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*"For the Holy One
that shall be born of thee
shall be called
the Son of God.
(Luke 1:35)*

Cover: **The Assumption of
the Blessed Virgin Mary**



From The Editor's Desk

Morning Prayer For a Meaningful Day

Our age seems to be an age of meetings and discussions, of comment and criticism. There is no shortage of advisers on how and when the harvest should be reaped but few seem ready to cut the hay.

With so much talk and advice in the air, it is easy to become confused or dispirited. This is as true in spiritual matters as in material affairs. Our Lord once said to his apostles: "You know these things, blessed shall you be if you do them."

When are we going to respond to the high calling of our Christian vocation? Tomorrow, next year, when we have more time, when our parish council comes up with their new plan, when we have the harvest gathered and our holidays over?

If we make an effort to begin each morning with a moment of prayer we will help ourselves to live our Christianity rather than talk about it. Such a prayer should focus our attention on the present moment. It should help us to be both single-minded and clear-headed, two qualities very important in our modern world of multiple choices and muddled thinking.

Our Morning Prayer ought to help us to be clear headed because it puts before us simply a clear vision of our Christian purpose in life. We are called **i)** to give glory to God our Father, **ii)** to live our lives in union with Christ his Son, bringing his light and redemptive grace to all things and to all men, **iii)** to work for the betterment of humanity and for the development of the wonderful world given to us. When we make an effort to sincerely spend some time in prayer each morning we become aware of what we should be trying to do with our lives.

This simple spiritual exercise also helps us to be single-minded. It directs our energies to the achievement of our Christian purpose in what we are doing at the present moment. It emphasizes that we don't have to make further plans or await the result of investigations in progress. We begin immediately. We start today. The time is now!

We take our lives at this moment, our family life, our friendships, our work, our pleasures and relaxations, our sufferings and anxieties and breathe into them the spirit of Christ and already we are transforming the world.

We try to do our work as Christ would do it. We try to accept our sufferings as he accepted his. We relish the good and beautiful things in life as he enjoyed the things that made him happy, relaxed and joyful.

When we offer ourselves to and with Christ in the Mass we are really living our Christian vocation. For it is "through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit that all honour and glory is given to God our Almighty Father," as we just try to live every moment of every day in His presence.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

8. TRANSFORMING LIFE'S DISASTERS

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss

On a wintry December night, we are told that a fire broke out in the film room of Thomas Edison's laboratory. Anyone would have surmised that as he saw his assets go up in smoke, this sixty-seven-year-old man's spirit would certainly be crushed. Instead, to everyone surprise, the moment he saw the fire he shouted to his son, "Where's Mom? Go get her! Tell her to get her friends! They'll never see a fire like this again!"

Later, he said, "One can always make capital out of disaster. We've just cleared out a bunch of old rubbish. We'll build bigger and better on the ruins." Strange man he certainly was, but stranger still was his reaction in this disastrous situation! What we actually see here is that Thomas Edison like all of us, could not control the circumstances of his life. But, his philosophy of life was such that rather than be heartbroken at seeing his life's work go up in flames, he chose to welcome the opportunity to start all over again, making a fresh new start. Edison, known for his overwhelming optimism anyway, is indeed a tremendous inspiration for many of us today.

Facing Life's Struggles

Much as we would like it to be different, Life cannot and will not be 'roses, roses all the way' for any of us. The Cross has to come our way, in some form or other, sooner or later. Even when one takes the greatest precautions, one cannot always prevent terrorist attacks or earthquakes or tsunamis every now and then, with perhaps several innocent people becoming hapless

victims, who are then laid up in hospital beds the rest of their lives! It is not what happens to us that matters, though, as much as how we take what happens to us. Especially for those who have understood something of the power of the Resurrection of Jesus, there can be no tragedy that beats them to the dust completely. Encouraged by well-known contemporary examples like that of a Helen Keller or a Christopher Reeves, they discover what life still offers them generously and somehow make the best of it.

What often happens in a person's life is that s/he launches out on a path which s/he thinks is what s/he is called to. But if that path is not really what God has destined him/her for to bring out the best in him/her, s/he is bound to be dissatisfied travelling down that road. And so God takes the matter in hand and gets it out of the way for us, in ways best known to him alone. Unaware of his positive purposes we could often cling to our own dream trying to get back to it, by hook or by crook. And the more stubbornly a person clings to his/her own self-designed plan of life, the more does s/he set himself up for a great crash - at times that is the only way the Lord can tear us away from those disastrous self-opinionated dreams and bring us to the path of true success.

In the aftermath of such a crash in life, if the person can sit back and allow God's still gentle voice to get to him/her, s/he would perhaps discover something really beautiful blossoming from within. There would inevitably be some period,

more or less extended, in which the person grieves over the loss and gropes for a new path. But the sooner s/he finds one, the better for everyone. And the sign that this new-found direction is from God is that even in the midst of excruciating pain and disappointment on the surface, a deep inner peace pervades his/her entire being. In spite of darkness all around, there is at least a faint glow of light at the end of the tunnel.

One Step At a Time

What is important at this stage is not that we have the entire process clearly mapped out before us, but that we are prepared to take things 'one step at a time.' Each little success builds up one's inner self-confidence and awareness of God's protective presence. It opens up greater possibilities for the next day. But perhaps the point worth noticing most is that during this entire process, one would need to focus *away* from the Self, turning one's gaze either on to God, or on to a significant other. That other person could be someone needing help, or a person in some deeper trouble than oneself. As the Chinese proverb has it: "I complained because I had no shoes, until I saw a man who had no feet!" The very effort to reach out and help such a person takes one's mind off one's own crosses releasing unknown resources from deep within one's being. The ultimate result is actually what Edison predicted: 'We will build something bigger and better on the ruins!'

It takes only a brief reflection to realize that some of the greatest works of art and inspiration were born out of deep suffering and pain. But for this to happen what is crucial is a vision that enables the suffering person to transcend the

pain and gradually emerge as a success. Thus, it is not pain and suffering as such that bring out the best in us – but the Spirit of God residing in the recesses of our hearts who makes use of these negative events inspiring us to allow him to mould and shape us in these moments of crisis.

Resources Available

Another angle worth exploring is that this transformation generally does not happen instantaneously – it usually takes a painfully long time, during which there could be several options available, numerous starts and stops, some back-slidings and wrong turns in the road. At such moments what sustains us is patience with ourselves and a deep belief that in the end all will be well not only for us, but for everyone around us too. Often it is this tenacity in holding on in spite of everything that sees a person through the deepest crisis no matter what its origin. The slightest positive sign should be held on to as a stepping stone to the next.

Besides, if one has trained oneself to be selfless, this habit will be priceless in moments like these. For, the more we focus on the Self, the more we tend to wallow in self-pity and remain where we are, or even get worse. The man who has lost both his hands in an accident could well ask, 'What can I still do with my legs and mouth, perhaps?' A Filipino young man does just this: he fixes a punctured bicycle tyre all by himself although he has no hands and only stumps for legs! He makes a handsome living in this way, as people tend to be generous with one who courageously helps himself no matter what the odds against him!

Resurrection is Real

When we say that Jesus has shared his Resurrection with us already now, it means, among other things - that we will never give up. Paul reminds us, 'We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies' (2 Cor. 4:7-10). However, it is only when this doctrine is lived that we have the opportunity to see heroic examples in our lives and in the lives of others around us. Is there something in your life that you need to turn around?

In our day we see a slightly different version of this truth being lived out. Several people today who have lived their lives following their regular avowed profession, no sooner do they retire than they take up another career which all along they had nurtured as a hobby. Thus, a teacher by profession who specialized in Geography and History took up to being a tourist guide to places in Russia, because this was her favourite subject. Not only was she good at this new profession and got several opportunities to visit places of interest, but the people she guided on their tours also benefited a lot more from her professional help. Besides, she was able to use her period of retirement much more profitably since by then her children had all grown up and could fend for themselves. Her active presence

wasn't really needed in the home very much and what is more the money kept rolling in too!

It is said of the great J.R.D. Tata who eventually retired from active service around the age of 78 - ever since official retirement, he worked as a consultant to various allied services till finally at 78 he chose to pull out completely. But it is at this stage that he got himself a computer and decided to learn the intricacies of working at it and becoming computer savvy. His argument to others and also to himself was: all along no one ever allowed me to do my own work on a computer, with the result that I could never learn how to master it. Someone or other would chip in and do the work for me, meaning to be of help no doubt, but at the same time effectively cutting out all possibility of my learning the art. Now that I have no secretaries to thwart my desire, I can work freely at it - and soon he was pretty good at it. He excelled in a new art at the age of 78! Wasn't he also building something better and new on the ruins of the past?

