

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*Dear Lord,
May this New Year
be my gift to you
and
may your presence
fill my life
with holiness
and love...*

Cover: **Don Bosco, the Great
Apostle of Youth at Risk**
by Nino Musio



From The Editor's Desk

A Hope-Filled New Year Thought

I was talking to a friend of mine some time ago, and he was telling me how difficult he found it to make up his mind on whether to become a priest or not. He did not come from a very well-to-do family and if we decided to go back to his family he would be able to help the family to earn enough to keep them all out of poverty. It was a difficult decision... but eventually he has been ordained and is a very busy priest much loved by the people he has dedicated himself to. His difficulty arose from the sense of helplessness he felt in the face of his problems. Yet he had a burning desire to bring Christ's love to people, and it was this desire that led him to accept his calling to become a priest.

But as time went on, he became more and more despondent about what he saw around him. At home his family was caught in the grip of poverty; he could see it taking its toll on all of them. They were living in fear of what the future would bring and in those difficult times most of his relatives were living drab lives on meagre incomes.

When he looked further afield he found little to relieve his gloom. He saw the greed and corruption of much of society, with its emphasis on the material world and its neglect of God. He knew that there were people who simply wasted so much or simply hoarded it, while so many others starved in the villages where he was working. Looking at the world and its problems, he felt overwhelmed and powerless. 'What can I do?' he used to ask himself. 'What difference can I make?' And he began losing heart.

Eventually he decided to talk about his anxiety to an elderly priest who lived in a nearby community. The priest listened to what he had to say in silence. Then he looked up and said simply, 'Come with me. I want to show you something.'

He led him to the little community chapel, where there was a mosaic of the risen Christ on the wall. 'Do you see that mosaic?' the old priest asked. 'What do you think of it?' 'It's very beautiful,' said the young man, as he gazed at the thousands of small stones that made up the picture. The old priest then walked up to the mosaic, and removed one of the stones which was loose. 'What do you think of it now?' The young priest looked at the mosaic, now disfigured, and said, 'It's ruined; it's no longer beautiful.' The old man put back the loose stone carefully and said simply, 'Each one of us is a stone in God's great mosaic.'

None of us can solve the enormous problems of our times alone. But by living our calling - whatever it is - with honesty, truth and love we can be a precious stone in the great mosaic God is creating in our world: a hopeful thought for the New Year.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

CAST YOUR BREAD UPON THE WATERS

(INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW SERIES)

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, SSS

We begin yet another series of reflections on the Eucharist based on an incident which has the potential of illustrating how the Eucharist could be lived in daily life. Most of these are true to life stories and so what they teach us is pretty much within the grasp of even the most ordinary person. The important point always seems to be the openness to listen to the Spirit guiding and inspiring us to launch into action which will prove beneficial to others. One possible help in this direction is to reflect frequently on how we ourselves feel when caught in a desperate situation. What a relief to find that someone is selfless enough to set aside his/her own agenda and assist us in our need!

After all, it takes so little to reach out to the other. And we often notice that once we take the very first step, every other step follows so effortlessly that we wonder why we had hesitated so long to take the plunge. One reason could very well be that the Self still predominates in our lives forcing us always to think of ourselves first. This is where the Eucharist comes in – for with the inspiring example of Jesus' total self-giving

made present for us on our altars in a very real, though sacramental fashion, who could resist following in his footsteps? And that, not just for the sake of a reward, but perhaps for the sheer thrill of passing on a blessing to a neighbour in need.

Our hope is that this series of reflections will help as much as previous ones have, to bring



about God's kingdom of love and peace, justice and freedom in our midst and through our humble efforts. For, wherever anyone has the courage to let go of Self and sacrifice something for the sake of others, the kingdom comes alive and begins to flourish. This kind of altruistic behaviour somehow is contagious – it literally spreads like wildfire – once someone has generously lit the first spark!

"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Lk 12:49) □

1. IF HE COULD, WHY CAN'T I?

by Fr. Erasto Fernandez, SSS

A young soldier, assigned to a supply division during World War II, found himself together with several of his companions called to supplement the heavy losses suffered while spearheading the Allied advance through France. Their assigned task was to flush out the enemy from French occupied territory and the going was really slow and agonizing. With the German soldiers at their best even in retreat and their artillery fire deadly accurate, the otherwise intrepid American soldiers were in constant dread of being the next casualty to be carried out. Hope of survival and a safe return home was a slim prospect for most of them.

Victory Almost Gained

Approaching the German border after months of relentless fighting, only one last nameless French village lay in their path to total victory. This village too was a mass of smoking ruins and as they hopefully inched forward winding their way through the smoking wreckage of a recent artillery attack, Charlillo glimpsed the contours of a bombed out Catholic Church. On approaching a little closer he noticed that on the only standing wall of the Church, there stood a crucifix with the tortured image of Christ, arms still outstretched, eyes piercing the heavens, serenely surveying the

destruction all around it. Even from a distance, he could clearly see the wounds the Crucified had received at the merciless hands of another enemy, but he had miraculously been left totally untouched so far in this battle. Charlillo instinctively made a devout sign of the cross, felt a surge of adrenalin rush through his aching body and gripped his rifle even more resolutely. The thought flashing through his mind was: 'If Christ had made it through that crisis, I too could possibly endure through the present one.'

Although almost shattered by the harsh reality of the raging war, from then on he was able to persevere till the bitter end. Carrying this vision deeply etched within his heart and mind into many more battles through the war, he finally reached home safely several months later. But the image has never left him since - staying with him all through life, seeing him safely through life's varied struggles and hurdles.

Those Who Believe

Jesus had announced solemnly that he had come not to condemn the world but that anyone who believed in him might have eternal life (Jn 3:16-17). For most people, the term 'eternal life' conjures up only the idea of an unending life after death. But a

little reflection discloses that this could never be the full meaning that Jesus had in mind. No matter who the person concerned is, his/her present life on earth is not what God would like it to be – fraught with uncertainties and difficulties, failures and unfulfilled hopes and aspirations, no sane person would want this kind of a life to go on endlessly, 'eternally!' So eternal life must mean something more - a higher quality of life, a life far superior to what we experience here on earth, or even better than the very best we could live on earth!

Further what most think is that this eternal life will begin only once we leave this world! Little would they imagine that even while going through this 'valley of tears' a higher quality of life can and should be ours! This is what Charlillo seems to have experienced as he caught a glimpse of the crucified figure of Christ - and he was a different and better person from then on.

Gifted - Yet of our own Making

Another misconception clouding the minds of most Catholics is that this eternal life will be just poured into our laps abundantly, without calling for any effort on our part. This is far from the truth. Jesus offers us only a glimpse of what is possible; he gives us, as it were, only the raw materials needed to work out the final product: the rest is left to us. Given all that is needed, each one has to decide what s/he will make of it - and that decision is generally made in the secret of our hearts, often without even our adverting to it.

There are some who decide that they will work only in ideal circumstances - anything short of that will draw only complaints and grumbling from such persons. These are the ones who live with a perpetual groan on their lips: 'I wish I had...' And of course, since ideal circumstances never come our way, at least not for long, these people end up like the third servant in the Gospel parable, who only returns to the Master the one talent he had received at the start (Mt 25:14-29).

Others are more enterprising and enjoy grappling with every challenging opportunity. They don't take anything lying down, as it were! Their slogan is: 'Every problem is a God-given opportunity for growth' - for greater creativity and pro-activity on their part. They take it as a chance to see where they are lacking, and without assigning the blame to anyone else, they do what is in their power to change the situation from within. These are like the four leprous men faced with sure death; theirs was only the choice of how and when! If they entered the enemy camp they would definitely be killed by the enemy, and if they remained in the city they would die of famine like the rest. Unfazed, they ingeniously decided on a way to circumvent this difficulty! They chose to enter the enemy camp, only to find what they couldn't have dreamt of, even in their wildest dreams - enough food for the entire starving population! (2 Kgs 7:3-20). These are the sort whose lives are fulfilled, for they achieve a lot, even blessing others in the bargain.

And there are the others, perhaps the larger section of humanity, who drift along in between the two extremes – availing themselves of the chances given sometimes, but at other times succumbing to their adversities. Their lives are adorned with a few successes, but more often it is anxiety, worry, disappointment and the like that forms the greater part of their preoccupation, with very little achievement to show for all their efforts and goodwill.

