

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*The Word took a body
from the Virgin
to prove his divinity
because He
who created that body
is the all pure Creator
of other bodies.*

(St. Athanasius)

Cover: **The Statue
of Mary Help of Christians
at the Basilica of Mary Help
of Christians, Turin, Italy**



From The Editor's Desk

The Beads and The Buttons

On one of my recent holidays I was called to visit the home of an old friend after he had passed away. I used to drop by and see him in my younger days... when he was already housebound. He was never dull or lethargic; his lively eyes always had that sparkle about them... and when we spoke he was always eager to get news from the 'outside world.'

What caught my eye was the TV remote by his easy chair and anyone who had visited him in his last years recognized that remote; it had the signs of use, with its sticky tape and its signs of handling. The patina that it had acquired was because - as he became more and more chair-bound - he relied on the television and radio to keep him in touch with the world and with the country around him.

I recalled the advice of the theologian Karl Barth to sermon-writers that retains an insight for us all: he told preachers to have the Bible in one hand and the *New York Times* in the other. It is easy for religion to become detached and to be concerned with itself and often alerts us to the temptation not to be concerned with the daily realities of the world. It reminds us too that the messages of the media are not to be taken as gospel, but need to be held up to the light of God's Word.

Even if there are times when we want to turn off the troubles of the world, or not to hear about them, we realize that where we are, is where God has placed us. And we realize that even the Son of God was born like us, into a troubled time and a difficult situation. So, as Christians, we continue to be at the heart of the world, bringing the care and compassion of God to life in our times.

We look to Jesus for inspiration and guidance about how we can make sense of our world and make the best use of the access we have to the media. It was prayer that kept Jesus 'in balance' and prevented his being distracted either by isolation or by the many claims for his attention.

Watching the news or reading the paper is not always uplifting and encouraging. The news is seldom given to us neutrally. It is often intended to provoke us, to capture our attention, to keep us tuned into the commercial source that wants our time. The time that Jesus gave to being with his 'Abba', his father, is a reminder to us to bring our concerns and fears - all our reactions to the news - before God.

We are fortunate to have access to so many channels, stations and publications. But we may need to remember that all the news we are given is not all the news there is. Much of what brings life and inspiration never makes it to the 'big' media.

The Bible and the *Times of India* were unlikely to have been most often in my old friend's calloused hands. For him it was more often the rosary and the remote. The beads and the buttons kept him in touch with God and with the world. He lifted the world before God in his prayer, aware both of its blessings and its needs. He did what could in his prayer and by keeping his heart open to the needs of his neighbours.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

5. DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss

When knocked down by a crippling illness, one often turns to God accusingly screaming: 'Why me? Why this? Why now!' And yet the set-back could turn out to be the biggest blessing the Lord sends us - in a strange kind of packaging, no doubt, yet with a message of his infinite love and concern. Much depends on the way we handle the situation - with deep and genuine faith or with self-seeking cynicism! Read on to learn how one individual without a tremendously encouraging background rose to the occasion and made a real success of his life by surrendering totally into the hands of his Creator.

God's Plan for Me

"Naga Naresh Karuturi had just passed out of IIT Madras in Computer Science and had joined Google in Bangalore. One would be tempted to ask cynically: 'what's so special about this 21-year-old when there are hundreds of students passing out from various IITs and joining big companies like Google?' But Naresh is special, in a sense. His parents are illiterate. He has no legs and moves around in a powered wheel chair. In fact, when his interviewer could not locate his lab, he told her over the mobile phone, 'I will come and pick you up'. And in no time, he was there to guide her to the place set up for the interview. Ever smiling, optimistic and full of spirit - that is Naresh. He says, "God has always been planning



things for me. That is why I feel I am so lucky."

Childhood in a Village

He continues: "I spent the first seven years of my life in Teeparu, a small village in Andhra Pradesh, on the banks of the river Godavari. My father Prasad was a lorry driver and my mother Kumari, a house wife. Though they were illiterate my parents instilled in me and my elder sister (Sirisha) the importance and benefits of studying. Looking back, one thing that surprises me now is the way my father taught me when I was in the 1st and 2nd standards. He would ask me questions from the text book, and I would answer them. At that time, I didn't know he could not read or write but to make me happy, he helped me in my studies!

“Another memory that doesn’t go away is the floods in the village and how I was carried on top of a buffalo by my uncle. I also remember plucking fruits from a tree that was full of thorns. I used to be very naughty, running around and playing all the time with my friends. I used to get a lot of scolding for disturbing the elders who slept in the afternoon. The moment they started scolding me, I would run away to the fields! I also remember finishing my school work fast in class itself and sleeping on the teacher’s lap!

The Fateful Day

“On the January 11, 1993 when we had the Sankranti holidays, my mother took my sister and me to a nearby village for a family function. From there we were to go with our grandmother to our native place. But my grandmother did not come there. As there were no buses that day, my mother took a lift in my father’s friend’s lorry. As there were many people in the lorry, the driver made me sit next to him, close to the door.

“It was my fault; I playfully fiddled with the door latch and it suddenly opened wide throwing me out. As I fell, my legs got cut by the iron rods protruding from the lorry. Nothing happened to me except scratches on my legs.

“As the accident had happened just in front of a big private hospital I was rushed into it, but they refused to treat me saying that it was an accident case. Then a police constable who was passing by took us to a government hospital. In no time, both my legs were amputated up to the hips. I remember waking up and asking my mother, ‘where are my legs?’ I

also remember that my mother cried when I asked the question. I was in the hospital for three months.

Life Without Legs

“I don’t think my life changed dramatically after I lost both my legs. All at home doted on me, and I enjoyed all their fond attention which helped me avoid self-pity. I was happy but still restless: ‘could I yet achieve anything worthwhile in life?’ I pondered. That is when I decided that I would take charge of my life and make of it something to be proud of. It was quite an uphill task, but I needed to remind myself each day, one day at a time, that my life would end up being what I made of it, for God had not deprived me of anything I needed to succeed in life! With this philosophy of life I am now where I am and my greatest joy is that my life-story could help another human being struggle to make his/her life all that it can be!”

As we struggle through life, each of us realizes that we are without some element or ingredient that would have ideally made our lives happy and successful. For some it would be health, for others sufficient resources to obtain a sound education, a physical defect or a broken family! Faced with this deficiency we either could sit back moaning our inability all through our lives, or taking a more proactive approach, we could step out and make the best of what is still within our grasp. Ultimately it is only those who believe that their life is in their hands who end up making of it all that it could be! This approach

is, of course, based on the rock-like belief that God who loves us infinitely has promised to be with us in every situation, if only we place our weakness into his powerful and mighty hands, and allow him to guide us step by painful step. "There is nothing I cannot do with the help of him who supports me!" (Phil. 4:13) is the motto of such people and it is this faith that carries them through thick and thin.

However it is worth recalling that no one ever made it to the top without unflagging efforts, especially in the face of insurmountable odds! Yet the tougher the obstacles in their path the stronger their determination to face them head on. Failures were seen only as a temporary setback, providing a pause to reassess the situation and find another more effective way out. Thomas Edison, it is said, failed about five thousand times in his efforts to produce the light bulb before he finally succeeded. But he took all these failures positively, seeing them as so many ways in which one just would not be able to produce the electric bulb!

Benefitting from Crippling Circumstances

Could you sit back and fearlessly face what you have so far been considering to be the crippling deficiencies of your life? Lack of a proper education, missed opportunities, dearth of advice and encouragement at the right moment... the list could be endless. Take the key ones and turn them around - view them rather as a challenge to overcome that obstacle with God's power.

The Lord who resides in the depths of your being assures you of his strength: 'With him I can do all things!' It is said that God never closes a door without at the same time opening at least a window, without showing us alternatives that could be even better than our original approach. Robert Clive and the story of the ant readily comes to mind: he observed an intrepid ant making repeated efforts to climb a wall, only to fall back again and again. Eventually it did succeed and in the bargain put new zest and enthusiasm into its admiring observer enabling him too to overcome the difficulties he faced in life!

The Eucharist we celebrate each Sunday is a reminder that our attempts to love others may not always 'succeed.' Yet to love even to the end is our greatest privilege as we seek to follow in the footsteps of our Master who loved us and gave his life for us saying, 'Take and eat/drink, this is myself given for you... the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world' (Jn. 6:51). As long as we stay close to him, we can never fail, even if it takes us the whole of our lifetime to make it to the top. We all praise a person who has finally made it to the finishing tape, even if last in the race, but we should not forget that Eucharist is food for the journey - it is given us precisely so that we can reach our Father's home in heaven. Yet, our heaven is what we make of it, beginning here on earth.