Resurrection is new life bursting into our limited earthly frames but manifesting itself in ever new ways of self-giving. It is amazing how much creativity we are capable of once we allow God's Spirit free play in our lives. The more we exercise ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally and otherwise, the more novel ways we discover to break of ourselves for others. Then we are truly free from within; we are no longer afraid to leave behind what we have been attached to, nor to fearlessly launch into something new. For we know that the Lord is ever faithful to his promise: 'Do not be afraid for I am with you always, even till the end of time!' (Mt. 28:20). □

*'Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near'* ((Is 55:6)



"SIX PAIRS OF SHORT PANTS FOR GAMES"

Fr. M.A. Isaac, sdb

Confessor to the pre-novices and Asst. Parish Priest at Mariam Nagar,
Agartala, Tripura - N.E. India

My parents were Abraham and Annamma Mattoppillil and I was born on 12th August 1936. From the time I was just 2 ½ years old I was brought up by my aunt (mother's sister). She and my grand parents decided that I would not need to attend Std. I so I was put in Std. II at St. Mary's School, Anickadu. The following year this aunt of mine left home to join a convent. I can still remember the scene as she walked away from my mother's house. This made a deep impression on me.

I must have been in class VII or VIII when I heard my father say: "If one of my sons becomes a Priest, I will be happy." My father's words made a deep impression on me and I said to myself "Maybe, I can become a Priest one day".

When I finished my H.S.L.C. exams, I told my father I would like to become a Priest. There was a junior seminary near Kottayam and so I registered my name there and they told me they would let me know.

I was told that my father's uncle was guiding several young people who were seeking to become Priests or Religious, so I went to meet him. He spoke to me about different religious congregations. Then he said, "There is a new Congregation known as Salesians. The Father will be coming shortly to recruit vocations."

It was Fr. Joseph Comandu who came to recruit candidates. There must have been about six of us who came. I found him friendlier than the others I had met. One requirement



of the Salesians fascinated me. It mentioned: "Six pairs of short pants for games". I needed no time to deliberate. If I could become a Priest and play games also, nothing more was needed.

After my ordination (January 29, 1966), I did my B.Ed. at St. Xavier's Institute, Bombay. Then I was sent to Don Bosco Lonavla for the next six years. I was able to contribute in some way to the formation of candidates, a number of whom are today working as Priests and Brothers in the Bombay and Konkan Provinces.

In 1973 I went to the North East as a Missionary. I am now working in Tripura as a Confessor to the pre-novices and Asst. Parish Priest at Mariam Nagar, Agartala. I would request you to say a wee prayer for the missionary work in Tripura where a number of people, especially tribals, are open to the Faith. □

For further details contact **Fr Brian Moras sdb**: frbrian@rediffmail.com

WHY JOHNNY DOESN'T GO TO CHURCH

by Ursula C. Van Oosten

Youth who attend church regularly are a minority; it just isn't 'cool' to go to church. But that's okay; because if we went to church to be 'in', we would be going for the wrong reason.

Church is a place to worship. When I was young we were told that the church was the house of God. It seemed to me that this was a positive approach because we realized that we had to touch basis with God, and what better place to do so than at His house.

Then, we began talking about Church as the people, and we became concerned with community - interacting with one another. There is nothing wrong with community but, we sometimes got so busy communicating with each other that we forgot to commune with God.

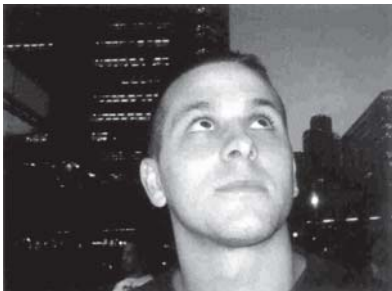
I'd be pretty insulted if I invited a group of friends to my house for a celebration, but they were so busy talking to each other that they forgot to talk to me. Likewise, the community can't forget that they've come to the celebration to pay tribute to the HOST, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharist is central, or at least it should be. It is the ALL important

reason for coming. We can actually meet Jesus on such a level that we can take Him deep within us. What a profound delight!

Unfortunately; many of our youth do not realize the impact and the privilege it is to receive the REAL presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

We have baptised and confirmed our children, but we have forgotten to evangelize them - convert them. In John 3:3, 8 Jesus said: "I tell you most solemnly; unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said: "How can a grown man be born? Can he go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus replied: "I tell you most solemnly; unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God..."

We must instill in our children a desire to 'hear with their ears, see with their eyes and be converted.' (Mark 8:18) It is imperative that each and every baptised Christian acknowledge their sin, and recognize their need for a Saviour. We must repent, accept Jesus into our Hearts, and be converted! A big step in this conversion is to speak it out. Rom. 10:9 says: "If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved." It is then that the full power and grace of the Sacraments is truly released. When our children really come to know God in this way; we won't be able to keep them away from the church!



Young people can not slide into heaven on their parents' coat-tails. They need to develop a right relationship with God. The scripture warns us that:

"EVERY time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death, and so anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be behaving unworthily toward the Body and Blood of the Lord."

It is the responsibility; therefore, of each individual attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist, to be in an attitude of reverence and respect for our Lord.

The Mass is first a sacrifice and secondly a celebration. We would have nothing to celebrate if Jesus had not been brutally scourged and crucified, and left to die for our sins. We cannot save ourselves. Jesus said: *"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me."*

Many young people do not attend church because they have not been convinced of this overwhelming fact. They do not comprehend the profound victory the Mass brings us. They need to be told, just as the Jews were told, "I tell you most solemnly if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in you." (John 6:53)

If we are distracted and dreaming at Mass, we must not go forward to Communion just to break the monotony; or go with the flow. If we are bored it is because we fail to enter into full communion with Christ - not because the Mass is boring! We need to pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the spiritual truths to our young people, so they will be set free from the world.



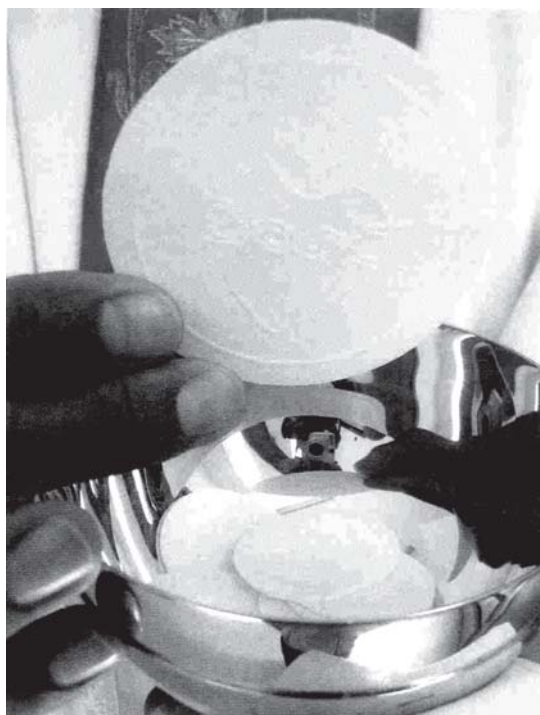
As parents, we drag them to church hoping that holiness or faith will rub off on them, when what we should be doing is teaching them to listen. Jesus says, in St. John's Gospel (Chapter 8 verse 47): "A child of God listens to the words of God; if you refuse to listen, it is because you are not God's children."

We need to ask our youth, and ourselves, if we are indeed God's children. Do we parents listen, with our hearts?

Johnny is not coming to church because he has not received the word of God into his heart. He does not believe - therefore he needs to be evangelized.

All too often we have introduced our children to a good-fairy god. A god of love - and only love. No matter what we do He will continue to love us. This is a half-truth. God is also a God of wrath - a God who gives His children commandments and expects them to live by them. He is a God who loves us enough to chastise us when we are out of line.

We wonder why many of our



parapatusus. I knew that God had the power to take one or all of my children. I knew I deserved to be punished, and I would not have blamed God in anyway if He'd chosen to take what was dearest to me, my children. He had the right to do whatever He wanted with me, or with my children - He created us!

In fear and trembling, I got to my knees and prayed for the grace to turn from my sin. I felt a definite touch of God. I knew He was going to give me the strength to turn from my evil ways. I felt His love, His compassion, His forgiveness. If I had not

youth are not spiritually tuned in, but the Bible tells us that "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111: 10) and we have failed to introduce them to the fearsome side of God's personality; we have only given them half a God but it is not enough.