Eucharistic Encouragement

Actually, the way a person goes through life is not only described for us in the Scriptures, but it also forms the raw material of the Eucharist we celebrate. In each Eucharist Jesus is present and he transforms the bread and wine (our gifts symbolizing ourselves) into himself, in-spiriting them with his own vision and power. But how much power and strength we really take back with us from the Eucharistic celebration depends on how much we truly mean what we do at Eucharist - specifically, how much personal meaning we put into the symbols will decide how much 'fruit' we derive from it.

Here again, most seem to be satisfied with a 'generalized and impersonal presence' at the Eucharist. What occurs at and on the altar doesn't seem to resonate with what transpires in their lives and so it happens that even after celebrating Eucharist for years on end, they still remain the same as before, absolutely untouched, with very little practical

difference in their lives. The Eucharist is geared for transformation, but it does not produce any automatic results either; it certainly makes Jesus present to us, perhaps even without our conscious cooperation. But how much this life-giving presence of Jesus will change our lives depends on how much of the real dying-rising of Jesus we incorporate into our lives.



If just a glance at a Crucifix enabled Charlillo to face his difficulties with a new burst of verve and courage for the rest of his life, what a difference could we not experience for ourselves, if we only came to the Eucharist each time with a more enlightened approach? What riches we forego, what power we waste, what newness we sacrifice just because we do not recognize the hour of our visitation (Mt 23:27-33)! Truly our situation too would possibly make Jesus weep as he wept over Jerusalem!

What is the one thing I need to do, practically, to make my life on earth more purposeful and meaningful? If others could do it, why can't I? □

MAY GOD HELP ME TO BE FAITHFUL TO THIS
HOLY VOCATION TO THE END

Fr. Joaquim D'Souza, sdb

Provincial of UPS (Universita Pontificia Salesiana)



When I try to recollect on how I received my Salesian vocation, I can't think of anything extraordinary that led me to join the Salesian Society and to become a Salesian priest. I guess the beginning was quite imperceptible, until one day I began to be strongly attracted to the Salesian way of life.

My memories go back to the day I received my First Communion in the parish Church of St. Paul, Parel, where I studied in the parish school before my family moved to Matunga in 1954. I believe that the seeds of my vocation were sown in the deeply Christian environment of my home and parish. The Sunday school catechism, my first Confession to our parish priest, Fr. Mata S.J. (of happy memory), my First Communion assisted by my good parents, and later also my Confirmation at the hands of the late Cardinal Gracias - all made a profound impression on my tender mind and heart. In those days the Archdiocesan Seminary was also housed in the parish premises. Seeing the seminarians go to class and prayer, or watching them at recreation, aroused my curiosity and made me wonder what it was like to be like them. Gradually, almost without my being aware of it the first seed of my vocation were sown until it blossomed into the Salesian vocation at Don Bosco, Matunga.

I remember the day when my father took me to Don Bosco High



School for the first time. It was about 4.30 one afternoon. The sight of so many boarders, resplendent in the colours of their teams, playing football in the vast playground of the school, thrilled me. It was love at first sight! I was admitted into the fourth standard as a day scholar. Gradually, I came under the influence of a good Salesian priest, Fr Carlo Restelli, who invited me to join a group of Catholic day scholars, whom he was following up. I learned to serve mass and loved to be an altar boy. Soon I was serving mass every morning, and it gave me great joy. I also loved reading story books and we were allowed to take home two books at a time but Br. Celestine Nathan, an elderly lay brother from Sri Lanka was the librarian at that time, would add another book without my asking

for it. "Take this one too, and read it. You'll enjoy it", he used to say. Thus, because of his extra book, I read the life of Don Bosco, and the lives of St Dominic Savio, of Mickey Magone and other Salesian heroes, and thoroughly enjoyed reading about their adventurous lives. Soon, they became my heroes.

The school, which was close to my house, became my second home. I spent all my leisure hours after class or during holidays in the school. I went to the summer camps with the boys, which in those years were held in Khandala. The walks in the hills with Br. Thomas Braganza, our Assistant, the swim in the waterfalls, the hobbies we learnt with Fr Bianchi, the stories he told us around the camp-fire every night, the humorous skits that Br. Viegas wrote and taught us to act in the family circles, the party songs we sang, the fatherliness and enthusiasm of Fr. Mauro Casarotti, our Rector -, all these enchanting experiences left an indelible impression on me, and drew me closer to the Salesian way of life.

In those years the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians was being constructed. I watched it coming up step by step and I was there when they finally placed the bronze statue of Our Lady on the top of the central dome. Together with the fathers and brothers we sang a hymn to Our Lady, when after a very difficult and risky operation, the statue was finally set in place, high above the surrounding buildings. I could even see it from the veranda of my house near King's Circle. My devotion to Our Lady, inculcated in my family,

grew with the building of the shrine. What a joy it was now to serve mass daily and to pray in the Shrine of Our Lady!

By now I was in the seventh standard. I remember clearly one evening, after an exciting football match, when I was taking off my boots, Fr. Restelli came to sit beside me, and in the midst of a lively conversation asked me quite directly: "Did you ever think of becoming like one of us, and doing for other boys what we are doing for you?" I replied that I had not thought of it in precisely that sort of a way, but that I would give it a thought. Gradually, I told my parents that I would like to go to the aspirantate at Tiruppattur in Tamil Nadu, a thousand kilometres away. My parents were hesitant to allow me, so Fr. Casarotti asked to see my father, and as a result of that colloquy my parents permitted me to join.

I became an aspirant in 1958, entered the novitiate in 1962, made my first profession in 1963 and was ordained a priest in 1975. I am ever grateful to God and to Our Blessed Mother for having called me to be a son of Don Bosco as a Salesian priest, and to my dear parents and family, superiors and confreres of the past and the present, for their example and encouragement. May God reward them abundantly for the immense good they have done and are still doing for me. This is my vocation story, a very simple one, with nothing exceptional or striking to make it stand out. I was happy as a youngster, was happy to join the Salesian Society, and am happy to be a Salesian priest. May God help me to be faithful to this holy vocation to the end of my life. □

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PRAYING WITH THE BIBLE

by Michael Paul Gallagher
PRAYER IS FOR YOU (7)

Dear Patrick,

Well done! 'I found your last letter helpful,' you write, 'but now I've gone beyond the Mass leaflets you were talking about. I've actually bought a Bible, and even if it's a bit confusing I'm finding my way around it. It's one of those editions with introductions to each book and some notes. Have you any suggestions for using it to pray?'

The New Testament

I agree. The Bible is a complicated book. I would not advise you to read it from start to finish. For a beginner like yourself, some parts will be more suitable for meditation. The reading of some books or passages will nourish your spiritual life more than others.

Obviously the New Testament is the climax of the Bible for a Christian. But it's only about a fifth of the whole book. As you can see easily, it divides into the four Gospels, then the Acts of the Apostles giving the history of the early Church, followed by various letters of Paul, John and others, and ending up with the Book of Revelation sometimes called the Apocalypse. This last section can seem strange, because it is written in such symbolic and visionary language.

For personal prayer my guess is that, for the moment, you'll find most fruit in the Gospels and the letters.

The Old Testament

But let's not forget the riches of the Old Testament. It's written in many different styles. It goes from poetry to legal prescriptions, from

words of Cardinal Martini, one time the Archbishop of Milan: 'I am convinced that for a Christian today it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep one's faith without nourishing oneself through listening to Scripture personally as well as with others. In this way a believer learns to rest in the heart of God, and one trains oneself to look at people and their weaknesses with the eyes of God'.

But your question, Patrick, is about how. What I want to suggest in this letter draws on an old tradition in the Church. Let me describe what was known for centuries as *lectio divina*, literally 'divine reading', meaning prayerful reading of Scripture. Let's approach a marvellous text in Isaiah in this way.

Prayerful Reading

First, find chapter 43 (verses 1 to 5) of the prophet Isaiah. It's a passage that has become well known in its sung version, 'Be not afraid'. To begin, you simply read the few short verses slowly. Be patient with yourself as you get acquainted with each detail.

This first stage involves your eyes, your lips (it can be good to read it quietly aloud), but most of all with your mind. As you try to understand these words, you begin to realize how much they are saying: about you being created by God, about you being saved, about you being protected in all dangers, about God being always with you, about God's love.

Already you have moved from reading to pondering. Now, little by little, you move from reflecting

parable - tales to religious philosophy, from history to the exhortations of the prophets.