"Come to me all you who are burdened, and I will give you rest!"
(Mt. 11:28-30) □



MOTHER MARY, THE MIRACLE WORKER

Fr. Barnabe D'Souza sdb

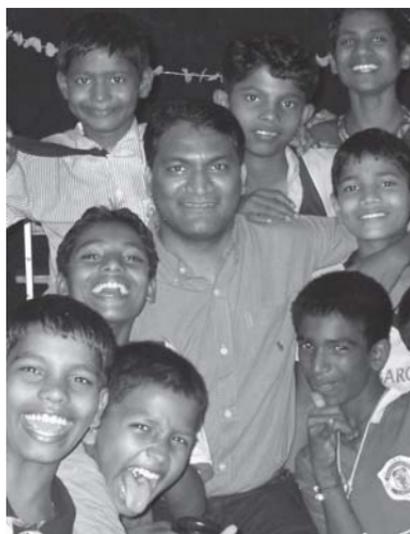
Director, Don Bosco Research & Development Centre, Mumbai

I can clearly remember that at the age of six I had gone to Goa with my family. We stayed at Pilar. One morning at Mass I saw the priest raise the Sacred Host, I tugged at my mother's sari and whispered to her: "That is what I want to do, mummy." Ever since that day I have thought of doing nothing else in my life.

As a youngster I was more interested in cricket, football and other sports than in studies. My rector at Matunga, good Fr. Dennis Duarte, was very keen that I go to Don Bosco's at Lonavla. He even typed out a letter, sealed it and handed it to my parents saying: "Take this letter and let him go to see Don Bosco, Lonavla. If he likes it let him stay. Mother Mary will take care of the rest."

At Lonavla I began to do my best and even stood second in class...for the first time in my life! That was a miracle of Our Lady! I remember my mother and Fr. Dennis returning my letters circling my mistakes in red ink.

On 28th September, 1981 I was playing with some poor youngsters from the neighbourhood of the school in Lonavla, when a bolt of lightning struck the tree under which we were taking shelter. I was flung away some 25 feet from two youngsters. When I came to my senses all I could do was to run out into the centre of the play field, fall on my knees and pray the Hail Mary. When I turned around I found that the two boys had collapsed at the foot of the tree were unconscious – a short time later they were both dead. All I could think of was the wonderful protection of Our Blessed Mother



whom I saw in the middle of that field. I saw this as another sign that Our Lady had a mission for me.

When I was a deacon I began working with street boys. I would spend hours with them caring for and loving them. Through it all I saw our Blessed Mother presence in the entire plan for my life.

Later when I was ordained a priest, while addressing our boys at our Therapeutic centre – called *Maria Aashiana* I told them what Don Bosco had once said: "Whenever a boy comes to Don Bosco's house he is under the special protection of our Blessed Mother. Tell her your troubles and she will take care of you." I have seen her help them to build a dignified future for themselves.

Over all these years I have had a special devotion to our Blessed Mother and I have seen what miracles she has worked in my life.

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Into Deeper Stillness

(The following article appeared in December 2009 but for the sake of continuity it is presented here as the concluding article of the author)

(PRAYER IS FOR YOU 11)

by Michael Paul Gallagher

Dear Pauline,

Your letter comes just in time for me to reply in this issue. Indeed, responding to your suggestion can fit in well with Christmas, as I hope you'll see.

Two Questions

You liked my quotation in a previous article from a mystic of centuries ago, who said that when we look at Christ in the silence of the heart we become like him without knowing it. In your letter you asked two questions: 'Who is the unnamed author? and would you devote one of your articles to this kind of simpler prayer beyond saying prayers?'

The first question is easy to answer. The words were from William of St. Thierry, a French Cistercian of the twelfth century. As to your request for something about simpler prayer, I'm sure that many 'ordinary' people, who are faithful to some personal prayer, would be greatly helped if they let simpler prayer happen. The courage to simplify is at the core of that long tradition of the contemplatives.

Sitting with God

You don't have to be a monk or a religious sister to do this. Nor do you have to be in the twelfth century! I like this recent story about an Australian mother who went on retreat. She listened to the talks of the retreat director, and tried to follow his advice about



'Here in this picture of contemplation is the core of our life, the encounter with Christ.'

praying. He suggested thinking about the words of the Our Father phrase by phrase, or taking one of the psalms slowly. It seemed easy enough, but she could not settle into it. After a day of confusion, she went to see the director. At one point he said to her, 'Since you've come on a retreat like this, I'm sure you've tried to pray before'. Her reply surprised and delighted him. 'I never try to pray,' she said, 'but every day I sit some time with God. When I finish, I feel different. It's as if I have been held.'

Being Present

The retreat director was able to

recognize that his methods were downright unhelpful for a woman who had found another wavelength of being with God.

Words and thoughts were no use to her. She had gradually arrived at her own way of being present.

Indeed, what she said is exactly parallel, in its modern language, to what William was saying so long ago. His 'becoming like Christ' was happening in her 'feeling different', just as what she describes as being 'held' is close to what some mystics call 'union' with God.

Our Australian friend may never have heard of Hildegard of Bingen, who was a contemporary of William's, who spoke of 'the embrace of God's *maternal love*'. The language is different, but the experience of prayer as resting with God is very similar.

A Confusing Transition

All this means trusting an unfamiliar wavelength. It can be a confusing transition at first, and may seem like 'not praying at all'. St. John of the Cross, in his typical down-to-earth way, says that people changing over from active to passive prayer may fear that 'they are doing nothing and wasting time'. But, he says, they usually need 'freedom of spirit' to enter this deeper kind of praying.

How would you know if this sort of prayer is right for you? One sign is that our old way of praying with words and holy thoughts comes to seem dry and empty to you. This *can*, of course, come from your own carelessness - but you would know that easily.

Is there a desire for God present? If so, and if you are trying to live a generous Christian life, this may

well be the moment to simplify your listening, to let go of too much activity, to create a different silence, and so to be ready for the gift of God's love beyond thoughts or words, like that Australian woman.

Relishing God

'Taste and see that the Lord is good' is a line in Psalm 34, and many of the great mystics had a sense of 'relishing' God. This word sums up their experience of how God's gift meets their attentiveness. In this light, you might look at the detail of the painting of the Magi reproduced with this article. It comes from the Benedictine monastery of Subiaco in central Italy.

See how the old Wise Man tenderly touches the foot of Jesus, and seems to rest his head on the knee of Mary. It is a perfect example of this meeting of gift and attention. The Infant Jesus has one hand on the head of the old man, and with the other is blessing him. There is no sense of effort or struggle, just of quiet belonging. You could spend time just gazing at that picture, and finding there an invitation to let go of too many words or thoughts in prayer.

The Core of our Life

The Magi, or Wise Men, had come a long journey to arrive at this climax of discovery. The star did not stay steady for them. When it disappeared, they ran into danger by asking the wrong person the way - Herod, who seemed so welcoming, but really wanted to kill. But they kept going even in the dark, stayed together, and brought their gifts.

(Continued on pg. 22)

walking with the Church



Mass on Holidays, The Real Presence, Abstinence, The Liturgy of the Hours

by St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland

Q. *Am I obliged to go to Mass when I am on holidays?*

A. Holiday time is a period of rest and vacation, when our tired bodies and minds are able to relax and feel at ease away from work and the pressures of daily living. It is necessary for our well being. People spend holidays in various ways, sightseeing, reading, relaxing on the beach, indulging in different kinds of sport, etc., leaving everything behind including employers, employees, and colleagues at work. However there is a constant factor in our lives which never changes which cannot be left behind. We are children of God and He is the one person in our lives from whom we are never separated. He never leaves us. He is always present in our lives, loving, helping, sustaining and comforting us. He never leaves us nor should we leave Him. That should help you with your question about the Mass. If it is convenient to go to Sunday Mass during our holidays then we should go. Sometimes people find themselves in places where it is difficult to find a church or the church is quite some distance away. Attending

Mass in those situations is not possible, but, in these cases, it is not asking too much of us to set aside some time on a Sunday or other day – every day if possible – and spend some time in private prayer to God who loves us and is with us always.