I know that if I had not been given the grace to fear the Lord, I would not be a committed Christian today; I had fallen into a sinful life style, and I knew it was sin but I made excuses. Then, one after the other each of my three children almost died. My son of a heart infection, my daughter after a routine tonsillectomy; and my five-month-old baby girl from a strain of whooping cough called

first feared His wrath, I'd never have felt His unconditional love and forgiveness.

When we are self-reliant, in control, we see no need for God. Our young people are encouraged to do their own thing, look out for #1, believe in yourself. All good things if indulged in minute degrees; but when self gratification becomes a life style, there is no room left for God.

We all want eternal life, "and eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Let's introduce our young people to Jesus Christ, and when they really come to KNOW God, they will long to attend church. □

walking with the Church



The Book of Revelation, The celebration of the Mass

From the St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland

Q. *What is the difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God? Why does one gospel call it the Kingdom of Heaven and in another gospel it is called the Kingdom of God?*

A. The gospel of Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of heaven" because this was written for a Jewish readership. Out of respect, the Jews did not like to use the name of God directly. Mark, on the other hand, writing for a different readership, has no problems speaking about the "kingdom of God". They mean the same thing.

Q. *The Bible (Revelation Ch. 14) states that Heaven is home to 144,000. Where are all the others? This problem has troubled me for many years.*

A. The earlier Chapter 7 of Revelations also mentions the 144,000 but quite clearly indicates that this number refers to the elect of the Jewish people from all the tribes of the people of Israel. It does not mean that only 144,000 would be saved. The writer also points out that apart from these he saw a great crowd impossible to count from every nation, race, people, language standing before the throne and the lamb.

Some people who take everything in the Bible literally say that the number spoken of is the number that will be saved. They seem to forget or obviously do not

understand that among ancient people large numbers were frequently symbols of an unmeasurable infinite time, so a large number of people, such as 144,000, would represent an infinite number of people - impossible to count.

Q. *Why is the celebration of the Eucharist called the Mass?*

A. The two chief parts of the Mass are the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The first consists primarily of two or three Scripture readings, a homily following the Gospel reading, and general intercessions or prayers of the faithful. This is the instructional part. In the early church the catechumens, or hearers who had not yet been baptised, were dismissed at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Catechumens (Liturgy of the Word), and the faithful, or baptised Christians, remained to celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist, also called Holy Communion. The Mass takes its name from the Latin *missa* (dismissed), referring to the practice of dismissing the catechumens (those being instructed in the faith and not yet baptised) before the offertory. St. Ambrose, who lived in the 4th century, is said to have been the first person to use the word Mass to describe the Eucharist. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. BERNARD TOLOMEI (Aug. 20) (1272-1348)

with contributions from the Monks of St. Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Another boy!" This shout echoed in the house of the Tolomei family, in Siena, Italy on May 10, 1272. Most likely that same day, following the custom of the time, the child was baptized, receiving the name Giovanni (John). He joined two brothers already at home, and would be followed by two more boys and two girls.

An accomplished jurist

Giovanni received the best possible education. From his father and his uncles he learned the basic techniques of business and banking. An ancient account describes him as an "accomplished jurist". His legal abilities certainly gave him the possibility to attain positions of administrative and diplomatic authority in his city. Spiritually, he knew his weaknesses and considered himself a sinner. Nevertheless, he was inspired by the religious atmosphere of Siena; the city of saints. The Virgin Mary was the city's patroness, and a "Maesta", an image of the enthroned Madonna, surrounded by apostles, saints, and angels, would be given the place of honour on the cathedral's facade in June 1311. A chronicler portrays



Giovanni in these words: "Enlivened by the breath of the divine Spirit and moved to his innermost depths by a passionate fervour, one with his noble Sienese friends, Patrizio de' Patrizi, Francesco, and Ambrogio Piccolomini, and meditating day and night, they aspired to the heavenly realities.

One day in 1313, Giovanni and his Sienese friends moved to a place called Acona, which the

descendants of the Tolomei had received as an inheritance. It was a completely isolated site, accessible from a single side, but otherwise surrounded by precipices. Inspired by the Spirit of God, these young men left the city with its numerous obstacles to their spiritual aspirations, withdrawing to this solitary spot to begin a new life and seek God more intensely.

A new way of thinking

The friendship that bound Giovanni and his friends flowed from their friendship with God, and the particular tone of the monastic family that was born came from this communion lived by the founders. Patrizio belonged to the group of very wealthy merchants who formed the supreme judiciary, was weary of frequent travel and activity that was deadening to the soul, he joined the confraternity to which Giovanni belonged. He brought the new community valuable help, thanks to his economic and administrative skills. He was the closest of Giovanni's companions. He would die in 1347. Ambrogio came from the same circles as Giovanni. A young man of means having lived in idleness, he would have to find courage to successfully live the conversion he undertook with his friends. He would die in 1338. It is not known whether Francesco accompanied the group of founders. In Acona, the three friends found a building that they moved into, exchanging their garments of fine cloth for rough habits. They built a place of worship to chant the divine office and have the divine mysteries celebrated by priests of their choice, since none of them had been ordained. Poverty forced them to

live by the work of their hands, which they probably were not used to. They grew some vegetables and gathered wild fruit. However, this work alone was not enough to support them, so they supplemented it with the revenues of Giovanni's possessions.

Solitude and friendship

Their fervour and joy drew other souls and, little by little, the small group grew. They devoted themselves in private to compunction of heart and to prayer, silence and solitude.

This foray into monastic life did not go unnoticed, and tongues soon wagged. The Church sent an official inquisitor to Acona. His conclusions, favourable to the ascetics, urged them to have themselves recognized as religious by their bishop and to adopt a Rule.

One day, Giovanni was alone in prayer when he saw rise before him a ladder made of silver, at the top of which stood the Saviour and His Most Blessed Mother, clothed in brilliant white. By this ladder, angels descended to earth, while monks clothed in white ascended to Heaven. Calling some nearby brothers, Giovanni shared with them this vision that foretold the future: the building of a monastery that would be a ladder to Heaven for many white-clothed monks. Strengthened by this supernatural revelation, the hermits of Acona chose to place themselves in the school of Saint Benedict. Giovanni took the name Bernard, after the 12th century abbot of Clairvaux who sang the praises of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Accompanied by Patrizio, he went to see the bishop in Arezzo. The bishop responded with kindness

and generosity, and on March 26, 1319, granted them a charter bringing the Benedictine monastery in Acona into existence. The new religious had received permission to distinguish themselves from other Benedictines by wearing a white rather than black habit.

On March 29, Bernard, Patrizio, and Ambrogio were officially clothed in the monastic habit, and made their religious profession at the hands of a monk from the abbey of Sasso, who had been delegated by the bishop for this ceremony. The first abbot elected was not Bernard, who wanted to be in the background and stressed his poor eyesight, but Patrizio.

The monastic days were divided between chanting the Divine Office, manual labour, which occupied an important place for the new monks, and reading. Poverty was apparent in their dress, their meals, and their beds, which were only sacks filled with straw. This monastic regime was patterned after the living conditions of the poor of the time.

The spiritual instruction of Bernard Tolomei after his election as abbot stressed the virtue of humility, to which he gave central importance in the life of a monk. He was attentive to each of his brothers, especially to the youngest. He governed as the father of a family, aware at once of his responsibilities and his limits, trusting in the aid of the Holy Spirit.

The preservation of unity

Soon, bishops and lay lords, moved by the fervour of the new monks, asked for foundations. The first was established in Siena

in 1322. Within twenty years, there would be ten, often located near cities, but sometimes completely isolated in the country. Each one was connected to and under the Mother House like limbs attached to the head, making up a single body. On January 21, 1344, the Pope granted Bernard's petition. The Pope's approval marked the official birth of this Congregation, which at that time comprised 160 monks.

At the beginning of 1348, the Black Plague, which would strike all of Europe, spread throughout northern Italy with devastating speed. His monks were in greatest danger, to give them the aid of his presence and his spiritual assistance and it is likely that, along with them, he also cared for the isolated and abandoned sick of the city. But he in his turn contracted the disease. On August 20, surrounded by a few surviving brothers, and reaching with all his faith toward his Lord whom he knew to be at his side with His glorious Mother, he rendered his soul to God. His body, quickly buried because of the contagion, has never been found, as if the saint wished to tell us not to turn our gaze to him, but toward Christ. The saint's monastic family was hit hard by the scourge, considering that 80 brothers—roughly half of the actual total—died at the same time as their Father.

