years earlier. As he entered the sacristy, a lad dressed in a cassock hastened toward him, jubilant and anxious to meet him. "Who are you?" Don Bosco asked.

"I am your little John"

"Which John?"

"Your John-John Courtois. Have you forgotten that when I was ill my parents had me brought to the railroad station in Cannes?"

"Ah, yes, now I do remember."

John was joined by his father and mother, who, weeping with joy, had come to pay their respects to him.

One year, while he had been in Nice, this lad's parents had several times written to ask him to come to Cannes to see their son, who, long confined to bed, had been unable to take a step. However, Don Bosco had then answered that he could not stop over at Cannes. But they did not give up. Finding out the day and time his train would pull into Cannes, they asked four men to go along with them and carry the boy on a cot to the railway station. The station master gave them a hard time and would not let them in. Finally, however, they brought the cot into the station and placed it a few feet from the track. As the train pulled in, they dashed from coach to coach, inquiring, "Is Don Bosco

here?" Don Bosco, unaware and sitting quietly in a corner, on hearing his name called stepped into the aisle and replied, "Yes, here I am, I am Don Bosco."

"Please, dear father, step off the train a moment."

"My ticket is for Marseille, and I cannot leave the train."

"Just for a second! Have you forgotten my son about whom I wrote to you at Nice? Please come and bless him."

They led him to the boy's side. Don Bosco was nonplussed. After a moment's hesitation he stepped up to the cot and asked the boy, "Who are you? What's your name?"

"I'm John. Bless me, my father," he feebly begged.

Don Bosco made the sign of the cross over him, recited a prayer with him and blessed him. In the meantime, the train was ready to pull out of the station.

"Give me a kindly word," the boy asked.

"Turning to him, Don Bosco replied, "What are doing here? Aren't you ashamed to have people bring you here like this? Get up!"

He said these last words as he hurried to reach his coach and the train was blowing its whistle. Before he sat down, he saw the boy eight or ten steps toward him to thank him, and then he saw him no more. Now, in the sacristy in Lyons, he was looking upon him again. The boy appeared to be well.

On December 10, 1885, Don Bosco received a letter recommending a young man named John Courtois from Cannes to his prayers. On that occasion, recalling the earlier episode, he recounted it to

Father Lemoyne, who has kept it in his memory. (*EBM.*, XVI, 51-52).

309. The story of Don Bosco's clothes (1883)

We cannot forget about Don Bosco's clothing. Not a few times he returned home with his cassock in shreds. On one occasion the whole back of it was slit from top to bottom and filched so fast that he was quickly helped to slip on his topcoat. That coat too has its own story that we'd like to tell.

One day Don Bosco was invited to the home of the marchioness of Pollerat, whose daughter had lain ill for ten years. On entering, Don Bosco bade her to put her trust in Mary Help of Christians and get out of bed, for she had been healed. The young lady did so and felt perfectly well. Later the mother sent him a donation of ten thousand francs and then asked Fr De Barruel to get her anything belonging to Don Bosco, offering to pay whatever he asked. Fr Barruel suggested Don Bosco's topcoat with a price tag of two thousand francs. The marchioness willingly sent him the money and requested that he send her the coat. Fr De Barruel answered her a few days later, saying that he no longer had the two hundred francs and that it was unfair to deprive Don Bosco of his coat without replacing it with another. The young lady sent him two hundred francs more, but she was told the coat had already been snatched away by someone else who had paid handsomely for it. Unruffled by the message, the marchioness immediately sent him an additional two hundred francs with the request that she might at least

have the new coat that had been purchased for him. In short, the matter stretched out so long that at final count, to acquire the coveted garment, the marchioness had to disburse on five occasions the total sum of a thousand francs.

But what had happened to the first topcoat? Countess De Combaud had persistently begged Don Bosco to give it to her.

"But I can't do without it," he told her each time.

"But another one to replace it."

"But how?"

"What does it cost?"

"Eighty francs."

"Here's a hundred." Then and there she handed the money to him.