Q. *How is our Lord present in the Eucharist? What is the teaching of the Church about the real presence?*

A. The Risen Christ is present in many different ways in our world. He is not limited by time or space. He is present in His word, in the person of His minister, in prayer, in works of mercy, etc. but as Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* says, “Christ is present in the Eucharist in a way that surpasses all others.” The Catholic Catechism states ‘In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist the body and blood together with the soul and divinity, of Our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore the whole Christ, is truly, really and substantially contained. Calling it real does not mean the other presences of Christ are not also real, but because it is present in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence

by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.' (CCC 1374)

Q. *What is the Church law on abstaining from meat? Does the OT say anything about abstaining from certain kinds of meat?*

A. Catholics are obliged to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. They are also encouraged to abstain from meat also on the other Fridays of Lent. Apart from these specific occasions the Church insists that self-denial is an obligation for all Christians. 'Whoever wishes to be a follower of mine must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'

The Jewish Law about abstaining from certain kinds of meat is laid down in the Book of Leviticus in the Bible. The Communion Sacrifice (often called "peace offering") was widespread. It was a sacred banquet at which the worshipers ate one portion of the animal, the other - the blood and the fatty parts, being the most vital were made over to God and burned on the altar as an offering to God. All the other parts of bodily meat could be eaten.



Q. *My local church is a chapel - that is a substation to the Parish church. Until recently, it had its own resident priest and we had Mass everyday. Now, with no resident priest, the Parish Priest is encouraging us to have Morning Prayer on days we have no priest for Mass. What is Morning Prayer?*

A. In the Catholic Tradition certain hours of the day are set aside for prayer and reflection on God's Word. It is called the 'Liturgy of the Hours' and is 'so devised that 'the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God. (CCC 1174) From early times all Christians said prayers at certain times of the day. This was developed further by founders and leaders of monasticism. The Liturgy of the Hours consists of (1) Readings (2) Morning Prayer (3) Midday Prayer (4) Evening Prayer and (5) Night Prayer. Those who have received Holy Orders and those who are vowed to religious life are required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Lay persons are also invited to pray it. Your parish priest is encouraging you to say the Morning Prayer which

consists of a hymn, three psalms, a short bible reading and some intercessions with a final prayer. There are many churches around the world where the congregation join with the priests or religious in Morning Prayer before Mass. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. ATHANASIUS (3 May) HE SUFFERED MUCH FOR THE TRUTH AND THE FAITH

300-373circa Bishop and Doctor of the Church

by Mario Scudu

When the great Augustine of Hippo, bishop and doctor of the Church, spoke to the Christians who were facing persecution during his time, he said that the Church had survived through the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God. Looking at the history of the Church one can truly affirm that there was no shortage of either. There have been several persecutions throughout history... but what about God's consolations? They are known only to God. Persecutions have always existed (*"they have persecuted me and they will persecute you too"* the words of Jesus) and we have no need of prophets to foretell forthcoming persecutions either. But the presence of holy men and women are truly signs of God's consolations and they are sent to remind us of his comforting presence.

The figure of Athanasius seems

to tower above all these not just because of his sanctity but because of the many trials and persecutions that he endured. They were like thorns strewn across his path and they came in the form of false accusations, of "apostolic" envy and jealousy. He was tormented by spies and repeatedly sent into exile but he always returned triumphant. This torture lasted for a period of 50 years but Athanasius sailed tranquilly across the stormy sea of his apostolic life with exemplary fortitude and patience. With great perseverance, faith and courage he defended the truth about Christ, expressing his great love for him. St. Basil the great defined him as a "great and apostolic soul." Gregory Nazianzen called him "a pillar of the Church" while the Oriental Church gave him the title "Father of Orthodoxy." Several of the Fathers of the Church have written most eloquently about him.



The Young Deacon - a Protagonist (325)

Athanasius (meaning Immortal) was born into a Christian family at Alexandria in Egypt around the year 300. He was fortunate to receive not just a good foundation in the faith but also a good cultural education. It was known as the Hellenistic culture. He studied philosophy and theology at the famous Didaskaleion in his hometown. As a boy he witnessed the courage of the martyrs during their persecutions. Those scenes were deeply etched in his memory and they were a great help to him during his own trials. While he was still a youth he was introduced to the world of Monasticism through the famous monks Pachomius and Anthony with whom he established a deep spiritual friendship.

In 319, when he was about 20 years old, he was ordained a deacon and served the Bishop of Alexandria who appointed him

to be his secretary much to the joy of the entire community.

That was how Athanasius had the opportunity to accompany his bishop to the great Council of Nicea in 325. Why was the Nicea Council great?

To know this we must step back a little. In those days, in Alexandria, there was a certain presbyter named Arius. He was very intelligent and theologically bright with a vast knowledge of Hellenism. But alas, his theological were very controversial and caused many bitter divisions in the Church and that dissent would persist throughout the IV Century. His ideas disturbed not only Athanasius but many others as well. What were those ideas?

Arius wanted to simplify the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. For him, Jesus was just a man whom God had raised to the dignity of his son making him master and teacher; an exceptional human being, extraordinary and charismatic as he thought of himself but nevertheless still a man. Therefore it followed (according to Arius) that Jesus Christ was not "*consubstantial with the Father*" but a simple man even though he was a great teacher. Thus as a man he was saved by his own strength and man was saved by one like himself!

Several bishops along with the young Athanasius realized the devastating and dangerous nature of the doctrine of Arius (called Arianism). The emperor Constantine summoned the Council of Nicea to settle the matter. It was here that Athanasius played a dominant and definitive

role to combat Arius and his theories. He defined Jesus Christ as the Son of God, "*consubstantial with the Father, light from light, begotten not made.*" But even before the entire Council of bishops Arius would not submit himself. This was where all the trouble began for Athanasius. Threats to his future grew darker and more menacing.

In 328 bishop Alexander died and Athanasius was hailed as his successor. One of his first pastoral visits was to Tebaide to visit the disciples of Pachomius and Anthony. These monks had a great influence on Christianity, and Athanasius wanted to consolidate his flock and seek their spiritual support.

It was during this pastoral visit he received his first threats. His appointment as bishop was questioned before emperor (he was too young!). They even plotted to take his life. - Athanasius escaped to Constantinople where met the emperor. Constantine seemed to agree with him except that a few days later he decreed that Athanasius be exiled to Treviri in Germany for two years. Even there in exile he preached all the more, warning his listeners about the dangers of the Arian heresy. The Christians of Alexandria did not accept his 'imposed' successor and were strongly opposed him. Their bishop was Athanasius even if he was in exile. While he was preaching vehemently against Arianism in Germany, the monk Anthony, his friend from the desert, stormed the emperor with letters on Athanasius' behalf.

In Exile but Always Beloved

Athanasius returned to his See

in 362 and immediately began the work of reconciliation among the Churches - naturally he asked them to affirm the faith enunciated at the Council of Nicea but Emperor Julian did not this as suitable and so he ordered Athanasius to be sent to Egypt. Athanasius went once more into exile. He was once more to be among the monks. This was a brief period because Julian, the dreamer of neopaganism soon died (363). After his death Athanasius returned to his people but not for very long since Valente, the Emperor of the East was a supporter of the Arians so Athanasius was forced to go into hiding. This time his enemies burst into the city but fearing they would lose the favour of the people they allowed the bishop to return to his See in Alexandria.

For the last seven years of his life the indomitable Athanasius finally lived in peace. He died on 3rd May 373. He was admired, revered and loved by his flock. He had suffered to preserve their faith in Christ, and he was also respected by his enemies who were never far away. He wrote a lot of letters to his fellow bishops, to Rome and naturally to his friends, the monks. He wrote in a variety of styles: a homiletic style (as if preaching to his people), an exegetical style (explaining Sacred Scripture), an apologetic style (defending the faith against the Arians) and pastorally. The Church recognized his holiness not only by proclaiming him a saint for the hardships endured but also for his fidelity to his faith. He was also as a teacher of the Spiritual life and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Shopping Plan

In the frozen foods department of our local grocery store, I noticed a man shopping with his son.

As I walked by, he checked something off his list, and I heard him whisper conspiratorially to the child;

"You know, if we really mess this up, we'll never have to do it again."

Photo Apology

Photographer Ruth Van Bergen specialized in celebrity portraits. One wealthy woman complained that Van Bergen's photo wasn't nearly as good as the first one she had taken.

"You must forgive me" the photographer said diplomatically. "The last time I took your picture, I was ten years younger."

Broken Bone

While leading a tour of kindergarten students through our hospital, I overheard a conversation between one little girl and an x-ray technician.

"Have you ever broken a bone?" he asked.

"Yes," the girl replied.

"Did it hurt?"

"No."

"Really? Which bone did you break?"

"My sister's arm."

Chocolate Calories

A good piece of chocolate has about 200 calories. As I enjoy 2 servings per night, and a few more on weekends. I consume 3,500

calories of chocolate in a week, which equals one pound of weight per week.

Therefore...

In the last 3 1/2 years, I have had chocolate calorie intake of about 180 pounds, and I only weigh 165 pounds, so without chocolate, I would have wasted away to nothing about 3 months ago!

I owe my life to chocolate.

