

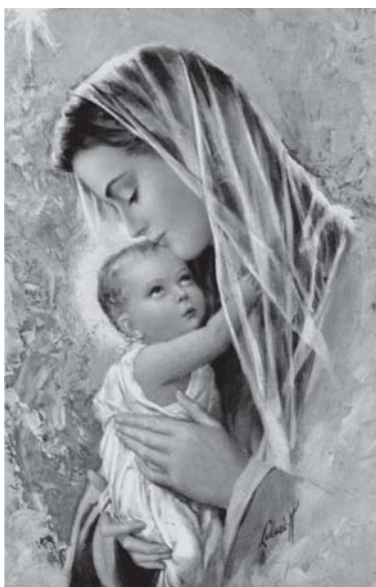
# DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

MUMBAI

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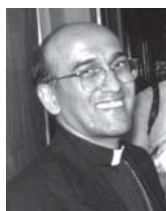
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*May his  
ever present love  
be a source  
of special joy  
to you  
this Christmas !*

Cover: **The Third Joyful  
Mystery - The Nativity**  
at The Shrine of Don Bosco's  
Madonna, Mumbai



## From The Editor's Desk

"The Man"

### in The Ragged Balaclava

It didn't take long to finish my Christmas shopping. Poona can get pretty cold around Christmas time. It punished the straggler and allowed little time for delay. I moved along briskly, deftly dodging passers by, barely acknowledging the brilliant displays in the shop-windows with just a passing glance. Even friendly greetings along the way were courteous but short.

As I headed home, along a dull East Street, only one item remained on my list. I had to call in at the optician to get the frame of my glasses straightened. Waiting in the rush, it dawned on me that this simple service might not be free, as it is back home. So, when my turn to be served came, a twenty rupee note was ready in my hand. The optician returned quickly with my glasses. 'How much is that?' I asked. 'No charge at all,' he smiled, 'a very happy Christmas to you'.

Head down, I made my way out, surprised and delighted by the generosity of this stranger. Barely had I reached the traffic light and another surprise was waiting for me. A tall, gaunt figure, leaning against the lamp post, suddenly stepped into my path. Under his ragged balaclava I caught a glimpse of his hollowed face and staring eyes. His appeal for help was moaned rather than spoken. 'I'm sorry,' I said, as I hurried past.

Immediately, I felt uneasy, agitated, even annoyed. He shouldn't have lunged at me like that; he shouldn't have startled me. I argued. But as I walked on, a guilty conscience followed my steps like an angry, persistent mongrel. Making excuses I realized, was not going to set me free. A few minutes earlier, I was ready to pay twenty bucks to the optician. Now, I could spare nothing for this man in the ragged balaclava. It was wrong to have passed by. It was mean to have refused him. The burden of shame slowed me to a halt. I turned and hurried back.

As I retraced my steps down East Street, I prayed that the poor man would still be there at the lamp post. My prayer was soon answered. 'I'm sorry I rushed past,' I said, as I handed him the twenty rupee note. 'It was very kind of you to come back. Happy Christmas to you,' was his welcome response.

The journey home was a prayer of thanksgiving. Tired arms carried the Christmas shopping. A light heart carried my Christmas presents: the joy of receiving and the greater joy of giving. I thanked God for letting me see the face of Jesus in the smile of the generous stranger. I thanked him again for letting me hear the voice of Jesus in the cry of the poor man in the ragged balaclava.

*Fr. Ian Douulton sdb*

## 12. DONKEY WISDOM

*Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss*

Many of us would be familiar with this story which possibly has also appeared in cartoon picture form in several magazines. Two donkeys tied to a single rope are straining to get to two piles of hay placed at opposite end of the yard. The more they struggle to get to their chosen pile of hay, the more they hurt themselves. When one overpowered the other and got to his pile, he barely got a mouthful when the other prevailed and dragged him away to the other side. This tug-of-war continued for quite some time till both were drained of all energy and sat down to think.

With a sudden breakthrough in their donkey way of thinking that seemed to have struck both at the same time, they both made a dash towards one end of the yard, finished the pile of hay in the twinkling of an eye and then hurried to the other end. It wasn't long before both sat down contentedly, laughing at their donkey stupidity when each tried to show he was the stronger; with a little bit of co-operation both could be perfectly happy.

### **Patterns of Interaction**

Initially the two donkeys played the game most people play: Win - Lose. It simply says: I am stronger than you and so will use my superior strength, intelligence, skills and what not to overpower you and get the victory - often at your cost. However, in most cases, the loser doesn't give up or keep quiet all that easily. He bides his time waiting for a golden opportunity to strike

back and take revenge. And how often is the former winner not literally brought to his knees in utter humiliation by the former loser! But then the present loser will not take it lying down either. He will wait till he can score his victory - and the process goes on... exactly as the two donkeys were doing.

A win - lose competition inevitably results in a lose-lose situation in which both parties lose. This stance at times can be a really ridiculous one for one loser says to himself: 'I don't mind if I lose, but I will ensure that you too lose equally or more.' A classic example of this is the divorce case in which the judge sentences the husband to give half of his entire property and possessions to his divorced wife. Without resisting the judgement, he promptly went and sold his brand new car costing thousands for a paltry ten dollars only so that he would have to give her just five! And he did exactly the same with every item he possessed. As is generally said, when two people fight each other, it is usually a third person, who is most often an outsider, who benefits from their quarrel.

### **Daily Examples**

Almost every parish, zone, locality, village or whatever other form of grouping we have witnesses so many situations of this kind in which brother fights brother tooth and nail with regard to ancestral property or finances. Both parties lose their peace of mind besides the other material

losses they inflict on each other. Add to that the stiff legal fees they have to cough up to keep the battle going for years on end. Instead, had they acquired a little bit of donkey sense or wisdom, could they not have settled their differences amicably in such a way that both stood to gain? I guess that in theory most would agree with this 'donkey wisdom', yet in practice it calls for a lot of emotional strength and stamina to be able to follow these principles. Often it is not merely a question of what I (or one party) feel/s about the issue, but really 'what others will say if I give in.' This 'other' could be spouse, neighbour, friend, colleague or anyone. Usually it is one or other of these 'others' who stands to gain from the internecine war that wages in the family.

In our better moments, we would all agree that after all, none of us is going to take all this property and money with us when we depart from this world. We have to let go of it some time or other. Or as the Zen Buddhists remind us, 'everything passes like water flowing down the river.' So, when looked at more closely, in the final analysis, these kinds of Win-Lose or even Lose-Lose battles are not just a matter of possessions, but rather of our ego. Our sense of worth is often made to reside in these external possessions; according to this philosophy the more a person possesses, the greater he is esteemed to be. This kind of philosophy seems to prevail in the glitter of the bollywood world, where money and possessions are flaunted with great gusto. But often the character underneath the person 'of wealth' leaves much to be desired. Jesus places before us the delightful story



of the "Rich Fool" who pulled down his barns and built new ones to store his bumper crop and enjoy it for the rest of his life – that same night he died! What did it profit him then to go through all that hassle? Jesus prefaces this charming story with these words: "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Lk 12:15).

### **True Inner Freedom**

How happy is the person who has understood his inner worth in terms of what God sees in him and what God has bestowed on him! This is the real message that Jesus came to give us and he stresses this when he quotes Ps. 82:6 "I say, 'you are gods, children of the Most High, all of you.'" Jesus said this to justify his own claim that he himself was the Son of God (Jn. 10:34-39). "If the person to whom God's word is addressed is called 'son' how much more the one whom the Father has chosen and sanctified and sent into the world?" Now while it is true that these words apply primarily to Jesus, yet they are also true of those who are chosen by him and made part of his body, intimately one with him to the extent that he can say: 'whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do to me!' In this



same argument Jesus calls as witness not just what he says but rather his actions – and it is these ‘works’ that demonstrate that ‘the Father is in me and I am in the Father.’ So, in parallel fashion, when we too ‘do the works of the Father’ which is precisely seen when we share our blessings with one another freely and generously, should we not see the divinity operating in and through us? In fact, the more we do this, the clearer does this truth become, and it is plain for all to see.

It is along these same lines that Jesus invites his disciples, saying: “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to

receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:27-37). All these kinds of behaviour demonstrate clearly that the power behind them comes from God.