Gradually you'll find yourself at home with it, and I'm glad your edition gives you some help and commentary. To have texts to pray from, I'd be inclined to focus initially on the psalms and on passages from the prophets.

The Drama of the Bible

Before I come to some particular suggestions, let's remember what the Bible is. It's a love story written over many centuries. On one side it is very simple: God wants people to know that they are loved, and that they can live lives of love. But on our side we 'mess things up' - to put it in modern terms - and so the love story becomes more complex.

God is steady. We are unsteady. The drama of the Bible - perhaps even the drama of life - comes from that difference. You wouldn't need to read articles on prayer if you were full of God's steadiness of love. I can write these letters, but please don't imagine for a moment that I always live them steadily. It's because of my unsteadiness that I need the Bible, to remind my heart of the promise of God. God has big hopes for us, but we forget. God's book re-calls us to what we are meant to be.

A Book for Everyone

In the Church there is a long and deep history of people reading the Bible prayerfully. The false impression that this book was not for everyone goes far back. A generation before even St. Patrick, St. John Chrysostom wrote to the laity, 'You think reading the Bible is only for monks, but you yourselves have even more need of it'.

You can put that beside some

with the mind to receiving with the heart. This passage is spoken to you. It touches you. The reading becomes relationship. Prayer becomes conversation. In this text you can quietly be overwhelmed with its consoling promise and gift of love. Nearly eighteen hundred years ago St. Cyprian gave a beautifully simple description of all this: 'If you give yourself to reading and to prayer, sometimes God will speak with you, and sometimes you with God'.

Reading. Pondering. Conversation. A fourth stage can be called 'resting'. What started from words now goes beyond words. The poetry of Isaiah leads you into a kind of quiet wonder. It is typical at this moment of *lectio divina* to pause on one phrase, and to enjoy it with gratitude and in inner silence. It may be the lovely phrase, 'You are precious in my eyes'. You pause and let yourself know the reality of that love-sentence from God.

Finally, some old writers mentioned a fifth stage: the stage of living it all. Sometimes in the ordinary tasks of each day you can deliberately remember a phrase of the Scripture, like a bee-keeping for honey, as was once said. Or, more generally, you can let the power of this passage change your attitude to people and to events. We all need to forgive, or to be kinder, or to let that love be lived.

Further Suggestions

Don't get too caught up in the five stages. It's just a description of what happens normally if you give time to praying the Scriptures. Here are a few suggestions: Psalm 139, (In some editions it, may be numbered 138.) Ephesians: 3: 4-21. Try them at your own pace and you may be surprised how easy praying with Scripture becomes. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



GOD - THE INFINITE DESIRE OF MAN **ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA (335-394)** **(10th January) Bishop and Doctor**

by James Kiefer & Mario Scudu

Gregory of Nyssa, his brother Basil the Great (14 June), and Basil's best friend Gregory of Nazianzus (9 May), are known collectively as the Cappadocian Fathers. They were a major force in the triumph of the Athanasian position at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Gregory of Nyssa tends to be overshadowed by the other two.

Gregory of Nyssa was born in Caesarea, the capital of Cappadocia (central Turkey) in about 334, the younger brother of Basil the Great and of Macrina (19 July), and of several other distinguished persons. As a youth, he was at best a lukewarm Christian. However, when he was twenty, some of the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (10 March) were transferred to a chapel near his home, and their presence made a deep impression on him, confronting him with the fact that to acknowledge God at all is to acknowledge His right to demand a total commitment. Gregory became an active and

fervent Christian. He considered the priesthood, decided it was not for him, became a professional orator like his father, married, and settled down to the life of a Christian layman. However, his brother Basil and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus persuaded him to reconsider, and he became a priest in about 362. (This did not affect his marriage though his wife died a short time later.)

His brother Basil, who had become archbishop of Caesarea



in 370, was engaged in a struggle with the Arian Emperor Valens, who was trying to stamp out belief in the deity of Christ. Basil desperately needed the votes and support of Athanasian bishops, and he maneuvered his friend Gregory Nazianzen into the bishopric of Sasima, and (in about 371) his brother Gregory into the bishopric of Nyssa, a small town about ten miles from Caesarea. Neither one wanted to be a bishop, neither was suited to be a bishop, and both were furious with Basil.) Gregory did not get along well with his flock, was falsely accused of embezzling church funds, fled the scene in about 376, and did not return until after the death of Valens about two years later.

In 379, Basil died, having lived to see the death of Valens and the end of the persecution. Shortly thereafter, Macrina died. Gregory was with her in the last few days of her life. Afterwards, he took to writing sermons and treatises on theology and philosophy. His philosophy was a form of Christian Platonism.

Of a Mild and Uncertain Character

Those were years of great theological turmoil between Catholic orthodoxy and the great heresies of the time, the most pernicious of which was Arianism whose poison was contaminating many parts of the Christian community.

It was in 381 at the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople that Gregory reached the pinnacle of his fame. His contributions, amidst much applause were a triumph of the theological ideas

of Basil and their common friend Gregory Nazianzen. By now he was a man and a bishop esteemed by everyone. Even the emperor Theodosius commended him.

In his approach to the Scriptures, he was heavily influenced by Origen, and his writings on the Trinity. His reflections on the Incarnation were built on and develop by insights found in the writings of his brother Basil. He is chiefly remembered as a writer of the spiritual life, contemplation, prayer and meditation, but also on community worship and the sacramental life in the Church.

His treatise *On the Making of Man* deals with God as Creator, and with the world as a good thing, as something that God takes delight in, and that ought to delight us. His *Great Catechism* is esteemed as a work of systematic theology. His *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is a work of contemplative, devotional, mystical theology.

Fortunately for us, the church and the theological controversies did not dissuade him from writing down the fruits of his reflections and research. His work is important for the Church and humanity: both because of the amount he has written and the depth with which the matter is treated. He has left us tracts of essays in dogmatic theology, commentaries on the Word of God, and works on ascetic and mystical theology.

For Gregory of Nyssa, God is the constant desire of Man. God is his supreme end and even though he is not aware God is there in every aspiration and endeavour. That is true because

man is created God's image and likeness but this likeness has been defaced by sin and evil so the aim of the spiritual life (*ascesis*) is to restore that image (of God) by gradually arriving at a contemplation of him. Through this man should free himself from the influence of sensuality and worldliness because God is beyond every image that we make of him. He is always the Absolute Other beyond everything that man thinks or conceives of. God is always beyond every human capacity to know or intuit. At the basis of this is the fundamental fact that God is infinite in nature while man is finite. There is the famous and original doctrine of the God's ineffability known also as "God's darkness," concepts taken from Pseudo Dionysius. Therefore human life is a continuous journey towards God, a tiring and constant pilgrimage and a

constant tending towards him. Human life should be a life of study and reflection of God and his totality, to contemplate him through the eyes of faith, seeking to love him more and more. At the end of this process of seeking to love, if we persevere, we shall behold the beatific vision and total bliss. Our final reward will be to contemplate him "face to face as he is." That will be our joy for all eternity - no more seeking but a real vision of God.

The Christian is therefore invited to grow in faith, because if he receives a perception of God he is nevertheless weak even though he might seem strong.

Gregory lived in a very turbulent time for the Church, during which he like Basil had to struggle against the Arians for orthodoxy. One need not marvel that he insisted so much on the unity of the Church because it is through its members that she is built up again.

The final stage of this grandiose personal spiritual endeavour will be the final reunification of the whole world, material, human, and spiritual. This eschatological vision of Gregory describes the whole universe finally being united and finally coming to rest in God. We will all form "only one chorus that will look to its one head" who is Christ. □



"Penance and austerity help to block sin from entering us when they present themselves attractively"

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Tea Service

One day my mother was out and my dad was in charge of me and my brother who is four years older than I am. I was maybe 1 and a half years old and had just recovered from an accident in which my arm had been broken. Someone had given me a little 'tea set' as a get-well gift and it was one of my favorite toys. Daddy was in the living room engrossed in the evening news and my brother was playing nearby in the living room when I brought Daddy a little cup of 'tea', which was just water.

After several cups of tea and lots of praise for such yummy tea, my Mom came home. My Dad made her wait in the living room to watch me bring him a cup of tea, because it was 'just the cutest thing!!'