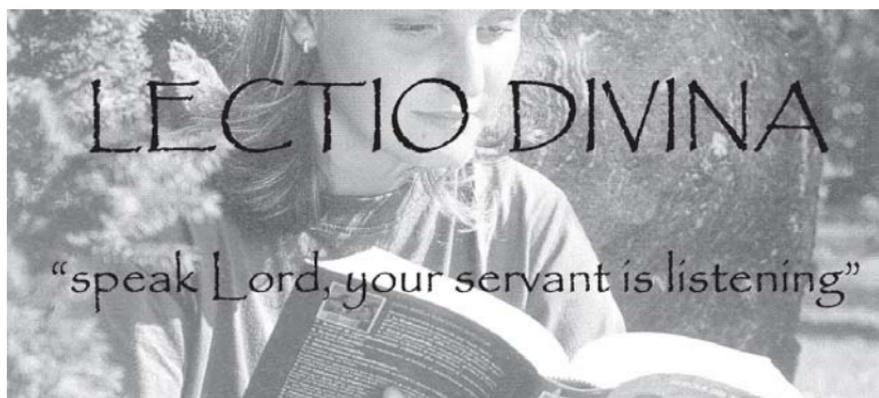
I was Just Wondering

During a summer break from my studies at an engineering university, I worked in a scrap yard repairing construction equipment. One afternoon, I was taking apart a piling hammer that had some very large bolts holding it together. One of the nuts had corroded onto the bolt, so I started heating the nut with an oxyacetylene torch. As I was doing this, one of the dimmest apprentices I have ever known came along and asked me what I was doing. I patiently explained that if I heated the nut, it would grow larger and release its grip on the bolt so I could then remove it.

"So things get larger when they get hot, do they?" he asked.

Suddenly, an idea flashed into my mind. "Yes," I said, "that's why days are longer in summer and shorter in winter."

There was a long pause, then his face cleared. "You know, I always wondered about that," he said. □



OLD RELIABLE

by Dermot Connolly

*O praise the Lord, all you nations,
acclaim God all you peoples!
Strong is his God's love for us;
The Lord is faithful for ever. (Psalm 117)*



An old missionary was driving his car, a model that was around 25 years old. It was a gift from a rich benefactor who did not want to send 'this piece of junk' to the scrap heap just yet. It was a strong car with large wheels and high clearance, great for rough roads. One day he drove into a neighbouring parish, and a woman by the church steps called over to me: "Old Reliable!" She meant the car.

These two words, a matching pair, that travel in tandem through the Hebrew scriptures: *love* and *faithfulness*, **chesed** and **'emet**. These are dense words, packed with meaning, and are often translated in different ways: *love* can also come out in our English versions as "mercy" or "kindness"; *faithfulness* could be "constancy" or "truth". *Your merciful love and your truth will*

always guard me (Psalm 40: 10-11; 57: 10; 89:14; 100:5; 115:1). The translations may vary, but the basic assurance remains: God won't let you down. Old Reliable.

But neither will God always do just as we ask; the psalms are full of that too. *Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?* (Psalm 44:24; 88:14). God figures in the blame game - there are what insurers call "Acts of God".

*For God spoke and summoned the gale,
Tossing the waves of the sea
Up to heaven and back into the deep.*
(Psalm 107: 25-26).

God does not spare us the declines and disasters of life; we grow old and weak and sick - we die, our prayers unanswered. Injustice flourishes. What price "Old Reliable" then?

This article was begun several months ago, but it lapsed for a while, and it is being finished during Holy Week when God's

reliability is tested to the extreme. A friend and colleague died suddenly here a few days ago, and what filled the old pastor's heart was the kindness of people. The "correct compassion" (as a poet named it) of doctors and nurses, the load-bearing dependability of friends, the tears of people. **Chesed** and **'emet**, *love and faithfulness*.

It eloquently spoke of God's love and faithfulness that courses all through our lives; they bring out the best in us, and at the worst of times. It may even be that God's work is best done through the love and faithfulness of ordinary people, so simply given that we might not recognize the gift for what it really is - the hope of the world.

In the end of his own story, **chesed** and **'emet** were all Jesus had to rely on:

*Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord,
faithful God.*

(Psalm 31:5; Luke 23:46)
Faithful God! Old Reliable! □



The rosary, a Catholic staple, is a most challenging avenue of personal devotion. Not that the path of sixty-five prayers is difficult. The complexity comes from the concentration, not the recitation. Granted it is difficult to recite anything sixty-some times and stay focused. Yet, this prayer, though sparse has a compelling energy to it.

The prayer starts out with five basic statements: 1. Hail Mary, full of grace, 2. The Lord is with Thee, 3. Blessed art Thou among women, 4. And blessed is the Fruit of Thy Womb, Jesus, 5. Holy Mary, Mother of God and ends with one request; 6. Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

Hail Mary Full of Grace

If you said Mary was graceful, you might automatically picture her as elegant when she moved, agile, perhaps lissome. But if you said she was grace full, it would be more difficult to describe what that means. The dictionary gives us over thirty descriptions of grace, including holiness, attractiveness, piety, mercy, splendour and kindness. It also encompasses *innocence*, in the sense of guilelessness, honesty, openness in dealing with those with whom you come in contact. Mary was every one of these things as well as a believer. Long before God made a personal appearance in her life, her innocence and her belief system were intact. Therefore, the *Hail Mary* begins as if heaven voted Mary most well rounded, the epitome of what we are to strive for, a road map to our humanness. To say, "Hail Mary, full of grace" is to picture Mary standing in front of us with open arms.

The Lord is with Thee

Yes, the Lord is with her. She is, after all, His Mother. But in this case it seems important to realize that after the resurrection, not just the apostles but Mary, as well, was infused with the Spirit of God. Inspired with the gifts of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, all the pieces of her life fell into place.

Through the Annunciation, the birth, and the life given up by her Son, Mary recognized *her* role. Thus, through this simple prayer she flawlessly teaches us what it means to *be* Jesus. She summons us not just to become aware of the people in our lives, but to serve them. Every time we say Mary is *with the Lord* it leads us to a global spirituality. Our humanness has been defined. We are to be open to the world.

Blessed art thou among women

No human could ever live up to Mary's standards. Yet in spite of the truth of that fact this part of the prayer is not trying to convey Mary's exclusiveness. Mary was always humble, so if we are reminded that

Spaces WITH FEELING

tt Zullo

Mary is the *most* blessed, then this statement is simply a provocation. What is it that makes her so blessed? How can we imitate her? What is she to us, in this day and age? Mary went through all the happenings of life that most of us will go through: disappointments, discouragements, loneliness, frustration, fears, all of it. Just because she was the mother of Jesus she was not spared life's painful events. But self-control, and the continuing love for God, kept her balanced and full of hope. We too are to know that God has blessed us, and has a major plan for *our* lives. We therefore must accept this adventure of life to which we are called. It is so much easier if we call on Mary.

And, blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus

In some ways, the birthing of Jesus sanctified all wombs. Every child, from that moment on, was pronounced sacred. Mary, the consummate mother, confirms in us the holiness of creating a child. She pleads for parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends, all, to recognize their responsibility to monitor a child throughout his/her life. This part of the prayer embraces responsibility toward children, the children of our family, the children throughout the world.

Holy Mary, Mother of God

This is a powerful statement, because it says in effect that God himself acknowledges Mary as mother... not just the mother of Jesus but because of the Trinity, of God. We read that we are created in the "image" and "likeness" of God. That fact tells us there are aspects of our humanity that actually reflect God. In His wisdom He gives us free will. His hope must be that our response to Him will be love. Mary, as nurturer, shows us how. She calls all of us to be nurturers of one another, of all that inhabit the earth.

Finally, the request:

Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

This part of the Hail Mary, this prayer that we have repeated over and over so many years, really begins with this last line. We are connecting with Jesus' Mother. We now acknowledge Mary's on-going role in the life of the human family; and see that she has not only the wisdom but also the power to answer our request. She can sort out what we *really* need, when we ask for her prayers. The absolutely magnificent thing about it is, she never refuses to speak to God on our behalf.

The *Hail Mary* keeps us aware of Mary as a motivator in our spiritual life. It helps us understand the role she plays, as she listens, not so much to our words but the fervor behind them. There is a "dare" in this venture we call life. The rosary is one way to accept that challenge, one that is vital, alive and full of passion for us-for her-for God. □

I TREASURE MY ROSARY

by Lisa Malia McDough

It's a perennial source of relaxation and affirmation

Everyone in my family has one somewhere in a dresser drawer, in a box in the attic, or at least at the bottom of a pocket. Having several lying about the house while I was growing up as ordinary as having a TV in the living room.