### **Gifted to Us Abundantly**

Now the beauty of all this reasoning is that we don’t have to strive to acquire this divine power: because of God’s infinite love for each of us, it has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who abides within us. Thus, each time we celebrate Eucharist, the impetus of God’s Spirit becomes stronger and stronger – all we need to do is ensure that the Self and our wounded sensibilities do not get in the way. At the crucial moment, if we could depress the “Pause” button of our minds and allow God’s Spirit to take over at that crucial juncture – what a miracle would we not witness? One needs to experience all this to realize how true it is.

As we conclude this series, could you say that you have hauled in a rich catch of fish because from the start you let down our nets at the word of the Master? We realize that our lives can be fruitful, happy, contented and fulfilled only when lived in obedience to his word. May the wisdom of this series enable us to change our lives and reap the precious harvest of blessings his love still has in store for us. ☐

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*“Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.”*



"THE ALMIGHTY HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME AND HOLY IS HIS NAME"

*Fr. Allwyn Misquitta, sdb*

*Asst. Parish priest, Don Bosco, Borivli, Mumbai*

**I**t was in May 1980 that as a young boy from an obscure village in Vasai I came to a Don Bosco Institution for the first time. I wanted to learn English. I struggled with this foreign language and I felt deeply the separation from my family. I struggled to adjust to the group, to the new culture and even to daily worship in English. It all was strange to me.

In spite of these challenges, I was overwhelmingly impressed with the 'English Castle' course, especially with the dynamic Salesians conducting it, Godfrey D'Sa and Anacleto D'Mello. That was the first time I saw priests and brothers in short pants, playing games with the youngsters, teaching them music, among other things. At the end of one month of English, I applied to join the Aspirantate at Lonavla in response to a deep seated desire.

At Lonavla, I was further challenged by Fr. Adolph the Principal, who admitted me directly into Std. XI, saying, "You will struggle in the English medium, but I'm sure, you will manage." I struggled with the language and the fact of having to adjust to a new environment. "Struggle I will, but I want to be a Salesian Priest" was the motto that helped me complete Std. XII and take the next step.

After completing Std. XII at the Don Bosco Aspirantate at Lonavla, my Novitiate, and two years of Philosophy, I did a three year course of 'Bachelor of Social Work' at Bombay University. My tryst with languages continued as I was sent to do my regency for two years at Don Bosco Quepem, Goa; where I picked up Konkani.

After my theology studies at



Bangalore, I was ordained a priest at Don Bosco's Matunga on Dec 18, 1993.

My fluency in the languages stood me in good stead as Director of the Catechetical and Audio-Visual Centre for the Diocese of Nashik, 'Loyola, Divya Vani' run by the Jesuits. This experience was a transforming one for me.

I now realize that Providence had been preparing me for my present ministry of preaching, teaching and healing. I am a stronger person today, deeply rooted in Christ, and working for His greater glory; thanks also to my earlier struggles!

My dear young friends the Lord too has plans for you and they are good plans. What is He asking of you today? Trust in God and move ahead bravely, for He who calls is always faithful. Take the first step and be sure He will provide. □

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# EMMANUEL

*By Oliver Treanor*

**T**he most beautiful name by which Jesus is known in the Scriptures is Emmanuel, the name foretold by the prophet Isaiah more than seven centuries before Jesus was born.

St. Matthew recalls the ancient prophecy in the opening pages of the New Testament and explains what it means. 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us).' It marks the beginning of his account of Christmas and ever since, the rich and meaningful associations of that title have graced the hymns and prayers of the Church's celebration of the holy season.

To invoke Jesus as Emmanuel is the most profound act of Christian faith for it acknowledges that Mary's Son is at the same time Son of God. It is also a profound act of hope, for it announces the immense significance of the incarnation for a world that feels lost and alone and longs for a friend who will bring it understanding and direction.

## **In More Ways Than One**

When we think about that name Emmanuel we realize that God is with us in Jesus in more ways than one. Obviously, of course, he is with us as man in Jesus' humanity. By becoming a member of the human race Christ brings God very close to all of us. No longer remote and beyond our experience, he is one of our own kind. God

knows what it is to live and breathe, to eat and sleep, to be happy and sad, to be unwell and to die.

Because of Christmas we can relate to God in a human way, confident that he understands our needs and problems and struggles. In Jesus he is a very human God. Quite literally with us in the flesh, in time and space, through the historical character of Mary's Son.

## **On Our Side**

But there is another sense in which God is with us. In the sense that he gives strong moral backing to everything we do that is truly human. He takes our part in the battle of life against the odds which are weighed against us. He is on our side against all that threatens to defeat us. Even when we fail to do our best, he is still 'rooting for us', giving us the encouragement that is needed to help us get up and start again. Never putting us down by criticising our efforts or jeering at our mistakes, he defends us by making excuses in our defence, and where no excuse is possible, by forgiving.

Truly Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us - in this most important way. Which is why Christmas is such a joyful season. Pope St. Leo the Great in a Christmas sermon once said that this joy is open to saint and sinner alike. For the saint, because he hastens to his crown; but for the sinner too because, through Emmanuel's birth, he is called to Life.



### **Forever and Always**

What makes all this good news for us is that it never ends. If God were Emmanuel only for the brief space of Jesus' life - the thirty - three years he lived two thousand years ago - then his name would be no use to us at all. But at the end of Matthew's gospel Jesus announced that 'I am with you always, yes to the end of time.' I will always be Emmanuel, always God with you, he is saying. As Matthew's gospel begins, so it ends: we are assured that God will never let us down since he is forever with us in both senses, both personally present and morally supportive.

### **In Word and Sacrament**

How Jesus makes this possible is in and through the Church. He is as much among us now as he

was when he walked among men on the roads of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem. Only the form of his presence is different. Today he is with us in Word and Sacrament, where the scriptures are read and believed, and where the sacraments are celebrated worthily with a pure and contrite heart. Every time we listen to the readings at Mass, receive the Holy Eucharist, go to confession, turn to him in prayer alone or with others, wherever 'two or three are gathered in his name,' there Emmanuel fulfils the promise of his name.

To make this joy complete, only one thing further is needed. This Christmas as we get into the festive mood we ought to be asking ourselves: Am I with God in all the ways that Emmanuel is with me? □



# walking with the Church



## *Worthy to receive Communion?*

*by F.J. Power*

*Q. Can everyone who participates in the Celebration of the Eucharist receive Holy Communion?*

A The answer to this question has been clear and unambiguous from the early days of the Church.

Not everyone qualifies for the reception of Communion simply by being at Mass. There is a condition that is required before a person can present himself or herself for the reception of the Eucharist. Long, long ago, St. Paul dealt with certain abuses about the Celebration of the Eucharist in his first letter to the Corinthians. He then stated bluntly: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." (11:27)

Thus it is clear that not everyone is to receive Communion just because one participates at Mass. There is a condition, a serious condition that must be met. What was true then is true today. This teaching has been consistent throughout the history of the Church.

The new Catechism of the Catholic Church states categorically and references the Council of Trent: "Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession." (#1457)

Another qualification is affirmed in the new Catechism. "The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church." (#1395) It would be wrong at an ecumenical service to offer the Eucharist to all participants as a gesture of greater union of hearts.

The required qualification of "full communion with the Church" would be lacking.

It should be obvious that the reception of the Eucharist is not meant to be a casual or trivial social event. In the words of the new Catechism, "The Eucharist is

'the source and summit of the Christian life.'" This is a quote from the dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Vatican Council II. The Catechism continues by citing from the Instruction on the Mystery of the Eucharist issued by the congregation of Rites: "For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch." (#1324)



Despite the clarity of the Church's teaching on what is required for proper reception of the Eucharist and to whom the Eucharist is to be offered, there arise situations where these regulations would appear to be violated. For example, those who are known to be not in full communion with the Church offer themselves for the reception of Communion; those who are publicly known to be in irregular marriage relationships that have not been or cannot be regularized by the Church, but offer themselves for Communion; those who are known publicly and even have stated publicly to be at odds with the official teaching of the Church in serious matters that objectively fall into the category of mortal sin, but offer themselves as if their difference with Church teaching

is of little consequence.

One might ask, how can these people present themselves as members of the Church in good standing when they are not in good standing? It is not sufficient to say that the person receives Communion in good conscience believing that he or she is right.

Conscience is not a personal preference or a vague sense or feeling of doing what is right or wrong. We have to follow our conscience, but we must do all that we can to make sure that it is an informed conscience. In other words, we must find out what the Church teaches about something in order to become properly "informed." In the case of being worthy to receive Communion, one must know what is required for proper reception as has been stated above.