The following day the lady serenely went to claim her purchase. "But," Don Bosco told her, "I've already spent the hundred francs." He disbursed money here and there as he received it and as the houses in France, the [Sacred Heart] church in Rome, and the Oratory needed it. The countess gave him another hundred francs and several days later came to retrieve the famous coat. "What can I tell you?" Don Bosco said. "Someone asked me for money, and so...." Without complaining the countess came back later with another hundred francs. Don Bosco smiled. It was the same story all over again! All in all, the scenario was replayed ten times, each time to the tune of a hundred francs. When the money rose to a thousand francs Don Bosco asked his secretary, "Do you think it is enough?"

"I think so," he answered.

"Look," he told the good lady when she came back. "I can't do

without the oat, and I have no time to go out and buy another. Please take care of this for me." She got him a new coat and then Don Bosco, taking it, gave her the old one. (EBM., 'XVI, 92).

310. Saved by the medal (1883)

One time, in France in 1883, at the end of a banquet, a little girl, the host's daughter, entered the room to greet the visitors with a kiss and to ask them if they had enjoyed their meal. People were curious to see how Don Bosco would react. When the child reached him, he took a medal of Mary Help of Christians from his pocket and told her, "Kiss the medal and then put it about your neck and love Our Lady." His gesture evoked an overall feeling of deep admiration (EBM., XVI, 94)

311. The Lady De Martimpré (1883)

On April 30, 1883, in Paris, during conferences led by Don Bosco, some dramatic scenes unfolded. Bethford had gone to Jacquier's on an errand when he heard a murmur coming from the library. Fr. DeBarruel, who was temporarily taking Bethford's place, also noticed the noise. Both men suspected a break-in through a usually closed door in the antechamber and decided to look into the library from opposite sides at the same time.

They quickly realized they were not mistaken: a group of ladies had forced their way in through that entrance. Despite their pleas for the women to leave immediately, one lady dropped to her knees and begged them to allow her to stay, pleading with her hands folded. Her insistence was

so compelling that she managed to secure permission. Before leaving, Don De Barruel instructed everyone to adhere to the rules, except (he added in a loud voice for all to hear) for Madame De Martimpré, who was to be admitted immediately.

What happened next? As soon as he left, an older woman shouted, "Madame De Martimpré!" In saying this, she pushed forward a barefoot, ragged young woman holding an emaciated, dying child in her arms. The mother's pale face, framed by an Indian muslin handkerchief, and her anxious, longing gaze moved the onlookers. Overcome with respect for such a vivid embodiment of misery, they made way for her to pass.

Immediately, Bethford opened the door for her, but as soon as she entered, he closed it again, only for the real De Martimpré to arrive. Bethford complained to the older woman about the misunderstanding. She defended herself by saying that she had thought she was performing an act of charity, as the unfortunate woman had come on a barefoot pilgrimage from the Bastille to have her son blessed by the saint. Suddenly, the poor girl emerged, filled with joy: Don Bosco had blessed her sick child, promising that he would live. (M.B., XVI, 134). □



THE NATIVITY OF MARY AND THE SEVEN SORROWS A JOURNEY OF GRACE AND SUFFERING

by A.B. Bosco

Introduction: Reflecting on Mary's Role in the Christian Faith

In September, the Catholic Church celebrates two significant feasts dedicated to the Virgin Mary: the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 8 and the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15. These feasts highlight both the joy of Mary's birth and the sorrow she endured as the mother of Jesus, inviting us to reflect on her vital role in salvation history and the profound connection between joy and suffering in the Christian faith.

Mary stands as a powerful example of faith for all Christians, serving as both intercessor and guide. Her life embodies the full Christian experience, with the Nativity celebrating her joyful emergence and the Seven Sorrows revealing the deep anguish she felt witnessing her Son's suffering. Together, these feasts remind us that joy and sorrow coexist on our spiritual journeys, urging us to

embrace both on our path of faith and discipleship.

The Nativity of Mary: A New Beginning

The Feast of the Nativity of Mary, celebrated on September 8, commemorates the birth of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Although this event is not directly recorded in the Bible, it has been observed in Christian tradition since at least the 6th century. This feast celebrates the joy of Mary's birth, as through her, humanity would receive the Saviour.