Yet, as I watched my teenage nephew and niece practice their faith, I notice its absence. Today, it seems to be a tradition reserved for older generations.

"It," of course, is the rosary.

In our house, the Rosary always rang in the changes – a birth, a death, a crisis or its resolution. Anything important was punctuated by a rustling of beads and a bending of knees. A solemn request from Mom or Dad met little resistance – a Rosary meant things were serious, that was it.

At first, there was usually fidgeting and elbowing among my five brothers and me, but it usually ended gracefully with that deep hum of united voices, the giggles spent, and a sense of participating in a family event that brought peace and a tangible sense of the divine into our ordinary lives. Afterward, we all went back to whatever we were doing, and the rosaries got put away, but a transition had been marked, an inner bonding made.

As a girl, I usually preferred the crystal rosaries that came in bright colours – emerald greens and sherbet pinks – that were presents from a faraway godparent or relative. A colourful wooden rosary that was a pre school gift remained wound around my bedpost until I

left for college, while my favourite beads were made from crushed rose petals that wafted a heady scent as they were warmed by hands.

Today a rosary still occupies a place in my room, only now it lies on my night table, and the colour is no longer the criterion for its appeal. Its presence in my daily life is renewing and affirming – both privately and when shared with others.

One friend and I made a standing Saturday morning date once a month to say the Rosary and have coffee. Like those childhood gatherings, at first we both got the giggles, experiencing the awkwardness of praying together, but soon it became a time for relaxation and inspiration. Now that we live a county apart and work takes up much of our weekends, the absence of that routine shows us what a treasure those get-togethers were.

Despite being a veteran of Catholic education and having a lifelong fascination with faith, deciding to once again practice the Rosary everyday meant just that. Practice.

It doesn't mean I always enjoy saying the Rosary, as I would a good movie or a gourmet meal, but it is no less nourishing or beautiful. Over the years, it has become a sort of vitamin for my ego that wards off infections of spiritual indifference. It balances bad times, enhances good ones. It's not a requirement, as in childhood, or just for crisis, when prayer seems so natural to all of us.

Nor is it something to feel smug

about, since I often forget and must recommit to it on a daily basis. It's a small patch of time that becomes a reconnection to where I've been as much as a road map to where I wish to be heading. And when my niece

visits and invariably starts playing with my rosary, it makes me smile at our ageless human hunger for spiritual practices. I think I'll give her a sapphire blue one, if I can't find one with real rose petals. □

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HEART

Author Unknown - Contributed by Jo Ann Gard

One day a young man was standing in the middle of the town proclaiming that he had the most beautiful heart in the whole valley.

A large crowd gathered and they all admired his heart for it was perfect. There was not a mark or a flaw in it. Yes, they all agreed it truly was the most beautiful heart they had ever seen. The young man was very proud and boasted more loudly about his beautiful heart.

Suddenly, an old man appeared at the front of the crowd and said, "Why your heart is not nearly as beautiful as mine." The crowd and the young man looked at the old man's heart. It was beating strongly, but full of scars, it had places where pieces had been removed and other pieces put in, but they didn't fit quite right and there were several jagged edges. In fact, in some places there were deep gouges where whole pieces were missing.

The people stared - "How can he say his heart is more beautiful?" they thought.

The young man looked at the old man's heart and saw its state and laughed. "You must be joking," he said. "Compare your heart with mine, mine is perfect and yours is a mess of scars and tears."

"Yes," said the old man, "Yours is perfect looking but I would never trade with you. You see, every scar represents a person to whom I have given my love - I tear out a piece of

my heart and give it to them, and often they give me a piece of their heart which fits into the empty place in my heart, but because the pieces aren't exact, I have some rough edges, which I cherish, because they remind me of the love we shared.

Sometimes I have given pieces of my heart away, and the other person hasn't returned a piece of his heart to me. These are the empty gouges - giving love is taking a chance. Although these gouges are painful, they stay open, reminding me of the love I have for these people too, and I hope someday they may return and fill the space I have waiting. So now do you see what true beauty is?"

The young man stood silently with tears running down his cheeks.

He walked up to the old man, reached into his perfect young and beautiful heart, and ripped a piece out. He offered it to the old man with trembling hands. The old man took his offering, placed it in his heart and then took a piece from his old scarred heart and placed it in the wound in the young man's heart. It fit, but not perfectly, as there were some jagged edges.

The young man looked at his heart, not perfect anymore but more beautiful than ever, since love from the old man's heart flowed into his.

They embraced and walked away side by side. □

It's a marvellous image for any of us on the Christian road: coping with darkness, persevering in hard times, being with one another, and trying to give of ourselves. Here in this picture of contemplation is the core of our life, the encounter with Christ. There is darkness and struggle in the story, but this picture is one of gentleness and peace. It reminds me of a modern summary of contemplative prayer as 'silence that is presence and presence that is silence'.

Courage to Go Deeper

Should you then abandon your old forms of prayer? Not necessarily. But have the imagination to recognize when it is right to move on to something simpler.

Sometimes a person can keep an anchor in words or images. You could take a line of Scripture or even this painting as a starting-point. But then allow yourself to enter a zone of slow conversation leading to inner quiet. If distractions come, return to your anchor, and then launch out again into those deeper waters of silence and presence.

Inevitably, this letter has oversimplified contemplative prayer. There is so much more to it, including deep dyings to self. This grace of quiet prayer can be gritty and tough at times: we have to be weaned from superficial desires, even for God's consolation. But my main hope here has been to encourage you not to be afraid of crossing new thresholds of silence, because, as life goes on, prayer can and

should find a deeper stillness.

For some people, prayer becomes a remembering of God with the heart. It means realizing the love that comes to us in Christ, a love that asks to flow through us into this wounded world. The old man in the painting seems to be relaxing in the river of that love. Why not put yourself there with him?

P.S. Since this is my last article, perhaps I will be allowed a few inches more to offer a Christmas gift to the readers. This description of how he prays was sent to me by Tom, a young man of nineteen, full of life and energy, who has been following this series. It needs no comment from me. I think it is marvellous that there are people like this secretly around us. I feel closer to God since I started my own form of prayer, which I feel proud of! When I go up to bed at night, I turn out the light, pull back the curtains, sit up, and gaze at the stars. I usually say a few Our Fathers and Hail Marys to break the ice, so to speak. Then I just sit there and pray about the day's events, my ambitions, my hopes and my worries.

Sometimes I just sit there and gaze, while my mind winds down with the comfort of being in the company of God and his servants. Amazingly, this is the highlight of the evening: this is where I feel most at home. It's just the Lord and me and the vast universe in harmony, and it is so tranquil and stimulating that if I don't perform my prayer this way, I feel as if I've lost something that I can't recapture. □

SPEAKING TO THE HEART

by Gianni Asti(T/A:ID)

It is always salutary to dwell how we ought to deal with adolescents, teenagers and young adults, hoping that through us, Don Bosco speaks to their hearts with a passion that seeks to save their souls.

In order to do this, we will use Don Bosco's reflections found the prayer book that he wrote for his youngsters, entitled *The Companion of Youth* so that we may passionately help them seek their eternal salvation. It will soon be clear that those meditations written so many years ago are still relevant for youngsters today.

The advice Don Bosco gave to his young Salesians on June 30th 1862 was very apt. He invited them to prepare the boys to face their teenage crises and offered them the means to overcome them.

Prevention

Youngsters of 17 or 18 need to be made aware; tell them: 'Be careful, you are at a very precarious stage of your life. The evil one is preparing traps to catch you.'

"In the first place, I'm asking you to go frequently to Communion, it is not such a big thing, but it is enough that you begin to go rarely and the evil one will draw you away all that is spiritual. The Word of God also will become so boring that you will be reluctant to either read or listen to it. He will also convince you that certain things are not really sinful.



ADVICE TO HIS BOYS

DON BOSCO'S

"Finally, your companions, the peer group around you, the literature you read, your passions etc... will tempt you, be on your guard! Don't let the devil rob you of your peace of mind, that innocence of soul that makes you a friend of God!

"My young friends don't forget these words! When you go out into the world and become famous and we have the opportunity to meet each other, I'll ask you: Do you remember what I told you?

- Oh yes, what you said was true! - You'll answer. That will be a good reminder."

To emphasize what Don Bosco had just said, read the confidential note he wrote to a young teenager: "It is better that you know these things three years early than five minutes too late after you have made a mistake."

It is true that God always forgives those who repent but nature does not. Certain negative experiences during one's teenage

years will leave a deep scar that will last throughout your life.

Notice how appropriate his advice is for youngsters even today. Nowadays so much obscenity gushes out of TV networks, newspapers, internet sites, music and in most other forms of expression there is nothing but vulgarity.