To sum up, one has to follow one's conscience, but that conscience has to be informed about what to believe and what to do. Having gathered the proper information to the best of one's ability, then a person must follow what appears to that person to be the right thing to do. One is then acting on an informed conscience as God intended that one should so act.

Others who witness a person doing something can never judge the other person's conscience; only God can do that. But everyone can judge whether what is done is objectively right or wrong, in conformity with what should be done according to the rules, regulations, and moral rightness. □

# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## ST. BARBARA (DECEMBER 4) 'PATRON OF MINERS, ARCHITECTS...'

by Mario Scudu & Jonathan Young (T/A I.D.)

**I**t is not rare that we have before us a saint who can boast of such a popular cult, (with millions of people bearing her name) one who was the subject of such a wealth of images of her but very little by way of her biography. Such artistic pictures also exist of saints like George, Catherine of Alexandria, Barbara and others, (especially in the first centuries) but very little is known of their historical lives. Another element that is common to most of these first century saints is that they are mentioned in the 'narrationes' or (the *Passiones*) of their martyrdom. We are often presented with such stories that have highly improbable legendary overtones popularly accepted as just a kind of "literary genre."

### Was Barbara from Antioch?

There are many traditions both in the Greek and Latin churches, about the martyr Saint Barbara and many different versions of her life. Most of these are treated more as legends with very little historical significance because of the several discrepancies in the contents. In fact, in some of the '*Passiones*' (or stories of the martyrdom) Barbara was martyred during the reign of



the Emperor Maximus III (235-238 ce) or of Maximianus (286-305 ce), others, instead say she was martyred under Maximinus Daraus (308-313 ce). She is believed to have been born outside Antioch of Nicomedia or probably Heliopolis.

There is also a Latin tradition that sets Barbara in Tuscany. In fact, in the martyrology of Adone, we read: "In Tuscany there was born the holy virgin and martyr Barbara during

the reign of the Emperor Maximianus." Therefore, according to this tradition Barbara was martyred in Tuscany and her remains lay in the Cathedral of Rieti of which she is the patroness. There is another confusion: according to the Venetian version or tradition, the Emperor Justin transferred the remains of the St. Barbara to Constantinople and from there the Venetians brought it back to the church of St. John the Evangelist in Venice in 1009. However, we cannot forget that even Cairo, Constantinople and Piacenza venerate her relics also. There is very little historical (and very contradictory) information to substantiate this. According to some reliable authority, "that can reasonably be relied upon" it is affirmed that she was martyred somewhere in the Orient, perhaps in Egypt and her cult was brought over to Italy around the sixth century during the Byzantine era. Nothing further is known.

### **The Most Accepted Legend**

Apparently, Saint Barbara was a maiden of great beauty whose father Dioscorus, locked her in a tower to remove her from many ardent suitors who were not to his liking. He also wanted to keep her from indulging in the habit of constantly helping the poor.

Barbara's father was devoted to the Greco-Roman religious system. As such, he especially wanted to keep her from talking to any followers of a new religion that he saw as dangerous. He was worried that she might convert. The new religion, Christianity, was beginning to nibble at the margins of Roman society. At that time, it had been mainly taken up by the

poor and downtrodden. Barbara's father was a rich merchant who had contempt for this scruffy movement. Beyond his personal prejudice was the political reality that any association with the outlawed religion would hurt his grain business.

Barbara spent years in the tower. She got her food and laundry by way of a basket on a rope. Her father began bringing suitors of his choosing but by then Barbara had lost all interest in marriage. One day, a stranger put a book in the basket from which Barbara learned about the new religion. Barbara so longed to know more about Christianity that she grew ill. Her father sent for a doctor and when the healer arrived, the father in his agitation, did not ask what kind of doctor this was. He was, in fact, a priest - a doctor of the soul. Barbara asked the priest many questions and received baptism.

Shortly thereafter, the father had to go away from their home on a journey. Barbara asked the men who worked on the estate to make a third window in her tower. As she was their employer's daughter, they complied. When the father returned and asked the meaning of the third window, Barbara told him that she had converted to Christianity and wanted to have three windows to be reminded of the three names for God. This bit of remodeling earned Barbara the honor of becoming the patron saint of architects.

The rest of the story is harrowing. Her father was infuriated by the fact that Barbara had become a Christian and had constructed a third window that was not authorized just so she could demonstrate her new faith. Because of this she was definitely to be killed

immediately. But she miraculously escaped by passing through the walls of the tower. Once she was found, her father, still furious by this deception had her delivered to the governor Marcianus who was to convince her at first kindly and then through the most refined torture. She was forced to wear rough clothes and subjected to numerous cruel atrocities after which she was confined once again to the tower so that she might have time to reflect and see reason once more. But even at this time, she was miraculously restored to health by an angel who appeared to her during the night. Naturally the next day she was subjected to further torture and this time in the presence of a certain Juliana, who, while witnessing her torture heard her declare that she was a Christian. Then she was subjected to be brutally scourged and burnt on her sides but she did not succumb even during this cruel test. Then the governor became impatient by her resistance and stripped her of all her clothes and had her dragged through the city streets while being beaten and scourged. There was yet another miraculous intervention. Hearing the prayers of the martyr, the heavens covered her with dark clouds and a very dense fog engulfed her allowing her to escape her malicious captors.

The father told her she must renounce her new faith or die. Eventually, they ordered her father to kill her. He tried to end her life by a variety of horrific means, but she slipped to safety again and again – becoming more radiant and holy each time she affirmed her faith. Finally, he grabbed her beautiful long hair and beheaded her. At that moment, bright flames flew out of her body. A moment later, lightning

struck the father and killed him.

Because of her father's fate, her name is invoked in prayers of protection from lightning. As an extension of this, she has become the patron of gunners, miners, and others who work with explosives. An odd aspect of this role is that she has been taken as patron saint by others who use firearms, including bandits, thugs and other criminal types. That was the end of the story (and the legend).

### **A Life of Beauty**

The mythic tale is a variation on the Rapunzel motif. On any holy card of Saint Barbara, the picture is a woman with a tower. The story can be read as an allegory for life's journey. There are times when we may feel as if we are locked away in a tower. This is when we are somehow removed from what would be most fulfilling. We may have hidden ourselves away out of a fear of getting caught up in a passionate cause. There are other ways that we might be like Saint Barbara too. It can take considerable initiative simply to find our deepest beliefs. It takes additional commitment to develop effective ways to express those values. Both parts of such a project require enormous tenacity.

Life serves up plenty of opposition to maintaining an inner life. Holding onto a vision calls for powerful resolve. Still, if we are dedicated, the vitality of the soul somehow manages to endure through many dangers. This survival sometimes involves seemingly miraculous assistance. At the end of this journey, like Saint Barbara, we will die. If, like her, we have been strong and loyal to what we find to be true and beautiful, it will have been a good life. □

# IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

## Unenviable Solution

On a ferry I boarded in the Sudan, scores of people stumbled over the squatting form of a small boy, who persisted in sitting in the bottom, despite oaths and kicks. I asked the captain to move the boy somewhere to keep him from being hurt. "Very good, your excellency," he replied, "but it is only fair to warn you that if the boy gets up, the boat will sink."

## In Hindsight

In a contest in Surrey for road safety slogans, one youngster came up with this suggestion: He looked; she didn't. He is, she isn't.

## Feverish Pitch

An aspiring vocalist had just completed a lesson. "Professor," she asked, "do you think I shall ever be able to don anything with my voice?" "Well," replied her instructor, "it might come in handy in case of fire."

## Advance Notice

A kindergarten teacher smiled pleasantly at the gentleman opposite in the bus. He did not respond. Realizing her error, she said aloud, "Oh, please excuse me. I mistook you for the father of my children." She got out at the next corner.

## Corresponding Love

A young lad we know is still trying to decipher the following letter from his current girl friend: "Dear John, I hope you are not still angry. I want to explain that I was really joking when I told you I didn't mean what I said about reconsidering my decision not to

change my mind. Please believe me I really mean this. Love, Grace."

## Manual Dexterity

Wife to husband about to hang picture: "You'll find the hammer in the drawer, the nails in the cupboard and the bandage in the medicine cabinet."

## Keeping the Beat

Basil Rathbone was visiting Victor Borge in his hotel room, and the Dane was telling the actor of the versatility of the piano. He told Rathbone that he could even tell time by the piano. The actor was sceptical; so Borge sat down and crashed out a few bars from a Sousa march.

