

# DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*Grant us,  
O merciful God,  
protection  
in our weakness,  
that we,  
who cherish the  
Immaculate Mother  
of God,  
may, with the help  
of her intercession,  
rise up  
from our iniquities.*

*From the Feast  
of Our Lady of Lourdes,  
February 11*

## From The Editor's Desk

### THE JOY OF FRIENDSHIP

As I write this editorial, today is the birthday of a friend of mine way, way, far away in San Francisco. I looked up my WhatsApp history of having connected with him, when I realised that the last time, I messaged him was for his birthday last year! It is embarrassing even admitting this in such a public forum and here is the reply I received: *Good morning and thank you Father. You have always loved, blessed and empowered me by your prayers. Please continue to pray for me so I can be the instrument of God for His glory always. Thank you so much.* That message was what gave a boost to my otherwise humdrum day. Even a year later, he seems to have that same warmth as if we met just the other day. That made me reflect... and here are my reflections: "We are truly blessed to have friends in our lives, and maintaining those connections over the years is even more special! Friends bring so much joy and hope into our hearts, and their impact is simply invaluable. Just think about how a quick message or a friendly call can instantly brighten a gloomy day – like a refreshing drink on a scorching afternoon! Spotting a friend in a crowded place can make your heart soar, transforming any weariness into pure excitement and happiness. Even a short visit when you're feeling under the weather can lift your spirits and provide incredible comfort.

I remind myself to cherish and nurture these invaluable bonds with all the care they deserve, as friendships are treasures that bring us closer and enhance our lives. So, here's to celebrating our connections and fostering the joy that friendships bring into our world!

It's important to acknowledge that each of us holds a unique part of our identity that only we can convey. St. Augustine beautifully reminded us, "*There is a part of every human heart that is locked from every other human heart.*" Understanding this allows us to foster realistic expectations in our friendships.

In this connection, it's essential to remember that Christ will never impose His friendship upon us; instead, He lovingly extends an invitation for us to come closer. He promises to respond when we reach out and open our hearts to Him. True love thrives only when it is freely given, and He honours that truth above all.

There's a wise saying that highlights this beautifully: "*Without a friend, life becomes burdensome; and if Jesus isn't your closest companion, you may find yourself feeling sad and isolated.*" It reminds us to treasure Him as our dearest friend, you'll never regret it. After all, when everything else fades away, He is the one who stands by us, lighting our way through the darkest times and ensuring we never experience despair alone. You would do well to take friendship to another level if you haven't yet done so, and experience the rich dividends of that Friendship that knows no end!

*Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb*

## THE FIRST STAGE: MEMORY

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

*An inner pilgrimage can accompany couples and families on their journey throughout the year. We need to return to our roots to remember the path we have travelled.*

The year like every other year, that has just begun a month ago is a powerful time, filled with grace—a true gift from the Lord. We must not overlook this opportunity, nor approach it superficially. What does it mean for a couple and a family to truly engage in during the rough-and-tumble of ordinary days? Are there challenges that this presents not only for us as believers but also for our families?

We suggest that you live each year like the Holy Year just gone by, as a “course of spiritual exercises” for couples and families. It offers a chance to pause and re-examine our lives in light of the Gospel, inviting us on a meaning-

ful and tangible journey of conversion. An inner pilgrimage can guide couples and families on their journey as a family, more especially as a couple.

Speaking at the time of the new millennium, Saint John Paul II wrote, “Every jubilee is an invitation to a wedding feast. Let us all rush to the feast that is being prepared, bringing with us what unites us. With our gaze fixed solely on Christ, let us grow in the unity that is the fruit of the Spirit” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 4).

Every journey of conversion begins from a distance, starting with a return to the origins of love between a man and a woman.



Returning to one's roots means reflecting on the path taken and recalling the warm memories of first encounters, the vibrant springtime of falling in love, and the enveloping summer warmth of love. It is an expression of gratitude for the years that have passed and for the blessings of children, while also acknowledging the storms that did not frighten the heart, the frost that did not freeze hope, and the drought that did not dry up love.

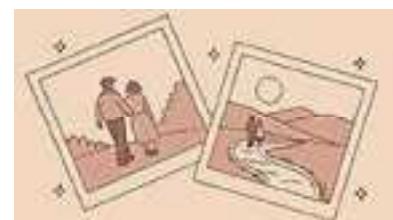
Christian remembrance is not like merely flipping through a photo album; instead, it becomes a celebration of God's interventions in the life of every family. The Risen One is present today and has always been with us, even when He seemed far away. To reflect on our lives is to recognize a history of salvation and to marvel at God's faithfulness to His promises. In doing so, we can rediscover the human and Christian strength of our roots.

When we think of the wedding at Cana, we can't forget that wine has always been a part of married life. At times, it has been obvious, while other times, someone has quietly turned our plain water into delightful wine. Moments like these invite us to celebrate the journey we have taken together with joy. Such occasions can bring us inner peace despite the complexities of our lives. They are a gift for our children as well, allowing us to share our joy with them. Thus, our celebration becomes something shared among ourselves and with our children. It embodies optimism—more precisely, a reliable hope for today and tomorrow.

*Every journey  
of conversion begins  
from afar, from a return  
to the origins of  
the love between  
a man and a woman.*

A husband shared with me recently, “After ten years of marriage, I am rediscovering the joy of falling in love with my wife all over again.” How extraordinary it would be if our shared moments of reflection could lead to this recognition: acknowledging that, over the years, we have enriched each other's lives; even if there have been times of disappointment, love has not faltered.

We have grown together, yet along the way, we may have paused, settled into routines, and allowed life to become merely functional—focused on work, children, and home. While we are happy together, we may have stopped exploring the depths of our relationship. This brings us to the next stage of our journey, which we will discuss shortly. □



## A PRAYER THAT ACCOMPANIES

Carlo Broccardo

In January, we set forth on a deeply meaningful journey of hope, inspired by powerful Bible passages. Our first destination brought us to the gates of the temple in Jerusalem, where a priest warmly welcomed pilgrims with a heartfelt prayer of blessing: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace." These profound words resonate as we welcome each new year, serving as our first reading on January 1st, reminding us of the fresh start that lies ahead.

Our journey then takes us back to Jerusalem, just days after Christmas, to the Gospel of February 2nd, celebrating the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. With Bethlehem only a short distance away, Mary and Joseph make their way to the temple to fulfil the sacred rites required after the birth of a child. They observe circumcision on the eighth day, followed by Mary's purification and the presentation of Jesus. While the evangelist Luke may intertwine these rites in chapter 2 (verses 22-40), we choose to focus not on the specifics, but on the individuals involved and their profound experiences during this momentous occasion.

Let us reflect on their stories and draw inspiration from their faith, as they embraced a divine promise of new beginnings and spiritual fulfillment. Together, we can cultivate our own journey of

hope, guided by their example and the blessings that await us.

To begin with, Mary and Joseph, a young couple bound by love, found themselves facing an extraordinary challenge: giving birth to their firstborn son far from their hometown—all because of a census mandated by the emperor. Initially, they named the child Jesus, just as the angel had instructed. Later, they reaffirmed this name, honouring the Law of the Lord. Their unwavering commitment to the Word of God is evident; they followed its guidance without a hint of hesitation.

Years down the line, amid a bustling crowd, a woman proclaims, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!"



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Simeon with the Infant Christ Child in the Temple*, 1669 Stockholm

Don Bosco's Madonna



Raffaello: The Presentation in the Temple  
(Pinacoteca Vaticana)

Jesus responded with profound insight: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:27-28). This is not meant to diminish Mary's significance; rather, it highlights her—along with Joseph—as a model of true faith, someone who attentively listens to the Word of God and actively embodies it in their lives.

Next, we encounter Simeon, a righteous and devout man who has dedicated his life to awaiting the Messiah, the promised solace of Israel. As he enters the temple, he lifts a heartfelt prayer of gratitude, exclaiming that at last, his eyes have beheld the one he has longed for; finally, he holds in his arms the child destined to illuminate the world! Though this child appears to be merely an infant born, days earlier, Simeon's profound connection to the Holy Spirit allows him to see beyond the surface. He recognizes the truth of who this child is: the Saviour, the Christ, and the embodiment of hope for all humankind.