Bernard Tolomei was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on April 26, 2009.

Let us ask the Lord to help us recognize the fullness of His love. May Christ live in our hearts and make us new men and women, witnesses to the truth in charity! □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Zookeeper's Dilemma

A zookeeper wanted to get some extra animals for his zoo, so he decided to compose a letter. The only problem was that he didn't know the plural of "mongoose."

He started the letter: "To whom it may concern, I need two mongeese."

No, that wouldn't work, so he tried again: "To whom it may concern, I need two mongooses." Is that right?

Finally, he got an idea: "To whom it may concern, I need a mongoose, and while you're at it, send me another one."

School Days

Early one morning, a mother went in to wake up her son. "Wake up, son. It's time to go to school!"

"But why, Mom? I don't want to go." "Give me two reasons why you don't want to go."

"Well, the kids hate me for one, and the teachers hate me, too!"

"Oh, that's no reason not to go to school. Come on now and get ready."

"Give me two reasons why I should go to school."

"Well, for one, you're 52 years old. And for another, you're the Principal!"

Conductor Problem

The symphony musicians had little confidence in the person brought in to be their new conductor.

Their fears were realized at the very first rehearsal. The cymbalist, realizing that the conductor did not know what he was doing, angrily clashed his instruments together during a delicate, soft passage.

The music stopped. The conductor, highly agitated, looked angrily around the orchestra, demanding, "Who did that? Who did that?"

Never Be Late

A local priest was being honored at his retirement dinner after 25 years in the parish.

A leading local politician and member of the congregation was chosen to make the presentation and to give a little speech at the dinner.

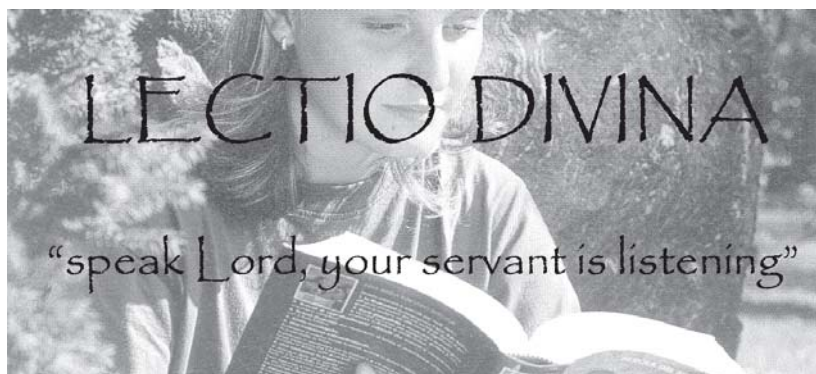
However, he was delayed so the priest decided to say his own few words while they waited:

"I got my first impression of the parish from the first confession I heard here. I thought I had been assigned to a terrible place. The very first person who entered my confessional told me he had stolen a television set and, when questioned by the police, was able to lie his way out of it. He had also stolen money from his parents, embezzled from his employer, had an affair with his best friend's wife, and taken illicit drugs. I was appalled.

"But as the days went on I learned that my people were not all like that and I had, indeed, come to a fine parish full of good and loving people."

Just as the priest finished his talk, the politician arrived full of apologies for being late. He immediately began to make the presentation and said: "I'll never forget the first day our parish priest arrived. In fact, I had the honor of being the first person to go to him for confession."

Moral: Never, never, NEVER-
EVER be late. □



MOTHER OF TWINS

or

How A Woman's Devious Ways Protected God's Promise

A Drama in Three Acts

by Dermot Connolly

Act 1 -Betrothal

We first meet Rebekah with a jug on her shoulder, come to the well for water: "The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known" (Genesis 24:16). Abraham had sent his servant all the many miles back to his own country and kindred, to find a wife for his son Isaac. Rebekah meets the servant at the well, gives him water to drink, and offers to water the camels too. With impulsive generosity, she invites him to stay with her family... "Yes, there is straw, yes, plenty of fodder with us, (and) yes, a place to spend the night - and then has to run off home to tell her mother what she had just done! (Genesis 24:25-28). She makes her own decisions, and without delay sets off on the long

unknown journey to Abraham's family, to become Isaac's wife (Genesis 24:57-67). Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah; she probably twenty or younger, if we are to take these figures at their face value. (Genesis 25:20)

Act 2 -Birth

For twenty years she is barren, and when she finally does conceive it leads to a difficult pregnancy. Not one to suffer in silence, Rebekah "went to inquire of the LORD", and the Lord's answer was -twins!

*Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be
divided; the one shall be stronger than
the other; the elder shall serve the
younger. (Genesis 25:19-28)*

God confided in her, not in her husband Isaac. Like Hagar and her son Ishmael, Rebekah got her own promise, and she will cherish it. Two boys were born, rivals from the womb: Esau the first, but Jacob clinging to his heel even in the act of birth. "When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Genesis 25:27-28)

Act 3 - Blessing

Many more years have passed. Isaac is now old and feeble and blind, and it is time he gave his blessing to his son and heir. Heir, that is, not only to Isaac's considerable fortune but to the promise God made to Abraham that "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you" (Genesis 21:12). It's the lineage that is in question: Abraham, Isaac - Who? Which of the twins is the heir? By right it ought to be Esau, the first-born and

Mother of twins: a batik from Burkina Faso, West Africa



Isaac's choice. But Rebekah thinks otherwise as she recalls God's promise made to her: the elder shall serve the younger. Esau had already sold his birthright (Genesis 25:29-34), but that wouldn't mean anything if he got his father's blessing.

Rebekah does not wait for God to intervene to protect the promise. She takes matters into her own hands, or rather the hands of her favourite, Jacob.

In a notorious con job on a blind man, she covers Jacob's hands with animal skins to make them feel like those of Esau, for as Jacob himself said, "my brother is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin". They got away with it and stole the blessing, to the terror of Isaac and the grief of Esau.

We are not told what God might have felt about it. □

It's a fine story, and could make a good play or film; for all know it might already have done so. But why don't you read it for yourself, the complete version, including what happened to Esau and Jacob in later life? It is all there in the Book of Genesis. (From AFRICA June 2009)

Dedicated
to Our Lady's Assumption

Quiet

CHRISTIAN LIFE FOLLOWING J

On the Solemnity of the Assumption 2009 the Holy Father celebrated Holy Mass at the parish Church of San Tommaso da Villanova in Castel Gandolfo. The following is a translation of the Pope's Homily which was given in Italian.

The Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady crowns the series of important liturgical celebrations in which we are called to contemplate the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the history of salvation. Indeed, the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation, the Divine Motherhood and the Assumption are the fundamental, interconnected milestones with which the Church exalts and praises the glorious destiny of the Mother of God, but in which we can also read our history.

In the Gospel passage (of the day), St. Luke tells that, after the Angel's announcement, Mary "arose and went with haste into the hill country", to visit Elizabeth (Lk 1:39).

With these words the Evangelist wishes to emphasize that for Mary to follow her own vocation in docility to God's Spirit, who has brought about within her the Incarnation of the Word, means taking a new road and immediately setting out from home, allowing herself to be led on a journey by God alone.

St. Ambrose, commenting on Mary's "haste" admits of no delay" (*Expos. Evang. Sec. Lucam, II, 19: PL 15, 1560*).

Our Lady's life is guided by Another: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38); it is modelled by the Holy Spirit, it is marked by events and encounters, such as that with Elizabeth, but above all by her very special relationship with her Son Jesus.

It is a journey on which Mary, cherishing and pondering in her heart the events of her own life, perceives in them ever more profoundly the mysterious design of God the Father for the salvation of the world.

Then, by following Jesus from Bethlehem to exile in Egypt, in both his hidden and his public life and even to the foot of the Cross, Mary lives her constant ascent to God in the spirit of the *Magnificat*, fully adhering to God's plan of love, even in moments of darkness and suffering and nourishing in her heart total abandonment in the Lord's hands in order to be a paradigm for the faithful of the Church (cf *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 64-65).

The whole of life is an ascent, the whole of life is meditation, obedience, trust and hope, even in darkness; and the whole



IS A JOURNEY OF JESUS CHRIST

of life is marked by this “holy haste” which knows that God always has priority and nothing else must create haste in our existence.