Immediately there was a pounding on the wall and a sleepy voice rumbled angrily: "Stop that noise, you idiot! Don't you know it's one-thirty in the morning?"

## Swift Thrift

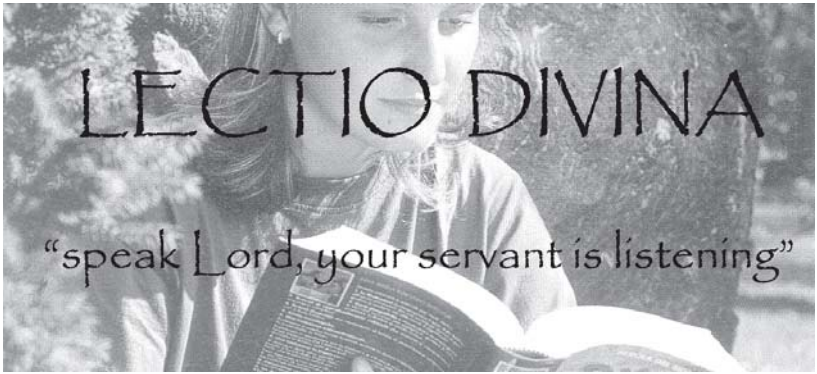
One man to another: "It's not that I spend more than I earn, it's just that I spend it quicker than I earn it."

## To be on Top

A little boy, taken to the ballet for the first time, watched curiously as the dancers cavorted about on their toes. "Mummy," he whispered loudly, "why don't they just get taller girls?"

## Political Figures

Accountant to his fellow worker: "For a minute this deficit really had me worried... I forgot I was working for the government." □



## 'FULL OF GRACE'

by Roberta Fora

*Meditating on this most common prayer is like meditating on the Word of God...may it touch our hearts. (ed)*

**M**ary, “full of grace!” - full of divine help, full of that inexplicable power, full of the Holy Spirit.

“The power of the Most High has overshadowed you” those were the words that the angel addressed to Mary. She was, however, confused, but the angel immediately

reassured her: “Do not be afraid, Mary! You have won God’s favour!”

God, then, was the source of this grace. He is the inexhaustible and eternal source. It was God who comforted and reassured her and it is He who reassures all of us as we journey toward our eternal destiny



which is heaven.

It is not so easy to rejoice in the blessings of Divine Grace as we try to discover it in our everyday lives. We are often left wondering about this grace in the depths of our hearts. Most of all, we need to really trust in the Provident presence of God.

"Nothing is impossible with God," but for us to accept this, it is obvious that the principal ingredient needs to be a blind and boundless trust in God. This trust is a natural consequence of a love we have for God and for our neighbour.

*"Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I will fear no evil because, you Lord, are with me."* We read these words in Psalm 23. It means that we are assured that He is always by our side even when we are faced with confusing and disagreeable situations.

There are times when everything around us is dark and sad, but we really wouldn't be afraid if we truly believed in God and so we prayed: *"Your crook and your staff, they comfort me."* If this filial trust in God is a fundamental part of our human existence, then we can most certainly repeat the concluding words of Psalm 23: *"Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life."*

Happiness is not possible if there is no grace. You will never be able to taste the fullness of joy deep in your heart if you are not in God's grace which is undoubtedly his precious help.

*We beseech you, O Mary, that following your example, may we live our lives daily in the "grace of God," cherishing the joy that comes from giving our hearts to the Lord. □*

## A Prayer to Mary

by Ganni Camilleri

**O** sweet Virgin Mary,  
My Mother most pure,  
I beg you to hear me  
For I'm really poor.

Stay always beside me.  
Protect me today.  
When Satan attacks me,  
Please, drive him away.

And when I feel lonely,  
Let me feel your love.  
You are my kind Mother,  
Come down from above.

And when I abandon  
Your Son's only Way,  
Please, help me to find it  
And there firmly stay.

I pray with the sinners  
Who stray from His Way.  
Do help them to find it  
And not stay away.

I pray for my family  
Which I really love.  
Protect them from evil.  
Do come from above.

And lastly, I pray You,  
Queen Mother of Peace,  
Stay by me always.  
For this I ask, please!

And when on my death bed  
I shed my last tear,  
I pray you sweet Mother,  
To stay by me, Dear. □

Melliha, Malta 2008



DEDICATED TO  
THE HOLY FAMILY

# Quiet BEING TO

by Cormac C

**W**hen our children were young we left our home in the country and moved to another place. When we asked them recently what memories they cherished of the old place they each replied in their own way. One said: 'I loved when the whole five of us got into your bed and we talked about everything'.

Another said: 'I remember, after Mass on Sundays, we would get ice-cream and then squash into the car and eat it down by the river.' A third said: 'Do you remember, you would lie down on the floor and we would all lie down *with you* in the dark and you would tell us stories out of your head?'

## **Togetherness**

And so it was with all five of them. They did not mention the beautiful view from our rustic home, nor the orchard garden, nor the parquet floors we had laid with our own hands. What they cherished most was the memory of 'togetherness.' 'We are all,' as a wise man has said, 'fragments of family.'

On the other hand we like solitude too. I myself need regular 'doses' of solitude, an hour casting flies into a stream, a few days occasionally - sorting myself out, getting in touch with the real 'me.'

Some feel called to a total solitude and take on the life of the hermit. Some, indeed, run away from what they perceive as a hostile society, ending up, as often as not, disgruntled and lonely. Others, however, take on solitude for God, not to escape the society of their fellowmen but, as Antony of the Desert put it, 'because the demon is there.' In solitude one is faced with oneself, and with all one's limitations. One must be built for such austerity, the rest of us need company. As the old Irish proverb has it, *people live in each other's shadow.*

## **Semi-Solitude**

In the modern world, especially in the vast sprawling cities, the nuclear family is caught a little between two stools. Because of its circumstances it lives a kind of semi-solitude. Deprived of the extended families, a husband and wife can live out their life sharing it only with their children. It is not solitude, but it is a kind of solitude, and is certainly a long way from true community.

When trouble strikes, as no doubt it does, the pain and the sense of isolation are heightened. They cannot share



# Spaces TOGETHER

O'Connor

their pain even with those next door – they are too distant for such intimate exchange. They even fear to share it at a distance, with those they have left at home. In need of shoulders to cry on they wilt for the want of family, for want of that togetherness they remember from their childhood when the neighbours gathered for the harvest or the sowing, for the dance or the festival, or, indeed, the funeral.

In this matter of preserving community it is the poor who are rich. The poor who have nothing know what it is to have each other. Having suffered want they find a fullness of life unknown to the rich, a fullness that cannot be taken from them for it comes from their pain. The poor can love without reserve. Their arms are open because they have no riches to protect, no possessions to shutter up their hearts.

## Bond of Suffering

We all saw on television the tragic people of Rwanda wandering in great crowds from their homes and country, travelling an aimless road but travelling it *together*. Being together they were strengthened, at least a little, to face that lonely road. Comrades on that awful journey, they were consumed with fear but consoled by their togetherness.

In times of great tragedy the barriers that divide us fall away.

Whatever divided us is of little consequence in the face of tragedy. Pain, especially if it is a shared pain, brings us together, and our neighbours love us all the more when they see and share our deepest wounds. We need togetherness.

But there is one togetherness that transcends all others. It is that found in a good marriage. Here is a bond that is the very prototype of togetherness for it is founded, above all else, on the truth that is written in the human heart from the beginning.

## The Truth of Love

This truth is like the seed that begets all togetherness, and it is, as we all know, 'the most natural thing in the world.' This is the truth that begets family and community and life itself. It is the love song of all love songs that only those truly in love can sing. On this truth stands the whole 'togetherness' of the people of God.

Because of it, and because it was there from the beginning, we yearn in our hearts to return to our roots, to our fully extended family where life, for the very first time, will be lived without barriers, and lived, as it should be lived, with all the family around the table. □



# Family Secrets

Helen Morgan

*While she and her fiancé, Jonathan, are planning their forthcoming wedding together; Sarah Williams receives the news that both her parents have been killed in a car accident. Originally Irish, Tom and Bridie Williams lived in Britain for many years, where Sarah, their only child, was born. Sarah has always believed that she has no living relatives. Now, after the funeral, a stranger approaches and starts to talk...*

'Sorry for your trouble,' said the stranger. The accent was unmistakably Irish, the handshake warm and sincere. He wore a well-cut grey coat and hat, and carried a rolled, black umbrella.