My Mom waited, and sure enough, here I come down the hall with a cup of tea for Daddy and she watches him drink it up, then says, 'Did it ever occur to you that the only place that baby can reach to get water is the toilet??'

Circles

During basic army training, a sergeant was telling his group how a submachine gun sprayed bullets. He drew a circle on a blackboard and announced that it had 260 degrees.

"But, sergeant, all circles have 360 degrees," remarked one of the trainees.

"Don't be stupid," the sergeant roared. "This is a small circle."

The End is Near

A local priest and pastor stood by

the side of the road holding up a sign that said, "The End is Near! Turn yourself around now before it's too late!" They planned to hold up the sign to each passing car.

"Leave us alone, you religious nuts!" yelled the first driver as he sped by.

From around the curve they heard a big splash.

"Do you think," said one clergy to the other, "we should just put up a sign that says 'bridge out' instead?"

Mom's Phone

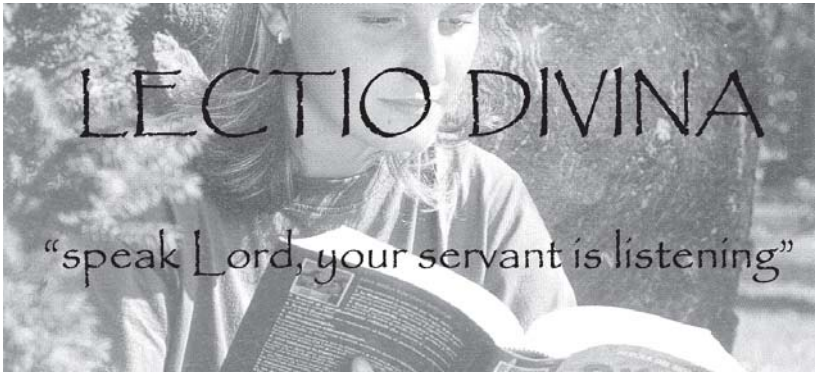
Because my mother had a habit of losing her cordless phone, I bought her a phone with a clip on it so she could attach it directly to her belt. A few days later, I walked into my mother's home and found her standing in the middle of the living room, halfway dressed. That didn't strike me as odd so much as the fact that she was holding her pants to the side of her head and speaking into them.

"Don't look at me that way," she yelled. "The phone started ringing and I couldn't figure out how to undo this stupid clip!"

Shopping Bags

It was very crowded at the supermarket, and the customer in front of me had a large order. As the harried looking clerk lifted the final bag for her, its bottom gave way, sending the contents crashing to the floor.

"They just don't make these bags like they used to," the clerk blurted to the customer. "That was supposed to happen in your driveway!" □



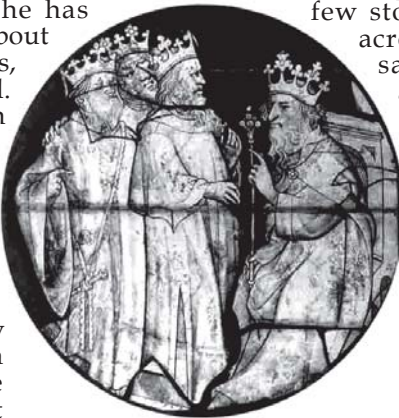
THE GOSPEL WRITER

by Dermot Connolly

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem... (Matthew, Chapter 2)

I have with me a copy of what Mark has written, but as you know I am trying to write something myself. I've been gathering all the information I can, to add to what Mark has, and of course he has nothing at all about the birth of Jesus, or his childhood. So I've been asking around, especially among older people coming from Jerusalem and the Bethlehem area, since we know Jesus was born there. There's the chance that someone might remember something, some family story

handed down. But there's very little; it may be just too long ago, about eighty years now since the time of Herod the Great.



The Three Kings before Herod
*Stained glass window,
France, 15th Century
(Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen)*

“As it happens, one of the few stories I did come across involves the same Herod. It's about some strangers who came to Bethlehem one night - no one was sure who they were; magi possibly, being from the East. Anyway, it seems they had been blundering about Jerusalem asking where they could find the 'new-born King of the Jews'

as they put it. Totally unaware of how dangerous that was! They had seen signs in the heavens, they said, and there was an unusual star. It all alarmed King Herod, who saw plots against himself around every corner, and it terrified everyone else.

“Herod sent them on to Bethlehem; that was where the prophet Micah had said a new ruler would come from. There the strangers visited one family who did indeed have a baby boy. But by the next morning they were gone: foreigners, parents, baby and all. Perhaps they had been warned - but who could have done that? The family fled to Egypt; nobody knew where the foreigners went. It would all have

been forgotten except for its terrible outcome, the revenge taken by Herod on the infant boys of Bethlehem: he had his soldiers kill them all. It was my first time hearing of that atrocity.

“Now, what do I do with this? Is it part of the story of Jesus? Or is it about someone else? Or is there any truth in it? As always seems to happen, the very people who could have told me are gone - Mary and Joseph! And yet, my Jewish instincts rise to the tale; it is full of echoes from our past. The magi search the skies; but we search the scriptures.

“Take the very name ‘Joseph’ - there was an earlier Joseph, a great man for dreams, son of the Patriarch Jacob and Rachel; he went down to Egypt and ended up saving his family. Centuries later, a ruler in Egypt ordered the death of all Hebrew boys, but Moses escaped that slaughter, and became another saviour of the Jewish people. Still with the death of children, I can hear the prophet Jeremiah’s words about Rachel, who is buried near Bethlehem: ‘weeping for her children because they are no more.’ And then, what the Lord said through the prophet Hosea: ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him, / and out of Egypt I called my son.’ Are these echoes of a deeper truth? How can I tell this story?” □



If you want to know what the gospel writer did with the story read Matthew, Chapter 2.

DEDICATED TO
THE WORLD DAY
OF PEACE

Quiet

CAN WE REALLY

by Pierluigi

*The song of peace resounds in the
and is born of a woman*

One cannot think of peace without justice. Verbs are generally conjugated but when they serve to express concepts then “peace” is all about reconciling any kind of conflict. Who of us doesn’t dream of peace for ourselves and our dear ones?

Peace and the aspiration for peace express the highest possible definition of this word and it is used even by those who profess no faith. In any part of the world, people of any culture, independent of their beliefs or ideologies, aspire for peace. Yet it is a word that has constantly been abused and this abuse comes when seeking peace only for oneself, without trying to help build up or share it with others as bread is shared. One cannot think of living in peace without sharing it. It is a scandal to yearn for peace just for ourselves, our loved ones, our city and our nation, without offering it to others as well. Peace, real peace is that universal embrace enveloping all humankind. It is that cosmic desire for universal brotherhood and friendship.

But what kind of peace are we looking for? Is it a peace that is synonymous with inertia or the peace of the tomb, or is it peace that comes prior to an outburst of violence?

The Christian definition is clear: we need to be builders of universal peace but all too often, even in our communities there is a certain indifference with regards to peace. One thinks that in order to achieve real peace everything else must be done away with. Evidently our preaching is still weak occasionally making us complicit with a fragmented world that won’t condemn the tyranny of certain oppressive regimes. Since we cannot strongly condemn violence we try to pacify ourselves that certain political or economic choices are necessary if we are able to live in peace.

To be aware that peace is the daughter of justice is decisive to any proclamation. Don’t close your eyes to the abuse of power but stand with those who are downtrodden. That should be the choice of every Christian.

What right have we to hope for a future of justice and peace when we cannot oppose the lacerating divisions, the imbalances and the violence that characterise our times? Gandhi said: *“Even without being a Christian, I can witness to Christ by the way I live.”* We, more

Spaces

HOPE FOR PEACE?

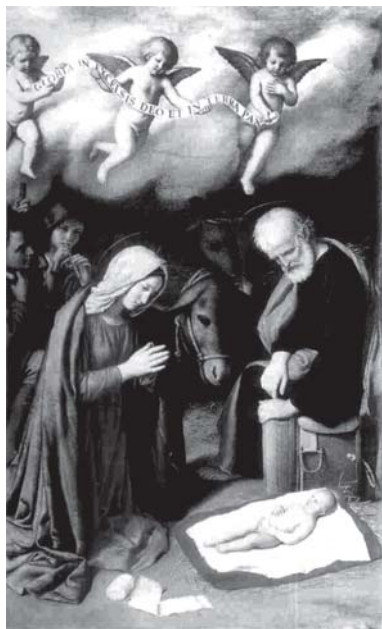
gi Menato

*heavens when God becomes man
in the fullness of time.*

than others, should become aware that we cannot be at peace when human dignity is being trampled upon, when the right to life is disrespected, when the violence of war and terrorism is being perpetuated and the weak are decimated because they are defenceless like those still in the womb too weak to cry for help. When we are indifferent to those who silently die of starvation or when refuge is denied to strangers from the hinterland or when their religious freedom is not respected then peace is ignored. We should realize that there can be no peace until all inequalities are brought to an end and the fruits of the earth are equitably shared so that we can build a climate of peace.