At the heart of the narrative

stands Anna, an eighty-four-year-old widow who dedicated her life to serving God, "never leaving the temple, fasting and praying day and night." When she encountered Jesus, her heart overflowed with praise, and she eagerly shared the news of this child with all who were longing for the redemption

of Jerusalem. Through this, Luke paints a powerful picture of a child born far from home yet enveloped by the warmth and tenderness of those who awaited and welcomed him with joy.

These were ordinary yet extraordinary individuals: two young parents, steadfast in their hope, alongside two elderly souls who had persevered in faith, supported by a multitude of others who were also waiting. These people were deeply faithful, attuned to the Word of God and committed to living it out. They allowed themselves to be guided by the Spirit, seizing every opportunity to pray before the Lord.

As the passage concludes, it tells us, "The child grew and became strong." This growth didn't happen in isolation; rather, it was nurtured by the unwavering faith of those around him. My hope, too, is firmly rooted in this legacy, drawing strength from the faith of those who journey alongside me as fellow travellers. Together, we embody a shared belief that can transform lives and foster resilience. □

## REASONS TO BELIEVE - 13

by Franco Molinari

### III THE BIBLE ON THE ANATOMICAL TABLE

#### The Jews, the Bible and the Catholic Church

One of the most serious accusations against the Church is its persecution of the Jews. During the Middle Ages, anti-Jewish pogroms occurred, Jewish communities were confined to ghettos, and the charge of deicide was levelled against them. Hitler, in his horrific anti-Semitic actions, drew inspiration from this long-standing and pathological hostility towards the Jewish people.

Despite this, Jews have played a significant role in culture and power throughout history. Could it be their intellectual prowess and wealth that provoke centuries of envious persecution? Or is it possible that the suffering and mistreatment they have endured have sharpened their intellect and enhanced their abilities as a people who are both chosen and despised?

To what extent did Christ's Way of the Cross contribute to the suffering faced by His people?

One undeniable fact is that many Nobel Prize winners have

Jewish roots. Consider that prominent figures such as Einstein, Fermi, Marx, and Freud were all Jewish. In the United States, only about 3 percent of the population is circumcised, yet they account for 18 percent of Nobel Prize winners. This significant disparity highlights the remarkable contributions of this group, which some misguided thinkers mistakenly consider inferior.

Hitler, influenced by these delusional beliefs, executed one of history's most horrific genocides, resulting in the massacre of six million Jews. He believed he was fulfilling the will of God, declaring, "I think I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator. I am fighting for God's work."

In response to such madness, Pius XI stated, "We Christians are all spiritually Semites." When Hitler invaded Mussolini's Rome, the Pope protested by going to Castel Gandolfo, emphasizing that the cross of Christ cannot be reconciled with the swastika.

The complicated and painful history of Judaism, during which Christians have sometimes stained their hands with blood, ultimately leads to the God of Abra-



ham and Christ – a God that, experts in comparative religious history struggle to explain.

How can we justify the strict monotheism of the Jewish faith? While neighbouring cultures populated the heavens with countless gods, the small community of Israel chooses to worship a single, jealous God.

The enigma involves not only monotheism but also the nature of this singular Divinity. In Homer's works, the gods embody all the vices of human beings: Venus is the matchmaker of pleasure, Mercury is the protector of thieves, and Juno is as sharp-tongued as Xanthippe, Socrates' irritable wife. In contrast, the biblical God speaks to His people and commands them: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 19:1).

Another mystery lies in the understanding of the world. Pagans perceive nymphs in springs, gods in forests, and divine forces in nature, reflecting the sacredness of the world. The Bible, however, promotes a form of secularism – a distinction between the Almighty and the world – when it narrates creation, emphasizing that God is not found in things; He transcends them. This concept of secularism is echoed by Christ in the Gospels when He describes the end of the world, assuring us that each person's eternal destiny

is not bound by sacred parameters. The reward will be given to those who break down the barriers of their own selfishness and live a life of humanitarian altruism. The fundamental law is: "I was hungry, and you gave me food."

From this passage in the Gospel, we derive the definition of a Christian. A Christian loves and embodies the idea of universal brotherhood. I use this principle to condemn all forms of racism as fundamentally anti-Christian. All persecutions against Jews bear a diabolical label, even those committed by Christians.

#### Gospel Authenticity and Weak Counter-Arguments

Some rationalist critics argue that the four Gospels are merely the condensed beliefs of a community of fanatics. They claim that the resurrection of Christ, which is the cornerstone of the entire doctrine, is nothing more than an absurd invention of a few hysterical and delusional women.

However, this explanation does not hold up under critical scrutiny. Let us examine the very heart of the Gospel, which centres on the death and resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of the world. Initially, the apostles, who were deeply distressed by the events of Good Friday, reacted with irony when Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary of James announced that the tomb was empty. They did not believe these women and dismissed their claims as delirium. Eventually, though, they had to confront the overwhelming evidence.

A key historical observation is that if the Gospels were purely



fictional, their authors would never have chosen to have the risen Lord appear to a group of women. In the Jewish context of the time, the testimony of a woman held little value. Thus, this episode possesses a strong internal logical consistency.

The events described in the Gospels are significant because they could have been refuted by the enemies of the Christians had they not been true. Even Renan, who does not believe in the divinity of Christ, points out that the priestly family of Annas and Caiaphas, who orchestrated the plot to execute Jesus, maintained their power for a considerable time and could have discredited the accounts.

Another important consideration is Julius Caesar, who wrote his own account, "De Bello Gallico," detailing his victorious campaigns against the Gauls. However, the Gauls were largely annihilated and could not testify against him. In contrast, Christ's adversaries were alive and well. This suggests that the Gospels deserve more trust than Caesar's writings.

The authenticity of the Gospels can be confirmed in various ways. For example, Peter, a key figure in the early Christian community and a pillar of faith, is portrayed in a troubling light due to his threefold denial of Jesus. This betrayal is particularly shameful because it occurred not under extreme duress but rather in a relatively casual setting, around a small fire during the night in the courtyard of the courthouse where the most tragic verdict in history was being passed. If the Gospels had been

fabricated by a fanatical group, the authors would likely not have depicted their leader in such an unfavourable manner. Peter's grave sins serve as a sign of the Gospels' authenticity.

Even his friends fare no better. Jesus criticizes their slowness to believe while they become entangled in quarrels, intrigues, and career ambitions – this adds another layer of sincerity to the narrative.

Above the apostles stands Christ. A mythological account might have depicted him as a triumphant figure, as the messianic expectations of the Israelites pointed to a liberator who would restore political power to the Jewish community. However, Jesus is portrayed in the vulnerability of someone who sweats blood in the anguish of a horrific death. He declares himself inferior to the Father and states that he does not know when the end of the world will come, which presents a challenge for theologians. This further reinforces the idea that the Gospels are not mere fabrications but rather preserve a body of memories that have been defended against any attempts at revising the narrative.

Some stubborn sceptics argue: if Christ truly rose from the dead, why didn't he appear to Pilate or the high priests? This question ultimately backfires on the sceptics and confirms the reliability of the Gospels. If the evangelists were merely spinning tales, they could have easily invented triumphant appearances of the Risen One to Pilate and Herod. Yet, the evangelists remain faithful to the facts and avoid indulging in myths. □

MONICA CORNALI

## HOW PRECIOUS IS THE PRESENT MOMENT!

**T**he few individuals who pass away when their lives are complete are contrasted with a larger group whose lives are perceived as failures – unfinished and unfulfilled. This comparison can easily lead to feelings of tragedy or even a sense of meaninglessness. However, what we have are merely human, subjective reflections that assume a norm of a fulfilled life, one lived optimally and for an average length of time. The true objective meaning and destiny of a life is something that humanity cannot ascertain. The Swiss philosopher and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) noted that "the answer to human life is not to be found within the confines of this life."