We have to courageously denounce this hypocrisy of the means of social communication which over the years has had such a negative influence over youngsters that it still succeeds only to scandalize them with violence and sex and allure them singly or in groups and sends them wallowing in the muck of such obscenity while insisting on every lurid detail.

When talking to the boys of his time Don Bosco warned them about certain symptoms that still torment teenagers today. The first sign of a forthcoming crisis is that the youngster stops going to Sunday Mass and Communion anymore. Then he defames the Holy Mass by saying that even his friends have stopped going anymore.

This is what normally happens when youngsters do not have a personal encounter with Jesus and he has not become the true Friend of their souls. Now the youngster begins to lose a taste for prayer and the Sacraments; he is ashamed to confess his sins and if he does go he makes an insincere Confession.

Don Bosco goes further as he describes the difficulty that the youngster has in approaching this Sacrament. Listen to him: "When speaking about the sacrilegious Confessions of

youngsters, caused especially by keeping silent about things that they absolutely must reveal; he narrated something that happened to him. - One night I dreamt that I saw a youngster whose heart was infested with worms. He tore it out and threw it away. I didn't pay much attention to the dream, but the following night I saw the same boy and a big dog beside him eating his heart. I had no more doubt that the Lord was granting that youngster a special grace because that poor lad had something weighing on his conscience. So I kept an eye out for him. One day I found him and asked him:

- Will you do me a favour?
- Of course, if I'm able.
- You can do it if you want to.
- Well then, ask, and I'll do it.
- Will you surely do it?
- Certainly!

- Tell me: have you withheld anything during your Confession?

He wanted to deny it, but I continued immediately:

- But this and that other thing... why did you not confess them?

The boy lifted his gaze and looked into my face and started crying...and he answered:

- You're right. For two years I've wanted to confess that but then something or other came in the way and I never dared to confess it!

Finally, I picked up some courage and told him what he had to do to make his peace with God." Don Bosco concluded.

When a youngster doesn't go to Confession any more or withholds something, he begins to develop a fascination with sin and evil now seems to get the upper hand and

he begins to see God as some kind of a killjoy who does not want to see him happy; as someone who does prefers to see him sad and depressed rather than have a good time.

That was the experience of the younger son who went away from home - in the parable of the merciful father (the prodigal son) as told by Jesus. After having buried himself in sin and evil he felt such nausea that he decided to return to his father's house so that he would not die of poverty and hunger. Even if he could not imagine the joy of being home he would try to reach his waiting father's embrace.

Unfortunately, today the common experience of youngsters is that they have lost the sense of sin especially in reference to Jesus Crucified. He weeps out of love for us and through his suffering he reveals the devastating effects that the sins of humanity have had on his body; even today innocent souls in his mystical body still suffer for sinners.

We know the type of life that young people today live. It is enough to hear the caustic language, blasphemy, and vulgar connotations that have become normal and casual thanks to adult role models around them who frequently mouth such phrases in movies, theatres, and popular TV soaps.

The denigration of love and family life fraught with infidelity, divorce makes young people accept these situations as normal and casual.

Youngsters in society begin to live their love freely, holding the Christian view of sexuality as Martian, something to be derided

or violently suppressed.

In times gone by education was the exclusive responsibility of parents and teachers and that education was the basis of morality among the young. Today youngsters go to their companions, the media, TV, pornography and the internet for the advice they seek. Today the school doesn't offer youngsters as constructive educative atmosphere as it did in the past.

To this add those passions that Don Bosco spoke of which now control the minds of youngsters and batter them into submission.

Some youngsters are already ruined and they will never know what true love is. If they do come to discover it they will bring to it their hurts and their negative experiences. Unfortunately others who have had a direct experience with evil will now no more act covertly. They will openly begin using drugs, listening to satanic music, give in to sexual abuse and lead other youngsters into physical and moral self-destruction.

This horrible picture of the dangers that face young people, forces us to return once more to the suggestions that Don Bosco proposed to his boys in that prayer book of his.

In the introduction to those reflections Don Bosco set out the main strategies of deception that the devil uses to lure youngsters away from virtue: the first is to put into the minds of the youngster that if s/he follows the Lord s/he is doomed to live a life of sadness and the second is that there is always time to repent in one's old age or at the point of death. We will see how these deceptive strategies are still popular today. □

NEWSBITS

PUNE

Some 3,000 Christians, along with Catholic and Protestant bishops, held a peace rally in Pune on Monday (Feb. 22) to condemn a bomb attack that killed 15 people and wounded 56.

Students and teachers joined the crowd which gathered at a church centre in the city to pray for peace and for those who died. Later they marched to a bakery where the bomb blast occurred on Feb. 13.

Catholic Bishop Thomas Dabre of Poona and Protestant Bishop Vijay Sathe, who head dioceses in this western Indian city, joined the prayers and the one kilometer march.

The procession saw Catholic priests and nuns carrying placards condemning terrorism and highlighting the promotion of peace, harmony and the protection of lives.

Suspected Islamic terrorists planted the bomb allegedly to force India and Pakistan to resolve issues over the disputed Indian Kashmir region, India's only Muslim majority territory.

Bishop Dabre told the marchers religion was getting a bad name as such attacks have been carried out in the name of faith. True religion speaks of love and therefore should inspire all to protect lives, he stressed.

The prelate said terrorism "doesn't distinguish between the guilty and the innocent" because it has "no morality or ethical values." People of good will should come together and oppose terrorism, he said.

The peace marchers also lit

candles and prayed in front of the destroyed German Bakery, a shop often frequented by foreign tourists.

Joseph D'Souza, a teacher, said some 500 students from various faiths joined the rally.

Lalrin Sailo, a student, said she and friends also prayed for "a change of heart by terrorists." Just condemning terrorism was not enough, the 24-year-old college student said.

Joshua Ratnam, secretary of the Protestant diocese, said "it was a moving experience" that both Catholic and Protestant bishops joined in the prayers. (UCAN)

NEW DELHI

An Indian Catholic nun will be among representatives and officials at a UN meeting in New York to review progress in providing greater equality for women.

Nazareth Sister Ann Moyalan, who left New Delhi on Feb. 24 for the March 1-12 meeting, said her presence at the meeting would be "proof" of what Catholic Religious have done for women's liberation in India.

The UN-sponsored meeting aims to review progress that countries have made in implementing the Beijing Declaration.

In September 1995, representatives of 189 governments and more than 2,100 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) met in Beijing and charted a new agenda for women's empowerment and equality.

The official conference and a parallel NGO forum were the largest in UN history, attracting over 50,000 participants and

observers.

The upcoming meeting will study how the governments have tried to implement the Beijing declaration, Sister Moyalan said.

She is attending in her role as a member of the UN-recognized NGO, the Charity Federation, which links up Religious congregations who share the spirituality of St. Vincent De Paul.

At the New York meeting, Sister Moyalan plans to present the work that women, particularly Religious women, are doing for women's socio-economic liberation and equality.

The nun said that for decades, Catholic Religious "toiled day and night in the villages and slums of India trying to help women and children" before corporate social services began.

Her own congregation, the Kentucky-based Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, has worked for women's liberation since its arrival in India more than 50 years ago.

She said she hopes to widen her network with other people and organizations during the meeting days.

"When I return, I can also share my experience with other Religious and co-workers," she told UCA News. (UCAN)

YANGON

Catholic and Buddhist villagers who survived Cyclone Nargis have collaborated to rebuild churches destroyed during the disaster.

"The majority of villagers, including Buddhists, participated in the reconstruction of churches," said Bishop John Hsane Hgyi of Pathein.

He admitted though that few showed much enthusiasm when

church rebuilding first began as people themselves were struggling to eke out a living. "But after a while they started working together," he said.

Bishop Hsane Hgyi together with eight priests blessed the reconstructed St. Theresa Church in Lemawgone village in the Irrawaddy Delta on Feb. 24. About 300 parishioners attended the celebration.

"Our first priority for the cyclone victims was to help them build their own livelihoods. Churches were then rebuilt later to help them grow spiritually," he said.

His diocese in the Irrawaddy Delta was hardest hit. More than 140,000 people died and hundreds of thousands of houses were destroyed when the cyclone struck in May 2008.

"As most of our churches were destroyed, it was impossible for us to rebuild them all by ourselves. So we had to look for donors locally and abroad," Bishop Hgyi.

He recalled that following the cyclone, Catholics attended Masses in parish centres built from bamboo and with thatched roofs.

"We have faced some challenges during the reconstruction of the churches," he remarked, but these were overcome. "We formed four groups and four priests were given the responsibility of reconstructing the churches," he said.