Only when we courageously fight will we really be able really to wish one another a wish of peace: peace to thousands of families and all those who have died at work in the years gone by, to all the migrants to our cities who are hiding in our shanties and slums away from prying eyes of the law, peace to those who in their desperation are subjected to the flesh trade to find money enough to feed their families. Peace to the women who are victims of rape in body and mind, to millions of men, women and children who struggle to live because of a lack of food and water and who are helpless to fight the battles against disease, ignorance and dignity.

Looking at Jesus who was born in Bethlehem we ought to see things differently but often our selfishness, both personal and social, tends to blind our eyes and dull our hearts... will you still wish someone 'peace' in this new year? □



Short Story

A DRESS FOR THE DANCE

by Pierluigi Menato

Id love to please you, my dear, but I can't" said her mother. Irene heard those words and was very depressed. She put her head down and turned away sulking. Those were hard words to hear...and she was very disheartened. She had been invited to a New Year's Eve party at her friend Martina's house. Those were wonderful occasions to dress up and meet friends... There weren't many occasions like that but New Year's Eve was one and then there was the Carnival party, the party on Easter Monday...and the celebration at the end of the school year... She would meet her friends at their beautiful palatial mansions.

She was looking forward to this party...and she needed a new evening dress...she didn't want something expensive. Something modest would do, but something new. But Irene knew she couldn't afford something like that!

"It's been a difficult time," her mother said, "we've already spent quite a bit." "Your school fees are so high...then there's the house to maintain...medicines and clothes and so many other little things. All that costs money...and your poor father is doing all he can...can I ask him for something more for a dress for you?"

Her mother was right, there was no doubt about that...but why had Irene to become the scapegoat and make such a huge

sacrifice for all her other younger brothers and sisters?

Her brother, Andrew was in Grammar school and he needed a new jacket, Sylvia her sister needed a pair of new shoes as her toes were peeking out of the front. Irene was eighteen years old and she looked pretty. Her blue eyes seemed to dance in her beautiful face whenever she smiled! She would try and forget it...what else was there to do?

"I think you could wear the dress we made for you last year," her mother suggested.

"Last year's dress! That's impossible, mamma! It's gone so short and tight. I won't fit into it anymore. Don't worry. I think I'll just stay at home."

What else was there to do...the days were going by and her longing for a new dress, instead of diminishing was only growing stronger... She heard her friends comparing patterns during the breaks at school.

"I'm getting myself a long dress with embroidery down the front...I've just found a pattern and it looks really great!" said one, "I hope it'll be ready in time!"

"My dress is made of raw-silk!" Someone else piped in.

"I've chosen a pale green velvet dress," said another of her friends.

"And what about you?" they asked Irene.

"Me? ... Oh, I don't yet know if I'll be able to come," she put her head down and turned away from the group. They were all so excited and were flitting around like butterflies. If she thought that by running away her thoughts would disappear, they did not.

It was her day for her usual piano lesson...and she landed up at her teacher's home looking downcast...but she forced a smile.

She had missed quite a few days during the last few months and she was embarrassed. She had not been practicing regularly...and her nervous fingers that moved gracefully over the keys revealed it all.

"What's wrong with you, Irene?" The elderly teacher asked, "that's a B flat, not a B natural!"

The girl, who was distracted corrected her mistake and went on... she made more mistakes. It was clear that her mind was not on the piece she was playing. She was completely distracted!

"Tell me, Irene, can you hear how horrible your playing sounds today?"

"I know, Miss."

"It looks like you haven't been practicing enough, have you?"

"I've tried to practice!"

"I understand! But you're still so nervous and distracted ...why?" Irene couldn't lie.

"That's true...I know why!"

"Why, then?" the elderly teacher gently pressed on. She loved Irene like her own daughter.

"I've constantly been thinking of Martina's party!" That was the beginning...and Irene poured out all her pain and hurt as her teacher listened attentively.

When Irene had finished her story, the teacher said: "And this

little thing, only a party, has got you so upset! There are so many more serious problems in life that God has preserved you from! Now, come on, be brave and get on with practicing and try not to think of anything else!"

The rest of the practice was very quiet and monotonous as the young student played on very mechanically. Everything sounded so insipid and expressionless. It sounded like the girl was going through a dark tunnel filled with shadows of the past. Her mind was trying to grapple with what the teacher had said about being prevented from more "serious problems." That thought seemed to blow her dark mood away like the wind blows a storm cloud away.

The memory of her friends talking during the breaks at school remained and she couldn't forget their comments and when those thoughts surfaced the sadness that seemed to have dissolved reappeared. When those thoughts came up her heart grew dark and heavy once more and she had to purse her lips to hold back her tears.

The kindly teacher thought of lifting this burden from her pupil's young shoulders. She would make a sacrifice. She would part with something she held very dear.

A short time later, the piano tuition came to an end and the teacher turned to Irene and said softly: "I've got a suggestion, Irene. Would you like to go to the New Year's Eve Ball?"

Irene searched the wrinkled face of her teacher who went on: "Then come with me!"



Her tone was such that she seemed to have become rather somber as if a heavy weight had suddenly descended on to the elderly teacher's shoulders.

The eighteen-year-old Irene walked behind the teacher to her small but cosy bedroom. She walked up to the cupboard and opened it and from the bottom shelf she removed a rather large cardboard box. Her hands seemed to tremble imperceptibly.

"Look here, I've never shown this to anyone! But I feel I ought to give it to you. Who knows? You must be my lucky child."

The teacher handed the old box to Irene. She could hardly believe what she was hearing or looking at. The girl undid the ribbon slowly and lifted the cover off the box: she gradually saw that precious thing reveal itself!

From the rustling tissue paper wrapping emerged a beautiful blue silk dress, with sleeves and pleats. It seemed so fresh. It was so well preserved.

Irene took it in her hands and was dazzled. Did this exquisite dress really belong to her teacher? When had she bought it?

"Irene, my child, I wore this for

the first and last joyful occasion in my life, on my engagement day," she calmly told her young student who just stood there transfixed with the dress in her arms. She was going to say something more, when all of a sudden she paused, had she revealed too much of herself and was it going to be too painful for words? "I believe that this year, silk is in fashion. If you like, I could have it altered in a few days and it will fit you to a T..."

"Oh, teacher how can I thank you?" Irene exclaimed, her eyes brimming over with tears. She went on: "No! I can't deprive you of this souvenir!"

Her resistance to this offer was brief and futile. She was very happy that here was a way out of her problem without even planning it. She put the dress back into the box and threw herself into the arms of her teacher.

It was New Year's Eve and at Martina's house Irene looked stunning in her long blue silk dress. It fitted her perfectly right down to her ankles. All eyes were on her. She really looked like a fairy queen. It was as if spring had come early that year...everything seemed brighter around her.

At the same time in another part of the town the elderly teacher was sitting by the window that evening with a quiet smile of satisfaction. She sincerely hoped that her student was having a good time. It was getting dark and probably the party was just beginning. She was so glad that she could relive the days of her youth through her pupil Irene...□

ADOLESCENCE: A TIME FOR SOWING

by Fr. Gianni Asti

Remember your Creator...

After having reflected with his boys on the necessity of knowing God, loving him and admiring the beauty of creation, he (Don Bosco) insisted on the importance of these tender years of their youth to build up the man and the Christian for his future destiny. He wrote to his boys:

"The Lord wants you to know that if you start being good in your youth you will be so during the rest of your life and you will be rewarded with eternal glory. On the other hand if you have a bad start you will continue in the same manner right up to your death and eventually lead yourself to hell.

Therefore, when you see elderly people steeped in the vice of drunkenness, or gambling, or blasphemy, it is easy to say that these vices began in their youth. The youngster who traverses one path in his youth will not change when he is old. Ah, my son, God says, "Remember your Creator in the time of your youth." Elsewhere he says: "How fortunate is the youngster who walks in the way of the commandments. Blessed is that youngster who observes the law of the Lord from his youth..."

