

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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CONTENTS

From The Editor's Desk: <i>Childlike or Childish?</i>	3
2 - God Revealed In Suffering - Fr. Erasto Fernandez. SSS.....	4
"Don Bosco Moved Me To Tears" - Fr. Giuseppe Moja,sdb.....	7
Does God Answer Prayer (8) - Michael Paul Gallagher.....	8
Veneration of A Relic - Fr. Edward McNamara.....	10
Witnesses In And For Our Times: <i>St. Margaret of Cortona (Feb. 22)</i> - Mario Scudu.....	13
Lectio Divina: End Bag - Dermot Connolly.....	16
Quietspaces: In the Face of Suffering, Christ Provides the Answer - Pope Benedict XVI.....	18
Waiting (1) - Pierluigi Menato.....	20
Don Bosco's Advice to His Boys: Sincerity and Lies - Gianni Asti.....	23
NewsBits.....	26
Reflecting On Mary: Our Lady Removes the Impurity of Misconception - Michael R. Tovrea.....	29
<i>In a Cheerful Mood</i>	15
<i>Loving Children to their Loving Mother</i>	32
<i>The Devotion of the Three Hail Marys</i>	33
<i>They Are Grateful to Our Lady & Don Bosco</i>	34
<i>Thanks to Dear St. Dominic Savio</i>	35



*God chose her
before all creation
to be holy and
immaculate,
in order to be
the Mother
of
the Redeemer*

Cover: **Mary
Help of Christians
patroness of Australia**



From The Editor's Desk

Childlike Or Childish?

Annie Dillard once wrote this about innocence: *"Innocence is not the prerogative of infants and puppies. Like any of the Spirit's good gifts, it is there if you want it, free for the asking as has been stressed by stronger words than mine. It is possible to pursue innocence as hounds pursue hares; single-mindedly, driven by a kind of love, crashing over creeks, keening and lost in fields and forests, circling, vaulting over hedges and hills, wide-eyed, giving loud tongue all unawares of the deepest, most incomprehensible longing, a root-flame in the heart, and that warbling chorus resounding back from the mountains."*

Just like any healthy child longs to become an adult, a healthy adult longs to have the heart of a child once more. Sadly, when (or if ever) you lose the desire for innocence, you lose touch with your true self. In fact, to lose one's innocence is actually to lose one's very soul.

Of course, adult innocence isn't exactly the natural innocence of a child. For an adult, innocence can no longer be naiveté but it is rather something that might better be called a "second naiveté". Therefore it is important to distinguish between childishness, the spontaneous innocence of a child and that which is experienced by an adult who, once more, takes on the wonder of a child on a more mature level.

How did Jesus define innocence? He identified innocence with: having the heart of a child. *"Unless you have the heart of a child you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* He was right because the heart of a child is fresh, receptive, full of wonder, respect and does not allow itself to be hardened by sin, hurt or cynicism. The innocence that Jesus speaks of can surely be lived without breaking any healthy taboos of adulthood, always being aware that, as a child, many desires and yearnings cannot be met just yet. Therefore, possessing a child's heart means that one still trusts and waits without yearning for instant gratification. One who possesses the heart of a child never tests God but trusts Him and waits with serene patience.

In her novel, *The Stone Angel*, Margaret Laurence describes a woman, Hagar Shipley, who, one day, after overhearing a child call her an old hag, examines herself in a mirror and is horrified by what she sees. She scarcely recognises her own face and what she sees frightens her. How can one, imperceptible to one's own self, change and become so different, so cold, so lifeless, and so devoid of freshness and innocence? Hagar's experience can happen to any of us and it does happen to many of us. Doesn't it?

These are profound thoughts and should you choose to covet that one-time innocence, then perhaps in Dillard's words: *it is time to pursue innocence as hounds pursue hares, single-mindedly, crashing over creeks, keening in lost fields, driven by a kind of love. You will know when you've acquired the heart of a child. It will show...*

Fr. Ian Douulton sdb

2. GOD REVEALED IN SUFFERING

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss

It is often surprising how the Lord leads his beloved children to discover his goodness and love. It is not always through the Bible stories that one discovers God in a meaningful and practical manner. Perhaps the most effective way to discover God's presence in a striking and indelible manner is through a personal crisis of some sort, as is described in the following story.

"When I was growing up, I knew about God," muses 15-year old Marissa, "but I naively believed that the only reason why people prayed to God was that they needed his help. It never dawned on me that one could just pray to the Almighty for any reason at all - if one was having a bad day and needed someone with a listening ear, or a shoulder to cry on! I would often pray about things like making up with friends after a fight or finding a lost article. Now, since I always made up with friends and I always found my lost treasure, I thought that God was simply marvelous.

"Then came the real upheaval when death struck my beloved mother down all of a sudden about four years ago; I was mad at God mainly because I just couldn't understand why he had to take away my mother, of all the people around me. It wasn't fair that all my school companions had adorable mothers and I was deprived of mine. I soon stopped thinking that God was the greatest, and gradually I found that I didn't pray anymore.

"Recently, I started to talk to a trusted friend about my mother's death because I was having a gruelling time coping with it. This wise and experienced counselor asked me to share a little about my faith, and to my dismay, I could find no worthwhile answer to give her, no matter how much I racked my tired brains. I mean, I still believed in God and heaven, but it wasn't the same as when I was growing. I think I was still pretty furious with him for snatching away my mother on whom I depended so much. The counselor brought up this question of faith several times, though, and I always felt ill at ease because I hadn't thought about it purposefully at all. Then one day when she said *she* would pray for me, it made me think: *Why don't I pray for myself?* I started to pray to God and asked him to come to my rescue. And strangely enough, I felt a bit more reassured and comforted. That encouraged me, and so I started to pray more often. I gradually started to feel a greater peace, serenity and a sense of belonging. I soon noticed that I had stopped praying to God only for help and would rather approach him just to talk and tell him as to a friend what was going on in my life. Although I still miss my mother, I find that I am not angry any more because now I know from deep within that God is really the greatest!"

Personal Discovery

This personal experience of Marissa calls to mind a saying of St. Augustine: 'We are made for You, O God, and we will be restless until we rest in You!' As long as we approach God as unreflecting little children, seeking only personal favours from God, we do not discover the beauty and marvelous love of the Father for each one of us. With infinite love and patience, he sometimes hides his face from us, and that is when we search frantically for something or someone else to fill our lives. But nothing and no one can really take his place. Inch by painful inch he draws us nearer to himself and once we glimpse his loving countenance again, the sun begins shining in our lives anew!

How different things would be if we could speed up the process of transformation by listening carefully to what God himself tells us about his love for us, particularly in the Scriptures! Unfortunately most people read or listen to the Word of God only to find instruction or warning to avoid straying onto the forbidden path. Rarely do we discover even a trace of God's unfathomable love in the Bible narratives. Take as an example the passage in Isaiah 40 where God says: 'A voice cries, in the wilderness: prepare a way for the Lord... make the winding paths straight...' This passage is familiar to all as it occurs several times every Advent. Yet, if asked: 'Who is being asked to 'prepare the way'? our spontaneous answer invariably is, 'Why, I/we, of course!' Little do we stop to think that this

admonition is being given at a time when the people of God are in exile, suffering under the yoke of foreigners. Nor do we attend to the opening words of the chapter: 'Comfort, comfort My people,' says the Lord... 'for they have already received double punishment for their iniquities... I will now lead them back to their homeland... carrying the weak and the wounded as a shepherd ...'

Only when we stop to look deeper do we realize to our consternation that here God speaks to the foreign nations ordering them to prepare the way so that his people may return without any further inconvenience or pain. And to think that he did this precisely when his Chosen people were still rebellious and disobedient! Isn't his love for them really marvelous and unbelievable?

This kind of altruistic love doesn't easily register in our twisted minds, even after we have heard St. Paul say to us: "...and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For, while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God! For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the

death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life (Rom 5:5-10).

Year of the Word of God

Having been given a whole year recently in which to appreciate God's Word, having had a special Synod on the Word of God (and the document on this will soon be promulgated), can we say that we are any nearer to a personal discovery of the Father's love in the Scriptures? How much do we not lose through our very casual and self-centred approach to the Word? Could we not turn our approach around and first look for what the Scripture passage tells us about God and his love for us? Once we have figured this out, we could then concentrate on what our response should be!