Now that they do not have to worship in a makeshift bamboo structure, "we take pride in our new church as we all can gather and pray peacefully."

Bishop Hsane Hgyi's pastoral visit in blessing 10 rebuilt churches destroyed by Cyclone Nargis began on Feb. 17 and is scheduled to last till March 2. □

Reflecting on Mary

The Apparitions of Lourdes

by Pier Giuseppe Accornero

It was foggy and raining on that Thursday, 11th February 1858, at Lourdes, a little village in the French Pyrenees. The “cachot” - the old prison cell where the poor Soubirous family lived was a hole of a place, just 3.72 metres by 4.40 metres and five people lived there: papa François and mamma Louise; two little girls, fourteen year old Bernadette and Toinete eleven and two little boys, Jean-Marie, six and Justin aged three.

I Saw Something White

Bernadette was born on 7th January 1844. She was sickly. She had asthma and she was illiterate and knew nothing about the teachings of the faith. She did not have an especially good memory, but she demonstrated a strong will. That morning, since there was no firewood in the house, the two sisters together with their friend Jeanne Abadie (aged 13 years) went to the cave of Massabielle along the river Gave to collect some firewood and some ‘bones.’ The dry bones of animal carcasses also burn well.

On reaching the river (rivulet) they bent down to remove their clogs



before crossing. Bernadette heard a sound like “a gust of wind” even though it was very still. She looked up and above the cave she saw “a lady dressed in white, with a white veil, a blue sash and a yellow rose on each of her feet.” The little girl made the sign of the Cross and recited the Rosary with the “Lady,” who was “passing the beads

through her fingers without moving her lips" and then she disappeared. On Saturday the 13th after the apparition she made her confession to the Abbé Pomian: "I saw something white that had the shape of a lady." The priest asked her permission to refer the matter to the 'curate' of Peyramale.

The Message of Lourdes

The year 2008 was the "Jubilee Year" - the 150th anniversary of the apparitions (1858 - 2008) and even two years later "the message of Lourdes" is still very timely.

None of those who were present saw the Virgin, only Bernadette saw her - her actions and her words, the others neither saw nor heard any of the conversations. After the apparitions, the young girl was badgered with questions and asked to reveal the words of "the Lady" complete with words and gestures. Whatever she heard and said about the Virgin could only have been reported by a seer. The conversations took place in the local dialect because the little girl knew no French. Bernadette felt strong and she was not intimidated by the questions and the threats. She always replied consistently and with confidence. She never contradicted her statements.

The Second apparition - 14th February was Sunday and it was Carnival day. Ten girls went to church and they filled a bottle with holy water and proceeded to the grotto. After the first decade of the Rosary Bernadette exclaimed: "Look at the glow, see the light. She has the Rosary in her right hand and she is looking at you." She lifted up the bottle of holy water: "If you are from God, stay, otherwise..." and she sprinkled the blessed water at

the vision. The Lady tilted her head and smiled. Bernadette grew pale and still. Her eyes were raised and she remained motionless.

She Will Make Me Happy

The Third - At dawn on Thursday the 18th, she left home while it was still dark to escape prying eyes. The Lady spoke for the first time. Bernadette offered her a piece of paper and a pen and asked her to write her name. "The Lady started to smile" and she replied: "that is not necessary... Would you be so kind as to come for the next fifteen days? I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the other."

The Fourth, fifth and sixth - they were three silent visions. On Friday the 19th, Bernadette went there with a lighted candle that she would henceforth always carry. On Saturday the 20th, thirty people witnessed the ecstasy. On Sunday the 21st, a hundred people gathered at the grotto. When she returned she was summoned by her vicar the abbé Pène: "You had a good time amusing yourself."

She replied: "That's not true. She told me she would make me happy, but I must strive to be good." The commissioner Jacomet questioned her but she refused to say anything even though she was threatened with imprisonment. On Monday 22nd, in the afternoon, she went to the grotto but nothing happened.

Seventh - Tuesday 23rd, the flame of the candle reached her fingers but they were not singed. "What did she tell you?" "A request for me alone."

Eighth - Wednesday 24th the silence ended. Colour returned once more to Bernadette's face and then it became pale again. The

Lady spoke and the girl went down on her knees and bowed to the ground: "She spoke to me in our dialect and she asked me to tell you this. She said: "Penance, pray for the conversion of sinners. She went down on her knee and kissed the earth in penance for sinners. Her face was very sad."

Repentance

Ninth - Thursday 25th, three hundred people reached the spot on their knees and they heard her whisper: "Penitenco, penitenco, penitenco." (*Penance, penance, penance*) Then Bernadette dug a little hole in the ground and drew some muddy water from it. She brought it to her lips and threw it out in disgust, the first, the second and then the third time. At the fourth attempt she swallowed it; she washed her face and began to eat the leaves of a wild shrub nearby. They were all the directions given by the Lady.

Friday 26th was a day of anguish. She went to the grotto, knelt down and began praying the Rosary. Nothing happened. She repeated the penances, still nothing. She washed in the spring...nothing. She continued praying and there was nothing. She was inconsolable: "What have I done to her?"

Tenth - It was Saturday 27th. It was the most mysterious vision. Not a word was said.

Eleventh - Sunday 28th she prayed, kissed the ground, she walked on her knees, washed in the dirty water. "The vision had ordered me to do penance first for myself and then for others."

Twelfth - Monday 1st March before 1500 people. She lifted the Rosary for everyone to see and everyone looked towards the grotto. The abbé Pène scolded her: "Now you are blessing



Rosaries?" She replied promptly: "I didn't bring my stole."

Thirteenth - Tuesday 2nd March - there were now 1650 people. "What did I tell you?" "Go and tell the priests to come here in procession" but she didn't say that she had also asked for a "chapel to be built." Accompanied by two of her aunts she went to the pastor of Peyramale but she did not allow him to intimidate her. "You say that you saw the Holy Virgin?" "I did not say that it was the Holy Virgin." "Then, who is this lady?" "I don't know her." "Liar..." "She asks you to go in procession to the grotto." "It is the bishop who gives permission for processions. If it were something good, the vision wouldn't be called a farce. Go home and don't go out anymore."

What is Your Name?

The three women started towards the grotto, Bernadette stopped in her tracks: "I forgot to meet the chaplain." She returned

to the pastor of Peyramale, to the two vicars Pène and Serres and then to the chaplain Pomian. The Lady told me: "Go and tell the priests to build a chapel here." "A chapel? But you don't even know her name. You need to ask her, her name."

Fourteenth - Wednesday 3rd She prayed the Rosary but "I saw nothing," ...not even the people did. She returned to the grotto in the afternoon and the Lady appeared to her. She was smiling. She told the parish priest "the Lady always wants a chapel." "If she wants a chapel, ask her to tell you her name and ask her to make the rose bush in the grotto bloom."

Fifteenth - Thursday 4th there were 8000 people present - the Rosary, greetings, penance and smiles. The People were waiting for a miracle but the Lady kept silent. Bernadette was calm but the crowd grew impatient and the anticlerical newspapers instigated her: "What a hoax. How many poor believers have been humiliated!"

For the next 21 days she did not go to the grotto because she did not feel drawn there. On March 18th she submitted to be interrogated by a lawyer sent by the commissioner of police and the town mayor.

Sixteenth - Thursday March 25th, the feast of the Annunciation. That was the most important apparition. Bernadette had prepared her question: "Lady, please kindly tell me who are you? But she was so confused and instead of "kindly tell me," she said "will you tell me." The Lady smiled but remained silent. The little girl was insistent and repeated her question. The fourth time she parted her hands and passed the Rosary to her right arm, stretching it towards the earth and then she let it rest on her breast. Then lifting her

gaze to heaven she said: "Que soy was Immaculada Councepciou» that is "I am the Immaculate Conception." The apparition lasted for an hour. Bernadette stood up very happy, her face radiant. "What did she say?" The little girl did not understand the term and neither did she know anything about the dogma of the Immaculate Conception that had been proclaimed four years earlier on December 8th 1854 by Pius IX. The gruff priest asked: "Do you know what you are saying?" The little seer shook her head and asked, "What do those words mean?"

The Physician is converted

Seventeenth - Tuesday 7th April - she was on her knees praying, her hands tightly joined. Then she cupped her fingers like a shell to shield the flame of the candle. For half an hour the flame touched her fingers. Doctor Dozous was stunned, he grabbed her hands: "any burns?" The "miracle of the candle" caused the physician to be converted and the news spread.

Three months went by. A decree was passed to close the grotto, pilgrims were fined. On June 3rd Bernadette received her First Holy Communion.

Eighteenth - Thursday July 16th the last apparition - She stopped some distance from the grotto and a smile brightened her face. "What did she say?" "Nothing, I only saw the Holy Virgin."