And, lastly, the Assumption reminds us that Mary’s life, like that of every Christian, is a journey of following, following Jesus, a journey that has a very precise destination, a future already marked out” the definitive victory over sin and death and full communion with God, because – as Paul says in his Letter to the Ephesians – the Father “raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

In Mary taken up into Heaven we therefore contemplate the One who, through a unique privilege, was granted to she with her soul and her body in Christ’s definitive victory over death. “When her earthly life was over”, the Second Vatican Council says, the Immaculate Virgin “was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory...and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords, (cf. Rv. 19:16) and conqueror of sin and death” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 59).

In the Virgin taken up into Heaven we contemplate the crowning of her faith, of that journey of faith which she points out to the Church and to each one of us: the One who, at every moment, welcomed the Word of God, is taken up into Heaven, in other words she herself is received by the Son in the “dwelling place” which he prepared for us with his death and Resurrection (cf. Jn 14:2-3).

Human life on earth – as the First Reading has reminded us – is a journey that takes place, constantly, in the intense struggle between the dragon and the woman, between good and evil. This is the plight of human history” it is like a voyage on a sea, often dark and stormy. Mary is the Star that guides us towards her Son Jesus, “the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history” (cf. *Spe Salvi*, n. 49) and gives us the hope we need: the hope that we can win, that God has won and that, with Baptism we entered into this victory. We do not succumb definitively: God helps us, he guides us.

This is our hope: this presence of the Lord within us that becomes visible in Mary taken up into Heaven. “The Virgin” – in a little while we shall read in the Preface for this Solemnity – “that you made to shine out as ‘A sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way.’” □





LETTING GO

By Marie Gahan

Muriel took longer than usual tidying the house. She wanted everything to look just right. It was silly really, she thought to herself, but she wanted to come out well under another woman's scrutiny. All morning, she had baked Maurice's favourite cakes for tea; a lemon meringue pie, a cream sponge and two rhubarb tarts. As she placed a vase of fresh flowers on the table, she stood back and gave an appreciative look all round. The furniture gleamed. Everywhere looked nice.

Finally satisfied with her efforts, she went upstairs and ran the bath. Sinking into its soft foamy suds, her body and mind relaxed. Time seemed to stand still. She smiled a self-chiding smile. Why was she getting so het up? After all, hadn't Maurice brought home at least half-a-dozen girls, in the past? But never to tea, her heart told her in the free and easy style

of today, hadn't girls come to the door calling for him? There had always been a group of them together, going to the tennis club, roller-disco, basket-ball matches and discotheques. She had always welcomed them into her



home, supplying them with coffee and cakes at their record sessions.

But somehow Muriel knew this girl was different. It wasn't anything that Maurice said, rather, in typical male fashion, what he didn't say. Her feminine intuition told her that this girl was the one. She knew it would happen some day. She even wanted it to. After all, wasn't it the natural way of things? Maurice was a grown man now. Six feet two inches in height and broad shouldered, he dwarfed her slight frame. Yet now that it was happening she wasn't prepared for the confused feelings she was trying so hard to suppress. For twenty-three years she had had him all to herself. It was going to be hard to share him with another woman. Letting go wasn't easy.

Muriel stepped out of the bath and patted herself dry. She put on her favourite dress. It usually made her feel good but this evening her forty-five years weighed heavily on her. Applying a little makeup to her face, she looked searchingly into the mirror. Brutally, she noted every line, every wrinkle. How come they hadn't seemed so bad before? Her golden hair was free from grey, yet its colour had faded a little. Where had the years flown to? She asked herself. It seemed like only yesterday that Maurice was starting school. She remembered how he clung to her hand, trusting and totally dependent. She thought of the way his eyes searched her out among all the young mothers waiting at the school gates when lessons ended.



As he had grown older, his dependence on her lessened of course. Yet still, it had felt good to be needed. Maurice had given her a reason for living when Dermot had died suddenly at the age of thirty-one. Neither of them had any inkling of his heart condition. Perhaps if they'd known Dermot could have taken things easier, lived life at a slower pace. But it wasn't to be. The one consolation Muriel had was the fact that Dermot had lived every day of his short life to the full. A big extrovert of a man, he was full of exuberance and *Joie-de-vivre*. He had never known a day's sickness, and the way he went would have been the way he would have chosen himself.

Muriel had gone round in a sort of daze for over a year. The duties of motherhood were the only things that kept her from going insane. Slowly, very slowly, the gaping wound that was her heart began to heal, but not entirely.

Now there was just a dull ache whenever she looked at his photo and wistful thoughts of what might have been.

All through Maurice's childhood, although money was scarce, Muriel had refused to leave him to go out to work. Once a competent typist, she had brushed up on her former skills and taken in batches of work to be typed at home. It was a solitary occupation, denying her the companionship of fellow-workers, but it had kept the wolf from the door and allowed her to care for Maurice whenever needed.



He was a good son and appreciated every sacrifice that she made for him. It gave him pleasure to see how proud she was at his scholastic prowess. It spurred him on to greater things. Now he had an excellent job and was on the threshold of life. Who was she to begrudge him the pleasure of a loving relationship? After all, hadn't she done it herself, so many years ago? At times, though, it seemed like only yesterday. She didn't feel much

different inside than the young girl she was then.

Now, Maurice was an exact replica of Desmond when she had first met him. The dark good looks; the athletic physique; even his manner was the same. Muriel began to think of her first visit to Desmond's home for tea. The agonies she had gone through, choosing a suitable outfit to wear; the trouble she had taken with her hair and make-up. Meeting Desmond's mother had been a daunting prospect and she had been extremely nervous. "Please God, make her like me", she had prayed silently.

A feeling of pity and understanding engulfed Muriel for this unknown young girl. "She must be feeling exactly the same as I felt then", she told herself. "More than anything else, she'll want me to like her for Dermot's sake. I'm not going to make things hard for her."

The doorbell roused her from her reverie. As she walked to open it, she could see Maurice's dark head through the glass. A diminutive figure, gold haired and dressed in pretty pastel colours, hung back shyly behind him. She beckoned the girl inside. They smiled at each other. One glance into her honest blue eyes told Muriel that they would hit it off. She took the girl's hand and shook it warmly. "I'm so pleased to meet you, Sandra, at last. Maurice has told me so much about you that I know we are going to be friends. Do sit down. I'll just put on the kettle". Right then, letting go didn't seem such a bleak prospect. □

LIFT UP YOUR EYES TO THE HEAVENS

by Gianni Asti

If knowing God is fundamental in order to love him, then Don Bosco offered his boys the simplest way to do that; by discovering Him while contemplating the beauty of creation. In his meditation he often recalled some of his mother Mamma Margaret's reflections which she used in order to help her children to discover God in the natural beauty that surrounded them and to marvel at God's love for his creatures:

"On a beautiful and starry night, as they were enjoying the fresh air outside the house, she would remark, "It is God who has created the world and all those beautiful stars that you see." When the fields were covered with flowers she would whisper, "How many beautiful things the Lord has created for us." (*Don Bosco: A New Biography*, by Teresio Bosco, Tej Prasarini, 2005).

In the prayer book that Don Bosco wrote for his boys, he seemed to echo the same experience of God:

"My dear boys lift up your eyes and see everything that exists in the heavens and on the earth. The sun, the moon and the stars, the air, the water, the fire and all those things that at one time did not exist. God, in His omnipotence made them all out of nothing, that is why we call Him Creator."

We believe more than ever that it is necessary to educate young



ADVICE TO HIS BOYS

DON BOSCO'S

people to contemplate on nature which reflects the beauty of the Creator. It is the first text book that they should learn to read. We must tell them to raise their eyes because they normally don't look around to admire all the vistas that nature presents to them. We must help them to experience intense moments of prayer during which they can spontaneously communicate with God while gazing on the majesty of the mountains, the purity of the snow or forget themselves as they gaze beyond the horizon or marvel at the various colours on the hillsides or sit by the quiet clear waters of mountain lakes.

It would be nice if the various ecological movements that exist today as custodians of creation and of a certain ethical defense of nature help their members to return to the Creator to discover the beauty of the Creator in the universe.

This first suggestion to

contemplate on the beauty of creation must have particularly impressed the young Michael Magone. The poor thirteen year-old ruffian from Carmagnola had met Don Bosco and his life was totally changed.

The present episode in his life took place on one of the famous autumn walks. Michael was at Becchi (Don Bosco's hometown). It was a beautiful starry evening in October. His companions were asleep in the barn at Joseph's house (Don Bosco's brother). Michael was outside in the courtyard leaning by the wall and gazing at the sky, crying. From his little room, Don Bosco heard the sound and went down to console him. He inquired:

"What's up, Magone? Are you ill?"

"I'm crying as I gaze at the moon.