'Thank you for coming,' said Sarah. 'Were you a friend of my parents?' she enquired.

'Yes,' he replied, 'a long time ago, but I haven't seen them for many years. Jim Brennan's the name. I was a friend of your father,

and also your mother's G.P., when they were young. I saw the death notice in the *Times*, so I flew over this morning for the burial.'

At that moment Sarah was grateful to Jonathan for insisting that she put the death notice in one of the daily newspapers.

'We're going back to the house now for lunch, Dr. Brennan. Would you like to join us?'

Sarah asked.

'If you're sure I'm not intruding,' he replied in his soft Irish brogue.

'You're very welcome. Jonathan, my fiancé, will organize a lift for you.'



Sarah sat in silence throughout the three-mile journey back to the house, her thoughts preoccupied with memories of the parents she had loved so dearly. She still couldn't believe that they were

gone forever. She felt as if she had strayed into some awful nightmare, from which she would eventually awake. She felt numb inside, stunned by the suddenness of it all. Nothing made sense to her any more.

Less than two weeks ago, her mother had been full of life as she tried on the new black dress she had bought for the London trip. With her tall, slim figure and black hair, she had looked stunning.

'You look wonderful, Mum,' Sarah told her. 'It makes you look ten years younger. Nobody would ever think you were fifty-seven.'

'Are you sure it's not too young-looking far me?' she asked, turning to look at herself once more in the mirror.

'Of course not. It really suits you, Mum.'

She remembered her father dressed in his new dinner jacket and bow tie, his grey hair combed to one side to cover the small bald patch he had recently discovered, which she and her mother had teased him about. At fifty-nine, he still cut a handsome figure. His tall, well-built frame complemented that of his elegant wife. Sarah was aware that she did not resemble either of them.

'You are the image of your maternal grandmother,' her mother had always told her. 'She was small like you are, and very pretty.'



Sarah stared abstractly at Jonathan's profile as he drove

through the wet streets of Kingsborough. He was a careful driver, just like her father had been. But her father was now dead. Even careful drivers can be killed in traffic accidents, she reflected.

The lorry driver responsible for the accident was also dead. According to a police report, he had suffered a heart attack at the wheel, and died, aged thirty-nine. There was nothing anyone could have done to prevent the crash. In another town a long way from Kingsborough, another family stood around another graveside. A wife and three small children were devastated by their loss.

The next couple of hours went by in a blur as Sarah helped Jonathan attend to the needs of their guests. She greeted several colleagues of her father - the same people with whom her parents had planned to celebrate - and thanked her own friends and work colleagues, and those of Jonathan, far coming to support her in her loss. They were the people whose names were on their list of wedding guests, she sadly reflected.

Jonathan had been a pillar of strength throughout. She couldn't have coped without him. Not only did he help her when she had to identify the bodies formally, but he also attended to the funeral arrangements. In addition, he had hired a firm of caterers to prepare a buffet lunch at the family home, in order to take the pressure off her.

In the early afternoon the

mourners began to leave, as most of them had to return to work. Looking across the room momentarily, Sarah suddenly remembered her extra guest, Jim Brennan, who was now standing by the fireplace, looking at the framed photograph of her parents on the shelf above.

‘They didn’t change much since I last saw them,’ he said, smiling kindly at Sarah as she approached. ‘Your mother was a very good-looking woman. She broke many a heart when she married your father, you know. Nobody else stood a chance once he came on the scene. They fell head over heels in love.’

It comforted Sarah to hear him speak of her parents with such affection.

‘I’ll have to be on my way now,’ he said. ‘Roger, your father’s boss, is giving me a lift to the airport. My flight leaves at five-thirty.’

He opened his wallet, took out a business card, and handed it to

Sarah. ‘Here’s my address and phone number. If there is anything at all I can do for you, you only have to ask. Call me any time, day or night.’

‘That’s very kind of you,’ she replied.

‘You’ve had a dreadful shock, Sarah. It will take some time for you to come to terms with what has happened.’

Just as he was about to leave, he turned to Sarah, and said in a slightly embarrassed tone, ‘I’m surprised to find that none of the family came over for the funeral.’

‘Family?’ she asked, puzzled.

‘Yes. Your mother’s people. I thought some of them would be here.’

‘But my mother had no family,’ replied Sarah, confused. ‘She was an only child.’

Jim Brennan’s eyebrows arched in disbelief, while his brown eyes surveyed her in a quizzical fashion. ‘Sarah,’ he said gently, ‘your mother was one of three children. She has family back in Ireland...’ □ *To be Continued*

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## *Christmas; Present*

*We use your gifts for selfish ends: For profit, power, and place;  
For oily politic that slides through transience without grace.  
We even foul our earthly nest, this lovely home you’ve given.  
If we can’t serve each other here, how can we manage heaven?  
We shout each other down while drugged*

*with aggrandizing pride.*

*One wonders that the Christ could call his Church, “Beloved Bride.”  
We cannot seem to mend ourselves. Elixirs spill and run.  
To heal our self-made wounds, O Lord, you gave to us your Son.*

*A.F. Schultz. Tucson, Arizona*

# *Don Bosco: The Times, The Man, The Facts*

## **DON BOSCO AND THE BIBLE**

by Natale Cerrato (T/A:ID)

A chapter of the dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation promulgated by the Vatican Council II entitled "Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church," warmly invites all the Faithful to frequently read the Sacred Scriptures.

It was a fact that during the time of Don Bosco, in the state of Piedmont, there was very little emphasis on the reading of Sacred Scripture both Parish and school catechesis. In the teaching of Christian Doctrine what was more in use were examples drawn from the abridged edition of Salvation History.

That was also how it was at the Oratory of Don Bosco at Valdocco.

However, from all the above we do not wish to deduce that Don Bosco did not personally read and meditate on the Bible. Already while he was in the Seminary at Chieri he was able to lay his hands on the Bible of Martini (A. Martini, *Old and New Testament according to the Vulgate translated into Italian with annotations*, Turin, 1769-1781). Besides this there were the well known commentaries of Calmet (*A famous French exegete*). But it was a fact that at the seminary what he was predominantly exposed to were scholarly Biblical essays on the doctrinal character of the Bible rather than on the Bible itself even though those dogmatic essays evidently contained relevant Biblical quotations. The cleric



Bosco was not satisfied with this so he personally dedicated himself to a self-study of the Bible.

In the summer of 1836 Don Cafasso was requested that John Bosco conduct Greek classes for the students of the *Collegio del Carmine* of Turin who had been shifted there due to the threat of Cholera. This opportunity urged the cleric Bosco to take the study of Greek seriously enough so that he would even be able to teach it.

With the help of a Jesuit priest who was a Greek scholar the cleric Bosco made great progress. In just four months the Jesuit scholar made him translate almost the entire New Testament, and then, for four years every week the cleric Bosco punctually brought some Greek compositions for him for his scholarly comments. "That was how," says Don Bosco himself, "I was able to

translate Greek as I would do Latin."

Don Bosco's first biographer noted that on February 10, 1886, when he was sick and old, Don Bosco, in the presence of his students recited in their entirety some chapters of the Letters of St. Paul in Greek and in Latin (cf *EBM* 1,294).

From the same *Biographical Memoirs* we come to know that during the summer, the cleric John Bosco was at Sussambrino with his brother Joseph, where he was accustomed to climb to the top of the hill where the vineyard owned by the Turco family was situated. There he spent his time studying what he was not able to finish during the scholastic year, especially the the study of the History of the Old and the New Testament by Calmet, the geography of the Holy Land and the principles of Hebrew so as to have some grasping knowledge of it.

In 1884 he was heard discussing the grammatical structure and the meaning of certain phrases of the prophets with a priest who taught Hebrew. Together they compared some parallel texts in different books of the bible. He also became interested in the translation of the New Testament from Greek, and began to prepare some sermons, basing himself on the original texts (cf. *EBM* 1,315).

Therefore, Don Bosco, as a self-taught student, was a careful researcher of the writings of the Bible and made certain he understood it well.

One day, while he was still a student of theology, he wanted to go and find his old teacher and friend Father Joseph Lacqua who lived at Ponzano. The latter when

he was informed of his visit asked him to "bring with you the three little volumes of the Holy Bible" (cf. *EBM* 1,359).

It was evident from this that the cleric Bosco was studying from them.