Psychology tells us that there are two kinds of love: acquisitive love which seeks mainly to get - in order to satisfy our urgent needs, and that too mostly for material things. This love is restless and keeps growing till the need is met. Once we get what we want, we lose interest in God! The other kind is appreciative love which rejoices in the beauty, goodness and other qualities of the person loved! It is selfless and also keeps growing but in gratitude, appreciation and praise. If our approach to God is of the acquisitive type, then obviously we will merely use this relationship for our own benefit and forget God once we are satisfied. What a difference when we come to God with an appreciative kind of love - that is when we truly grow into a deep relationship with him. In the

story of Marisa we can see clearly these two types of love operating with predictable results.

On-going Discovery

Once we 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps. 34:8) through the Scriptures, we will find ourselves discovering signs of God's love for us everywhere, and in every person. Having learnt how to live within the 'intention' of God we will personally discern how 'for those who love God, everything works for their good' (Rom 8:28). God wants us to be happy and has arranged everything around us so that this might be our felt experience all through life. If we do not have this kind of an experience or have it only rarely, it is because we choose rather to place ourselves outside the circle of God's intention or approach him only with an acquisitive love! We are then like the Executive who has his desktop computer unplugged but yet expects it to function. Unless we plug in to the source of power, our computer cannot work!

As it is much easier to discover God in pleasant happenings could we focus a little more on the unpleasant events of our lives and seek more consciously to discover the hidden meaning behind them? We would certainly benefit from the help of more experienced persons around us, but it would have to be our decision to seek and obtain that 'push' when we need it. With so many helps readily available all around us, why remain in uncertainty and pain? Why not launch into the adventure of the hidden reality of our lives and be happy now and hereafter? □



"DON BOSCO MOVED ME TO TEARS"

Fr. Giuseppe Moja, sdb (1915 - 2009)

with contributions from Frs. Ivo Coelho and Bernard Britto

Fr. Giuseppe Moja passed away on May 26, 2009 at Arese in Milan, Italy. He was 93 years old. He was the son of Tanquillo and Elisa Clivio, born on December 20, 1915 in Orino, Varese, Italy. He entered the seminary in 1928 and four years later he chose to come as a missionary to India. He began his novitiate at Shillong on December 7, 1933 and a year later he made his first profession as a Salesian. Because of his competence and diligence he was appointed secretary to the Bishop of Krishnagar (W. B.) in 1937. WW II was just beginning so he was incarcerated and sent to the internment camp at Deoli and later to Dehradun. He was ordained a priest on December 8, 1944.

Fr. Moja was the quintessential, sola-topeed, bearded foreign missionary. He never quite abandoned his Italianity; he loved cheese and wine and the good food and the culture and the languages of his home continent, and he never quite completely and wholeheartedly accepted everything that was Indian.

When he was released in 1946 he chose to go to Goa where he worked with a veteran Salesian missionary Fr. Scuderi and he continued to work there from 1962 to 1977. He was assigned to a large jungle in a place called Sulcorna which he transformed into a flourishing community and agricultural hub in that part of Goa. From Goa he went to Lonavla, Poona and later to Antop Hill, Mumbai. In 1988 he was appointed the editor of *Don Bosco's Madonna*



for which reason he moved to the Provincial House where he stayed and worked for the next 20 years. In May 2007, due to his ill health he asked to return to Italy where he spent the last two years of his life at the Salesian house at Arese.

Fr. Moja was a multifaceted human being. He was a linguist, editor, musician, a preacher, writer, physician, technician, farmer, builder, hunter who defied any classification or definition. Looking back one can say without hesitation he was a great Salesian who loved his father Don Bosco immensely. He spent several of his last years translating Teresio Bosco's 'new biography' of Don Bosco, and it was, for him, a labour of love. "I know all these stories and these facts," he would tell Fr. Ivo "but so many times I have been unable to go on, I was simply moved to tears." If Fr. Moja has left us anything, I would say it is this passionate love for Don Bosco. He has been for us, in our province, an icon of that love. □

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DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER?

by Michael Paul Gallagher
PRAYER IS FOR YOU (8)

Dear Anne,

Don't be ashamed of *'such a simple question.'* In your letter you voice a traditional difficulty about prayer, but it's always a tough one to tackle. *'I wonder whether I should bother the Lord with my needs!'* you write. *'Does God really answer our prayers?'*

The rest of your letter gives the vital background to your question: the incurable illness of your school friend, who died relatively young. You had prayed for his recovery, but... That's not easy to face. Perhaps most deathbeds are scenes of unanswered prayer. Or better, of seemingly unanswered prayer.

The Deeper Desires

If we take a less painful example, it might help to shed light on your question. Imagine someone praying for good weather for a wedding-day, and let's suppose that in fact it pours rain. Has that prayer gone unanswered? On the surface, yes. But what was the real desire behind that prayer? Is not the desire for good weather a part of wanting the wedding-day to go well? And is not that in turn a part of praying that the couple's whole married life will be blessed and good? Nobody seriously believes that a rainy wedding-day will cause an unhappy marriage!

Do you see what I'm getting at? If our smaller petitions seem to remain unanswered, God is surely answering the bigger desires behind them. We do not know this at the time. Only afterwards can we begin to understand. It's a bit like those two depressed disciples walking away from Jerusalem after the horror of their

Master's crucifixion. They were shattered and disillusioned. *'We had hoped,'* they say. But...

A Different Light

In that great scene (Lk 24:13-32) the risen Lord himself acts as consoler. He gives them a different light on suffering. Slowly they emerge from shock, and glimpse a pattern behind the outer tragedy that has left them so broken. As they walk with the Lord - and walking with the Lord is prayer - their hearts listen and even 'burn' with the wonder of what they are coming to realize.

The Gospel does not tell us what parts of Scripture Jesus 'opened' to them. Probably he mentioned the famous Servant Songs of the prophet Isaiah. Those deep poems explore how something that seems futile can become fruitful in God's own way. *'While I was thinking, "I have exhausted myself for nothing," all the while my cause was with the Lord'* (Is 49:4). *'We thought of him as someone struck down by God; yet through his wounds we are healed'* (Is 53:4-5). I find it marvellous that in both these sentences there is a contrast between the way we think and the way God sees things. Even when we can see only grief or tragedy, God can bring about newness of life.

Towards Serenity

But to move from numbness to serenity takes prayer and, especially in a situation of loss or mourning, it takes a lot of time. While waiting for that slow peace, there is no reason to

feel guilty if you seem confused over things, or even angry with God. The psalms are full of such feelings. So if you express them in prayer, which means that you are rooted in trust, you are in a great tradition.

In fact you are in the tradition of Jesus himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. His was also a prayer of struggle, of fear, and of confusion before death.

This is marvellously consoling for us. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus twice prays with a negative: 'My Father, if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done!' (Mt 26:42).

This was far from a pagan kind of resignation to fate. Jesus' prayer was one of relationship, of trust and tenderness, however dark and agonized. In one sense his prayer was not answered, but in a deeper sense, yes it was. He asked for life, and he was raised into Life. At the centre of that journey was an obedient trust in the Father, even through the horror of Good Friday.

Confidence in God

Someone has counted, and found that Jesus calls God 'Father' or 'Abba' ('Daddy') one hundred and seventy times in the Gospels. His many prayers reach out to the Father with confidence, no matter what the situation. Even while weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, his prayer begins, 'Father, I know that you always hear me' (In 11:42). Your prayer can start from the same confidence, especially in times of weeping and agony.

In all this we have our best model in Jesus himself. It is he who tells us to ask for what we need; he also says that the Father knows our needs before we ask (Mt 6:9; 7:7). Whether we are praying for good weather for a wedding, or pleading for the life of a sick friend, our prayers don't

tell God something he does not already know. They don't try to bridge a gap between us and a God who is distant. God already knows.

God is already with us in our desires. Our prayers are not like 'making a wish.' All prayer involves some reaching out with childlike trust, even when the inner tone is chaotic or full of confusion. Prayer is always more than petition, even if petition is always a strand in prayer. Even if you do not use his words, all praying echoes the surrender of Jesus: not my will but yours. We ask for what we think is best, but we try to hand everything over to the One who knows much better.

The Ground of Hope

If prayer does not have a little of this deeply trusting relationship, there is a danger that a magical image of God can be lurking unnoticed. Do you remember how God was shown in some old films: pointing a finger and - zap! - some strange event takes place? Our Christian God is much more mysterious than that. Those childish images do small justice to the God of Jesus Christ, who did not 'answer' the Son's prayer in the garden of agony. There was no easy zap. Instead there was the resurrection after the darkness. And that is the ground of all our hoping, especially when faced with the dark of death.