For so many centuries it continues to appear with such regularity to dispel the darkness of the night without disobeying the orders of the Creator and I who am young and intelligent and who should be more faithful to the laws of my God have been so disobedient so many times and have offended him in so many ways."

Truly, sin is the first ecological

disaster that pollutes the world and so many ignore it.

Man, the Masterpiece of Creation

Don Bosco went on:

"This God, who always was and always will be, after he had created everything in the heavens and all that is on the earth, brought man into existence. He is the most perfect of all his creatures. Therefore, our eyes, mouths, tongues, ears, hands and feet are all gifts of God."

Man is truly the masterpiece of creation, and his body seems to sum up in itself all the wonders of all the other creatures, displaying such order and harmony. Therefore think of the horror that genetic engineering causes to the human embryo and all the various degradations of love to which the human body is subjected.

From this reflection on the beauty of God which is manifested in His creatures, particularly in man, the need spontaneously arises to educate youngsters to be grateful for the gift of life, never bringing it to any harm. This would involve

appreciating the use of the eyes as windows of the soul and the use of the tongue, that small organ that can spread much good and offer the highest expressions of love or cause so much evil. We can say the same thing about all the other faculties of which we hear so little and at the same time we must avoid using them for evil.



The Sense of Beauty

We need to urgently recover the sense of beauty in our lives. Beauty has an extraordinary power to draw us towards God who is, in Himself, harmony, beauty, fullness and truth.

Therefore, it seems only right to help our young people to rediscover a taste for the beautiful through order, purity, the taste for dressing well, particularly on the Lord's Day, realising that certain popular fashions are ugly, dirty, torn, faded and suggestive. It is time that we react to these fashions that estrange us from God.

The most beautiful garment that youngsters should don is the yearning to live in God's grace, with eyes as clear as mountain pools in which you can see right into the depths. How wonderful it is to rediscover these spiritual habits. Don Bosco always re-clothed his youngsters who were covered in rags. It was a garment through which the inner spiritual life of soul shines.

Saving Your Soul You Saves Everything

Don Bosco reminded his youngsters once more about the creation of Man:

"Man is especially distinguished from all the other animals because he has a soul that can reason, think, will and know what is good and what is bad. This soul, being a pure spirit, cannot die with the body. When it is brought to the grave another life begins, one that will never end. If it has done good it will experience the happiness of God in heaven where it will rejoice forever, but if it has done evil, it will be punished with the terrible punishments of hell where it

will suffer fire and every other form of punishment.

Be careful, my dear boys, take care of one another. We are all created for Paradise and God is our loving father. Only those whose sins deserve it are condemned to hell because of them. Oh, how God loves us and how he yearns that we do good so that we may enjoy the great happiness that he has prepared for us for all eternity in heaven."

The beauty of God is particularly reflected in man who has been created in His image and likeness and we see this especially in the spiritual likeness of our soul. Don Bosco saw the marvels that God worked in the hearts of so many of his youngsters while he was anguished in the face of the dangers that they encountered and to which they succumbed. Even in his dreams at night he fought to save their souls. Just a few months before his death he wrote: *Those who save their souls save everything, those who lose their souls, lose everything."*

For this reason he helped his boys by having them meditate on life after death and to think often about Heaven and their eternal happiness and the possibility of losing it by becoming slaves of their own sins which would guarantee them hell already in this life.

How many rich, refined and influential people never think of life after death while making exaggerated sacrifices for their benefit here in this world? For them these words resound with clarity: *"What does it profit you, if you gain the world and lose your soul?"* ■

NEWSBITS

NEW DELHI

A local Church official says phasing out motorized tricycle taxis in Delhi would cause injustice to the poor drivers if the government fails to offer them alternative jobs.

Father Susai Sebastian, director of the Delhi archdiocesan social service wing, told UCA News that the government should give the drivers of tricycles, popularly called auto-rickshaws, an alternative before phasing them out.

He wants the government to give drivers financial assistance in the form of a loan or subsidy to start an alternative business. While stressing that the government has a duty to act against polluting vehicles, he said it also has a duty to consider the "plight of the poor."

Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit announced on March 17 that her government was planning to phase out the auto-rickshaws from the national capital since they "are not the best option for travel."

Over 55,000 of the vehicles ply Delhi's roads, making it an important means of transport in the city.

Mohammad Juman, a migrant from Bihar, who drives an auto-rickshaw in Delhi said he makes some 1,000 to 1,200 rupees a day but 400 of it goes to the owner of the rickshaw as rent.

"Even if we don't earn, we have to pay the rent," he says.

"This auto helps me to support my family and if the government goes ahead with its plan then we will suffer. Even with this job I find it difficult to make both ends meet. I cannot imagine the government

removing the autos from Delhi," says Jaman who has driven for the past 20 years in Delhi.

Sushil Kumar, who owns an auto-rickshaw says he has to support his wife, three children and his parents.

He says it "will take years for the government to find an alternative job for all drivers." (*UCA News*)

VATICAN CITY

The Vatican City State has announced a major upgrade to its communications infrastructure including fibre optics links to other Vatican sites including the pontifical villa at Castelgandolfo.

The Governorate of the Vatican City State and Telecom Italia announced the signing of a contract for the installation of the first nucleus of the "Integrated Communication Infrastructure for Vatican City State", VIS reports.

This consists in a broadband IP network capable of voice, data and video transmission within the territory of the Holy See and Vatican City State, a communique says.

The plan includes, among other things, fibre optic cable links between the ten main extraterritorial sites including the Pontifical Villas at Castelgandolfo and the radio stations in Santa Maria de Galeria. (*VIS News*)

DHAKA

A poor Catholic widow has become the first Christian woman in Bangladesh to receive a national award for putting her children through college and helping them get established in life.

Hiron Rozario, 57, from Holy Cross Church in Luxmibazar, Dhaka, received the Rotnogorva Maa 2010 Award on May 9, International Mother's Day, along with 26 mostly Muslim women.

Bangladesh's Information and Cultural Affairs minister Abul Kalam Azad presented the awards.

Azad Products, a leading business group in the country, has been giving this award since 2003 to a select number of women who have struggled to put their children through college and establish them in society.

"A mother is the first teacher to her children. The mother who helps her children obtain a proper education contributes to building a prosperous country," said Azad at the ceremony.

Rozario, who has three daughters and one son, told UCA News: "I never imagined I would receive such an award. I'm so happy!"

She said her family faced a severe crisis when her husband fell seriously ill in 1985 and died that year. However, she did not give up hope of giving her children a future.

"I started sewing and teaching to support the family," she said.

Her son is now a doctor and coordinator of Caritas Bangladesh's HIV-AIDS Project. Her daughters are teachers in Church-run schools in Dhaka.

She added, "My children ... realized the sacrifices I made and never gave up working toward their goals."

Holy Cross Father Edmond D'Cruze, pastor of Luxmibazar parish told UCA News that Rozario is an "inspiration for mothers."

He added that she is also an active member of the parish's Legion of

Mary and St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Mitu Gomes, 24, a Catholic post-graduate student told UCA News, "Hiron Rozario is a model for future mothers like me. Her example inspires us to educate our children properly and establish them in society." (*UCA News*)

LAOS

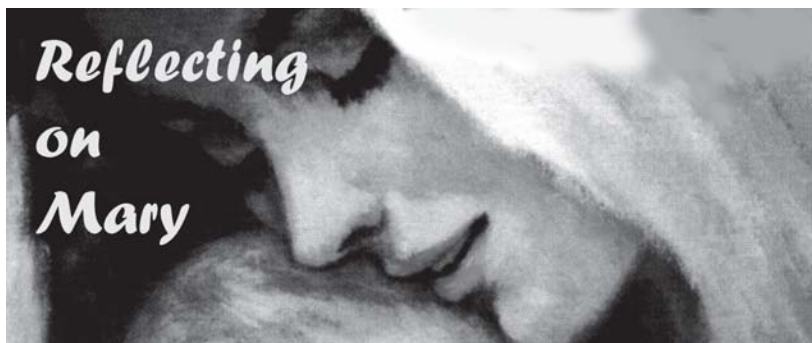
The access road to the secluded village is unpaved, bumpy and dusty, while the village itself has neither piped water nor a regular electricity supply. However, its 20 families, all Catholic, say they are happy and united in their faith.

It all started more than 20 years ago when some "outcasts" settled here from other areas. Local Church sources say some of them were accused of being possessed by spirits and had to leave their original villages.

They established the village in Khammouan province, central Laos, calling it Ban Mai Somboon (perfect new village). Others later joined them, including some fleeing areas of conflict.