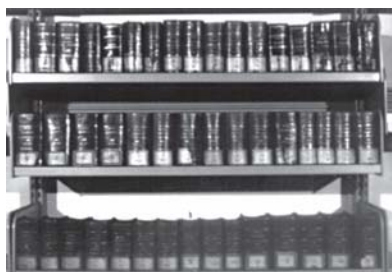
The young priest, in conversation with his Parish Priest, Father Cinzano began speaking about Christian mortification. Don Bosco then quoted to him the words of the Gospel: "*Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me*" (Luke 9, 23). "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross everyday and follow me." Father Cinzano interrupted him saying: "You have added the word *quotidie* (meaning everyday) that is not in the Bible."



*The portico of Valdocco, Turin with inscriptions above the doors.*

Don Bosco replied: "This word is not found in the three evangelists but it exists in the Gospel of St. Luke only. Refer to the ninth chapter and the 23<sup>rd</sup> verse and you will see that I have added nothing."

The good pastor, competent though he was in theological and scriptural subjects, had overlooked that particular verse. Speaking with some friends later,



A collection of  
the "Catholic Readings"  
written by Don Bosco

he emphasized how well Don Bosco knew all the books of the Bible and how carefully he followed its precepts and counsels, particularly in controlling his own fiery and very sensitive temperament (cf. *EBM* 2, 396).

### Don Bosco's Zeal at Valdocco

Don Bosco also demonstrated in many other ways the depth of his interest in the study of Sacred Scripture and later when he was at Valdocco brought his knowledge to bear on his boys too.

You will recall his edition of the *Sacred History* that was first published in 1847, after which it actually went into 14 editions, with tens of reprints right up to the year 1964.

Think also of all the other writings related to Bible History such as *An Easy Way to Study Scripture*, (*Maniera facile per imparare la Storia Sacra*) published for the first time in 1850, *the Life of St. Peter*, that came out in January 1857 in an issue of the "Catholic Readings;" *the Life of St. Paul*, in the month of April that same year appeared in the "Catholic Readings;" *the Life of St. Joseph*, in the issue of the "Catholic

Readings" of March 1867; etc.

Don Bosco then took scriptural themes from the Breviary such as: "*Bonus Dominus et confortans in die tribulationis*" (Nahum 1, 7: The Good Lord comforts us in the day of tribulation) (cf. *EBM* 2, 406).

On the walls of the porticos of Valdocco he had painted quotations from Sacred Scripture such as the following: "*Omnis enim, qui petit accipit, et qui quaerit invenit, pulsanti et aperietur*" (Matthew 7, 8: Whoever seeks finds and whoever knocks to him will it be opened) (cf. *MB* 5, 543).

He directed that philosophy and theology students were to memorize ten verses of the New Testament each week (in Latin) and recite them in the dining room on Thursday (a regular school holiday) morning at breakfast. This custom began in 1853. When, that first morning, Don Bosco came into the dining room, all the clerics had the Vulgate opened at the beginning of St. Matthew's Gospel, believing he would start there. Instead, after the usual prayer, Don Bosco said: "Take St. Matthew, Chapter 16, Verse 18: *Et ego dico tibi, qua tu es Petrus, et super haec petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non prevalebunt adversus eam.*" which means "And I tell you, you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." For years he himself sat in on this recitation, tersely but admirably commenting on the text and concluding with some maxim that would foster divine love and serve as a norm of conduct. (cf. *EBM* 6, 109-110). He really wanted his sons to keep in mind always this evangelical truth. □



## NEWSBITS

### ROME

On the evening of the opening of the world Synod of Bishops on the Bible, Pope Benedict XVI served as the first reader on Italian state television's Bible-reading marathon.

"The Bible, Day and Night" began on Oct 5. Each of about 1,200 people read for between four and eight minutes until all 73 books of the Catholic editions of the Bible were read. No commentary was offered and the only pause provided was a musical interlude every 90 minutes.

Pope Benedict read from the Book of Genesis in Italian.

While the Bible-reading marathon coincided with a Catholic event and was organized with Vatican assistance, Italy's Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish communities also were involved and had representatives among the readers.

The head of the Italian Bible Society, Daniele Garrone, a Protestant theologian, said: "The Bible, Day and Night will bring the sacred Scriptures to the public square, to that modern public square which is television. This free, public circulation of the Bible has been the objective of the Bible Society for more than 200 years."

Garrone said that the programme "is a beautiful image of the church as a creature of the word. It is a lesson for the divided churches, reunited before the word that calls them, guides them and forgives them." *CNS*

### VATICAN CITY

**Bishop Josef Clemens**, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, said the letters of St. Paul demonstrate an understanding of the grueling demands of sports, and his missionary travels show that he probably was physically fit, as well. Thus the year marking the 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Paul's birth is an appropriate time to launch the John Paul II Foundation for Sports, Bishop Clemens said at a July 28<sup>th</sup> press conference.

**Edio Costantini**, president of the foundation, said it was named after Pope John Paul because the late pope spoke so often about sports as a way to bring people together in peace and as a way to team teamwork, self-control and respect for rules.

The first big event on the foundation's calendar is a series of marathons "in the footsteps of St. Paul." The marathons will begin by joining with the five-year-old Bethlehem-to-Jerusalem John Paul II marathon for peace.

Successive stages of the run will take place in Caesarea, Israel; Rabat, Malta, where St. Paul was shipwrecked; and then up the Italian coast to Rome.

Organizers hope the marathon will finish with an international symposium on "*The Social and Educational Values of Sports*."

The foundation's promotional material highlights six values taught by sports: respect for one's body, knowing how to lose, knowing how to win, discipline, practice and hard work. *CNS*

## INTRODUCTION TO A NEW SERIES

### *On the Eucharist*

Dear Readers,

It is time to introduce yet another series of articles linked with the Eucharist. In several recent messages emanating from the Holy Father's desk we find that he lays very heavy stress on **living the Eucharist** which we believe in and celebrate. A little serious reflection would suffice to make us realize that this emphasis is certainly in the right place because ultimately the Eucharist is meant to produce a very definite result – our assimilation into Christ who is our Way, Truth and Life. It is not so much what we believe about the Eucharist or even the wonderfully imaginative and creative manner in which we celebrate it that really matters. What counts in the final analysis is that this belief and celebration transforms each of us into a new kind of person. *“For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!”* (Gal 6:15).

Living out what we celebrate in the Eucharist is perhaps one dimension that is sadly lacking in the Indian Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Statistics in this regard could be really frightening. We all believe that the Faith was brought to India by the apostles Thomas and possibly Bartholomew – but that was about two thousand years ago! These great men and several others who followed them periodically worked might and main to spread the faith; hundreds of them died as martyrs for the faith they proclaimed and lived and yet after two thousand years all we have to show for their heroic efforts is a paltry 1.3% Catholics in the whole of India. And if it took two thousand years to produce only 1.3% how many years would it take, at that rate, to reach the full 100%? We'd need a minimum of another 98,000 years!

With the powerful presence that we have in terms of an education network at all levels, health-care, social uplift and work among dalits and the poorest of the poor, why has the Faith not spread more than it has? Is there something inherently deficient in the Faith we profess, or perhaps is the deficiency in us, Christ's apostles today? Could it be that we are not sufficiently convincing and effective in our living of the Eucharist? Would we need to wait for 98,000 years before the dream of Jesus be realized: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! (Lk 12:49-50)?

Assured that the ultimate answer is that we **live** what we believe and celebrate, we present a few captivating examples of how simple people with the fire of Eucharistic self-giving and love blazing in their breasts, have made a real difference in the place of their stay and work. Not all the stories presented here recount what Catholics have done – but it does not really matter whether the person behind the project is externally Catholic or not! What matters is that the person is open to God's Spirit, alive and active in the hearts of all people of goodwill. Our hope is that Catholic readers of *Don Bosco Madonna* who have so much more incentive, reminders and also opportunities will be inspired to do something in their own small little way on reading these examples. All it requires is to 'light one candle rather than curse the darkness' around us.

The examples we present are taken from real life 'local heroes' and their accounts of how they reached out to God's poor and needy around them. There are still hundreds of creative ways in which we could be moved to chip in our little bit too – what is needed is that we listen to the still gentle voice of the Spirit within us and allow ourselves to be moved out of our self-absorbed lethargy or perhaps even fear, and we could be sure that great things will happen. These stories are based on the articles of Ms. Joanna Rebello of Matharpakady, Mazagon who has published many of these in *The Times of India* in recent months; we have also drawn inspiration from several others who do similar work, taking the time and trouble to research these events thoroughly.