Perhaps it's when shadows come that we learn a different wavelength of prayer. The seeming silence and absence of God is an invitation to let the net down into deeper waters (Lk 5:4). You already know, Anne, that this is not an easy journey, but I hope you find how blessed it can be as well, because it touches so many deep things of the heart and of hope. □

walking with the Church



Veneration of a Relic

Fr. Edward McNamara

Q. *In our community when we celebrate a saint's feast day, and we have a relic of the saint present at the Mass, we offer the faithful an opportunity to venerate the relic at the end of the Mass. There seems to be a disagreement regarding the rubrics for how this should be done. I was always told that the proper veneration for the relic of a saint is a genuflection on one knee if it is the actual feast day of the saint; otherwise it is a profound bow. Someone told me that the genuflection on one knee is only for the relic of the True Cross. Could you please clarify this matter as I am unable to find the answer anywhere? Also, is it true that the faithful may receive a plenary indulgence if they receive the blessing of a newly ordained priest and that this may be obtained anytime during that priest's first year of ordination? — E.M., Bloomington, Indiana*

A: According to the rules for genuflection contained in the Ceremonial of Bishops, No. 69, and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, No. 274, the genuflection, as the most solemn sign of liturgical reverence, is "made by bending the right knee to the ground, signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the

Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as for the Holy Cross from the solemn adoration during the liturgical celebration on Good Friday until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.

"During Mass, three genuflections are made by the priest celebrant: namely, after the showing of the host, after the showing of the chalice, and before Communion.

"Certain specific features to be observed in a concelebrated Mass are noted in their proper place (cf. above, nos. 210-251).

"If, however, the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is present in the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the celebration of Mass itself.

"Otherwise all who pass before the Most Blessed Sacrament genuflect, unless they are moving in procession.

"Ministers carrying the processional cross or candles bow their heads instead of genuflecting."

Although no longer mentioned in current legislation, the custom of making a genuflection before a publicly exposed relic of the True Cross or another relic of the Passion remains in force. Indeed,

the abovementioned practice of genuflecting to the cross on Good Friday and Holy Saturday most likely began in Jerusalem with the veneration of the True Cross.

In the extraordinary form of the Roman rite there is a wider use of the genuflection. For example, during liturgical functions the altar cross receives the same genuflections as those accorded to the reserved Blessed Sacrament. The pope and others such as cardinals, bishops and some other ecclesiastical dignitaries were also revered with a simple genuflection albeit only within the confines of their jurisdictions.

There are also some genuflections made on pronouncing certain words, such as when remembering the Incarnation during the Nicene Creed on Christmas Day and on the feast of the Annunciation. The extraordinary form has many more such incidences than these two days.

Outside of the liturgy, popular piety has several occasions for making genuflections. For example, many Catholics have the custom of making a genuflection during the Way of the Cross at the words "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, for through your Holy Cross you have saved the world."

Regarding the mode of venerating relics, there are few recent norms except the prohibition of placing them upon the table of the altar for public veneration (Ceremonial of Bishops 866, 921). The classical 1962 ceremonies manual in Italian by Ludovico Trimeloni, recently reissued, states that it is good, but not obligatory, to make a bow of the head toward relics of saints that are solemnly exposed for veneration. He also states that all

relics, including those of the Cross, should not receive the kind of veneration usually reserved only to exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, such as removing any head covering and incensing from a kneeling position.

According to present practice, if a relic is present in the presbytery during Mass, it may only be incensed at the beginning of Mass after incensing the altar. In general, however, the veneration of saintly relics should be kept separate from the Mass. For example, it is possible to have a relic present in the presbytery during Mass, but it would not be correct to conclude the Mass by blessing the people with the relic. After Mass, however, the celebrant could return from the sacristy after removing his chasuble and direct some devotional prayers toward the saint, bless the faithful with the relic, and offer the possibility of them coming forward to kiss it.

Trimeloni states that nothing is said when blessing with a relic of the Passion. When blessing with a relic of a saint the celebrant may use an appropriate formula such as: "Through the intercession of St. N. may Almighty God bless" Likewise, when offering the relic to be kissed, the celebrant may also use a suitable formula although it is by no means obligatory. For example: "Through his Passion and Cross (or through the intercession of St. N.) may God free you from all evil. Amen."

Trimeloni notes that all should kneel during the blessing with a relic, even for that of a saint. Perhaps this custom is what led our reader to believe that a genuflection was in order in venerating the saint's relic on his feast day. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



MARGARET OF CORTONA (22 February) Franciscan Tertiary (1247 - 1297) A Woman Always in Love

Mario Scudu

Margaret of Cortona is a saint that is fondly remembered during the month of February. She possessed a particular trait that she demonstrated throughout her life: she was always 'in love.' Love constantly pervaded her life. In several ways she was a modern saint, or perhaps she was a post-modern one. At least for the first part of her life she could be considered pretty modern.

Eventually she became a model of traditional classical sanctity with all its ingredients present in her either overtly or covertly.

During the first part of her life Margaret was a woman known for her ardent and profane love but after her conversion she was consumed like a candle by her love for Christ. Her light and her warmth went out to everyone in need and she was consumed slowly like a candle - totally out of love. She lived the Gospel command just as Christ proclaimed it, losing herself for Him in order to find herself and God in return. Each day she offered herself like Christ and for Christ as she carried her daily cross out of love for Him. She rejoiced in this sacrifice



*St. Margaret of Cortona
with the dog which led her
to her husband's corpse*

because she was aware that it was preparing her to live with him for all eternity. She was like a seed that fell to the ground and died

and then sprouted again and bore abundant fruit. That was a difficult command to follow, yet it was a law that guided so many men and women down the centuries to become saints.

Holiness is an impervious race up the mountain of God. It often entails walking in the dark without the company of the stars (see **"The Dark Night of the Soul"** – where the absence of God is described so graphically). That is the only way to be transfigured into Him. It means becoming light and warmth in order to be transformed into God's light and the warmth. That was how Margaret lived during the second half of her life, totally out of love. It was with "clean hands and a pure heart" that she climbed God's arduous mountain. She was transfigured in light as she contemplated the Passion of Christ. This thought might be disturbing but it was truly comforting for Margaret.

At 16 and in love

Margaret was born in 1247 at Lavianio in Umbria. She lived in Cortona for more than 25 years. Just a few years after the death of St. Francis (1232) she saw that the aura of his sanctity had spread not just around Umbria but throughout the rest of Italy. Margaret was also fascinated by this aura of Franciscan holiness.

Her father, Tancredi was a wealthy landowner who discreetly administered some properties that he owned in the nearby commune of Perugia. Unfortunately already at the age of 9 Margaret lost her mother. This was a very painful blow from which she took some time to recover. She was still a

child and dependent on her mother for her maternal guidance. Almost immediately, into this already difficult situation there came a new woman with her father's second marriage. She should have looked forward to her second mother, but unfortunately the wife of Tancredi revealed herself as a real step-mother in every sense of the term. She did not treat Margaret as a daughter but a step-daughter. She was very hostile and cold, even jealous of young Margaret.

Things became more difficult and more complicated for Margaret because, added to the normal problems of childhood and adolescence there was the continuous torments of her stepmother. It was no surprise that her father was out of the picture.

She was confused and temperamental and in this situation she desperately looked for someone outside her family to guide, understand her and show her some affection. She found it outside her family.

Her beauty did not go unnoticed. In fact at the age of 16 (or was it 18?) she married young and rich nobleman of Montepulciano who later came to be known as Arsenius.

When convinced her to run away and take refuge in his family's castle, she saw it as an opportunity to broaden her horizons. She discovered that this new found freedom was more comforting than what she had endured till then.

According to tradition she was permitted live together with her lover or rather cohabit for a good nine years.

At this time, of particular importance was the arrival of a son,

Jacob (Jacopo). They stayed together up to the sudden death of Arsenius during a hunting trip. Incidentally, Margaret was led to her lover's corpse by her dog (a curious element from her biography). She was deeply shaken but not discouraged. Her lover's family shunned her and so she took her son and left the castle.

A Life of penance and prayer

After the death of her husband, Margaret discovered a great emptiness within her and after prayer and reflection she now underwent a total conversion.

By now, Margaret was a woman in love, but this time, with God. This did not prevent her from taking responsibility for her son's education and upbringing. She refused the assistance of her husband's family when she took her child, dressed him in mourning and set out for Cortona to undertake a path to penance, humility, prayer and service to the poor.

Once more the winds of Franciscanism blew her way stronger than ever and Margaret allowed herself to be swept up in them. She reached the convent of the monks and asked to be given the penitential robes as she decided to publicly begin a new life. The superior did not think she was ready and he refused her. In fact, he refused to accept her because according to him the aspirant to penance was "too young and too beautiful" and she would not have persevered.