Therefore, have courage, my dear boys, I am giving you time to be virtuous and I assure you that you will always be happy and you will taste and see how good the Lord is."

Notice how Don Bosco is not



ADVICE TO HIS BOYS

DON BOSCO'S

afraid to talk to youngsters about death and about life after death, of eternal happiness or of definitive failure. He does not hide the vices of adults of his time and he does not want his youngsters to repeat them and so he challenges them to experience the happiness that only God can give to those who promptly and without delay begin serving the Lord, not waiting to reach adulthood.

You reap what you sow

In a "goodnight" which was "a goodnight thought" that Don Bosco gave his youngsters before they retired for the night he returned to this matter because the boys knew that it was the harvesting season:

"Tomorrow is Thursday. When you go out you will see wheat being harvested. The farmers make sheaves of it which are then tied up in bundles and they are bound together into bushels. This reminds me of what we so often



read in Sacred Scripture: "A man will reap what he sows." If these farmers who are happy reaping the wheat cheer and rejoice, had not done the work of sowing and cultivating the field well and irrigating it properly at the proper time could they cheer at the harvest? Certainly not! They reap what they have sown. It will be the same with you, my dear boys. If you sow now then you will rejoice in reaping a great harvest at the proper time, but the one who shirks the work of sowing, will starve when the time for harvest comes.

Be attentive to this text of Holy Scripture: "What is reaped is that which was sown." The harvest depends on the sowing. If wheat is sown, then wheat is harvested; if millet, then millet; if barley is sown then barley is harvested; if oats, oats; if cockle or darnel, cockle or darnel is harvested. If you want a good harvest of useful things, you must sow useful and profitable things. But remember, although you labour hard when you are sowing, that is nothing compared to the joy you will have at harvest time. For this, the farmer is an admirable example."

These are such precious hints for youngsters even in our times.

These same means of communication highlight the necessity and the urgency of the educative thrust given in the family and the school to prevent the phenomenon of bullying, violence of gangs and of racism.

The Time for Sowing

Infancy, adolescence and early youth are those privileged moments to sow in the minds and hearts of young people the seeds of virtue that will help them grow into virtuous and upright adults. Teaching virtue, preventing and eradicating vices is the precious work of parents, educators and social communicators. They need to sow in the minds of youngsters, virtues of goodness, meekness, sincerity, love for work, spirit of service and sacrifice.

In the past books and anthologies, already from the first years, were rich in texts that praised virtue. Today, we spontaneously ask: how are our



youth being educated in our schools? Do they get their information from newspapers or the television? What is being sown in their minds through violent movies, cartoons, fiction, and pornographic sites on the internet? Because of certain permissiveness on the part of some parents and educators youngsters are exposed to what they see in schools, on the streets, and in discos.

We always admire Don Bosco's 'evening thoughts' and the liveliness of his educative dialogues with his young listeners:

"Just one more thing: If a seed is to flourish and bring forth fruit at the proper time, it has to be sown at the proper time; wheat in autumn, the millet in spring and so on. If they are not sown in time then the crop fails. At what season must the sowing be done in man? You can tell me!

(He took the maize of one of his boarders):

- The spring of life, that is in one's youth.

- And what of those who don't sow in their youth?

- They will reap nothing when they are old.

- And what needs to be sown?

- Good works.

- And what of those who sow darnel?

- They will reap thorns in their old age.

- Remember that well! Remember that and keep it in mind, all of you, since all of you will need it!"

A privileged time for sowing

For Don Bosco, the privileged

moments for 'spiritual sowing' something into the minds of the youngsters were the days of the spiritual retreat. On those occasions he presented his reflection on the Salvation of the Soul depending on how old the youngsters were:

"On the contrary, I have never heard of someone at the point of death being happy about the evil he has committed. The reason for this is very clear. Oh, my dear sons remember, evil gives a brief moment of pleasure to the one who commits it but then it leaves nothing but remorse thereafter. On the other hand, goodness truly satisfies the heart while doing it and the joy lasts a lifetime.

At the point of death, which of these will give you more pleasure? Will it be the desolate thought of having committed evil, the fear of judgement, and the awful punishment of God, or the good will that will certainly bring us the hope of an eternal reward? Do not let yourself be deceived by the evil one!

With a good confession reclaim the lost glory of the children of God and your guilt will never continue to accuse you."

It is useful to recall the effectiveness that Don Bosco attributed to Confession and for formation of a young conscience.

We conclude with an admonition of Don Bosco:

"See then, my dear boys, whoever wishes to become great must begin by practicing virtue fearlessly from his youth" (EBM 6,48). □

NEWSBITS

SPAIN, JAEN

Benedict XVI has conferred a papal decoration on a devotion to Mary as she is revered in the Diocese of Jaen.

The Pope has given the Golden Rose to the "Virgen de la Cabeza" (literally, Virgin of the Head), the patron of the diocese. This is the first Marian image in Spain to receive the now uncommon honour.

At a press conference, at the end of October last year, Bishop Ramón del Hoyo of Jaen displayed the Golden Rose - a golden rosebush complete with leaves and flowers in a Renaissance silver vase decorated with the papal coat of arms.

The inscription in Latin says: "Benedict XVI. Golden Rose. For the image of the Blessed Virgen de la Cabeza, Heavenly Patroness of the Diocese of Jaen. Most gracious concession. November 22, 2009."

The bishop of Jaen requested the Golden Rose from the Pope on the occasion of the Jubilee Year being observed in the diocese in honor of its patroness on the centenary of her coronation.

In making the request, Bishop del Hoyo noted that the oldest pilgrimage in Spain is held in her honour and that thousands of faithful profess their devotion to her.

The Golden Rose is a papal decoration conferred on prominent Catholic personalities; it has gone through a significant evolution.

Initially, kings and dignitaries received it, later it was conferred almost exclusively on queens and, more recently, on Our Lady. The distinction was created by Pope

Leo IX in 1049.

In more recent times, after the Second Vatican Council, the papal decoration has become almost exclusively a gift from popes to Our Lady.

AUSTRALIA, SYDNEY

In early November the Gospel message was sent through the Internet to isolated places, even prisons, in a global e-conference organized by the Australian bishops.

A press release from the bishops' conference reported that thousands of people, including convicts from Sydney's Long Bay Correctional Centre and Silverwater Correctional Centre, tuned in to the online conference to learn more about the Gospel of Luke.

Through the Internet, individuals joined the global network of participants from across Australia, as well as Rome, Great Britain, the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland, the United States, the Philippines, Korea, Fiji and New Zealand. They were able to listen to the talks and send in questions by email, which were then answered throughout the day.

The conference, titled "Come to the Table," is the second of its kind, following the successful online presentation on St. Paul last June.

The events were organized by the bishops' conference along with The Broken Bay Institute.

Bishop David Walker, member of the Bishops' Commission for Mission and Faith Formation, hosted the conference in his

diocese of Broken Bay, Australia.

He explained that these activities are meeting the need for accessible, quality, adult faith formation.

"We know from the feedback we received from the St. Paul e-conference that while everybody recorded a positive experience, those who were especially appreciative were those who were isolated and were not usually able to access such high quality speakers," the prelate affirmed.

The director of The Broken Bay Institute, Gerard Goldman, stated that the organizers were "delighted" to include the prisoners.

"This is a wonderful faith formation opportunity for them and for many others," he said, "and we hope to be able to build on this outreach in the future."

Speakers included Archbishop Mark Coleridge of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese, and Sister Elizabeth Dowling of the Sisters of Mercy. Lay people also presented a panel discussion on the application of this Gospel to their lives.

The sessions are being offered for free online access on The Broken Bay Institute Web page.

POLAND, ZLOTNIKI

The archbishop of Poznan, Poland, blessed the provisional chapel for the first parish in the country dedicated to St. Gianna Beretta Molla.

Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki visited the chapel in Zlotniki on Saturday, during which he made an appeal for the defense of life from the moment of conception, reported Loolek.org.

The parish, which had been founded on Jan. 1st, will celebrate

Masses in the provisional chapel until a church is built.

The archbishop, who is vice president of the Polish episcopate, said the parish will become "for the diocese and for the whole of Poland an exceptional place of the defense of life."