I am reminded of a passage from Dostoevsky's profound work, 'The Idiot', where the protagonist contemplates the meaning of human existence: *"By sowing your seed and doing your good deeds, in whatever form they may take, you give a part of your individuality and, in return, welcome a part of the individuality of others into yourself. You participate reciprocally in the lives of others. Moreover, all the ideas and seeds you have sown – those you may have even forgotten – will sprout and grow. Those who have received something from you will pass it on to others. Therefore, how can you truly know what role you will have played in the fulfillment of human destiny?"*

The main emotions expressed by people who are approaching the end of their lives often in-

volve feelings of remorse, regret, and resentment. In the context of palliative care, the term "unresolved" refers to the issues that hinder individuals from departing this world in a peaceful manner.

Remorse, which literally means "to bite again," describes the inner turmoil caused by our conscience "gnawing" at our spirit. This feeling can be likened to a painful bite that creates excruciating pain, tearing apart our body and soul as we confront the mistakes we have made or the harm we have caused.

Regret, on the other hand, refers to the painful memories of missed opportunities and the suffering that arises from dwelling on what we have not accomplished or what we have lost.

Resentment arises from feelings of anger or bitterness toward people or situations that have caused us suffering or that we perceive as unfair. What can these experiences teach us? They remind us that, in a world that often refuses to accept fallibility, we must recognize that not everything can be predicted or controlled, and we need to embrace our human imperfections.

From a psychological stand-



point, overcoming resentment involves transforming feelings of guilt and paralysis into a sense of responsibility. While we may not be perfect, we have done our best with the awareness and resources available to us at each moment in our lives. By acknowledging that we acted with the best intentions, considering the many limitations imposed by reality, we can better frame our regrets and remorse. This perspective prevents these feelings from becoming burdens that hinder our ability to create change.

Additionally, this understanding encourages us to clarify and improve conflicted relationships by focusing on what unites us with others rather than what divides us.

The experiences of the dying teach us to accept our human limitations and fragility. At the same time, these experiences urge us to let what we have inside and around us flourish. We should not allow ourselves to be wei-

*"If there were no fruits,  
the beauty of the flower  
would be useful;  
if there were no flowers,  
the shade of the leaves  
would be useful; if there  
were no leaves,  
the intention of the seed  
would be useful."*

*Adriana Zarri 1919–2010*



ghed down by habit, apathy, and selfishness. Instead, we should love like poets and rediscover the treasures in the world, much like children see in the maps of their childhood.

Cory Taylor, a writer who addressed her experience as a terminally ill patient in a book published in 2005, reflects on her life and concludes: "When you are dying, you may feel a kind of tenderness even for your most unhappy memories, as if joy were not confined only to the most beautiful moments, but were woven into your days like a golden thread."

There are three main "remedies" for the experiences we have described: forgiveness, gratitude, and compassion. These attitudes should be cultivated throughout our lives until they become a way of life—a practice of hospitality towards the eternal values within us.

Sharing experiences, engaging in dialogue with others who have faced similar challenges, as well as writing, rituals, art, and other personal methods of expression, can help us address "unfinished business." These practices also facilitate the mourning process for those left behind and allow for a more serene and peaceful remembrance of those who are no longer with us.



## ST. PETER DAMIAN

**February 21**

*Ian Pinto, sdb*

**S**t. Peter Damian (c. 1007–1072) emerges in Church history not merely as a fierce reformer but as a profound spiritual guide who united ascetic zeal with deep charity. His life, shaped by early hardship and relentless commitment to Christ, offers timely wisdom for anyone seeking transformation—within the Church and within the heart. With 'a pen that was as sharp as a sword,' he called the Church of his time to repentance, discipline, and mercy, championing integrity in an age of confusion and moral instability.

### Tough Childhood

Raised as the youngest child in a poor but noble family in Ravenna, Peter's earliest memories were marked by loss. Orphaned while still a child, he was left in the care of an elder brother who subjected him to neglect and cruelty, forcing him to labour as a swineherd and often leaving him hungry. These years of deprivation did not embitter him but planted in him a hunger for God and for human kindness. It was another brother, a priest by the name, Damian, who rescued young Peter and nurtured his



intellectual and spiritual growth. Out of gratitude, Peter adopted his brother's name, thereafter becoming known as Peter Damian.

Education soon revealed the extraordinary gifts of his mind. He excelled in grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy—preparing him for university-level teaching by his early twenties. Yet, beneath outward honours, Peter felt an interior tug: he longed for God alone and recognized that the true path to wisdom lay not only in books, but in a life radically conformed to Christ.

There is an incident recorded of his childhood that shows his early spiritual leaning. As a young boy, he once found a coin on the road. Many fanciful ideas pranced around his little childish imagination but ultimately, he decided to spend the money offering a mass for the repose of his father's soul. This act itself is amazing, for not many Christians today believe in the power of offering mass for a specific intention including for the deceased. Already, as a young boy, perhaps through his priest-brother's influence, young Peter recognized the power of the Eucharist and willingly sacrificed whatever pleasures that coin could afford to ensure that his father enjoyed eternal bliss.

### Monastic Formation

Peter left a prestigious academic post to enter the Benedictine monastery at Fonte Avellana, inspired by the ascetic reforms of St. Romuald. Here, he threw himself into severe penances: fasting, long vigils, wearing hair-shirts, and even flagellation. His zeal was such that his health rapidly declined, and he was eventually counseled by his abbot to temper discipline with care for the body. For Peter, the monastery was a preparatory stage, a training ground, for the more perfect life of solitude as a hermit.

After a few years, he was elected Prior, that is, head of the monastery, and transformed the monastery into a wellspring of holiness. He believed that the monastery ought to be a place where contemplate God. He writes about the importance of contemplation: "It removes almost all the occasions of sin and directs us to

an increase of those virtues which please God; so that it destroys the power of sinning and imposes by force of necessity perseverance in good works." In one of his letters to another abbot, he compares contemplation to a flying fish, saying that like the fish takes flight for a while but later falls into the sea, so also the soul by wings of virtue takes flight into the heavenly air of contemplation but soon must fall back into the sea of everyday life.

He founded five more hermitages, insisting that silence, charity, and humility were the pillars of authentic monastic life. This focus on the heart, not merely external observances, became the hallmark of his spiritual teaching, and many future saints – such as St. Dominic Loricato and St. John of Lodi – were direct products of his spiritual guidance.

### Watchman for the Church

The 11<sup>th</sup> century Church reeled from the chaos of clerical corruption, sexual immorality, and the buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices (simony). For Peter, this crisis threatened the very soul of Christianity. He became famous for his books *Liber Gomorrhianus* and *Liber Gratissimus*, scathing critiques of clerical sexual activity and simony. Both these works are said to be so harsh in their detailing of sin and denouncing of evil that they could only have been written by an enemy of the Church or a man of great faith and holiness. These books created great controversy to the extent that the Church unsuccessfully tried to defend herself. Such was the impact that reform was the only way out of this embarrassment.

He was called the 'Monitor of the Popes' on account of his close collaboration with the Pope's of his time. They sought his advice and valued his counsel; he was assigned as Papal Legate to a number of mission areas.

As a trusted advisor to popes and bishops, Peter did not merely denounce evil from afar. He wrote thousands of letters and personally confronted corrupt officials – even challenging the Holy Roman Emperor and recalcitrant prelates to their faces. His reforms were not abstract theories but personal interventions, always pastoral and oriented to healing. He insisted that penance and discipline were both medicinal and necessary, not only for individual souls but for the integrity of the whole Church.

Peter Damian's literary output was as prolific as it was passionate. His letters, sermons, and treatises vitally shaped the moral thinking of his era. He championed the dignity of the priesthood, the necessity of chastity, and the profound importance of interior conversion. He saw the Church as a living body, wounded by sin but always capable of renewal through penance and the grace of Christ.

His teachings were soaked with Scripture and monastic wisdom. He wrote, "May hope raise your joy, may charity kindle your fervour. Thus your mind, well satisfied, will be able to forget exterior sufferings and will progress in the possession of the goods it contemplates within itself." For Peter, the ascetic struggle was always about freeing the soul for charity; the harshest penances had value only insofar as they fostered purity of heart. □

### Reluctant Leader

Peter Damian longed for obscurity, yet he became a driving force in Church affairs. Popes repeatedly called him from monastic seclusion to take up roles as papal legate, mediator, and, eventually, cardinal-bishop of Ostia. Though this brought him into the political and ecclesiastical storms of his age, he obeyed with humility, seeing service not as power but as sacrifice.