After three years of persistence she was finally admitted to the Third Order of the Franciscans and given the penitential garb. She was given a small cell near the church

of St. Francis in Cortona where she lived and made penance. She was given to prayer and she selflessly laboured serving the poor and the sick too. In 1278 she founded a hospital called house of Holy Mary of Mercy (that still exists today).

Only Christ and Only He Saves

One day she even dared to go to her native town of Laviano and reached the church during the celebration of the Eucharist where she publicly asked for pardon for the sins of her youth. Margaret's advice was much sought after in suing for peace between the various warring factions of the city. It was obvious that she did not live cut-off from the problems of the world that surrounded her but at the same time she was also deeply aware of God's presence.

Margaret also lived an intensely contemplative life replete with mystical experiences and visions of the Passion of Christ. She wrote nothing about her spiritual experiences (her visions and dialogues with Christ) but they were handed on by her Franciscan Confessor and biographer Fra Giunta Bevignati.

Margaret's earthly life ended on February 22. Immediately after her death and the cult of her veneration grew greatly especially in central Italy. She was canonized on May 17th 1828 by Pope Benedict XIII.

Margaret of Cortona is a very important figure in the movement of Franciscan spirituality. It was not for nothing that she was called the Third Franciscan Star (after Francis and Clare).

Even today it is possible for us to understand that holiness is possible for everyone and the mercy of God is immense and available to all. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Cleaning Job

Fresh out of high school, I found a job cleaning the elegant home of an older couple. Among other duties, I had to dust their many imported carvings and petrified collectibles, as well as pick up after their pets.

One day, I was astonished to find two ivory fossils lying on the floor beside the bookcase. I quickly picked them up, and put them back on the shelf. The next week, the same thing happened.

That afternoon, my employer came into the parlour, her faithful dog behind her. Looking around, she eyed the bookcase. "Nya," she asked the dog, "how in the world do you keep getting your bones up there?"

Test Crash

As the test pilot climbed out of the experimental aircraft, having torn off the wings and tail in the crash landing, the crash truck arrived.

A rescuer saw the bloodied pilot and asked, "What happened?"

The pilot replied, "I don't know, I just got here myself!"

Mailbox Problem

A friend asked me to replace the rotted post that her mailbox sat on, but to save the beloved old box. I managed to extract all but one of the rusty nails in the bottom of the mailbox. To free the last nail, I wrapped my arms around the box in a bear hug and started yanking up.

Just then a truck came by, and the driver stuck his head out the window. "I tried that," he said, "but the bills just keep on coming."

Psychology Course

During a phone conversation, my nephew mentioned that he was taking a psychology course at the university.

"Oh, great," I said. "Now you'll be analyzing everyone in the family."

"No, no," he replied. "I don't take abnormal psychology until next semester."

New Car

The first Sunday after my husband and I bought a new car, we parked it in the last row of the church lot, not wanting to be ostentatious.

While talking with friends after the service, my husband accidentally hit the panic button on his electronic key. Immediately our car's horn blared and its lights flashed.

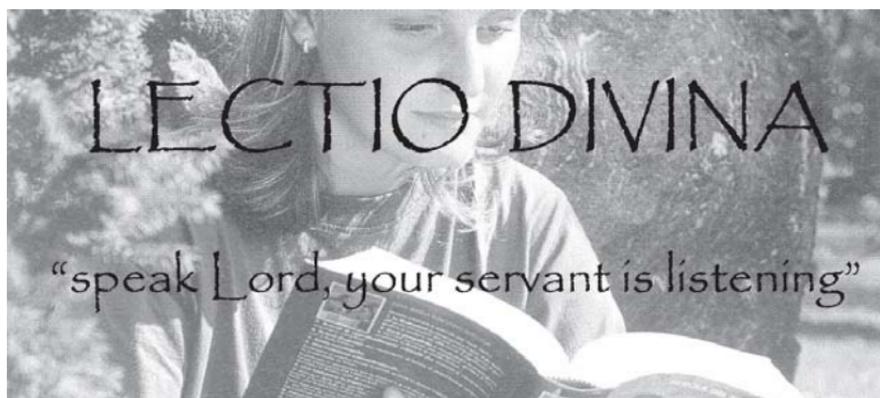
Watching my husband fumble with the button, his friend teased, "Wouldn't it have been in better taste to just put a few lines in the church bulletin?"

Rice Preference

The young woman really thought she'd been very patient, through a protracted period of dating with no talk of marriage.

One night her steady boyfriend took her to a Chinese restaurant. As he perused the menu, he casually asked her, "So . . . how do you like your rice? Boiled? Or fried?"

Without missing a beat, she looked over her menu at him and replied clearly, "Thrown."



END BAG

by Dermot Connolly

*“He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.”
(Mark 6:8-9)*

A year ago, passing through Gatwick airport in England, when I collected my checked-in luggage it had a label attached to it which proclaimed in florescent orange, **end bag**. This was new to me; were the baggage handlers – experts in these matters – telling me the bag was past its best, and should now be decently retired, or put down? **END BAG!** On enquiry, however, I learned it was simply a tag put on the last item of luggage off-loaded from the hold of the aircraft. No need to expect any more – this is the end-bag.

In more recent times I have taken to travelling with hand-luggage only. This is not out of any excess virtue, or detachment from the things of this world; simply that I am tired of wrestling with several suitcases, or standing in long queues to be weighed and

measured. I try to carry only what I have to, and trust there will be a clean shirt at the end of the



journey. In this I claim an odd kinship with David, son of Jesse, in the First book of Samuel, Chapter 17.

The young David is about to face the Philistine warrior-giant Goliath in single combat and, as if to relieve the tension in the narrative, there is a moment of farce. To kid him out of the contest, King Saul "clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk..." (1 Samuel 17:38-40)/ He couldn't move because of the weight he was carrying. In the end, he took only his sling and a pouch of stones - the ultimate in hand-luggage? (Though in today's airport anxiety even that would probably be regarded as too dangerous to be allowed on board). The clean shirt? After Goliath had been defeated and killed, Saul's son Jonathan "stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David." (1 Samuel 18:4)

Jesus told his disciples to take no bag at all on their journey: "...no bread, no bag, no money in

their belts." (Mark 6:8). This is a severe and spare injunction, and I can't say that I have often witnessed it. And perhaps there is an alternative generosity in carrying things for others to enjoy; that is certainly a common thing among missionaries I know.

There is another kind of baggage we can carry with us, more deeply embedded in our lives and our persons, and not so easily left behind - hurts, grudges, prejudices, and obsessions we have acquired. Some of these we know about, some we are not aware of, but they weigh us down all the same. Like the suited-up David, sometimes we clunk around and try in vain to walk. We may need to learn what we should let go, in order to get anywhere at all. Maybe that is what Jesus meant: not what we carry in our hands but in our hearts.

One way or another, on our final journey, - which we have already begun - we will have to let go of everything. The end bag will be an empty one, and we will stand, alone, cherished and called. □

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Prayer surmounts difficulties.

*It scales the barriers of timidity and sadness;
it frees our hearts from anxiety and sadness;
and it imparts joy and peace to our souls.*

DEDICATED TO
THE WORLD DAY
OF THE SICK

Quiet

IN THE FACE OF CHRIST PROVIDE

by His Holiness P

On the afternoon of 11 February 2009, the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes and the World Day of the Sick the Holy Father spoke at a Mass for the sick and their caregivers. Here is an excerpt from his talk:

The world day of the Sick occurs on the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes. This day invites us to feel with greater intensity the spiritual closeness to the Church's sick which, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, we are the family of God in the world within which no one must go without the necessities of life. (cf. n. 25b).

At the same time, today we are given the opportunity to reflect on the experience of illness, suffering and more generally, on the meaning of life to be lived to the full even in suffering. In the Message for today's event, I wished to focus attention on sick children who are the weakest and most defenceless of creatures. It is true! If we are left speechless before an adult who is suffering, what can we say when illness affects an innocent child? How is it possible to perceive the merciful love of God, who never abandons his children in trial, even in these difficult situations?

Such questions are frequent and at times disturbing. Truly, they find no adequate answers on the merely human level since the meaning of pain, illness and death remains incomprehensible to the human mind.

However, the light of faith comes to our aid. The Word of God reveals to us that even these ills are mysteriously "embraced" by the divine plan of salvation; faith helps us to consider human life beautiful and worthy of living to the full, even when it is undermined by evil.

God created the human being for happiness and for life, while illness and death entered the world as a consequence of sin. However, the Lord has not left us to ourselves. He, the Father of life, is the physician of man par excellence who ever lovingly bends over suffering humanity.

The Gospel shows Jesus who "cast out spirits... and healed all who were sick" (Mt. 8:16), pointing out the way of conversion and faith as conditions for obtaining healing of body and mind.