Historical Significance

The Feast of the Nativity of Mary, originating in the 7th century under Pope Sergius I, is a significant celebration for Christians, as it marks the site of Mary's birth in Jerusalem. Her birth is not just a historical moment; it symbolizes the beginning of God's divine plan for salvation, culminating in her Son, Jesus Christ. Mary's arrival fulfills Old Testament prophe-

cies and represents God's unwavering love and mercy. Revered as the chosen vessel through which hope entered the world, her Nativity signifies the start of a transformative journey in faith. By celebrating her birth, we honour a pivotal moment in history and embrace the hope and love she embodies.

Mary's Immaculate Conception

To fully appreciate the significance of Mary's birth, we must consider the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which teaches that she was conceived without original sin. This purity uniquely positioned her to fulfill God's plan by bearing Jesus. The Feast of the Nativity of Mary offers us a chance to honor her exceptional role. Mary's sinlessness and total submission to God's will made her the ideal choice for this sacred mission. From the very beginning, she was marked by holiness, ready to respond to God's call with a confident "yes." As we celebrate her Nativity, let us reflect on her purity and her willingness to embrace the divine mission entrusted to her, inspiring us to deepen our own faith.

The Seven Sorrows of Mary: A Mother's Suffering

The Seven Sorrows of Mary, observed on September 15, is a feast that invites Christians to meditate on the profound sorrow that Mary experienced throughout her life, particularly in relation to the suffering and death of her Son, Jesus Christ. This feast honours the immense pain Mary endured as she witnessed Jesus' agony, and each of the Seven Sorrows corresponds to a moment when her heart was pierced with grief. The devotion

offers a powerful invitation for the faithful to unite their own sufferings with those of Mary.

Historical Origins

The devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary, popularized by the Servite Order in the 13th century, provides profound spiritual insight. It helps Christians connect their own suffering with Mary's sorrows, drawing strength from her unwavering faith. Linked to the Seven Dolours, these pivotal moments in Mary's life illustrate her deep grief. Reflecting on the Seven Sorrows allows Christians to appreciate the depth of Mary's suffering and her incredible resilience. Her journey through grief encourages individuals to remain steadfast and faithful during their own trials, offering hope and strength even in the darkest times. Embracing this devotion enriches one's spiritual life and fosters a sense of courage in facing challenges.

Exploring the Seven Sorrows of Mary

The Seven Sorrows of Mary reveal key moments in her life where joy and sorrow are intertwined. Each sorrow demonstrates her deep love for her Son and her active participation in the unfolding plan of salvation.

1. The Prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35) When Simeon prophesied in the Temple, he told Mary that a sword would pierce her soul, indicating the suffering she would face in the future. This prophecy marks the first sorrow, as Mary learned that her Son's mission would bring pain and hardship.

2. The Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15) When King Herod sought to kill the infant Jesus,

Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt. This sorrow reflects the fear and uncertainty Mary experienced as she sought to protect her child, showing her courage and willingness to endure danger to safeguard her Son.

3. The Loss of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-50) During a visit to Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph lost Jesus. After searching for three days, they found Him teaching in the Temple. This sorrow captures the anxiety and distress Mary felt while searching for her Son, reflecting a mother's anguish at being separated from her child.

4. Mary Meets Jesus on the Way to Calvary (Luke 23:27-31) As Jesus carried His cross, He encountered Mary on His way to Calvary. This sorrow represents the immense grief Mary felt as she watched her Son's suffering and realized the fate that awaited Him.

5. The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus (John 19:25-30) Mary stood at the foot of the cross as Jesus was crucified. This sorrow represents the deepest pain Mary experienced, witnessing her Son's suffering and death. Her heart broke as she saw her Son enduring such agony.

6. The Body of Jesus Is Taken Down (Luke 23:50-54) After Jesus' death, His body was removed from the cross and placed in Mary's arms. This sorrow captures the heartbreaking moment when Mary held her lifeless Son, a powerful image of a mother's grief.