"Although we are poor, we have just about enough to eat. We plant rice and root vegetables and forage for food and other produce in the forest. We get water from a stream. We are happy," said Yod, the village catechist. Now 30 and with four children, he first came here 20 years ago with his parents.

The villagers said the communist government has given them ownership of the land. Thus each family has about 20 rai (about 3.2 hectares) to live and farm on. The villagers have also been granted additional land on the basis of common ownership. (*UCA News*) □



BERNARD: MARY'S CANTOR

by Roberto Spataro

"**V**irgin Mother, daughter of your son, humble yet the most exalted of all creatures..." so begins the beautiful prayer to Our Lady that Dante (in his *Paradiso*) placed on the lips of St. Bernard of Clairvux, a Cistercian monk. He was considered a towering personality in his time because of his extraordinary devotion to Mary. He was the abbot for 38 years, of Clairvux, the monastery that he founded, and placed it under the special patronage of Our Lady. It was not surprising therefore, that it became a beacon of spirituality throughout Europe. He truly deserves the title given to him: "Marian Doctor." Bernard was an excellent theologian of the mystical life and has written several treatises on Our Lady that have had a great influence on the history of Mariology. The immensely popular and fervent prayer composed by him was entitled the *Memorare* (first Latin word meaning *Remember*). It is the heartfelt petition of an adamant believer addressed to the Virgin Mother certain to be heard. It is such a beautiful prayer that the

Liturgy of the Church has incorporated it among the Marian anthems to be recited at the end of her last official prayer before one retires at the end of the day, the Compline. It is so effective that Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta used it as a kind of "flying novena" in times of urgent need - repeated nine times.

Mary, Star of the Sea

Like most medieval writers, Bernard too was very interested in the etymology of words. St. Augustine alluded to Mary as "Star of the Sea" and it seems appropriate because, like a bright star in the dark night of people's lives, she emits a brightness that cannot be missed. "O you who, in the midst of the vicissitudes of life try to walk the earth and feel that you are being tossed about by storms and waves, should you wish to reach the shore then do not take your eyes off the glow of this Star! In dangers and difficulties and in times of uncertainty, think of Mary, call upon Mary." In his celebrated sermons entitled *Missus est*,

Bernard offers a commentary on the Annunciation. It is truly a *Summa Mariologica*. In one of those sermons the Marian doctor explains this very important concept. God in his omnipotence willed the mystery of the Incarnation. Our salvation depended on the free assent of the Virgin Mary. For this reason humanity is immensely indebted to Mary's "yes." With his unsurpassed ability add pathos to narrative, Bernard imagines heaven and earth and all humankind down the ages being present at the poor house of Nazareth waiting for Mary to give the angel her answer: "We too are waiting, O Lady, for the word of pity, even we who are overwhelmed in wretchedness by the sentence of damnation. If you consent, straightway shall we be freed. In the eternal Word of God were we all made, and lo! We die; but by one little word of yours in answer shall we all be made alive. Adam asks this of you, O loving Virgin, poor Adam, exiled as he is from paradise with all his poor wretched children; the salvation of all Adam's children, of all your race. Arise, then, run and open. Arise by faith, run by the devotion of your heart, open by your word." Beyond its artistic value, this meditation is so significant from a theological viewpoint that the Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours offers this reading every year on December 20. The "yes" of Mary in Latin is called "fiat." Bernard read the Bible in Latin. He acutely observes that the word has a nuance in Latin that seems to suit the emotions of the Virgin's soul. "Fiat" expressed a sincere desire, a willingness, a prayer of assent. Bernard was right: the original language of Luke's Gospel was Greek. Luke is the evangelist who sought Mary's secrets. He records the



Bernard of Clairvaux was a religious, an abbot and a French theologian

words of Our Lady in words that are peculiar to that language, his choice and the type of word used reveals how passionately one wants something. In other words, Mary's response to the Lord's request was a consent that was confidently and joyfully given so that the Father's will and hers were merged into one: the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation of humankind.

Mary, "the aqueduct" to draw from

Bernard, in general, when speaking of the Virgin Mary, develops themes and images

borrowed from Holy Scripture and the writings of the Fathers though some of them are original too. For example, when adopting the very effective comparison to convey an idea: if Christ is the living water that gives God's grace to sinful humanity, the Madonna collaborates in a unique and indispensable way in this salvific work. She is the aqueduct. "The aqueduct is full, so everyone can draw from its fullness." He then proceeds to ask: "How could the aqueduct tap such a lofty source?" The response he gives comes from an excellent evaluation of the moral and theological virtues that Mary practiced in an

incomparable manner. Of these virtues, Bernard likes to emphasize humility which is necessary for every believer: "The feelings that Mary proclaims," writes our author, "defines her humility. If you cannot imitate the virginity of the humble, then imitate the humility of the virgin. Her virginity is commendable but her humility is most necessary. Bernard's teachings are supported by the authority that surrounds him and other Marian theologians of his century, the twelfth century and we should follow in his footsteps. □

Mariological Practices and Scripture

by Rev. Charles Dickson Ph.D

A question which is constantly raised concerning the Mother of our Lord is whether or not we have sufficient New Testament evidence to justify her position in faith and practice. Christians in different traditions have held widely varying attitudes toward Mary. Some have revered and venerated her while others have virtually ignored her. Do we know enough about her to accord her a unique place in Christian theology and devotion?

While there is some difficulty in constructing historical information about Jesus, there are even more problems concerning His Mother. She seems to be mentioned only incidentally and from the fragments available, it is a difficult task indeed to piece together a consistent picture. However, one must remember that theology is concerned with a much broader scope of materials than

just a few historical facts; it is also concerned with how these facts have been subjected to reflection over the ages and incorporated into a body of beliefs concerning God's communication of Himself to His created world and its people. In other words, we must look at a bigger picture than the old Protestant doctrine of SOLA SCRIPTURA would have us believe.

The Biblical material is indeed quite scanty in comparison with the sometimes elaborate doctrines which have arisen around Mary throughout the centuries. Are, therefore, the teachings about her justifiable? And is it strictly Scripture that should form the basis for all Mariological dogma, or do we need to also consider the many responses in the Christian community which have evolved over time?

From a biblical perspective, the oldest documented comment on Mary occurs in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians (4:4-5) "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

For the Apostle, the woman is obviously Mary. But many theologians regard this verse as having much more theological than historical significance. That is to say, Paul is not a mere journalist reciting an historical event, but rather an interpreter of the Christian faith who wants his listeners to understand that through Mary, Christ became one with all humankind.

The second New Testament reference, going in chronological sequence, is Mark's Gospel written about 15 years after the letter to the Galatians. Mark has no birth narrative, unlike the other synoptics, Matthew and Luke. But it does recount stories not told in the other Gospels, including the numerous misunderstandings between Jesus and His family, including Mary. Mary's thoughts and feelings are important to the writer, for while she understood the mission of her Son, like any mother, she was concerned for His safety.

Both Matthew and Luke's Gospel include not only the Nativity stories, but also incidents from Jesus' childhood. A quite detailed picture is constructed, particularly from Luke's Gospel, and this continues even into the Book of Acts where Mary and the family of Jesus are shown as being firmly committed to the cause of the early Christian

community. John's Gospel contains the immortal picture of Mary standing at the Cross of Our Lord and being commended to the care of His beloved disciple, John.

What conclusion then can we draw about devotion to Mary on the basis of the New Testament narratives? If the Scriptural record alone constituted the entire basis for establishing the position of Mary in Christian thought and practice then, as Anglican theologian, John Macquarrie points out, there would not be enough data to support such later doctrines about her and the devotional practices directed to her. There simply is quite a wide gap between the Mary of the New Testament records and the Mary of present theology and practice.

But the existence of such a gap does not mean that the Church has abandoned the Scriptures, nor does it suggest the Church has forsaken its Apostolic foundations. The answer to this apparent enigma lies in understanding what Cardinal John Henry Newman meant when he referred to the "development of doctrine."

And the word, "development" suggests a gradual evolution of thought, which is a key point in this discussion. In present theological dialogue the concept of the development of doctrine has become a recognized branch of theological study. Newman may be credited as being a pioneer of these studies.