With his passion and his death he took our weakness upon himself and totally transformed it. This is why - according to what the Servant of God John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris* - - "To suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ" (n. 23).

Spaces

OF SUFFERING, SUFFERING IS THE ANSWER

Pope Benedict XVI

Dear brothers and sisters, we are increasingly realizing that human life is not a disposable good but a precious coffer to be preserved and looked after with every possible attention, from the moment of its origin to its ultimate natural end.

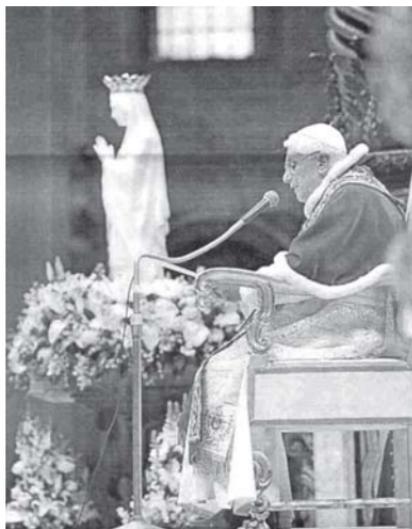
Life is a mystery that in itself demands responsibility, love, patience and charity, on the part of each and every one. It is especially necessary to surround those who are sick and suffering with care and respect. This is not always easy; yet we know where to find the courage and patience to face the vicissitudes of earthly existence, and in particular sickness and every kind of suffering.

For us Christians, it is in Christ that the answer is found to the enigma of pain and death. By participating in Holy Mass, we are immersed in the mystery of his death and resurrection. Every Eucharistic celebration is the perennial memorial of the Crucified and Risen Christ, who defeated the power of evil with the omnipotence of his love.

It is therefore at the "school" of the Eucharistic Christ that we are granted to learn and to love life always and to accept our apparent powerlessness in the face of illness and death.

My venerable Predecessor John Paul II wished the World Day of the Sick to coincide with the Feast of the Immaculate Virgin of Lourdes. In that sacred place, our heavenly Mother came to remind us that on this earth we are only passing through and that the human being's true and definitive dwelling place is Heaven.

Let us ask Our Lady to turn her motherly gaze on every sick person and on his or her family, to help each one to carry the weight of the Cross with Christ. Let us entrust to her, the Mother of Humanity, the poor, the suffering, the sick of the whole world, with a special thought for suffering children. With these sentiments I encourage you to trust in the Lord always...and I warmly bless you all. □



WAITING

by Pierluigi Menato (T/A: ID)

As evening fell and the shadows lengthened, in her little room she dreamt of the time she was twenty and relived the yearning of those years when she resolved never to ever grow old. Francesca saw the young man in the photograph that stood in its ornate frame on her bedside table. He seemed withdrawn, dressed in a dark suit, above which hung a pale face that stood out like a star

in a moonless sky. His hair was jet black and his lips, red. As she gazed at those penetrating eyes and those pale cheeks, a rush of emotion flooded her and she saw in those eyes what seemed to twinkle like some falling star.

She was a student at the institute of Chartered Accountants and to attend class she took the same route there each morning and in the afternoon when she returned the



same way. Along the path she remembered seeing a garden full of trees that gave out a peculiar minty scent during the month of December and in March those trees were filled with violet flowers. Then, in May, she was suddenly fascinated with the scent of lilies.

When the institute closed for the holidays she could still sense the perfume and her eyes seemed to see the garden once more. If she suddenly heard the teacher call out her name she was jolted out of her reverie and her heart would beat fast in utter embarrassment.

She said nothing of this to her mother; she just smothered it within herself, as she had done to all the stirrings of her heart, from the time her father died. She would have liked to tell her brother Albert this but he was about eight years older than her. She would gently lift her gaze, smile and move on.

Her mother was a different person when Albert was around. But since Francesca returned for her lunch before her brother, she had to listen to all her complaints.

"Why do I have to hear all this from mother?" she thought to herself, "She knows that I can do nothing about any of this."

"I'm tired, so tired." Her mother complained. "I think I'll rest a little...."

Francesca knew what she really wanted to say. She wanted to say: "I've got to work so hard all day so that my daughter can spend the whole day studying." She was the only daughter, and Albert? Who

could say anything to him? Francesca's mother went on: "He's got to go ahead in life. The poor boy, he's missed three years and he needs a year or two to complete his degree in engineering. Only after that will he be able to earn something. He had earned a scholarship and what was more, he was giving private tuitions. He sent his mother a tidy sum each month; if only she could look after the house they would be able to live comfortably. But the mother had other ideas, if only Francesca gave up her studies and helped around the house so much money would be saved. Servants are so expensive these days!

But Albert was adamant: "Mom, don't ever say that! It's better that Francesca gets her diploma now that she's just on the threshold of her graduation." In fact, eventually she did get her diploma and passed with flying colours and because of the stiff competition she secured a seat only in the small nearby town of Vicentino.

So, Francesca was now a full fledged accountant. And it was time for her to look for work, but her mother became a bit emotional and exclaimed: "Imagine letting her go alone out into the world." But Francesca found some odd bookkeeping jobs here and there and this added to what Albert was sending home every month.

The mother said: "Albert has always loved me and I know he will never forget me."

But Francesca not only brought

home her salary, she also helped her mother from early morning up to late in the evening, doing all work around the house. She kept repeating: "It better to work in the daylight to save electricity."

But when Francesca awoke each morning the sun was not up yet she prepared the coffee and gave her mother her medicines. She was on her feet up to ten in the night.

She left the house just once during the day for a walk; it was her free time. She breathed deeply, filling her lungs with the fresh open air as her face shone, her eyes sparkled and a contagious smile played about her lips. She always wore dark dresses but she possessed an elegant simplicity that gave beauty to whatever her slender arms unconsciously brushed against.

In spring she hurried eagerly as if she were on her way to encounter happiness. Her soul was like a room open to the sunlight and at twenty, the brightness in her soul was because she was someone truly in love. She did not realize that her soul had been overcome with this feeling.

For Francesca, 'love' had a name and it was Carlo. He had a candid smile and clear blue eyes like the sea at dawn. She met him every morning in spring and for Francesca it was a celebration of love every day - a feast day. On her way home she carried within her the joy of living. However, when she entered the house she felt very much like her old self because the most beautiful part of herself was left

outside, like something discarded and she felt she had to do this out of necessity.

This could not go on. Summer was coming and soon her brother Albert would come home. Francesca would speak to him. Carlo's intentions were rather serious; he wanted to present her to his mother. But Francesca feared she would be shunned.

When Albert arrived she told him about the young man and how she loved him. She mentioned that he was an engineering graduate and was about to be absorbed into a respected engineering firm nearby. He had a sterling character.

Albert spoke of Carlo to his mother but she was afraid that she would be neglected and left alone. Did she not have a right to some demonstration of affection from her children for whom she had done so much? She was getting on in years and she had nothing much to look forward to. She did not demand that her daughter give up everything but she expected her daughter to wait for a year, or two, or perhaps three and in the mean time the young man would be more stable and she would be able to keep her mother company. But her daughter had her whole life before her.

Francesca saw very clearly what would happen to her. She would inevitably be drawn into her mother's way of life and she would never free to leave. □

(To be continued)

SINCERITY AND LIES

by Fr. Gianni Asti *sdb*

Humility is Sincerity's pedestal

Continuing our reflections on the virtues that should be sown in the minds of youngsters, we find that the virtue of the obedience, to which Don Bosco educated his boys has gone out of fashion and now seems to be replaced with the virtue of humility.

The best example of humility is Jesus. Try to imagine the twelve-year-old Jesus after his revelation in the Temple of Jerusalem returning to Nazareth to be subject to two creatures: Mary and Joseph for the next thirty years.

Humility is a virtue that endears one to both God and men.

If the virtue of humility is difficult for everyone to practice, it is particularly difficult for pre-adolescents, teenagers and young adults. They gradually want to distance themselves from their families gravitating towards the world of their friends from whom they seek affirmation and acceptance. It is because of this that conflicts with their parents originate, at first they are small confrontations, rebellion at comments made; occasionally they resort to lies just to escape having to do chores or in order to hide something, like poor results or the fact that they are hanging out with questionable friends; using smutty language, taking money without permission which eventually reaches a point when the youngster begins smoking and experimenting with light drugs.

The little lies of youngsters over the years lead to tragic marital infidelities, lies at work and in the



ADVICE TO HIS BOYS

DON BOSCO'S

world of commerce or politics.