7. The Burial of Jesus (Luke 23:50-56) The final sorrow involves the burial of Jesus. After His body was placed in the tomb, Mary faced the painful separation from her Son. This sorrow speaks to the emptiness and deep sorrow

she felt as she awaited the Resurrection.

Combining Joy and Sorrow: The Two Sides of Mary's Life

The Nativity of Mary celebrates the joy of her birth, while the Seven Sorrows highlight the suffering she endured as the mother of Jesus. Together, these feasts demonstrate that joy and sorrow are inseparable aspects of the Christian experience. The balance between joy and sorrow is crucial for the Christian journey. Mary's life exemplifies that moments of grace often coexist with times of suffering, teaching us that true discipleship involves accepting both the joys and challenges of spiritual life.

Mary as an Inspirational Model for All Christians

Mary serves as a powerful model for every Christian, guiding our spiritual paths with her unwavering faith and compassion. The Nativity symbolizes new beginnings, while the Seven Sorrows teach us to find strength in suffering and trust in God's plan.

As the mother of Jesus and all believers, Mary embodies the love and sacrifice essential to discipleship. Reflecting on her joyful birth and painful sorrows enriches our understanding of God's love and the resilience we need to follow Christ.

Conclusion: A Call to Embrace All Aspects of Life

Celebrating the Nativity of Mary and the Seven Sorrows invites us to recognize the connection between grace and suffering. Joy and sorrow are vital parts of our journey toward salvation. Embracing both strengthens our faith and helps us trust in God's love, even in difficult times. With Mary as our guide, we can bravely accept the full spectrum of life's experiences. □



JOAQUIMANTUNES

MY VOCATION STORY

"THE INTERNET IS NOT AN ENEMY"

*Says Fr. Filiberto Gonzalez, sdb
former General Councillor for Social Communication*

I had a meeting with Fr. Filiberto González, who was once the Councillor for social communication of the Salesian Congregation.

How did your Salesian vocation begin?

I was born in Jalisco, Mexico, where families are closely connected and the Catholic faith is deeply ingrained. I received my first formal education at a public school located directly across from my parents' house. Just about a hundred meters away were the church, the oratory, and the Salesian aspirant school. At the age of six, I encountered Don Bosco and the Salesians, engaging in activities such as playing, praying, walking, and serving as an altar boy during Mass.

My parents recognized his significance right away. While I didn't fully understand what it meant to be a Salesian, I could see

that the Salesians treated me with the same warmth and affection that Don Bosco had shown.

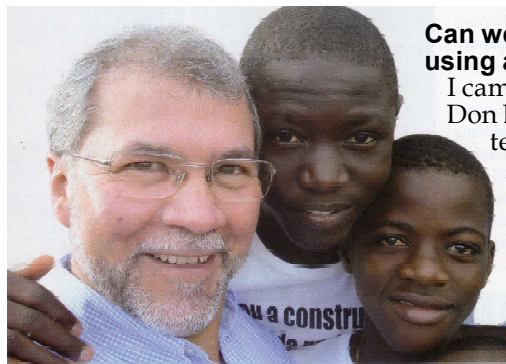
From an early age, I aspired to be like the Salesians I encountered at the oratory, in church, and at the aspirantate. Shortly after turning twelve, I entered the aspirantate. I am grateful to God and Mary, Help of Christians, for guiding me to where I am today.

How present is the Congregation on digital platforms?

The Congregation is a large and complex entity, marked by the history, culture, and economic conditions of each region. Some provinces are quite advanced in their digital efforts, while others are gradually entering this space. Nonetheless, all provinces recognize that digital platforms and technologies are essential tools for the future of young people.

Can we envision Don Bosco using a computer?

I came across a classic photo of Don Bosco holding an iPad instead of a breviary. I was intrigued because I believe that, as a man of God, Don Bosco would have utilized this tool to access the breviary, the Bible, and a vast library of Church documents. His creativity in education and



pastoral work would have allowed him to connect with thousands of young people through new technologies.