Archbishop Gadecki noted that today human life is strongly attacked by the civilization of death: "We must remember that, from the scientific point of view, human life does not begin from the moment of birth, but from the moment of conception."

"Acceptance of the fact that from fertilization there is a new human being isn't a matter of opinion," he added, "but an experimental fact."

The archbishop referred to the parish's patron saint, Gianna Beretta Molla (1922-1962), as a person dedicated to prayer and sacrifice.

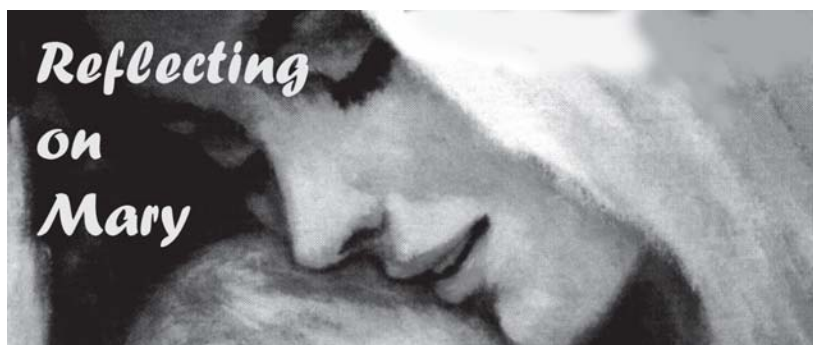
Gianna, an Italian pediatrician, wife and mother, developed a tumor on her uterus during her fourth pregnancy. Doctors advised an abortion or a hysterectomy, which Gianna refused, knowing that going through with the pregnancy could lead to her death.

"If you must decide between my life and the child's, don't hesitate. Choose hers. Save her!" Gianna told her doctors.

A week after giving birth to her daughter, Gianna died. She was 39.

"Her death illustrates in a wonderful way Jesus Christ's words: 'There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's friends,'" said Archbishop Gadecki, based on the words of the saint's husband.

Gianna was canonized a saint in 2004. □



MARY: WOMAN OF GOSPEL FAITH

By Eamon R. Carroll, O. Carm

What do we know about the young wife and mother, Mary of Nazareth, who lived so long ago and so far away? God has not seen fit to reveal many details of her life story. We meet her in the Gospel as the promised bride of Joseph; by the customs of the time it would have been an arranged marriage, Mary hardly more than fourteen, Joseph not much older. What went on between mother and son the early years, when Jesus was a child, an adolescent, a young man? After the presentation of the Christ child in the temple according to St. Luke "When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

"And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom, and God's favour was with him." After the strange incident at the Passover in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve St. Luke writes "He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their

authority. *His mother stored up all these things in her heart* (emphasis added). And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man." Twelve years earlier when the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger and spoke of the angelic message they had received from the heavens (in St. Matthew's gospel the Magi from the East were also guided from the skies). Mary's reaction at Bethlehem had been simply "...she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart."

For the infancy and childhood of Our Lord recent popes and authors, poets among them, have offered such reflections as the following. In October 1979 John Paul II said: "As he sat on her lap, and later as he listened to her throughout the hidden life at Nazareth, this Son, who was 'the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth,' was formed by her in human knowledge of the Scriptures and of the history of

God's plan for his people and in adoration of the Father." Some years back a French priest, J. Roche, wrote the book "The Silence of Mary." Hewing to the sober style of the Gospels he reflected tenderly on Mary's own hidden life after Pentecost. Here are a few of his sentences: "She no longer saw her Son in human form... Today, in the decline of life, she had a tremendous realization of the divine fullness and immensity of the little child she had carried in her arms. ... Jesus had taught the apostles to search the Scriptures. He must have taught her first at Nazareth ... She continued to wait for Jesus to come for her... She had nursed the infant Jesus: now, like a discreet and smiling grandmother, she nursed the Church at its infancy."

During his ministry the Mother of Jesus rarely appears, finally at Calvary. After his resurrection and ascension she is with the apostles at Pentecost, the last clear bible reference to her. We do not know how long she lived after that, though, given what we know of normal life spans those days, by the time of her Son's death and resurrection she would have been regarded as elderly. We may say: "Well, that's not much to go on, with respect to Mary's life." In fact, however, we do know a surprising amount from the scriptures. She is there at all the crucial stages of the life of Jesus: conception, birth, childhood, adolescence (at twelve), public life (the Cana wedding at the start, the second luminous mystery of the Rosary that we owe to John Paul II). During his ministry (the third luminous mystery) she must have been apprehensive, as the

initial enthusiastic reception of this preacher and healer gradually changed to deadly anger by some of his own people along with the constant suspicion of the Roman occupiers. At the end, the Mother of Sorrows shared the agony of Calvary, the joy of the resurrection, and with his disciples awaited the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Mary is mentioned more than any other woman in the New Testament: her name occurs 19 times, and every single reference points to her as the Gospel woman of faith. For the Son of Mary the Gospels are primarily concerned not with details of his life, admittedly circumstances we would satisfy our curiosity, but the New Testament thrust is the mission and message of Jesus, not just biographical details, but the meaning of it all. Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah; he is himself the Word of Life. What the Bible says of Mary is at the understanding of Jesus himself.



The New Testament picture of the Mother of Jesus has been drawn with a profound understanding of the **obedient faith** (emphasis added) Mary manifests to the Church. The young woman of Nazareth and Bethlehem, the pious Mary in the temple at the presentation of her infant son and again when he was 12 years old, the sensitive guest at the Cana wedding, the valiant woman on Calvary, the forgiving mother of the Risen Jesus at Pentecost - all these scriptural scenes have a larger ecclesial echo than ordinary circumstantial detail. Especially for St. Luke, Mary is always the trusting woman of faith who is praised by her Son for hearing and heeding the word of God. Consider the incidents in Luke 8, 19-21 and Luke 11, 27-28. In St. Luke's book two, the Acts of the Apostles, Mary appears a final time as

witness in faith and obedience to her Son's resurrection. She is at the heart of the first community of believers, named with the eleven apostles, in persevering prayer awaiting the Spirit of Pentecost. There is an extraordinary presence of Mary in Christian memories from the start. She is part of the "good news of Jesus Christ." That is the meaning of the word "gospel," which in old English was "god-spell." Scripture shows us the Mother of Jesus, pondering her Son's birth and development, accepting the will of God and following in faith.

I have not found this better expressed than in John Paul II's Rosary letter of October 2002, on the central glorious mystery as "revealing the face of the Church as a family gathered together with Mary, enlivened by the



"Mary went with haste to visit her cousin in the hill country of Judah"

outpouring of the Spirit and ready for the mission of evangelisation. The contemplation of this scene, like that of the other glorious mysteries, should lead the faithful to an ever greater appreciation of their new life in Christ, lived in the heart of the Church...."

We do not lightly describe the mother of Jesus as "faithful." Recent statements and documents of the Church, from the Vatican Council and the popes, keep stressing Mary's "obedient faith" (words from the epistle to the Romans 1, 5 and 16, 19) John Paul II's letter for the Marian year (1987/8) was built around the "obedient faith" of Our Lady. Tracing the gospel references to her faith, starting with the annunciation, the late pope paused to remind us that along with the beginning of the good news of salvation the Mother of the Saviour experienced (his words) "a particular heaviness of heart," linked with a sort of "night of faith," to use the words of the Spanish Carmelite St. John of the Cross—a kind of "veil" through which one has to draw near to the Invisible One and live in intimacy with the mystery (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*). This is the way that Mary, for many years, lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son, and went forward in her "pilgrimage of faith," while Jesus "increased in wisdom...and in favor with God and man" (Lk 2, 52).

What can be said of Mary's life of faith? What of her family background; how observant were they to their Jewish heritage? Here again the Gospels give us more information. Mary came from a devout family. Elizabeth her kinswoman and her husband

Zachary, parents of the surprisingly late-born John the Baptist, are described as "upright in the sight of God" (Lk 1, 6). Mary's husband Joseph is called simply "an upright man," no small praise! And something that dawned up recently: according to St. Luke "every year they went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover." It was no easy trip from northern Nazareth, with all the journey inconveniences.

The many of us who have had to travel at holiday time, by air or road, know what a trial it can be. In the confusion of departure from Jerusalem for home it was all too easy for a twelve-year-old to slip away from the family group. At the festival there was all the hassle and jostling of noisy crowds. The Gospels describe the angry Jesus driving from the temple area those who were profaning the sacred precincts.