It was because of this that Don Bosco felt like making these recommendations to young people so he put them in the prayer-book he wrote for them.

Two Recommendations

"I earnestly recommend to you two things: The first is: be sincere with your parents and your superiors, never hide or cover up your shortcomings with pretenses or attempt to deny them. Always tell the truth frankly, lies besides offending God makes you a child of the devil, the prince of lies so that after knowing the truth, you still lie to your superiors and your companions. The second is: accept the advice and the warnings of your superiors because they help you to live and work well. So, blessed are you if you do this. Your days will be happy. All that you will do will edify and encourage those around you. Therefore in conclusion, let me tell you: give me an obedient youngster and I will make him a

saint, on the other hand, a disobedient youngster goes down the road to perdition losing every virtue" (from *The Companion of Youth*).

Therefore, sincerity is that precious virtue that needs to be cultivated in youngsters as they are inclined to hide anything that could discredit them, or perform deeds of bravado just to impress their peers. They are afraid of telling the truth even about themselves for fear of losing the esteem of their friends, or a priest friend or even of their regular confessor.

It was for this reason that Don Bosco specially insisted on sincerity in the confessional. Because of this he narrated two rather famous dreams that we report here.

Crystal doors on which hang broad curtains

On the evening of May 3rd, 1868, Don Bosco narrated a dream he had when he was taken down to hell accompanied by an unknown personage...

"Come inside then," my friend went on, "and see how our good and almighty God lovingly provides a thousand means for guiding your boys to penance and saving them from everlasting death.

Taking my hand, he led me into the cave. As I stepped in, I found myself suddenly transported into a magnificent hall whose curtained glass doors concealed more entrances. Above one of them I read this inscription *The Sixth Commandment*. Pointing to it, my guide exclaimed, "Transgressions of this commandment caused the eternal ruin of many boys.

"Didn't they go to confession?"

"They did, but they either omitted or insufficiently confessed the sins

against the beautiful virtue of purity." This is really the downfall of so many youngsters and is the reason that prompts them to skip their confession. One needs to find the opportunity, for instance during a session on education to sexual and affective maturity, to help youngsters who feel ashamed to find the proper words when confessing their sins, calling them by their proper names and even mentioning the lies they have told in their previous confessions. Adults too remember with remorse the bad confessions they willfully made as teenagers and young adults keeping quiet out of shame because of serious sins.

The story of the dream goes on: "Other boys may have fallen into that sin but once in their childhood, and, through shame, never confessed it or did so insufficiently. Others were not truly sorry or sincere in their resolve to avoid it in the future. There were even some who, rather than examine their conscience, spent their time trying to figure out how best to deceive their confessor... Only those who die truly repentant shall be eternally happy. Now do you want to see why our merciful God brought you here? He lifted the curtain and I saw a group of Oratory boys - all known to me - who were there because of this sin. Among them were some whose conduct seems to be good.

"Now you will surely let me take down their names so that I may warn them individually."

"It won't be necessary!" He replied.

"Then what do you suggest I tell them?"

"Always preach against immodesty. A generic warning

will suffice. Bear in mind that even if you did admonish them individually, they would promise, but not always in earnest. For a firm resolution, one needs God's grace which will not be denied to your boys if they pray. God manifests His power especially by being merciful and forgiving. On your part, pray and make sacrifices. As for the boys, let them listen to your admonitions and consult their conscience. It will tell them what to do (EBM 9, 95-96).

Padlocks On Their Mouths

To emphasize the difficulties that young people have with sincerity, here is another dream that we present. It is the famous dream of the padlocks. Don Bosco said that he found himself on the road from Becchi to Capriglio, when he met a distinguished-looking gentleman who invited him to look through a large lens encased in a wheel. This is what he saw:

"I immediately looked through the lens. What a sight! All the Oratory boys stood there before my eyes. I saw seven boys, defiant and distrustful, their lips padlocked. They were also clamping their ears shut with their hands. Painfully amazed to see those boys in their predicament, I asked why their lips were padlocked. "Can't you see it for yourself?" the stranger replied. "These are the boys who refuse to tell." "Tell what?" Don Bosco asked "They won't tell, that's all!"

I understood then that he meant confession. These are boys who, even when questioned by their confessor, will not answer or will answer evasively or contrary to the truth. They say "no" when the answer should be "yes".

What an experience it was for Don

Bosco, seeing these youngsters! This confirms what priests, teachers and confessors say. Initially the confessor is so prudent since he doesn't know the young penitent. He does not ask him any questions that might tempt the youngster to lie. Only when he has earned the confidence of the youngster, sometimes after waiting for months or years, will he open himself to the confessor with perfect sincerity and thus attain peace of mind.

His friend went on:

"Do you see those three clamping their hands over their ears? They are boys who not only do not tell their sins, but even refuse to listen to their confessor's advice, warnings and orders. They hear your words, but pay no heed to them. The other four boys, instead, listened to your exhortations and warnings but did not put them into practice. "How can they get rid of that padlock?" The stranger said "Let them cast pride out of their hearts." (EBM 6, 533- 534).

So much said on sincerity in confession also applies to other life situations from youngsters to honest and upright adults. This trait is so much in demand in our society if we are to have honest citizens. But youngsters must have before them adults who are models of sincerity and transparency in all areas of their lives. It is so disruptive for youngsters to see duplicitous and corrupt individuals occupying positions of prestige in politics, economics and the world of social communication.

The lies of children in adults develop into great faults to the extent that they end up corrupting regimes in countries making them weak states that are ripe for wars and conflicts that dot our world today. □

NEWSBITS

MANILA - PHILIPPINES



CNN Hero of the Year Efrén Peñaflorida will provide inspiration for other young people at the Asian Youth Day, the organizing bishop says.

His award "would surely be very much a part of our celebration of Asian Youth Day (AYD) because he has done such a great thing!" Bishop-elect Joel Baylon of Legazpi told UCA News.

The fifth AYD, launched on Nov. 23, is being held in Cavite, Peñaflorida's home province, just southwest of Manila.

CNN anchorman Anderson Cooper presented the award to Peñaflorida, 28, at a ceremony in Los Angeles on Saturday evening in recognition of his work of using a "pushcart classroom" to educate street children.

Peñaflorida's work is credited with helping poor children stay away from gangs and crime. Peñaflorida received a US \$100,000 prize from CNN to continue his project.

In 12 years, he and a group of teenaged volunteers have taught more than 1,500 children aged two to 14 reading, writing, math and English.

AYD is held during the years in which no international World Youth Day celebration is organized. After the first AYD in Thailand in 1999, it was held in Taiwan in 2001, in India in 2003 and in Hong Kong in 2006 (UCAN)

HUA HIN Thailand

Men and women Religious are needed in Asia today to inspire laypeople and be a powerful sign of God's presence in their economically driven societies.

This was the message a lay Church worker gave to leading Asian Religious gathered for a Federation of Asian Bishops' (FABC) meeting in Hua Hin, Thailand.

Religious must live the consecrated life not only for themselves but as an inspiration for laypeople, who face the pressures of modern living, Sherman Kuek told some 60 nuns, brothers, priests and bishops at the Nov. 16-21, 2009 FABC symposium. The meeting had the theme, "The Impact of Today's Culture on the Church, especially as regards Consecrated Life in Asia Today."

Kuek, 33, is director of the Melaka-Johor Diocesan Pastoral



Institute in Malaysia and was the only lay speaker at the symposium. Religious must live radical antithetical lives that inspire and excite laypeople to emulate them, albeit in their lay state of life, he said.

He noted that laypeople live in a culture that urges them to “work more, earn more, spend more,” and which is “at odds with the Gospel.” They faithfully perform religious duties and obligations but otherwise they are busy engaging with a culture that advocates consumption and the acquiring of wealth.

Now the Church in Asia is challenged to answer a prophetic call to authentic discipleship, Kuek continued, explaining that this call is for Religious to make a stand for the sake of the laity.

“The Church can shout and shout” in condemning materialism and urging charity but laypeople do not necessarily listen because they have to survive in the modern world, he stressed.

Many Religious said on the sidelines that his call to them was a powerful challenge. (UCAN)

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala police say they have broken a bible-smuggling racket that has been selling copies of the book on the black market.

“They stole bibles from the printer and sold them at knocked-down prices,” senior police official Vinson Paul told UCA News. “It was a thriving business.”

