

# DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*The Virgin Mary  
offers  
modern man  
a vision  
of serenity and  
a word of  
reassurance:  
Victory of hope  
over anxiety*

Cover: **Christ the King**



## From The Editor's Desk

### Free From Fear

There was a time when I felt sorry for that poor fellow in the Gospel parable who buried his talent in the ground. When he was called upon by his master to give an account, he was dismissed as a 'good-for-nothing servant' and ordered to be thrown out into 'the outer darkness where they was weeping and gnashing of teeth' (*Matt. 25: 14-29*). I always thought that it was rather unfair that he was given such a harsh sentence, because the punishment he received was surely disproportionate to his crime.

Admittedly, he wasn't a very enterprising chap. He didn't earn any interest on his master's investment, but, on the other hand, he didn't embezzle or squander it either. In fact, he returned the original amount, so the worst you could say about him was that he may have been unduly timid and acted in an over-cautious manner.

However, my sympathy for this character soon faded away when I re-examined verses 24 and 25 and discovered a deeper meaning hidden there. At this point in the story the servant explained that his shameful inaction was caused by fear and that his fear was he saw his master as 'a hard man', who reaped where he had not sown and who gathered where he had not scattered.

Sooner or later, it seems to me, we all have to face up to a basic choice in life. We can either listen to those fears in our hearts which distort our vision and paralyse our movement, or we can listen to the words of Jesus, words that reveal the truth and set our spirit free.

As the Gospel shows clearly, Jesus reveals God to us as a loving and merciful Father who is incapable of being mean or harsh. But if we allow our vision to be constricted by fear, we may tend to look on God as a 'hard man', who latches on to every little mistake we make and hands out punishment for every little offence we commit.

Perhaps, we need to take more notice of St. Paul's reminder to the Galatians that 'we are led by the Spirit and called to freedom'. Perhaps, we need to remember, too, that if we allow our lives to be dominated by fear, especially the fear of failure or the fear of rejection, then much good is likely to be left undone.

On the other hand, if we have the courage to let the Spirit guide our steps we will be in a better position to see God as he really is and to see ourselves as his children. In that case, we shall avoid the misery of feeling spied upon or watched and rejoice in the freedom of being welcomed and accepted.

*Fr. Ian Douulton sdb*

# 11. GRATITUDE IN ACTION

*Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss*

**T**he melodic strains of a violin heard one Friday evening from a lobby at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, was the heartfelt gratitude of a former patient who had almost lost the ability to play the instrument again. "I suppose it is a beautiful way of saying 'thank you' to the hospital and its staff, but it's a lot of other things as well," mused Ken Wollberg. "It's a way to share a beautiful thing."

## **The Violin – His Passion**

Wollberg, 58, began playing the violin in a fourth-grade music class in Omaha, Nebraska, and became 'almost addicted to it, in a way.' His love for the instrument eventually led to a master's degree in viola performance from the University of Iowa. Although he was passionately fond of playing professionally, his real delight was teaching the viola and violin to enthusiastic young students. Besides, he performed with various music groups and symphonies, but it was hard to make a living off his music, as everyone in the profession knows only too well. So he and his wife, Peggy, decided to launch careers as truck drivers and in 2002 began hauling rigs cross-country. Eventually, they bought a truck for themselves and leased their services. Wollberg and his wife were hauling three flatbeds, piled up on the back of their truck on Dec. 27, 2007, when it struck a patch of ice in Montana and before they knew what was happening, they found themselves slithering across the length of about four football fields before toppling to one side.

The driver's side window had shattered, and Wollberg's left elbow

took a beating. His triceps muscle detached, and bone scraped away from his elbow. Surveying the damage, the orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jay Keener who attended on him observed, "I told him from the get-go that it was uncertain if he would ever be able to play the violin again, depending on the amount of nerve damage, weakness and stiffness he had sustained." Keener re-attached Wollberg's triceps muscle to the bone. Plastic surgeon Dr. Ida Fox performed a skin graft to cover the outside of the wound. A second operation last July released scar tissue and stretched the elbow. But it was only after several months of painful gruelling exercises and therapy visits that Wollberg gradually returned to teaching music as before.

"That whole time, I didn't realize how serious it was," Wollberg reminisces. "My hand worked, but it was a struggle to play the violin again. It took a month, maybe, to reach the bottom string." He complains that his arm is still weak, but nevertheless, last fall he performed with the Paducah Symphony Orchestra in Kentucky.