(Continued on pg. 32)

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

This is our testimony in thanksgiving of thanksgiving to our Blessed Mother. We were fighting a court case for the last 13 years with people who were taking advantage of a 86 year old widow compelling her to rent her small house to him. When he finally lost the case he vacated the premises but not before he damaged the house. We are most grateful to Our Lady for her protection. *Bernadette Xavier, Nagpur*
My sincere thanks to the Holy Spirit and to "Mary Help of Christians" for curing my mother, Nancy Waring from diarrhoea, vomiting, headaches and chest pain and also for curing my son Savio from vomiting and a cough. *Mrs. Hollarene Parrie, Udaipur, Rajasthan*
Many thanks for a safe and normal delivery and the gift of a healthy baby boy. *George Koshy, Melanie and Sarah*
Thank you dear Mother Mary for healing me from a severe case of food poisoning and thank you for the wonderful family members, near and far who rallied around me and prayed for me.

Mrs. Aveil James (nee) Roberts Trichy

Thank you dearest Mother for all the graces received through your intercession.

Alison N. Miranda, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Our Loving Mother for the many graces and favours bestowed on me. *Christopher Hubert Collins, Chennai*

Our sincere thanks to Our Lady, Help of Christians for all the favours bestowed on my family and for good health. *Benny & Jacinta, Mumbai*

Mariological Practices and Scripture - continued from pg. 31

Of course some fundamentalist thinkers who espouse SOLA SCRIPTURA as the only guide to interpretation, suggest that one cannot distinguish between the genuine development of doctrine from illegitimate accretions which get added by later generations. Newman provides an answer to this dilemma and shows how Mariological development may be accepted as a permissible presentation of the New Testament witness to Mary.

In his *ESSAY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE*, he discusses the rules governing such development and thus to arrive at the criteria for distinguishing genuine development from that which is only mere accretion, or in other cases, just plain distortion.

He begins by noting the importance of the decision of the Council of Ephesus in 431, to ascribe the title of Mother of God (Theotokos) to Mary. But, he is quick to point out that this is not an attempt by the Church to set up Mary as a parallel figure to Jesus Christ and therefore draw attention away from Him. It is rather the recognition by the Church Fathers of the need to preserve the doctrine of the Incarnation. And this doctrine is, of course, basic to the Christian faith.

And so, Newman's work provides us with a start toward support for belief that there exists a solid biblical basis for Mary's position in the devotional practices of many modern-day Christians. Understanding this is monumental along the path to Christian unity. □

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 all the blessings showered on us, during the preparation of our wedding. Please bless our wedding day and keep us in your loving and tender care always. *Doreen Ivy, Abu Dhabi, UAE*
I want to thank Jesus and Mother Mary for performing a miracle in my life. I passed an exam that was vital for me, without which I couldn't have gone on in life. Thank you so much dear Jesus and Mary for helping me experience your love and power. *Jennifer, Trivandrum*
My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother for all favours received.

Cyril Viegas, Kuwait

Thank you Jesus and dear Mother Mary for curing my brother of his fever and joint aches, through the recitation of the *Flying Novena* and the 3 Hail Marys. Do continue to shower on us your spiritual blessings.

P. D'Souza, Nalasopara

Our grateful thanks for the safe delivery and the gift of a normal baby boy to our daughter on 8th February 2010. Every test during the pregnancy indicated that all was not well with the unborn child, but we continued the fervent recitation of the three Hail Marys and this baby is truly a miracle from God. Thank you Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for your love and protection during the entire pregnancy.

Marie Mendonca, Mumbai

Our sincere and heartfelt thanks to our dear Jesus and Mama Mary for numerous favours received and blessings bestowed on our family through the daily recitation of the 3 Hail Marys in the morning and the night. Keep us, dear Mother always under your mantle of blue.

Sonnu Dalby, Visakhapatnam, AP

My belated thanks to Our Lady for my nephews success in their examination through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. *Effie, Mumbai*
My husband who works on the rigs in Muscat was scheduled to leave the following morning. The day before he realised that his passport was missing. He telephoned me to tell me of the situation. I immediately began to pray the 3 Hail Marys fervently interceding with our Blessed Mother. Later that same day he called to say he had found the passport. We are most grateful to Our Lady for her help. *Mrs. Caroline Moore*

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

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco, for the gift of a beautiful baby boy to my son and daughter-in-law. Thank you also for blessing my daughter-in-law with a normal safe delivery and for bringing home my grandchild (who was prematurely born) in good health from the Neonatal ICU after just 3 weeks although the doctors had said he would be there much longer.

Lavinia Mendes, Goa

Thank you dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for all the graces and favours received.

Maheshwar Rajan Thiyagarajan, Mumbai

Thanks to the Divine Mercy, Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco for protecting us in times of need and for blessing my niece and nephew with good jobs. Please help them to find suitable partners.

P. D'Souza, Nalasopara

Our grateful thanks to our dear Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for hearing our prayers and hastening the arrival of my sons' PR visa to migrate and to find a new life in the New World, also for helping him to find a life partner of his choice.

Zeena Machado

My sincere thanks to Our Lady Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of my daughter Ivy and for the gift of a baby girl after twelve years.

Mrs. Saudin Goes, Goa

My sincere thanks to dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for curing my granddaughter and grandson of their sickness.

A Devotee, Mumbai

My belated thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the gift of our 2 children and for many favours granted.

H.B. D'Couto

I am grateful to Our Lord Jesus, Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping out my daughter throughout her pregnancy and for blessing her with a healthy baby boy.

Mrs. Aguetha D'Cunha, Goa

Thank you, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for helping our brother settle in marriage and for blessing him with a son.

Fernandes, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Our Lady Help of Christians and Don Bosco for a successful surgery and a special thank you to Dominic Savio for a favour granted.

C.C. Goa

I am sincerely grateful to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the gift of a daughter to my daughter Joanna and a son Joal.

Joaquim & Alda, Goa

My sincere thanks to Our Lady, Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of my daughter-in-law and for gifting my son a healthy baby girl.

Mrs. Guida Pinto, Mumbai

Dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio, my sincere thanks for a safe delivery and the gift of a baby boy - Johann Pinto.

Mr. & Mrs. Marcell & Judith Pinto, Mumbai

Thank you dear Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the many graces and favours received and for healing me of severe nerve pain and headaches.

Mira D'Silva, Mira Road

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Thank you, dear Jesus, Mother Mary, Dominic Savio and all the saints for a loving and caring husband, the gift of a healthy and normal child, a good job for my brother and a new job for my husband. *Monica Rodrigues, Goa*
Thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a good job and also for successfully completing three months of probation.

Veena D'Souza, Doha, Qatar

Thank you for the gift of our children and the many graces and favours received. We thank you dear Mother Mary! Always guide and protect our family. *J.C. Quadros, Thane (W)*

I was married in 1981 and my first child - a son was born in 1982. When I conceived I prayed throughout my pregnancy for my child to be a boy and that I would publish my thanksgiving in the *Madonna*. My eldest son will be 28 years old very soon. Thereafter I conceived a second child and he too was a boy who will be 27 years of age, but my thanksgiving remained pending till date. I am feeling terribly ashamed for not keeping my promise. I pray to our Heavenly Mother and Dominic Savio to forgive me and to bless my home with peace, love and happiness.

A Devotee

Belated thanks to dear Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for blessing me with the gift of two lovely sons after five years of marriage. Please keep my family in your loving care. *Socorro and Piedade Pinto, Goa*

A special thanks to you dear Jesus, Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for watching over me and my baby right through my pregnancy and for a safe and normal delivery of a healthy baby. *M. Ann D'Souza, Mumbai*

Many thanks to Our Lady and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby girl. *Mr. & Mrs. Fernandes, Pune*

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

AUGUST 2010

General Intentions: *That those who are without work or homes or who are otherwise in serious need may find understanding and welcome, as well as concrete help in overcoming their difficulties.*

Missionary Intention: *That the Church may be a "home" for all people, ready to open its doors to any who are suffering from racial or religious discrimination, hunger or wars, forcing them to emigrate to other countries.*

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MARY WAS THERE

My companion sister, Sr. Madeleine Sophie, had very poor eyesight due to her diabetic condition. This was an obstacle to her reading vision. As soon as the Don Bosco's magazine came, she would eagerly ask me to read to her first "**Mary was there**" from the back cover. On November 25, 2009, Sr. Madeleine Sophie passed away. From early morning of that day to the time of her death at 1.45 p.m, she continuously repeated, loudly, at least 100 times, the prayer "**Holy Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen**" Surely **Mary was there** to lead her into the presence of her Son. (*Sr. Philippa csj, Sagar*)

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay. The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (*Rs 200/- India & Rs 500/- Airmail*). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors. Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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SHRINE OF DON BOSCO'S MADONNA,

Matunga - MUMBAI - 400 019 - INDIA

Phone/Fax: 91-22- 2414 6320, email: dbmshrine@gmail.com

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