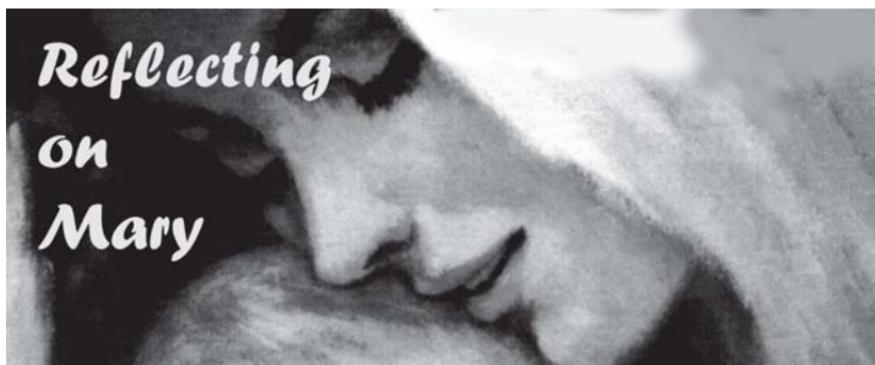
Police arrested and charged Selva Raj, 36, on Nov. 23, 2009 following a complaint from the Kerala Catholic Bishop’s Council (KCBC). The council had been tipped off by Church people saying that the Bible KCBC was selling for 100 rupees was available on the streets for 70 rupees.

But Raj, who had 30 bibles on him, was “only a salesman who may be getting 10 rupees a copy,” Paul said. “He is only the end of long chain” in which hundreds may be involved, he added.

The press is owned and managed by Divine Retreat Centre, run by Vincentian priests. KCBC spokesman Father Stephen Alathara said he suspects some managers and workers helped print more copies and smuggle them out.

The KCBC Bible Commission, headed by Bishop George Punnakottil of Kothamangalam, has been campaigning to make the Bible available in every Catholic family.

He said the Church has no means to identify the smuggled bibles because they and the official ones look the same in every respect. (UCAN) □



OUR LADY REMOVES THE IMPURITY OF MISCONCEPTION

by Michael R. Tovrea

As we make our journey on this earth toward unity with God, oftentimes we are plagued with misconceptions of Who Our Divine Lord is. I believe this is an attempt to humanize Him, so that He will be palatable to our psychological makeup.

We know, instinctively, that God loves us and we have a need to be accepted the way we are. Over the years, there have been writers who have painted a picture of Christ which, if we study Scripture thoroughly, and know that it is contradictory for God-the-Son to sin, or to be tempted from within, we can more readily identify those who are promoting sacrilegious and blasphemous ideas, of Who the Second Person of the Trinity is.

The Mother of God is a great aide in helping us to remove the dross of our misconceptions concerning God-the-Son, and bring us back into the light, when we have fallen

prey to the darkness which some false prophet has attempted to engulf us in.

Devotion to Mother Mary helps us to imitate her total purity of heart and soul, as our ever-virgin Mother guides us through the insidious traps which the devil wants to set for us, with a false portrayal of Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ.

We know, as Catholic Christians, that we have to overcome the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, and devotion to Our Lady, I believe, is the surest and safest path to reach union with Christ, and not to fall prey to deception.

If we follow her example of total surrender to God, then we come to find that the errors of our misconceptions concerning God-the-Son begin to fall away from our consciousness. Then we are no longer quick to justify sin within us, as she fortifies our

fervor to excel in virtue, because she will not allow us to do that which will lead to our ruin, in the end, if we are but willing to turn to her in times of temptation.

Our Lady also encourages us with her gentle, tender heart to bring others into Christ's presence with our love, patience, and gentleness, rather than alienating them with judgement and condemnation because, as her heart is one with the Heart of God, she does not want to lose one soul to the evil one.

She also leads us to seek to sanctify our souls, and seek after Divine love, rather than the affection of fickle and passing love of fellow creatures.

Some years ago, I was having coffee with a Protestant friend of mine, who told me that every time she approached Christ's Divinity, she experienced great condemnation.

In a world where others would want to promote a man-made-god, rather than the Second Person of the Trinity, who took on the form of humanness; it is very convenient, if not deceptive, to attempt to make God in our own image, rather than to know that we are created in His image.

It would seem to me that none are worthy of the love God shows them through His Son, but that Our Lady mediates for us, before the throne of God, and forms us in Christ's likeness, so that the Heavenly Father



*Our Lady of Walsingham
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will recognize His Son, when we come before Him, at the end of our lives.

Because she is without the stain of Original Sin, and remained free from all sin, she shows us the path to sanctifying our lives. Like God, she accepts no excuses for our faults and sins, and works fervently with us, to put the old man to death.

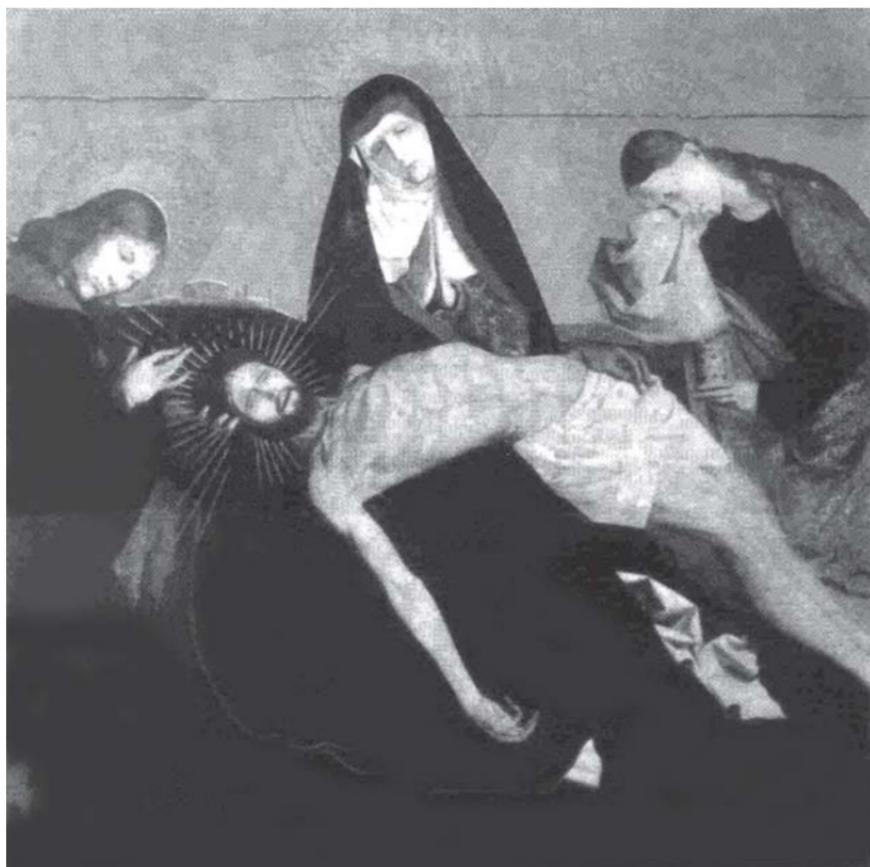
She teaches us the great lesson of self-mortification, and shows us how to avoid the near

occasion of sin. We come to understand that: yes, we are loved by God and, more tenderly and with much more condescension than we could imagine was possible. He turns even our failings into material for reflection on greater fervour and fidelity.

Because Mother Mary was, first of all, in total subjection to the will of God, she teaches us to love obedience, and also to surrender to Godly authority. She teaches us to reverence those God has placed under our care, and to love them as children of God.

She also teaches us the prudence of patiently and lovingly working toward bringing others to the joy of their salvation and is, like Christ, in that He would never break a bruised reed.

If our consciences are free from any stain of serious sin, and we have sought to please Our Divine Lord rather than the World, the Flesh, or the Devil, then we understand more readily that our brothers and sisters respond more quickly to love, and, like us, are truly in need of mercy rather



Pieta, Ghirlandaio (1449-1494 Deutsches Museum, Berlin)

than condemnation.

My experience in prayer over the last thirty years, since I have made a commitment to praying every day, has been a gradual growth toward union with God. Our Lady has helped me greatly to understand that, I can never truly justify any sin in my life and that I must always be on the path to removing it from my heart and soul, lest it choke out the virtue I have attained.

In the beginning of my journey, this was not the case, and I was given to any misconception of Christ which would come along, so that I did not have to practice self-restraint, when it came to my passions.

By God's grace, He did not leave me in these misconceptions, and Our Lady has been a great help in removing the dross of these, so that I can more readily worship God, in truth and Spirit, and work out my salvation daily in fear and trembling.

I have also come to learn, with Our Lady's assistance, that the way I live, and what I do every day of my life, has directly to do with my idea of who God is. If I truly espouse the idea of God-made-man and that His words are to be obeyed without excuse or justifications, then I more readily understand that I must always be fighting the good fight of attempting to overcome any sinful tendencies in my heart or soul, and always seeking to offer my neighbours the Charity, which loves them as I love myself.