What would the adolescent John Bosco be like today if he had access to the Internet, smartphones, tablets, and other technological tools?

From a young age, John Bosco had a clear mission: to bring both young people and adults closer to God. In his time, he utilized ropes, magic tricks, sports, storytelling, homilies, musical instruments, and organized choirs and plays to achieve this. If he were a teenager today, he would undoubtedly embrace new technologies. He would be a teenager deeply in love with God – cheerful, sociable, creative, communicative, a good friend, and an expert Internet user. He would have the ability to navigate social networks and various applications wisely, demonstrating prudence and balance in their use.

Is the future of new generations truly at stake here?

New technologies, the Internet, and the digital world are undeniable realities. They are not merely options for discussion; society, science, commerce, communication, and even education are increasingly dependent on these tools. Moreover, the boundaries between virtual and real worlds are becoming increasingly blurred in the everyday lives of children and young people.

The virtual world and the real world are both integral parts of human reality, shaped by factors such as time, space, relationships, and the quest for meaning. These

experiences are shared with both God and others and must retain their person-centred dimensions. Adolescents and young people often exceed necessary boundaries because they lack guidance from parents or educators to help them differentiate between these two realms and provide the support they need. At times, adults themselves require assistance in this area, and they may also feel confused.

Computers are often seen as confidants and best friends, connecting us with countless individuals. This leads to an important question: does Don Bosco's Preventive Method, rooted in personalized formation, face a significant competitor?

The Preventive System emphasizes meaningful relationships with God and others, characterized by reason, faith, and loving kindness. Don Bosco's "presence" was personal, even in his absence.

Instead of viewing computers and the Internet as rivals, we should see them as valuable platforms for engaging with young people. Those who build strong relationships in physical spaces – like playgrounds, classrooms, and events – often do the same online. It's not just physical presence that matters; it's the genuine way we connect in the lives of young people. By embracing this, we can extend the spirit of Don Bosco into the digital world, enriching the lives of youth across the globe.

It's vital to help young people understand that new technolo-



gies and the Internet are neutral tools, capable of being used for both good and bad. They must also learn to take responsibility for their choices and actions in the digital space. We can achieve this by fostering close relationships built on respect, dialogue, and trust, while also providing guidance when necessary. Additionally, creating meaningful family and school experiences allows them to disconnect from technology and connect with those nearby.

The Salesians are addressing this digital divide through two inspiring initiatives. First, they promote the use of Free Open-Source Software, which aligns with ethical and educational values. Second, they encourage young people to engage in popular media such as theatre, dance, music, and community radio. These initiatives not only spark creativity but also offer significant educational benefits, enhancing the Salesian mission to guide youth toward a responsible digital future.

Today's culture leaves many young people struggling with a profound sense of emptiness. Can the Salesian Youth Movement truly fill this void?

Postmodernity, which combines history, philosophy, and art, has a significant impact on youth. It promotes hybrid thinking, diminishes respect for authority, and fosters mistrust in essential truths, contributing to a sense of emptiness. We must address this challenge – not just individually, but through our educational efforts and initiatives within the Salesian Youth Movement. Together, we can help young people find meaning and purpose in their lives. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

No Problem

Boxer: "Isn't it a long way from the dressing room to the ring?"

Opponent: "Yes, but you won't have to walk back."

The Army Life

Captain: "Are you happy now that you're in the army?"

Recruit: "Yes, Sir."

Captain: ""What were you in civilian life?"

Recruit: "Happier still, sir."

Indelible

Mother (over the phone): "Come quick, Doctor, the baby has swallowed a whole bottle of ink!"

Doctor: "Incredible!"

Mother: "No, Doctor, indelible."

Which of the two

He: "Do you really like conceited men as well as the other kind?"

She: "What other kind?"

Woman's Man

He was attending a meeting of the Henpecked Club. Suddenly the door flew open. His wife sailed in, grabbed him by the collar, shook him till his teeth rattled, and exclaimed:

"What do you mean by attending this club? You're not henpecked!"

Can't Say

The quack was selling a cure-all which he declared would make men live to a great age.