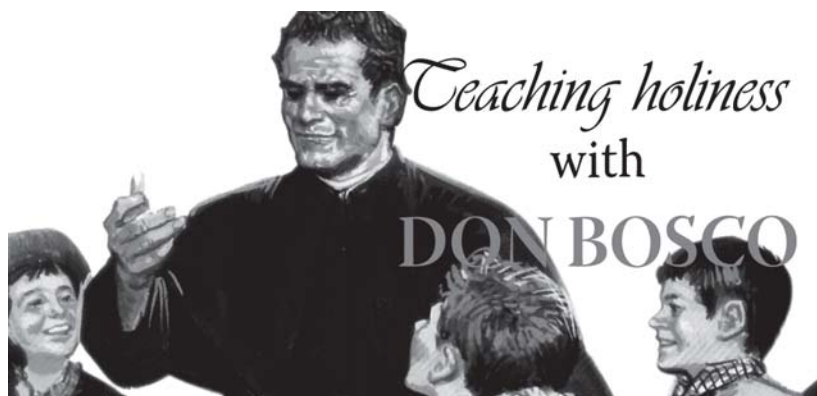
What we have added to their stories is, of course, the Eucharistic dimension and in doing this the key element we stress is that as Christians who receive so much from the hands of our loving Father in heaven, we have the duty to give back something to the Society in which we live. We cannot afford to celebrate Eucharist anymore with a merely self-centred approach: 'I go to Eucharist to obtain grace for myself, to save my soul!' It is worth recalling that there is no 'I' in the Eucharist, but rather always a 'We.' Even when one individual receives Jesus in Holy Communion, the grace of that reception devolves not just on that one individual but on the entire Church. The meals that we eat do not nourish only the hands, mouth and stomach that are actively involved in the ingestion of food but the whole living body! Similarly, while it might be one individual that is directly involved in the reception of Holy Communion (or for that matter in communing with the Lord through the proclaimed Word) yet it is the entire *Body of Christ* that benefits.

So, Christians need to be involved a lot more in sharing their blessings with others – they can do this in the context of their Small Christian (or Human) Communities, in neighbourhood groups, in Mahila Mandals, Church associations like SVP and Legion of Mary and other existing set-ups or even individually. What we provide them with here are insights and incentives to break out of their self-contained lives and live as Jesus would in our concrete human context today. We would deem ourselves amply rewarded if these stories could inspire and motivate a few at least to venture forth into the deep in response to Jesus' words: 'Launch out into the deep for a catch.' But we need to further add Peter's courageous statement: 'Lord, we have worked all night and caught nothing. **But, if you say so, we shall lay down the nets.** May the Eucharistic Lord reward and bless all our efforts to make him the centre of our lives.

And if those who venture forth can also send us a brief report of their attempts, we certainly would have enough material for the next series after this one! We look forward to hearing from you about how God's Spirit moved you to a dynamic apostle who lives each day what s/he celebrates at Eucharist.

*Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss*

Eymard Cottage,  
22, Matharpakady, Mazagon, Mumbai 400 010.



## FRANCIS BESUCCO

### *Penance and the Will of God*

by *Claudio Russo*

#### **With Innocence or Penance**

After staying at the Oratory for a few months, Francis Besucco confided to Don Bosco: "I am very worried. In the Gospel Jesus tells us that you can go to heaven either through innocence or through penance. Through innocence I cannot, because I have lost it. I have to go through penance."

Don Bosco suggested that he could consider applying himself to study as penance, or being attentive in class, or even being patient during the warm summer months or bearing the cold during the winter, or even bearing hunger or thirst.

"But these things are suffered out of necessity," Francis replied.

"It is true that you suffer them out of necessity, but if you accept them out of love for God then they truly become a penance pleasing to the Lord and you will gain merits for your soul."

For a few days after this explanation Francis felt reassured but then the lad started asking for permission to undertake other penances such as, to fast, put rough objects in his bed or inside his clothes so he would feel discomfort. These penances were however forbidden to him. On the eve of the feast of All Saints Francis asked to be allowed to fast on bread and water. Don Bosco forbade that for him. The only concession he was allowed was to forego his breakfast. In short, Don Bosco forbade him from making any corporal penance. Instead, he was allowed other types of penances more in keeping with his age. He was allowed to run errands for his companions, to clean their shoes, to serve at table, to set the tables in the refectory, to make the beds in the dormitory, to

carry out the dustbins, to carry luggage. Francis did these things with serenity and satisfaction.

Some months later, however, even these penances were not enough for him. He confided to a companion that when he was in his village of Argentera he did even more penances and they never affected his health. When Don Bosco came to know this he explained to him that true penance consisted in doing even what you like for the love of God: "Would you do something that would please the Lord more than any other sacrifice? Try to be obedient, do your duties well, be kind and charitable to your companions, forebear their defects and give them good advice."

Francis listened carefully and took this back to his daily life.

#### **"Why do you never complain?"**

Francis often thought of his father. Papa Matteo, by profession was a knife grinder. During the fair

weather he worked in the fields and raised livestock but in the Autumn he left his home and went from village to village earning his keep and supporting his family. On October 26 Francis wrote a letter to him: "Dear dad, it is almost time for you to leave home in order to provide for the needs of the family. I would like to accompany you on your trips but I am unable. However you will always be in my thoughts and my prayers. Here in the Oratory we eat four times a day and as much as we want. At lunch there is soup and a main course. At supper there is soup. Once upon a time we had wine everyday but since it has become expensive we now have it only on feast days. Don't worry about me, I have everything I need. I must tell you that my superiors are pleased with me and I am content to be with them."

In the Oratory Francis found



everything according to his taste: the food, the rules of the house, the timetable and the school. "Why do you never complain?" a companion asked him. "I am made of flesh and bone like the others, but I desire to do everything for the glory of God. If I don't like something, it will certainly be pleasing to God and so I have reason to be very happy."

One day some boys who had just arrived a few days earlier complained that they couldn't get used to the life and the atmosphere at the Oratory. To make them reflect, Francis asked them: "If we had to join the army would we be able to make a timetable that we liked? Would we be able to go to bed when we wanted? Would we be able to get up when we wanted? Would we be able to go out for a stroll whenever we liked?"

"No, but we would have some more freedom..." one of them replied.

"We are free when we do the will of God," Francis said. "We become slaves only when we fall into sin, because we are enslaved by our worst enemy, the devil."

"But in my house I ate better and I slept better."

"Certainly, but you constantly lived with two enemies by your side, idleness and greed. We were not born to sleep and eat, like sheep or goats. We must work for the glory of God. We must avoid idleness that is the father of all vices. And then, have you not heard what Don Bosco told us?"

"No."

"Just yesterday he told us how happy he was to welcome the boys but he did not want to keep the boys here by force. He said that he would help anyone who was not happy to go back home. Those who did not wish to remain at the Oratory were

free to leave, but if they remained, they remained gladly and would not sow seeds of discontent among their companions."

"I would go elsewhere, but I would need to pay and my family can't afford that," replied a boy.

"Since you do not pay, that is a greater reason to show that you are happy. You should be more satisfied than the others because, as the proverb says: 'do not look at a gift horse in the mouth.' My dear friends let us always remember that we are staying in a house that is supported by Divine Providence. Some of us pay a little; some pay nothing at all; where would we get such treatment at this price?"

"That is true, but if we could only get better food..."

"Seeing that you want so much to eat well, I have one solution: take your fees and go elsewhere."

"But I don't have the money to pay the fees..."

"So then, be satisfied with what you get to eat! All the other boys are happy. Dear friends, if I want to be strong then I should not expect so many delicacies. As Christians we ought to make some penance if we wish to go to heaven. We have to control the pleasures of the stomach. Believe me! It is so easy for us to merit the Lord's blessings and Paradise too."

For Don Bosco, making penance did not mean striving some serious suffering but accepting and living daily the will of God even when it calls for sacrifice. □

**LOVING CHILDREN TO  
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Thank you dear Mother Mary for always being with me and letting me feel your hand on me. *Dephny Pinto, Mumbai*

Dear Mother Mary, thank you for helping me find the site of *Don Bosco's Madonna*, and for many other favours received.

*Sophie Vaz, Chennai*

My belated thanks to my beloved Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for helping me in my Std. X and XII examinations and even in my FYBA exams.