Amid profound reforms, he championed mercy for the repentant and urged leaders to balance justice with compassion. His commitment to harmonizing discipline and forgiveness remains vital during times when spiritual renewal risks hardening hearts.

Peter Damian's influence reached far beyond his lifetime, with his contemporaries recognizing him as the holiest man of the eleventh century. Humble in his self-description as "Peter the Sinner" or "Peter the Sinner-Monk," he was canonized in 1828 and later declared a Doctor of the Church, inspiring countless reformers and contemplatives. He is remembered as a fierce opponent of vice, yet also a compassionate spiritual father who distinguished between sin and the sinner.

St. Peter Damian's life serves as a powerful response to the challenges of scandal, apathy, and despair. He is a patron for reformers and those seeking purity and deeper charity. The world needs such saints – individuals willing to speak the truth, live selflessly, and love the Church in its flaws. His legacy teaches us that true reform arises from inner transformation, as any external change must stem from a heart filled with love and humility. □



## THE WISDOM OF FREE WILL

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

Sirach 15:15-20 - 1; Corinthians 2:6-10; Matthew 5:17-37

### Reading:

Take a moment to read the gospel passage slowly and attentively. In this gospel, Jesus emphasizes that He fulfills the Law and urges His followers to embrace a deeper righteousness that goes beyond mere external observance. This leads us to examine ourselves and cultivate good intentions in our hearts.

### Meditation:

As you reflect on these readings, consider how they are interconnected. The reading from Sirach reminds us of our free will and the choices we make, while Paul speaks to the people of Corinth about the divine wisdom that guides those choices. Jesus then invites us to a deeper understanding of the Law, calling us to align our actions with the intentions of our hearts.

Think about the choices you face in your own life. Are they informed by the wisdom of God? Do you strive to fulfill the spirit of the commandments in your



daily interactions? Reflect on the areas where you may struggle to align your actions with the teachings of Christ, and ask the Lord to help you become a better person. Consider the implications of Jesus' teachings on anger, lust, and honesty. How do these teachings challenge you to examine your own heart and intentions?

### Questions for Reflection:

1. What choices are you currently facing that require careful discernment? How can you seek God's wisdom in making these decisions?

ions?

2. In what ways do you find yourself following the letter of the Law instead of its spirit?
3. How can you cultivate a deeper relationship with God to better understand His will for your life?
4. Are there areas in your life where you need to align your actions with your faith?
5. How can you embody the teachings of Jesus in your relationships with others?

### Prayer:

Take a moment to engage in a prayerful conversation with God. You may find the following prayer helpful:

*"Lord, I thank You for the gift of free will and the wisdom You provide. Help me make choices that reflect Your love and righteousness. Open my heart to understand the depth of Your commandments and guide me to live authentically according to Your will. Please grant me the grace to see beyond the surface and to act with integrity toward everyone I know. Amen."*

### Contemplation:

Take a moment to sit in silence, allowing God's presence to surround you. Focus on your breath and the stillness around you. Invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate your heart and mind, revealing areas in your life where you may need healing or guidance. Reflect on God's love and mercy as you contemplate the teachings of Jesus. Let His words touch your heart, transforming your understanding and inspiring you to live out your faith in tangible ways.

### Action:

As you near the end of your Lectio Divina, take a moment to

consider how you can apply your reflections in real life. Identify one specific action you can take this week that aligns with the teachings from the readings. This could include:

1. Making a conscious effort to choose kindness and patience in a challenging relationship.
2. Engaging in a conversation about faith with someone who is not Christian.
3. Reflecting on your intentions before making decisions to ensure they align with God's will.
4. Seeking reconciliation with someone you have conflicts with, embodying the spirit of Jesus' teachings on anger and relationships.

### Conclusion:

As you finish your moment of Lectio Divina, take a moment to express gratitude for the insights you've gained. Ask God to help you carry the lessons from this reflection into your daily life. May the Holy Spirit empower you to make choices that reflect His love and righteousness, fulfilling the spirit of the commandments in all your actions. Embrace your journey of faith with the assurance that God walks beside you, guiding your steps and illuminating your path. □



## UNITY AROUND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

*Pope Leo IV on the tenth anniversary of the Encyclical *Laudato Si* at Centro Mariapoli,  
Castele Gandolfo, Wednesday, 1 October 2025*

My dear sisters and brothers, peace be with you.

Before sharing the reflections I have prepared, I want to express my gratitude to the two speakers who spoke before me. I would also like to say that the true "action heroes" among us today are all of you, whose dedication and collaboration are making a real difference.

As we mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Encyclical "Laudato Si'" on caring for our common home, I warmly greet the organizers, speakers, participants, and everyone who has made this "Raising Hope" Conference possible. I am especially grateful to the Laudato Si' Movement for their unwavering support in spreading and living Pope Francis' message from the very beginning.

This Encyclical has deeply inspired the Church and countless people of goodwill. It has sparked dialogue, encouraged study groups, influenced educational programs, and led to partnerships and projects across the globe. Many dioceses and religious communities have taken concrete steps to care for our planet, placing the needs of the poor and vulnerable at the center. Its influence has reached international gatherings, ecumenical and interfaith conversations, economic and business sectors, as well as theological and ethical studies. Even the phrase "care for our common home" has become part of academic, scientific, and political language.

As with any important anniversary, we remember the past with gratitude but also ask what still lies ahead. Over time, we have moved from understanding the Encyclical to putting it into practice. What must we do now to ensure that caring for our common home—and hearing the cries of the earth and the poor—does not become a passing trend, or worse, a cause of division? In harmony with *Laudato Si'*, the Apostolic Exhortation "*Laudate Deum*," released two years ago, noted that some still mock the signs of climate change (no. 6), ridicule those who discuss global warming (no. 7), or even blame the poor for the very suffering they endure (no. 9).

At this moment, it is more essential than ever not only to share the message, but to return to the heart. In the Bible, the heart is not merely the seat of emotions—it is the place of freedom. It involves reason but also goes beyond it, shaping the whole person and his or her relationships. The heart is where reality touches us most deeply, where our truest desires emerge, where we understand who we are, and where choices are made. Only by returning to the heart can

genuine ecological conversion occur. We must move from gathering information to cultivating compassion; from talking about the environment to embracing a way of life—personally and as communities—that reflects ecological conversion. For believers, this conversion is inseparable from our turning toward the living God. We cannot love the God we do not see while disregarding His creation. Nor can we be true disciples of Christ without sharing His love for creation and His tenderness toward what is fragile and wounded.

My friends, may each of us grow in these four relationships—with God, with one another, with the natural world, and with ourselves—through a continual openness to conversion. Integral ecology flourishes through these relationships. By embracing them, we nurture hope and live the interdisciplinary vision of "*Laudato Si'*," which calls us to unity and collaboration.

We are one family with one Father, who makes the sun rise and the rain fall on everyone (cf. Mt 5:45). We share one planet and must care for it together. I therefore renew my heartfelt appeal for unity in advancing integral ecology and building peace. It is encouraging to see the diverse organizations present at this conference and the many groups that have joined the Laudato Si' Movement and the Platform for Action.

I hope that the upcoming United Nations summits—the 2025 COP 30 Climate Conference, the 53rd Session of the Committee on World Food Security, and the 2026 Water Conference—will truly listen to the cries of the earth, of the poor, of families, of indigenous peoples, of migrants forced to leave their homes, and of believers everywhere. I also encourage everyone—especially young people, parents, and those who work in public institutions—to contribute to addressing today's cultural, spiritual, and educational challenges (*Laudato Si'*, 202), always persevering for the common good. There is no room for indifference or giving up.

Let me end with a question that touches each of us personally: God will one day ask whether we have cared for the world He entrusted to us (cf. Gen 2:15), for the good of all and for future generations, and whether we have taken care of one another (cf. Gen 4:9; Jn 13:34). What will our answer be?