"Look at me," he shouted, "I'm almost 300 years old."

"Is he really as old as that?" said a bystander to the quack's

youthful assistant.

"I really can't say," replied the assistant. "I've only worked for him for 70 years."

Mother Tongue

Tommy, doing his homework: "Dad, why is our language called the mother tongue?"

Dad: "Because, I guess, father's hardly ever have a chance to use it."

Lecture on Economy

Tom: "Did you give your wife that lecture on economy you were talking about?"

Bill: "Yes."

Tom: "Any results?"

Bill: "Yeah, I've had to give up smoking."

Member of the Family

From Dublin comes the story of the man who had long sought for a few well chosen words with which to declare his intentions to the girl of his choice.

Out walking one evening they passed the village cemetery. At that moment the elusive words finally came to him: "Mary," he said, "how would you like to be buried with my people?"

It Pays to be Diplomatic

Judge O'Flaherty: "Haven't you been before me before?"

Prisoner: "No, your honour. I never saw but one face that looked like yours and that was a photograph of an Irish King."

Judge O'Flaherty: "Discharged, call the next case." □

'I'M TIRED'

Mum and Dad were watching television when Mum said, "I'm tired, it's late, I'm going to bed." She went to the kitchen to prepare sandwiches for the next day. First, she put the dishes in the dishwasher and took the meat out of the freezer for dinner.

Then checked that there was enough cereal, filled the sugar bowl, and set the breakfast bowls and spoons on the table. She also prepared the coffee pot, put the wet laundry in the dryer, and placed the dirty laundry in the washing machine. After ironing a shirt and



Pardon me, would you come back some other time, at the moment, it's inconvenient!

sewing on a button, she collected the toys, returned the telephone to its base, and put the phone book away. She watered the plants, closed the dustbin, and went out to hang a dishcloth.

Afterward, she yawned, stretch-ed, and went to her room. She paused for a mo-moment to write a note to the tea-cher, counted the money for a trip, and retrieved a book from under her chair.

Meanwhile, she signed a birthday card for a friend, wrote the address on the envelope, took a note to the butcher, and placed everything next to her bag. Finally, she washed her face with wipes, applied anti-wrinkle cream, and brushed her teeth.

Dad shouted, "I thought you were going to bed!" "I am," she replied. She filled the dog's bowl with water and took the cat out onto the balcony. After closing the door, she turned off the light in the hallway.

Next, she peeked into the children's room, turned off the lights and television, grabbed a T-shirt, and put her socks in the dirty clothes hamper. She then spoke to one of the children who had not finished his homework.

Once in her room, she set his alarm clock, prepared her clothes for the next day, and tidied the shoe rack. She added three items to her list of urgent tasks, just as Dad turned off the TV and announced, "I'm going to bed." And so he did, without a second thought. □

Why do women tend to live longer than men? They seem to be well-suited for long journeys and have too much to accomplish before they can leave this world.

Mamma's prayer at the end of the day

Lord, I'm tired. My body aches and my mind is full. You saw every moment today, and You were with me. Thank You for that, I didn't do it all right, but I tried my best. Please fill me with Your peace. Help me sleep deeply and wake up ready to try again. Be with my family. Watch over them. I give this night to you. AMEN

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK SEPTEMBER 2025

For our relationship with all of creation

Let us pray that, inspired by Saint Francis, we might experience our interdependence with all creatures who are loved by God and worthy of love and respect.

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THE SECRET OF JOY

And day after day, the Church expresses its ebullient joy before this Mystery, extracting its secret from the heart of the Mother of Christ as she sings the "Magnificat": "My soul magnifies the Lord...great things has the Almighty done in me. Holy is his name..." (Lk 1:46, 49). Let us learn from Mary the secret of the joy that flows from faith, to illuminate our lives and the lives of others with it. "The Gospel of the Visitation is full of joy: the joy of being visited by God, the pleasure of opening the door to the Redeemer. This joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and no one can take it away from us if we remain faithful to him.

(Pope St. John Paul II - L'Osservatore Romano, September 1998)

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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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