*Silvia Fernandes, Bhopal, MP*

While walking on a busy road I was struck by an oncoming autorickshaw and thrown against a car. I felt some pain in my back and my head, but thankfully it was nothing serious. I am grateful to Our Blessed Mother for having protected me from what could have been a rather nasty accident.

*Agnello Torres, Mumbai*

Grateful thanks to our dear Mother Mary for blessing us with a healthy baby girl named Maria.

*Annette and Vinay, Mumbai*

My sincere though delayed thanks to Mother Mary for helping my daughter select a life partner. Mother Mary kindly bless her with a child.

*Bertha Tavares, Goa*

Thank you, Mother Mary for saving my daughter. She injured her leg in a car accident. Even though there was pain there was no fracture as the X-ray revealed.

*Rochelle Diniz, Goa*

Thank you Mother Mary for the favours granted me.

*Arun Joseph Sebastian, Akhil Agnel Sebastian, Nerul*

My mother and I met with an accident. I was barely injured but my mother dislocated her arm. She had to be operated and had rods inserted. She was due to have a graft too but after two months the doctors seeing the progress and the healing that had taken place cancelled the operation. I'm most grateful to our Blessed Mother for this grace.

*Lita Ferrao, Goa*

I am most grateful to Jesus and Mother Mary for a good job that I received.

*A. Almeida, Mumbai*

Our nephew had deposited Rs. One Lakh in a bank nearby and on the due date when he went to collect it he found the bank had closed down and moved away. Now twenty years later. He has recovered his money. We are so grateful to Our Lady for having granted us this grace.

*Piedade and Iona Andrade, Goa*

Thank you dear Mother Mary for curing my daughter of fever and chest pain and for protecting my son in the cyclone.

*Mattilda Carvalho, Mumbai*

Our thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for all the favours granted.

*Joey & Cressy DaCosta, Texas, USA*

My sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians for the many favours received.

*Mrs. B. D'Gama, Bangalore*

My thanks to the Infant Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for helping my son Amit with his first two years of engineering studies and putting him through his third year.

*Shirley D'Souza, Mumbai*

Thank you dear Mother Mary for giving me a negative report with regard to my walking problem.

*Christina D'Souza, Bangalore*

## THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



*The devotion of the THREE HAIL MARYS is a very simple yet most efficacious devotion. Everyday, recite Three Hail Marys, adding the invocation: "O Mary, My Mother, keep me from mortal sin." Many people recite the Three Hail Marys as part of their morning and night prayers. To practise this devotion in time of danger, stress, special need or temptation, is a sure means to obtain Our Lady's help.*

Thank you Mother Mary for the favours received through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. *Silvia Fernandes, Bhopal, MP*

I am grateful to Mother Mary for a clear medical report that I received after having recited the 3 Hail Marys. *Juanita Cardoz, Goa*

Thank you, Mother Mary, for the instant blessings through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. We have a clear report of cardiology for my husband Elias Fernandes. Do continue to keep us in your care.

*S. Fernandes, Doha*

While eating a fishbone lodged itself in my throat and I began to panic. After calling my husband I finally decided to pray the 3 Hail Marys. When I had finished I felt the bone dislodge and reach my mouth. I retrieved it easily. Thanks to Our Blessed Mother for this grace. I am sincerely sorry for the great delay in writing this. *Ansey Thomas, Idukki*

My daughter passed her SSC examinations with a first class thanks to her faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. I am most grateful to Our Blessed Mother. *Mrs. Maria Alina Dias & Rocha, Goa*

Thank you, Mother Mary for helping us obtain a visa through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. *A. D'Silva, Mumbai*

My belated thanks to Our Blessed Mother for helping my son during his mental breakdown and I ask Mother Mary to help him completely through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. *Terezinha, Goa*

Belated thanks to our Blessed Mother through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys I had a successful operation of an ovarian cyst. *Sandra D'Costa, Mumbai*

### A Blessed Christmas to All



**W**e wish our benefactors, readers and all who in any way help our mission here at the office of **Don Bosco's Madonna**, the graces of a holy peace-filled Christmas. You and your families will be remembered in our prayers and Masses throughout the

Christmas season. May the Son of Mary born for us in Bethlehem, bring healing, hope and peace to all our lives. □



**THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO  
OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO**

Thank you, dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for granting us numerous favours especially for granting me a good job.

*Mrs. R. James, Australia*

Thank you dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for the job you found for me.

*Rodney D'Souza, Mumbai*

Our special thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco for good health and so many other favours.

*Silvia Fernandes, Bhopal, MP*

My special thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for showering me with blessings and working wonders in my life.

*Mrs. Rajni Fernandez*

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping my husband get his visa and a job. Thanks also for all the blessings and favours granted to me.

*A Devotee*

Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the favours, graces and blessings granted to my 3 sons, particularly to my eldest son for his success in the entrance interview to the Catering College.

*M. D'Costa, Goa*

Thank you dear Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for all the favours granted to me and please keep me always in your care.

*Loretta Mascarenhas, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for helping my husband get a good job.

*Mrs. A. George, Mumbai*

My grateful thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. John Bosco and Dominic Savio for getting me a good job on the ship.

*Cliff Savio Pereira, Goa*

Dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco do accept my belated but sincere gratitude for helping to heal the open wound on my husband's right leg.

*Hollarene Parrie, Udaipur*

## THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Thank you dear St. Dominic Savio for the gift of three baby boys to the Gonsalves family.

*A Devotee*

Sincere thanks to the Most Blessed Trinity, Our Lady and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy to my daughter. Doctors had told my daughter that she would have to undergo a caesarian but I prayed to St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery which was miraculously granted.

*Ida Pereira, Goa*

Thank you, Jesus, Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a child and for all the other favours received.

*Michelle and Amancio Britto*

Thanks to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the many favours received.

*Vijay Aranha, Udipi, Karnataka*

My sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Joseph, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy and all the other favours.

*Mrs. Thomas, Kerala*

Our sincere thanks to Our Lady help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for gifting me with a lovely baby girl, Michelle.

*Sony and Reshma Soares, Goa*

My sincere thanks to Dominic Savio for curing me of my leg pain.

*Stella Carvalho, Mumbai*

## NO ROOM IN THE INN

Vincent Travers OP



**T**he fact that there was no room in the inn on the night Jesus was born continues to trouble us. Times have changed but human nature hasn't. Christ is always being born into our world at Christmas, and throughout the year, and the bottom line is that there is still no room in the inn.

Jesus, born again in our world, is more easily seen and accepted, by the poor and culturally marginalized, than he is by those who can afford homes, condominiums, and hotel rooms. It is more difficult for those with power and influence to make a place of welcome in their hearts for the Christ Child. That's why he ended up being born out of town, in a barn that sheltered animals, far removed from the centres of power, pomp, and prestige, far from all that seems important, in a place where the poor and needy are to be found, in a place where the rich and influential find him, only if they are led there.

Jesus is as accessible to the poor as the village pump; he is more hidden to the rich and famous, and to those who think they have made it in the world. Why is this so? Thomas Merton explains it this way:

*Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, who are tortured, bombed, and exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in the world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst.*

This is a disturbing thought for the smug, that the world at its worst is a good place to find Christ. Lost is a very good place too, and happens to be one of his favourite places. □

### **APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER**

DECEMBER 2008

**Holy Father's General Intention:** *That those who, because of wars or oppressive regimes, are forced to leave their homes and country may be supported by Christians in defending and protecting their rights.*

**Missionary Intention:** *That, faithful to the sacrament of Matrimony, every Christian family may cultivate the values of love and communion in order to be a small evangelizing community, sensitive and open to the material and spiritual needs of its sisters and brothers.*

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## **MARY WAS THERE**

I was returning home after an official tour and even though I was tired I couldn't sleep as my wife wasn't well. The following morning I had to go to the office to hand in my tour report. After praying a Hail Mary I drove off. Passing the church I made it a point to greet Our Lady of Lourdes where her statue is erected. I said another Hail Mary. I must have suddenly dozed off while the car was travelling at around 45-50 kmph on its own. There were vehicles behind and in front of me. Suddenly the entire body of the vehicle shook and I woke up to find a motorcyclist staring at me. I slowly stopped the car and got out. Going up to him I said "I am sorry". He smiled and left me without a word. There was not even a scratch either on his bike or on my car. I believe my Mother Mary woke me up in time. Now looking back I can see that driving with my eyes shut anything could have happened. Our Blessed Mother certainly protected me.

*(A.B. Bosco, Bangalore)*

**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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