My dear friends, thank you for your dedication. I gladly extend my blessing to all of you. Thank you. □

# ROY

By Nancy D'Costa

They brought their firstborn, a tiny baby just a year old, to her. He was flesh of her flesh and bone of her bones. She had named him Roy because he looked so regal, with dark skin, vivacious eyes, and sharp, perfect features. She felt he deserved to be born into a royal family, not into the life of her daughter and son-in-law, who already considered him a burden due to their poverty. They wanted his grandmother to take responsibility for raising him. Her heart went out to him. Did they truly want to give him up so unceremoniously, especially since he was their firstborn? She hugged him tightly, holding him close to her heart.

They had provided her with a long list of reasons for their decision, citing their poverty and in-



ability to care for the baby. They concluded that they could not even contribute financially to his upbringing. She had raised her daughter with great difficulty after her husband passed away. Life had not been easy even while he was alive; he often spent his earnings on liquor, and the hidden savings from her wages were frequently siphoned off, leaving her back at square one. Only her strong faith in God had kept her going.

Her difficult forceps-delivery had left her daughter with a lifelong mild cognitive impairment. Despite the challenges, she had managed to marry her off to another low-income family. She felt a sense of relief that the burden of providing for her daughter's marriage was finally lifted. Little did she realize the nature of the family she had sent her to: a family lacking principles and purpose in life. Practically every male member of that family was addicted to alcohol, except her son-in-law, who was too mild to raise his voice to anyone.

Thus, began her rewarding yet challenging task of raising her grandson, Roy. His magnetic, innocent, and lively eyes motivated her and brought vibrant colours to her otherwise dull life. She had worked as a top servant in several households, earning just enough to meet her daily needs. However, now she aspired to earn more to provide the very best for her grandson. Eventually, she secured a permanent job at a hotel. She took Roy to her workplace, and the kindhearted hotel

owner offered her a place for him to stay while she worked. When Roy turned five, she managed to enrol him in a good school with the money she had saved.

By that time, Roy's brother, Rick, had been born—a beautiful little baby who was both tiny and exceptionally smart, with an infectious laugh. Although their parents chose to care for Rick themselves, they thankfully never mentioned taking Roy away from her. She felt grateful to have Roy, but sadly, she discovered that her daughter had become addicted to alcohol. As a mother, she tried various methods to help her break free from addiction, but nothing worked. Now, left as a lifelong addict, she worried about little Rick and feared he might follow the same path. All she could do was pray for him.

Roy excelled in his studies but was also very playful and mischievous. She was known for her quick temper, and Roy often received a lecture and a few whacks when he misbehaved. After a long day of hard work, dealing with both her exhaustion and the complaints about Roy's antics was wearing down her patience. It seemed there wasn't a day when Roy didn't face her temper. If he tried to avoid punishment, she would throw things at him, and Roy became very good at dodging them. Nonetheless, life was great for them, as they both loved each other deeply.

One day, her daughter came home and witnessed her temper. Roy was in eighth grade, and his mischief had led her to throw a brush at him. He dodged it as usual, and it hit her daughter, Bella. This sparked a heated argu-



ment between the mother and daughter, and Bella stormed off in frustration. She dismissed all of her mother's efforts to raise her grandson, which hurt her mother deeply. It pained her to think that she had never taken the time to appreciate what a fine young man Roy had become.

The following week, Roy did not return from school. The grandmother rushed to the school only to find out that his parents had withdrawn him and taken him away. She hurried to her daughter's house, but was met with harsh words and sent away. Her heart ached for Roy's safety; prayer was her only recourse. Alone, she surrendered Roy to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and prayed to St. Don Bosco to watch over him, just as he had cared for countless others.

Slowly, her worst fears began to materialize. A purposeless life, lack of guidance, and unchecked



freedom had led Rick, her daughter's husband, to become an alcoholic. One by one, addiction claimed victims in her daughter's family. First, it was the father-in-law, followed by his youngest son. Then it was her daughter's turn, which shattered her heart. Despite her efforts to help her daughter overcome addiction, it was all in vain. Next, the eldest son in the family succumbed to addiction. By then, she discovered that her own Roy had also started drinking. It seemed as though God had never heard her prayers. "Why, God!" she cried. "Please free my family from the evil bondage of addiction."

One day in August, she received the news that Rick was very ill. She rushed to see him, but he wasn't eating and was just skin and bones. His only desire was for alcohol, and she realized there was no hope for recovery. He died in her arms at only 25 years old, his head resting on her lap. Her brilliant Rick was gone, taken to a place of no return. Roy, too, looked stunned, having become

quite a heavy drinker as well.

However, she was not ready to give up. She decided to fight against the evil of addiction and reclaim him. At just 28 years old, he was the only family member she had left. She convinced her son-in-law and Roy to come stay with her. She had discovered that de-addiction centres were ineffective in creating a total turnaround. Desperate for guidance, she prayed to Jesus for help in showing Roy how to find purpose in life. She dreamed big, wanting him to dedicate his life to Jesus, living in a way that glorified God.

Her prayers and relentless search led her to Brother Praveen, a spiritual counsellor from the Disciples of the Divine Saviour congregation. It took time, but Roy made a complete turnaround. Under Brother Praveen's guidance, he dedicated his life to Jesus. Given the life he had led and the comments she had received from neighbours, she knew this change was nothing short of a miracle.

Now, as she sat in the retreat hall, listening to Roy speak about the love of God and the importance of surrendering, she could see that everyone in the hall was visibly moved by his words. His message touched her seventy-one-year-old heart more deeply than ever before. Tears ran down her cheeks. Yes, her Savior lived, and in this Lenten season, she experienced it firsthand. For the first time, she felt she truly understood the mystery of Salvation. Her Roy was safe in the hands of his Saviour, and she resolved to dedicate the rest of her life to guiding the lost to Him. At last, she had won the battle! □

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 73

by Michele Molineris

### 327. Don Bosco, a doctor (1884)

One day in 1884, as cholera approached Turin, Don Bosco said to his friends, "Recently, a wealthy gentleman who prides himself on being open-minded came to my room. He had heard me speak about the efficacy of the Medal of Mary Help of Christians and asked, 'Is it true that this promotes superstitions?'

I inquired, 'What superstitions are you referring to?'

He responded, 'The belief that those who wear the Medal of Mary Help of Christians will be saved from cholera.'

I replied, 'What does it matter to you what I say?'

He said, 'It matters because my family, especially my eldest son, desperately wants the medal.'

I asked, 'Do you believe in its efficacy?'

He answered, 'Not at all.'

I told him, 'You are free not to believe it. No one is forcing you to. If you don't believe, feel free to go without a medal; no one is going to give it to you against your will. However, if you chose to believe, obtaining one would be easy.'

He frowned, saying, 'But how can I believe that a piece of metal is so powerful?'

I encouraged him, 'Understand that a practice endorsed by the Church is never superstitious.'

After our conversation, talk of the cholera outbreak in France continued for a while. The gentleman appeared deep in thought. As he was leaving, he

hesitated and said, 'Don Bosco, may I ask you for a favour?'

'If you must, even ten.'

'Do you still have any of those medals?'

'But you don't actually believe it!'

'When it comes to saving your own skin... well, you know... I'm just saying... please give me the medal. I believe in this, and I would like one for my wife and each of my children. (M.B., XVII, 178).

### 328. The nun from... Monza (1884)

On March 22, 1884, Don Bosco was in Marseille and had lunch with Broquier, a lawyer who lived in a convent with his devout wife.

After lunch, Don Bosco had several appointments that he could not avoid, but the nuns of the Visitation were particularly eager to see him. One nun, in particular, had caused her superiors, the chaplain, and even the bishop to despair due to her behaviour.

Don Bosco was unaware of her situation or peculiarities. As soon as he entered, the nuns knelt before him, seeking his blessing and commanding themselves to his prayers. He took the troubled nun by the hand and said, "I will pray especially for you so that the Lord may grant you this and this, free you from this and this, and that you may be able to do this and this."

The sisters, initially surprised, became moved and began to cry, claiming, "This is a miracle!" Don Bosco suggested ways for the nun to correct her faults, and she assured her superiors that she would not be the same as before.