During this war of the Flesh against the Spirit, I have learned that I can turn to God's Mother, to help me clarify any misconceptions I may



have concerning her Divine Son, or what I am called to in this life; to seek union with my merciful and loving Creator without excuses or justifications. To fight the good fight and run the race with every fibre of my strength, because the victory is possessing the pearl of great price. Even so, the path of this treasure is narrow; but if we take Our Lady's hand and turn to her, in times of temptation, while we are walking it, she will lead us to its destination; eternal joy and peace, where every tear will be dried in union with Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. □

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Sincere thanks to Our Lady for the safe confinement of my sister during her pregnancy and for answering my prayer for being able to conceive during the month of Mary Help of Christians. So far I have a safe and healthy pregnancy. *J. D'Sa*

Thank you, Mother Mary, for a safe delivery.

Mrs. Stephanie Sanches, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mother for all your blessings and favours that we have received.

Mrs. Martha Fernandes, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mother Mary, for the successful operation of Ravi and for healing my feet. I know I will get better.

Ramona D'Costa, Mumbai

I was suffering from a severe pain in my right leg. The doctor advised surgery to repair a ligament tear. I prayed to Mary Help of Christians. The doctor prescribed medication for 7 days before the surgery. When I went back to him after 7 days he told me there was no need of a surgery. I am so grateful to Mary Help of Christians.

Mrs. Elizabeth Mathias, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary for a speedy recovery from an open heart surgery.

Mrs. Zenaflor, Mumbai

I was experiencing severe pain and could not sit for a long time. I prayed to Mother Mary for a cure every day. The pain became unbearable and I was unable to attend office for two months. I had undergone many tests and had to take many medicines. During this time I continued to pray and the pain started subsiding. I am so grateful to Our Lady for this grace.

Mrs. Juliana Dias, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Blessed Mother Mary for being with us during difficult times. Please continue to keep us in your care.

Joaquim Faria, Canada

We have waited for six long years and almost gave up in despair but the Good Lord and Our Blessed Mother Mary blessed Chhaya. Now all we do is to wait in joyful hope for our bundle of joy.

Coleen, Elvis and Chhaya Traynor, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mother Mary for your intercession. My son Jose Marlonford obtained his visa with great difficulty. He has also been blessed with an opportunity for higher studies.

Mercia Coutinho

I am grateful to Our Lady for curing me of a painful illness. Do continue to assist me always.

C.R. Ukachikwu, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians for protecting my sons from their illness during their examinations, for their excellent results and for the many other favours received. Do continue to protect us always.

Mrs. B. Colaco, Mumbai

On the 21st October 2009 my daughter fell from a wall box during the night but she was unhurt. I am most grateful to Our Lady for her protection.

A Devotee

Thank you, dear Mother Mary for curing me from depression.

Monica Fernandes, Mumbai

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.

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Our Lady for the recovery of my son after having fervently prayed the 3 Hail Marys.

Michelle Albert, Malaysia

Thank you, dear Mother Mary for helping me solve all my problems, granting me a true contrition of my sins and a spirit of real conversion. Please bless my parents.

Aditya Tawde, Mumbai

I have been praying the Three Hail Marys everyday, to get a good location for my job. In spite of many problems, I have been granted the location of my choice. I am very grateful to Mother Mary and St. Don Bosco for this.

Devotee, Bangalore

Thank you for the favours received through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

S.J. D'Souza, Mumbai

My belated thanks to Mother Mary for helping my son to pass his TY B.Com examination through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

Mrs. A. Fernandes, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for having allowed me to achieve a life long dream of becoming a veterinary doctor. I waited for five months and when the last day of applications arrived I received a call informing me that I had secured an admission. Thank you, dear Mother Mary for blessing me through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. I continue to faithfully pray the 3 Hail Marys.

Marsha Gabriel, Secunderabad

Our sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians for granting me several favours through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys and for curing me from severe pain.

Fatima, Mumbai

Thank you dearest Mother Mary for the recovery of my mother from her many ailments. Please keep us under your care always.

Alice Rodrigues, Mumbai

I prayed the 3 Hail Marys Novena for the first time and both me and my daughter am most grateful for the graces received.

Mary Felix, Australia

Our sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for blessing my daughter with a baby girl. We prayed the 3 Hail Marys with full faith. Bless our baby always.

Rose Luis, Mumbai

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

My belated thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco for miraculously saving my friend's mom who met with a terrible accident and the doctors had given up all hope. Now the doctors say that she will be totally fine within a year. Thank you dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for protecting her.

Cleta D'Souza, Mangalore

Thank you, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for a safe and normal delivery and the gift of a healthy baby boy to Mildred. *Maria D'Souza, Mumbai*
My sincere and humble thanks dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for curing my grand daughter from a sore throat and high fever. Please continue to shower your blessings on my family.

Mrs. Luisa Pinto, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for a safe delivery and blessing my daughter-in-law with the gift of a healthy baby girl.

Lily Rego, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for providing me with a clear MRI report.

Z. D'Silva, Mumbai

My belated thanks to Mother Mary, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for helping me do well in my board examinations and for helping me to seek admission into an engineering college.

Regvina Olivera, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the successful operation of my husband.

Mrs. R.D. Paymaster, Mumbai

Thank you dear Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for a healthy baby boy. I am also grateful for a normal colonoscopy result. We have named our baby Savio.

A Devotee, U.K.

Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the favours and graces received.

Sherene Dickson, Bangalore

Thank you dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for all the graces we have received and for giving me a job in the Gulf, through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Do continue to bless me always.

Ajit Pinto, Mumbai

Thank you dear Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for a successful cataract operation on my right eye.

Jacintha Andrews, Chennai

Thank you dear Don Bosco for the safe delivery of a baby boy to Mrs. Lavey Mascarenhas,

Lourdes Dias, Goa

Thank you, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the favours granted to me. Please continue to bless and protect me and my loved ones.

Irene A. Castelino, Vashi

Dear Don Bosco thank you for all your blessings on our family and for my son's success in his examinations.

Sangeeta Rodrigues, Mumbai

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

Namrata Josephine Fleming

Thanks sincerely to Our Blessed Lord, Our Lady and Don Bosco for helping my son obtain his visa.

Mrs. John

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Thank you, dear Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping my son to get a good job and for many other favours received through the recitation of the holy Rosary. Always protect him and our whole family.

Ramira Godinho, Goa

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for curing me from a severe stomach pain and many other favours received.

Mrs. A. George, Mumbai

We thank the Lord and his Blessed Mother for the gift of twins -a healthy baby boy and girl. We also thank St. Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio

for a safe delivery and other favours received. We pray that they may bless our children and guide us in bringing them up to be pleasing in the eyes of the Lord.

Mark and Maria Renaux, Chennai

Thank you dear Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy after a difficult pregnancy.

Tony and Natasha, Mumbai

Our heartfelt thanks to dear Mother Mary, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of my daughter and for the gift of a baby girl. Also thank you for the many favours received.

Mrs. Aurora D'Souza, Pune

Thank you dear Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for all the blessings and favours on all our family members and for taking good care of us in all our good and bad times. Mother Mary, continue to protect us always.

M. Dias, Goa

Dear Mary Help of Christians and Dominic Savio thank you for a successful surgery on my dad's spine and for helping my mother recover from Malaria. Help them to recover completely.

Noella (USA), Wendy & Fiona (Canada)

Dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio thank you for granting my daughter success in her Std 12 examinations and for many other favours received.

Devotee

Dear Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio thank you for the safe delivery of a healthy baby boy.

Claussie and Bipin Talwar, Mumbai

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER FEBRUARY 2010

Holy Father's General Intention: *For scholars and intellectuals, that by means of sincere search for the truth they may arrive at an understanding of the one true God.*

Missionary Intention: *That the Church, aware of its own missionary identity, may strive to follow Christ faithfully and to proclaim His Gospel to all peoples.*

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MARY WAS THERE

My wife had been undergoing treatment for cancer. Twelve cycles of chemotherapy and ten of radiation did not better her condition. The oncologist had detected the malignancy and told us that it could not be treated. She was advised to seek palliative care especially since she would be in great pain. We put our trust completely in Jesus Christ and Mother Mary and kept on praying for the courage to be able to face the painful days ahead. Finally the doctors gave up treating her. We, however continued to pray and by the intervention of Our Lady she breathed her last on 5th November 2009 without undergoing any pain. It reminded us of the words of Our Saviour: "But didn't I tell you, that you will see a wonderful miracle from God if you believe?" (John 11:40)

(Varghese Vattakuzhy, Kerala)

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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