In the old "Roman Canon," now the first Eucharistic prayer, the prayer after the consecration reads: "Father...look with favour on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchisedech." I recall that soon after the Second Vatican Council a Lutheran theologian said that if we can speak of Abraham as "our father in faith," surely we can also call the mother of Jesus "our mother in faith." □

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Thank you, blessed Mother for granting me a negative result on the biopsy of my wife's mouth ulcers and for saving her from a fall from the first floor staircase.

A Devotee

My grateful thanks to Our Lord Jesus and Mother Mary for the safe delivery of my daughter and the gift of a healthy baby girl. Although she was born pre-term she needed no special medical support which is indeed a great miracle.

Mrs. Philomena Fernandes, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mother Mary for your continued intercession as we moved safely from India to Dubai and my son got a job there.

Mrs. F. Pinto, Mumbai

Thank you, dear Mother Mary and Mother Teresa for granting Joanne success in her Law examinations.

Amy Moniz, Mississauga, Canada
My sincere thanks to the Lord Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for all the favours we have received.

Marge DeSilva, Mumbai

My belated thanks to our Blessed Mother for giving me a healthy baby daughter. Everytime I pray to Jesus and Mother Mary they have miraculously saved me and my family from difficult situations.

Anna Assisi, Mumbai

My brother-in-law had come down to Goa on the death of his father. His employer thought he had lied and so he came down to Goa. The very next day his employer had asked him to come back to Kuwait. He was heartbroken. I prayed to Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio. My brother-in-law's employer relented and asked him to resume work. I am most grateful to Our Lady and Dominic Savio for this favour. I am sorry for the delay.

Annette D'Souza, Goa

Thank you dearest Mother for answering my prayers.

Gail Fernandes, USA

My belated thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for a safe and successful brain operation after a major accident and also for saving my grandchildren.

Felicidade Dias

Thank you so much dearest Mother for a clear report when the doctor thought I had cancer. Keep me always under your protection.

Argentina Fernandes, Mumbai

Our sincere thanks to the Lord Jesus and Mother Mary for giving me a job abroad and for all the favours that my family has received.

G.C. D'Souza, Mumbai

Thank you dearest Mother for the success of both my sons in their examinations. I recited the 3 Hail Marys regularly.

Mr. Aleluia Louis Rodrigues, Goa

My most sincere thanks to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and our most blessed Mother Mary for taking care of my wife Patricia and daughter Jennifer during their illness. Please continue to keep us in your care.

Ashlyn M. Saxby, Perth, W.A.

Dear Lord Jesus and Mother Mary thank you for the safe delivery of my daughter and for helping my son clear his Merchant Navy Exam.

Mr. & Mrs. Almeida, 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 gratitude to the Lord Jesus and Mother Mary Help of Christians for helping my son succeed in his HSC examination through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys and the Rosary everyday. Loving Mother Mary continue your merciful protection on our family.

Mrs. Edna Paes, Goa

While travelling by train my daughter dropped her bag through the door. She called me and we began walking from one station to the next along the tracks. As we had almost reached the next station we found the bag in a bush. All the time I was praying the 3 Hail Marys. I am most grateful to Our Blessed Mother for her protection.

Rosy Rodrigues

I am most grateful to Mother Mary for all the blessings she has showered on me and my family and thanks to the power of the 3 Hail Marys I have never been let down.

Alvito Vaz, Goa

Dear Mother Mary, Help of Christians thank you for granting us a very special petition through the daily recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Please continue to bless and protect us, dear Heavenly Mother.

The Heldt Family, W. Australia

When working on my system it began hanging and the work of the entire team used to hang. It suddenly struck me to stop and pray the 3 Hail Marys. The team leader thought I was inefficient. The following day, the team leader faced the same problem and I realized that there was nothing wrong with my system. Thanks to the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys the problem was solved. I'm so grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio.

Tharsheela

Thank you, dear Mother for always answering my prayers. Please bless me as I start my new job and bless all my loved ones too.

Mrs. F. Fernandes, Goa

My husband accidentally dropped his wallet on his way home while refuelling his bike at the petrol station. It contained his work ID, his driving license and the RC card of his bike. On receiving the news I immediately prayed the 3 Hail Marys with deep faith and that same evening 3 good Samaritans came by with the wallet and all the contents safe. I thank you Oh, Mother for all the graces you always grant your children.

Aurelia Fernandes, Navi Mumbai

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

My sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping my son get a job and for many other favours.

Mercy Fonseca, Ambernath, Mumbai

I am most grateful to dear Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for helping my wife, myself and my children, for keeping us in good health and our jobs safe.

Clifton Fernandes and Family, Mumbai

Belated, but sincere thanks to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for all the favours we have received.

A Devotee

Belated thanks to Our Blessed Mother, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for all the favours received.

Humble Devotee, Mumbai

Thank you, Lord Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for granting my fiance's dad a clear medical report. We are most grateful.

Princy, Dubai

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco. Through the daily faithful and fervent recitation of the 3 Hail Marys every morning, on my way to the office I have experienced her protection. My mother's life was saved. She would have stepped on a cobra while getting out of the house. When it raised its hood she stepped back in time. There were hardly 20 or 30 cms between her and the snake - she had her Rosary in her hand. I will continue to pray the 3 Hail Marys and I know that Our Lady will continue to protect us.

Emera, Goa

Thank you, dear Mother and Don Bosco for all the favours and graces that I have received during my life.

Akzol Joseph Pereira, Goa

Thank you, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for giving me a good life-partner and for all the blessings I have received. Thank you also for the strength and grace I received to go through my operation successfully.

Michelle Patil, Mumbai

Thank you Mother Mary and Don Bosco, our son cleared his tenth class examination with a good class and for the many other favours received.

Anjulo and Flavia Fernandes, Goa

Our sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and Dominic Savio for all the blessings bestowed on our family.

Michael and Marietta, Mumbai

My gratitude to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for all the graces and favours received.

Clynton Fernandes, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping my son in difficult times and for all the graces we have received.

Mrs. E. D'Souza, Mumbai

Thank you dear Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for curing my grandson's sickness.

Mrs. A. George, Bombay

My heartfelt thanks to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady and Don Bosco for always protecting us.

Mrs. Sabina Anthony, Mumbai

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



My sincere thanks to St. Dominic Savio for blessing me with a healthy baby boy. I was wearing a Dominic Savio Scapular throughout my pregnancy. *Ms. Arlene Cardoza D'Cruz, Mumbai*

A million thanks to Mary Help of Christians for all the favours received and also thanks to St. Dominic Savio for protecting my children and an improvement in my health.

Mrs. B. Colaco, Mumbai

Thank you dear Dominic Savio for all the favours received through your intercession.

Lyndon and Brenda Pereira, Kalyan

I thank Almighty God and the powerful intercession of Dominic Savio for the safe normal delivery of a lovely baby girl on April 27th 2009.

Irene Gonsalves, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping my son pass his second officer examinations in UK.

Anthony Netty, Goa

Thank you dear Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for granting my son success in his board examination and for the numerous other favours received.

Clara Carvalho, Mumbai

Thank you Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery of my daughter through a caesarian and for the gift of a baby girl.

Mrs. Celine D'Mello, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Almighty God, Mother Mary, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the many favours received and for the safe delivery of my daughter and the gift of a baby boy.

Maria Nunes, Mumbai

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

Anthony and Avril Murzello, Australia

My sincere gratitude to Mother Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the safe and normal delivery and for special favours received by my family.

Glermine Valladares, Mumbai

Thanks dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of a healthy baby girl to my sister-in-law. *Mr. Cruz Tereza, Goa*

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MARY WAS THERE

During the renovation of my home on the 15th May 2009, I had promised Our Lady that I would pray the Rosary every day. When I came home that night I was rather tired and so almost put it off. However, I began the Rosary and by the time I reached the 2nd Mystery I felt a wriggling sensation near my foot. I put it off and continued to pray. It persisted and again I put it off. When the wriggling sensation went on I stopped and lifted up my pajama and found a centipede was attempting to crawl up my leg. It could have been very dangerous. I am sure that I was protected by Our Lady. Had I not prayed the Rosary that night and gone to sleep, I might have been stung. Thank you dearest Mother for saving me.

Susanna A. Bonsley, Godhra

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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