On the feast of the Annunciation, the chaplain approached Don Bosco to share that the nun had spent hours in prayer at the church. She had sought forgiveness from her superiors and, for three days, had set a positive example for the community in every way. (M.B., XVII, 54).

### **329. Curiosity... punished (1885)**

In 1885, a young cleric, who was assigned to assist Don Bosco with personal tasks, particularly correspondence, admitted to his faults. He confessed that, at times, driven by curiosity and having misused the trust placed in him, he had read certain letters he believed would interest him. He requested forgiveness, assuring Don Bosco that he would never repeat this behaviour.

Don Bosco smiled warmly at the cleric, collected all the letters from the desk, and handed them back to him. (M.B., XVII, 649).

### **330. Change without compensation (1885)**

In 1885, Don Bosco made his usual trip to the coast. While in Marseille, he promised to celebrate Mass in a local church and then give a talk to his collaborators. However, on the appointed day, at the time of Mass, he had not yet left his room. His secretary, concerned about the delay, entered to inform him that the scheduled time had passed and that the church was full.

"I have a dreadful headache," Don Bosco replied, "and I don't feel up to standing. Would you like to take my place? Who knows?"

"If only that were enough. I'd

be happy to help! Just get up, and I'll take care of it," the secretary joked before leaving.

Once back in his own room, the poor secretary had to lean against the wall to keep from collapsing; it felt as if his head were being squeezed in a vice. His headache was so intense that it took tremendous effort to reach his bed, where he lay down, becoming completely unaware of his surroundings.

Don Bosco, freed from pain, went to the place where he was expected and spent the entire morning there with his co-workers. Upon returning home, he asked for his secretary and learned that the secretary was in a pitiful state, suffering from a severe headache. Remembering the pact he had made, Don Bosco went to see him. After giving him a blessing, he said, "Now get up." The pain disappeared immediately, and the secretary was able to resume his duties. (D'Espiney, *Don Bosco*, 261).

### **331. At Don Bosco, money rains down from the sky (1885)**

On April 2, 1885, in Rome, a miraculous event occurred in favour of Don Bosco. Don Dalmazzo had written to Turin requesting financial assistance because he needed to pay 12,000 lire on Holy Saturday. The Banca Tiberina had already lent him eighty thousand lire without requiring collateral and refused to give him any more funds.

On Holy Thursday at noon, he was called to the reception room by a well-known lady, Countess Stacpoole, to whom he had previously appealed without success. He asked her if he could

finish his lunch first, but she insisted he come immediately. Upon his arrival, she informed him that she had an urgent sum of money to give him because she wished to do so on the day of the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

Expecting to receive at most a single hundred-pound note, Don Dalmazzo was astonished when he received a package containing fifty thousand-pound notes from the National Bank. Forgetting all about his lunch, he rushed to the Banca Tiberina and insisted on having the money released within the week. However, the treasurer apologized, explaining that a telegram had already been sent to the director, Mr. Garanti, in Turin, and the response had been negative; therefore, it was impossible to do anything differently.

"What if I made a deposit and later wanted to withdraw part of it?" "Even all of it," replied the clerk.

"I don't need all of it."

The treasurer, Mr. Angelois, was so surprised at that moment that he stated in the proceedings he couldn't find the words to express his feelings. I remember him exclaiming, "Money really does rain down from the sky for Don Bosco!" (M.B., XVII, 429).

### **333. Come by ten o'clock at the boarding school. (1885)**

In 1885, Don Bosco celebrated the feast of St. Louis in Borgo San Martino. A poor mother approached him, carrying her two-year-old child in her arms. The child was screaming inconsolably and was unable to utter a single word. The mother was from San Martino di Rosignano.

After celebrating Mass in the nuns' chapel, the saint went out to the atrium to greet the people who were waiting for him. The mother stepped forward and said, "Here is my child," her sorrow evident. "He cannot speak and just screams. .. Please bless him so that he may be healed."

Don Bosco smiled and asked her, "What is his name?"

"Johnnie!" the mother replied promptly.

"Like me!" the saint joked. He then took a medal of Mary Help of Christians from his pocket and handed it to the little boy, who continued to cry loudly. The child took the medal but immediately dropped it on the ground.

"Come by the college around ten o'clock," the saint advised the mother, who clearly had not lost hope.

She arrived on time. When the saint saw the little boy again, he looked at him lovingly, blessed him, and handed him the medal of Our Lady once more. The little boy received it like a precious gift, clasping it in his tiny hand and holding on tightly.

"Kiss it!" said Don Bosco. The boy kissed the medal.

"Now call out: Mummy!" "Mummy!" said Giovannino clearly. "Well done! Now call out: Papa!" "Daddy!" the little boy exclaimed. Don Bosco then placed him on the ground. "Walk, come on!" the saint urged the little boy.

Obediently, Giovannino began to walk on his own. Those present looked on in amazement. The mother was overjoyed, her heart overflowing with gratitude for the saint restoring her son to health. She wanted to make a donation.

"Here you are, Don Bosco," she said, handing him five lire for a Mass. "I would like to give more, but I am so poor!"

You have accomplished a great deal by giving what you can! (Cassano G., *Le lezioni di un santo*, 209).

### 334. Our Lady is here among you (1885)

In August 1885, Don Bosco was in Mâthi to escape the stifling heat of the city, and he immediately felt relieved. A delegation of nuns joined him there to ask for his presence in Nice to conclude their spiritual exercises. He agreed to go and, after taking all necessary precautions, managed to speak with them and spend some time together at the end of the service.

He also honoured the requests of those who asked him to share a special message with the capitu-lars. Accompanied by Don Bonetti, he entered the parlour, where the mothers were anxiously awaiting his blessing. He addressed them, saying, "Oh, so you want me to say something to you! If I could speak freely, there are many things I would like to share! But as you can see, I am very old, and I have difficulty speaking. I want to tell you that Our Lady loves you very, very much. And, you know, she is here among you!"

Seeing him struggle to continue, Don Bonetti interjected to provide some distraction: "Yes, that's right! Don Bosco means that Our Lady is your mother, and she watches over and protects you." "No, no," replied the saint. "What I mean is that Our Lady is right here in this house, and she is pleased with you. If you continue in the spirit you



have now, which is what Our Lady desires..." Don Bosco was even more moved, and Don Bonetti spoke again: "Yes, that's right! Don Bosco wants to tell you that if you are always good, Our Lady will be pleased with you."

"No, no," Don Bosco tried to explain, trying to control his emotions. "I mean that Our Lady is truly here, among you! Our Lady walks through this house and covers it with her mantle."

As he said this, he stretched out his arms, raised his tearful eyes, and seemed eager to persuade the sisters that he saw Our Lady walking about as if she were at home, and that the entire house was under her protection.

The scene deserves to be captured by a skilled painter so that it remains indelibly imprinted in the minds of those present, preserving the attitude of the holy Founder as he made such a solemn statement to take his final leave of his eldest daughters. To keep the memory alive, the sisters had the very words of the saint that we have just read painted on the wall of that place. (M.B., XVII, 557). □



## OUR LADY OF LOURDES: THE MOTHER WHO INTERCEDES FOR US

by A.B. BOSCO (A Salesian Cooperator)

### The Feast that Rekindles Hope

Every year on February 11, the Church celebrates the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, recalling one of the most remarkable events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to a humble shepherd girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in the small French town of Lourdes. Between February 11 and July 16, 1858, the Blessed Mother appeared eighteen times, delivering a message of prayer, penance, and trust in God's mercy.

Lourdes, nestled at the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains, soon became a living testimony that heaven is not far from earth. What began as a private encounter between a poor girl and a beau-tiful Lady has grown into one of the world's greatest centers of faith and healing – a place where the sick find courage, the doubtful regain belief, and sinners discover forgiveness.

### Heaven's Humble Girl

Bernadette Soubirous was born on January 7, 1844, the eldest of



six children of François and Louise Soubirous. Her family lived in deep poverty; her father was a miller whose business had failed, and the family struggled even for daily bread. Bernadette herself was frail, suffering from asthma and other illnesses. She could neither read nor write and spoke only the Occitan dialect of her region.