Bernadette's life was transformed; prayer and penance. On July 3rd 1866 she visited the grotto for the last time. Later she entered the convent of the Sisters of Charity at Nevers where she passed away on April 16th 1879 at the age of 35. □

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

My sincere thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for guiding us to buy a house. *Solomen and Susan Concessio, Wellington, New Zealand*

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother Mary for protecting my mother from a dangerous incident. She was returning to her bed after using the bathroom around 2 am only to find a snake coiled below her bed. It was a terrifying moment for her and thanks to our neighbours the venomous intruder was dealt with accordingly. Thank you beloved Mother for your numerous blessings and for protecting our family always.

Patrick DeCosta, Bahrain

Thank you dear Mother Mary for all your blessings.

Pauline Abernathy, Dubai

Thank you dear Mother Mary for granting me a successful operation for the removal of a pituitary tumour and other favours granted to me and my family. Do keep us under your protection.

Fiacre Fonseca, Mumbai

Thank you dear Lord Jesus and Mother Mary for curing me of a bad shoulder pain and for many other favours received.

Mrs. Spinola Paul, London

Dearest Mother Mary, thank you for interceding with Jesus. My daughter Caroline received a gift from Jesus after eight years. (23-01-2010) The baby was normal and healthy and the delivery was safe. Thank you dear Jesus and Mother Mary for this miracle.

Percy and Dolcy, Mumbai

Thank you Mother Mary for taking my mother under your care and for curing her cough - do continue to take care of her.

Almeida, Mumbai

Thank you Mother for granting me a promotion. It seemed impossible. I thank you for the many other favours granted to me and my family.

Donald Figueiredo, Mumbai

Thank you Mother Mary for giving my friend's husband a good job in Dubai, for granting my nephew Rahul a good break in his job and for the many favours received.

Joanita Figueiredo, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary for the safe delivery of my sister who had severe complications throughout her pregnancy and she safely delivered a baby boy.

Azwolda Fernandes, Goa

My sincere thanks to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians for all that has been given to me and done for me.

M. Dodd, Pune

My sincere thanks for all the graces and favours received through the intercession of Our Lady, Help of Christians.

Mrs. Maria Theresa Fernandes, Mysore

My husband, my son and daughter and I were travelling on our scooter and we skidded on oil and narrowly escaped a serious accident with just a few bruises. We are most grateful to Mother Mary for having protected us. We faithfully pray the Rosary everyday.

Mrs. Niloufer Roach, 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.*

Thank you sincerely dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco, St. Dominic Savio and through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys I have received numerous favours. *S. Ravindran, Bangalore*

Thank you dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for giving my daughter a job through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Do continue to bless our family. *V. Gomes, Mumbai*

It was Thursday, 11th February, the feast day of our Lady of Lourdes, my son, daughter and myself - after saying the Morning Prayer and reciting the **3 Hail Marys** left for work individually. My daughter who was driving alone had her front tyre burst, resulting in swerving the car in a circle. It stopped only after hitting the centre railings. It was a miraculous escape as no other car was involved, neither was she hurt but her car was damaged very badly. Our Lady was present there to protect her for praying to her she was saved by the precious blood of her son, Jesus. All glory to Him and thanks with grateful heart for Mother Mary's constant protection for our whole family, when called upon her. Mary our Mother, smile on us. *John Rebello, Bahrain*

On the afternoon of March 9, 2009 my husband suddenly had a paralytic attack. His left arm, leg and mouth were badly affected. We immediately took him to the hospital. I began to pray the 3 Hail Marys and begged Our Lady's help. The doctor gave him an injection and by late that night his leg and mouth were completely cured. After treatment, physiotherapy and prayers his left arm is much better. Thank you Mother Mary for the wonderful miracle. *Cynthia Gomes, Goa*

Thank you dear Mary Help of Christians for protecting my daughter from an accident through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

Melliza B. D'Souza, Mumbai

My wife was suffering from varicose veins. It was the 25th December 2009 and she expressed her desire to accompany her daughter and her ailing mother along with me for Midnight Mass. I was hesitant because at that part of the night there would be no autos to take us to church and after the services there would be no auto to bring us back. This was where Our Lady came to our help. I had been reciting the 3 Hail Marys ever since the year 1970. Thank you Mother Mary.

Theo Alphonso, Mumbai

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

On June 11th, 2009 I fractured my leg and I was in plaster for two and a half months. My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for curing me completely and today I am walking normally. I thank you also for giving my children good jobs and good incentives. *Mrs. Veena D'Costa, Mumbai*

Our sincere thanks to Jesus, Our Lady Help of Christians and Don Bosco for protecting, guiding and helping our son to complete four years of studies in London.

Stanislaus & Bernadette Tavadia, Mumbai

Thank you Mother Mary and Don Bosco for the safe delivery of my daughter and for granting my son-in-law a good job.

Mrs. Lucy D'Souza, Manipal, Karnataka

Thank you dear Mother Mary and Don Bosco for granting our son Isino good results in Std. XII, for securing admission in a good engineering college and for all the favours granted.

Mr. & Mrs. Peris, Vasai

Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping us to get a buyer for our house in Andheri and for helping us to shift safely in our new home in Thane. We thank you for numerous other favours. Mother Mary please guide and protect us in everything we do and always keep us under your protection.

Philomena Licinto D'Souza, Thane

We are grateful to Our Mother Mary Help of Christians, St. Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of Sandra's baby on July 13, 2009 and now we pray for the safe delivery of Anita's baby due later in the year. Thanks for all these favours and blessings on our family throughout the year.

Mrs. Rosalind Moreira, Canada

Thank you dear Don Bosco for granting my son success in his examination.

Valerie Rego, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco for miraculously curing my husband of severe ear problems.

Diana Pereira, Bahrain

Thank you dear Infant Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for a successful surgery on my calf and for other favours received. Please help my complete recovery.

Rubertina Carvalho, Mumbai

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

Nazario, Canada

My belated thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco for saving me from a Tempo accident. It skidded off the road but nothing happened to me. It took place some 28 years ago and I have not acknowledged my gratitude. Please dear Mother Mary, forgive the delay.

Maria Fernandes, Goa

My sincere gratitude to Our Lady and Don Bosco for all the favours bestowed on me and my family.

Cedric Gonsalves, Goa

My gratitude to dear Mary Help of Christians for all the favours received especially for my daughter's negative test results. *M. Monteiro, London*

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



My sincere thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for guiding us to buy a house.

*Solomen and Susan Concessio,
Wellington, New Zealand*

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for granting me so many favours and especially for the gift of a healthy baby girl after four years of marriage.

Minella Lopes, Goa

I would like to express my gratitude to the Infant Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the safe and timely delivery of my son in Oct 2009.

I had miscarried two years ago and would probably have done so again if

it wasn't for Divine intervention that took me back to India to have a cesarean and a healthy, lively baby boy whose middle name is Dominic and whom till today, has given me the grace and strength to carry on with my duties. In this time of recession it was with their help alone that I have returned to my job. I pray to the all of them to watch over my infant son, mother, husband, brothers and sister and their families too and give us the grace never to stray from the path God has chosen for us.

Maria Murray

My belated thanks to Our Blessed Mother and Dominic Savio for the many favours received and for protecting my husband from an accident.

Mr. & Mrs. Dominic and Merlyn Fernandes, Dahisar

Thank you dear Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for hearing our humble prayers and reuniting us with our daughter Antoinette and her family in London to celebrate Christmas after 5 years.

Deryck and Maria and daughter Jenniferann Fernandes

Belated but grateful thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for helping my son secure a good percentage in his SSC examinations and for his admission to college. *E. D'Souza, Mumbai*

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

MAY 2010

Holy Father's General Intention: *That the shameful and monstrous commerce in human beings, which sadly involves missions of women and children, may be ended.*

Missionary Intention: *That ordained ministers, religious women and men, and lay people involved in apostolic work may understand how to infuse missionary enthusiasm into communities entrusted to their care.*

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MARY WAS THERE

On the feast of the Holy Innocents, Dec 28th 2009 we were returning home late that night by rickshaw when a private car cut across our path and knocked our rickshaw off balance and the vehicle turned turtle. We landed on our heads. At the time of the impact we were certain that we were protected by the maternal hand of Our Lady. We got out of the overturned rickshaw and were ushered into another rickshaw and sent off home. Miraculously we were unhurt. We thank God for protecting us from what could have been a terrible disaster. Every morning we pray Psalm 91 and before leaving the house we always recite the Consecration prayer to Mary Help of Christians and the Three Hail Marys.

Pamela & Alex Gracias, Mumbai

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

The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail)). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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