On February 11, 1858, while collecting firewood with her sister and a friend near the Grotto of Massabielle along the River Gave, Bernadette heard the sound of rustling. She lifted her eyes and saw a radiant young lady, clothed in white, wearing a blue sash, and holding a rosary. Roses adorned her feet, and a soft light surrounded her. Instinctively, Bernadette knelt and began to pray the Rosary. At the end of the prayer, the Lady smiled and disappeared.

The apparitions continued over the next few months. Mary appeared to Bernadette eighteen times, each encounter filled with simplicity, purity, and power. The Lady spoke little but conveyed profound truths that touched hearts and changed lives.

#### **“I Am the Immaculate Conception”**

On March 25, 1858, the Feast of the Annunciation, the Lady finally revealed her name. In the dialect of Lourdes, she said: *“Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou”* – “I am the Immaculate Conception.”

Four years earlier, in 1854, Pope Pius IX had solemnly defined this dogma, affirming that Mary was conceived without original sin. For a poor, uneducated peasant girl to repeat such a theological phrase stunned the clergy and confirmed the supernatural authenticity of the apparitions.

Our Lady’s message was simple yet demanding: prayer, penance, and conversion of sinners. She told Bernadette to dig in the ground near the grotto, from which a spring of water began to



flow – a sign of purification and new life. To this day, pilgrims bathe in this miraculous spring, and countless healings – physical and spiritual – have been documented. The Church has officially recognized more than seventy of these cures as miraculous, though many more remain known only to God.

#### **The Shrine and the Pilgrimage of Faith**

Following the apparitions, the Bishop of Tarbes approved devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes in 1862. A basilica was soon built on the site and consecrated in 1876. Over the decades, millions have come to pray, to hope, and to be healed.

After Rome and the Holy Land, Lourdes is the most visited Christian pilgrimage site in the world. What makes Lourdes unique is not just the spring water or the grotto, but the living faith of those who come – the sick carried on stretchers, the volunteers serving joyfully, and the pilgrims praying the Rosary by candlelight.

It is at Lourdes that the Eucharist shines as the heart of healing. Mary points always to her Son, repeating the words from Cana: *“Do whatever He tells you.”* The daily Eucharistic Procession,

during which the Blessed Sacrament is carried among the sick, remains the most moving moment of the pilgrimage – a silent river of faith flowing through human suffering.

#### **The First Eucharistic Miracle at Lourdes**

A particularly remarkable event took place on August 22, 1888, when, for the first time, a Eucharistic procession with benediction for the sick was held. Among those present was Pierre Delanoy, who had been suffering from ataxia – a disease that paralyzed voluntary movement and led inevitably to death. As the priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament passed before him, Pierre was instantly cured.

It was the first Eucharistic miracle at Lourdes. From that day onward, the Benediction of the Sick became an integral part of the pilgrimage, and miraculous healings associated with the Eucharistic blessing have continued ever since.

#### **“Jesus, If You Do Not Cure Me, I’ll Tell Your Mother”**

In 1928, another extraordinary miracle occurred. A ten-year-old boy, paralyzed since birth, was brought by his parents to Lourdes. His mother told him stories of the Virgin’s love and the many miracles that had taken place at the grotto. During the Eucharistic procession, as the priest passed by, the boy whispered with childlike simplicity:

“Jesus, if you do not cure me, I’ll tell your Mother.”

The priest, moved by faith, blessed the boy again as he returned. Suddenly, before the

astonished crowd, the child stood up – completely healed!

Beside him was another twelve-year-old boy afflicted with a tubercular hip disease who had never walked. When the priest carrying the monstrance passed before him, he grasped the humeral veil and cried out, “I will not let go until I can get up cured!” After a brief struggle, he too rose and walked. The crowd burst into tears and joy, giving praise to Jesus present in the Eucharist and to Mary, His Mother, who interceded for her children.

These stories are not legends but documented events that bear witness to the Real Presence of Christ and Mary’s maternal intercession. Lourdes became a living school of faith – where Jesus heals, Mary intercedes, and the Church rejoices.

#### **Don Bosco and the Madonna Who Works Miracles**

During the same period that the Virgin was appearing to Bernadette in France, another great work of the Spirit was unfolding in Italy through St. John Bosco, the Apostle of Youth. Though Don Bosco never visited Lourdes, he shared the same deep conviction: that Mary is the help of Christians, the Mother of the Church, and the channel of grace.

He once told his boys: “Have devotion to Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are.”

Don Bosco’s entire life was a testimony to the miraculous power of Mary’s intercession. Whether it was bread multiplying in the Oratory, a lost boy returning home, or a sick youth recovering after a prayer to Mary, Don Bosco



saw her as a living presence — the same compassionate Mother who appeared at Lourdes.

Both Don Bosco and Bernadette were humble instruments in Mary's hands. Bernadette once said, "The Blessed Virgin used me like a broom. When she had done with me, she put me back in my corner." Similarly, Don Bosco would say, "Mary has done everything for us; let us not forget her."

The Madonna of Valdocco and the Madonna of Lourdes are two radiant signs of one Mother — who continues to guide her children toward her Son in the Eucharist.

#### **The Message for Our Time**

In a world burdened with sickness, doubt, and moral confusion, Lourdes remains a symbol of hope. The message Mary gave — prayer, penance, and faith — is as urgent today as it was in 1858.

Every time we approach the Eucharist, we relive the same mystery: Christ who heals, forgives, and restores us. And Mary, ever the Mother of Mercy, whispers to us as she did to Bernadette: "Pray for the conversion of sinners."

At Lourdes, faith is visible. The sick who come to the baths, the doctors who volunteer, the youth who serve the infirm — all form a living Church of compassion. The Eucharistic procession, passing among the wheelchairs and stretchers, is a foretaste of heaven, where every tear will be wiped away and every wound healed in Christ's love.

#### **Conclusion: Mary Who Leads Us to the Eucharist**

The story of Lourdes is not only about miracles of the body but also about miracles of the soul. Mary appeared to remind us that God is near, that His mercy flows like a spring, and that the greatest healing happens in the heart.

St. John Bosco's life and the apparitions at Lourdes proclaim the same truth: Mary always leads us to Jesus. Whether she is invoked as *Our Lady of Lourdes* or *Mary Help of Christians*, her mission is to bring us to the Eucharistic Christ — the source of life, healing, and joy.

So, when we face sickness or sorrow, let us echo the child of Lourdes and say with faith: "Jesus, if you do not cure me, I'll tell your mother."

For surely, as Don Bosco promised, "If we have Mary with us, we shall never be lost."

*"If you ever find yourself in trouble, say to her: 'O Mary, powerful Virgin, you are the mighty defender of the Church; come to my aid.' She will come to your rescue." — St. John Bosco*



#### **MY VOCATION STORY**

## **FR. ALBERT TRON MAWA**

ANS MEDIA

*Member of the 155<sup>th</sup> Missionary Expedition*



Here is the interview with new missionaries about Fr. Albert, from the 155th missionary expedition (last year) sent as a missionari from India to Sri Lanka who is participating in this year's *Corso Germoglio* and received the missionary cross on November 11.

#### **Introduce yourself**

I am Albert Tron Mawa from the beautiful province of Shillong, India. Today, I am privileged to serve as a Salesian priest in the Vice-Province of Sri Lanka, dedicating my life to a mission of faith and service.

#### **What inspired you to make this missionary choice?**

My heart was set ablaze with mission from the earliest days of my formation, even as an aspirant. I found profound inspiration in the heroic life stories of missionaries who brought light not only to Shillong but to countless communities around the world. Their dedication planted



the seed of my own calling, showing me a life worth living.

#### **Are you happy about the place you are going to? Have you any fears about the new place, culture and people?**

My journey in Sri Lanka has been a blessed one; I have proudly called it home for the last 14 years. This is no longer a 'new' place, but a place of deep connection. I am completely comfortable with the vibrant culture, the beautiful language, and the warm, welcoming spirit of the Sri Lankan people.

#### **How did your family members, friends and confreres react to your choice?**

Initially, my family felt a natural pull for me to stay and serve

in our home province of Shillong. While my confreres were immediately and wonderfully supportive, it took time and patience for my family to fully embrace my decision to pursue a missionary vocation. Their eventual support was a true blessing and affirmation of my path.

### What are your plans and dreams about your missionary life?

My mission is simple yet profound: to offer myself without reserve. My greatest dream is to pour my energy into the upliftment of the poor and abandoned youth, restoring their hope and helping them realize the full, incredible potential that God has placed within them.

### Have you in mind any model of some great missionaries whose style and life you want to follow?

While I draw inspiration from the many dedicated missionaries who served in Shillong, there is one figure who stands out: Father Vendrame, the valiant Apostle of the Khasis. His style of life, his tenacity, and his passionate commitment to the people have inspired me most profoundly to dedicate myself fully to the mission.

### How do you feel about the experience you are going through now doing the missionary course (Corso Germoglio) and receiving the missionary cross on the 150th anniversary?

I am deeply grateful and elated to be part of this missionary course in this special year! This experience has been invaluable in deepening my understanding of

my vocation, and the opportunity to connect with fellow missionaries from every corner of the globe is truly energizing. It reinforces the global family of our mission.

### What is your message for young people about missionary choice and vocation?

My message is a call to courage and radical generosity. Young people, be daring enough to say 'yes' to God's call! You are needed as missionaries not just across oceans, but right now—in your family, in your society, and in the wider world. Embrace the adventure of faith and service. □



## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### It is Alright

"Look here, waiter! What kind of pie is this?

"Can't you tell from the taste?"

"No, I can't."

"Well, then, what difference does it make?"

### Blame the Other Sex

"Did he take his misfortune like a man?" Mr. Jones asked.

"Precisely," answered his friend, "He laid the blame on his wife."

### Sunday Collections

Father criticized the sermon, mother disliked the blunders of the organist, and the eldest daughter thought the choir's singing atrocious.

The subject had to be dropped when the small boy of the family with the school boy's love of fair-play chipped in with the remark: "Dad I think it was a good show for a dollar."

### You Can't Kid Me

The mother thought her little girl ought to be examined for any possible abnormal tendencies, so she took the tot to a psychologist. Among other questions, the man of science asked:

"Are you a boy or a girl?"

"A boy," the little girl answered. Somewhat taken aback, the psychologist tried again. "When you grow up, are you going to be a woman or man?"

Afterwards as they were returning home, the mother asked, "Why did you make such strange replies to what the man asked you?"

"The little girl drew herself up with dignity. "The silly old dear,"

she said, rolling her eyes, "If he was going to ask me crazy questions, I was going to give him crazy answers. He couldn't kid me."

### Willie's first concert

Mother took Willie to his first concert. The conductor was leading the orchestra and directing the soprano soloist as well. Willie was greatly interested.

"Mother, why is that man shaking his stick at the lady?" he asked.

"Hush, he is not shaking his stick at her."

"Then what is she screaming for?"

### Chatter Boxes

Two small boys were discussing the capabilities of their mothers who were active club members.

"My mother can talk on just about any subject at all," he declared proudly.

"Aw, shucks," retorted the other, "my mother can talk without any subject at all."

### Wedding Hijack

"Papa, what kind of robber is a page?"

"A what?"

"It says here that two pages held up the bride's train."

### Which Baby

"Uncle Louis," said little Eleanor, "do you know that a baby that was fed on elephant's milk gained twenty pounds in a few weeks."

"Nonsense! Impossible!" exclaimed Uncle Louis, "Who's baby was it?"

"The elephant's baby," remarked little Eleanor. □

# THE BLESSING

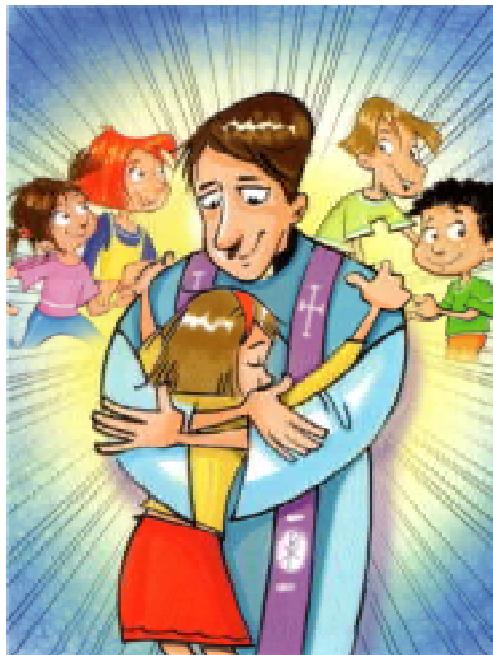
In the L'Arche community, where he had chosen to live after spending a lifetime in academia, the renowned Father Henri Nouwen was approached one day by a differently abled member of the community who asked him, "Henri, can you bless me?"

Father Nouwen automatically responded by tracing the sign of the cross on the girl's forehead with his thumb. However, instead of expressing gratitude, she protested vehemently, saying, "No, that doesn't work. I want a real blessing!"

Realizing that he had reacted in a habitual and formalistic manner, Father Nouwen replied, "Oh, I'm sorry... I'll give you a real blessing when we're all together for the service."

After the service, as about thirty people sat in a circle on the floor, Father Nouwen said, "Janet has asked me to give her a special blessing. She feels she needs it now." The girl got up and approached the priest, who was wearing a long white robe with wide sleeves that covered both his hands and arms. Spontaneously, Janet hugged him and rested her head against his chest. Without thinking, Father Nouwen wrapped his sleeves around her, enveloping her almost completely in the folds of his robe.

As they held each other, Father Nouwen said, "Janet, I want you to know that you are God's beloved daughter. You are precious in God's eyes. Your beautiful smile, your kindness to others in the community, and all the good things you do, reveal what a remarkable person you are. I know you're feeling a bit down these days and that there is sadness in



your heart, but I want to remind you of who you truly are: you are a special person, deeply loved by God and by all the people who are here with you."

Janet lifted her head and looked at him; her broad smile showed that she truly heard and received the blessing. When Janet returned to her seat, all the other disabled individuals wanted to receive a blessing as well. Even one of the assistants, a twenty-four-year-old young man, raised his hand and said, "What about me?"

"Of course," replied Father Nouwen. "Come."

He embraced him and said, "John, it is so good to have you here. You are the beloved son of God. Your presence brings joy to all of us. When things are difficult and life feels hard, always remember that you are loved with infinite love."

The young man looked at him with tears in his eyes and said, "Thank you, thank you so much." □

*When times are tough and life feels challenging, remember who you are: you are a special person, deeply loved by God and everyone around you.*

## LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Our eyes have witnessed miraculous mercies from Mother Mary through her Son, Jesus, over the last 43 years of my life. - My wife, Martina, has a hectic office travel schedule. Mother Mary touches her and provides her with the strength to continue her hard work. - Juan faced health problems early in life, but through Mother Mary's intercession, he was healed and given the strength to grow into adulthood. - Mother Mary has helped Jace gain confidence at school and excel in his studies. - Our grandmother received daily strength and survived her battle with cancer.

- Sunil Gonsalves, Vasai, Chulna

## POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK FEBRUARY 2026

*For children with incurable diseases.*

*Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.*

posted at Mumbai Patrika Channel Sorting Office  
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### **TO JESUS THROUGH MARY**

Who do we turn to in our moments of need? We turn to Mary to reach Jesus. For us, as devoted disciples of the Church, this connection is not just reasonable; it is deeply meaningful. While we know that "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5), we also recognize the essential role of human cooperation in God's plan for salvation. As St. Thomas Aquinas explains, this 'ministerial disposition' prepares us to receive grace and fosters the circulation of charity and communion. The intercession of saints is vital to our faith, particularly that of the Blessed Mother. Mary uniquely participates in the Incarnation (Gal 4:4) and the redemptive suffering of Jesus (Lk 2:35; Jn 19:25). By turning to her, we strengthen our connection to Christ and deepen our experience of His grace.

*(From the General Audience on 8/10/1969)*

**Don Bosco's Madonna**, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay.

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