When Wollberg returned to Barnes-Jewish Hospital recently for a checkup, he brought along his violin. "My desire was to show that I had my violin-playing back under control. I wanted them to see the work they had done with such loving dedication and care was eminently successful," he reflected. The doctors were immensely impressed and grateful and the hospital staff asked the patient to schedule another appointment - but this time as a performer. Wollberg and his friend, guitarist

Jim Stieren, appeared that Friday at the hospital's Centre for Advanced Medicine in St. Louis. Peggy Wollberg joined them and sang a few songs, including 'Amazing Grace.' Cherry Brown, 58, paused after a vascular test to join the crowd in the lobby and enjoy the music. "The fact that he is able to play after the accident is a wonderful thing," she remarked. "That's a God-given talent well used."

### **Gratitude Meaningfully Shown**

Most people express gratitude with a casual 'Thank-you' or sometimes with a heartfelt expression accompanied by a gift of some kind. However, gratitude is best shown by a change of life-style as did Wollberg. How many of us pay heed to this aspect of gratitude? Take the example of the gift of *forgiveness* which God gives us so graciously through the dying-rising of Jesus, his Son. The ideal way to show one's gratitude for this gift is to avoid repeating the sin ever again in one's life, and at the same time to share one's forgiveness with another, especially when the person has hurt us beyond our expectations. Only when our gratitude for forgiveness includes these two aspects can we say that it is genuine and complete - gratitude shown in action and not just in words alone. The express need of passing on forgiveness to others is brought home to us through the parable of the unforgiving servant. However, what most seem to miss in their understanding of this parable is that when the first servant fails to extend forgiveness to his fellow-servant, he loses the very gift that he had received earlier - he is thrown into prison until he had paid the entire debt. And considering the amount he owed (ten thousand

talents, the equivalent in modern currency being several thousands of crores of rupees!) that would mean an extremely long sentence!

And what about gratitude for the gift of life, experienced through recovery from a fatal illness, or when we escaped a near-death accident? Does that ever really make us begin life on a fresh page, with a deeper trust in the Lord's providence and a greater readiness to reach out to others, especially those for whom life is a burden in some way? How often does good health and physical vigour move us to go out of our way to work for the physically challenged and less gifted, polio patients, accident victims and the like?

We would all acknowledge that it is fairly easy (even though meaningful) to say a verbal 'thank-you' for a favour received. But to make that favour the springboard for a new level of living is something out of the ordinary! In 2 Cor. 5:14-15 Paul reminds us that Jesus loved each of us so much that he literally identified himself with us, taking the penalty of death on himself (one man died for all!). And so, he concludes, living persons should no longer live for themselves for him who for their sakes died and was raised. He not only taught this truth, but actually lived it. *'For me,'* he avowed, *'to live is Christ and to die a gain!'* What a difference it would make if each Christian were to realize this truth to the very marrow of his/her bones! Would we not thank the Lord for all that he has done for us?!? *"What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord"* (Ps 116:12-13).

### **Other Inspiring Examples**

A young Indian couple living in

America, own a Restaurant doing pretty brisk business all week. They decided one day to launch into a novel scheme. Every Sunday they serve their guests as usual, but when presenting the bill, the amount is always \$0.00. When the surprised patrons seek an explanation wondering whether there is some kind of mistake or other, their answer is: 'The previous guests who had a meal here have paid for your meal! They wanted you to enjoy your Sunday meal and remember it for a long long time! It is absolutely free for you!' Taken aback the guests would be tongue-tied for a while, but invariably would offer to pay for those coming after them. It has been noticed that Sunday is their busiest day - and never once have they got less than what they would have, had they charged their clients the full fare. Rather, it was always way above their expectations. Not only that, several people offer their services, some as waiters, cooks and in other capacities, all wanting to join in this novel way of sharing and bringing joy to others. And that is what the couple originally had in mind - to provide people with the opportunity to think of others and to share their blessings with them generously. Their hope is that this experience will enable the people who go through it to extend it to other spheres of their lives.

The 'Joy of Giving Week' was celebrated in India from September 27 to October 3, 2009 in a nationwide outreach, spearheaded by the NGO *Give India*. The theme of the week is 'giving' - whatever you can to some needy person: a glass of water, a smile, a hug or even a hot meal, in short an act of kindness extended to anyone, including family members too. This appeal goes out to each individual to do

his/her best during the week - and already thousands have responded generously. One can give personally or even through the NGO. Those interested could even organize fund-raisers in the office, neighbourhood or through Church and other organizations. The idea is simply to dedicate the week to thinking less of oneself and more of others around us and in this way bringing joy to others. Professionals like doctors, lawyers, accountants and others are encouraged to donate a few hours each day of the week helping others in need of their professional competence. Besides, the NGO has developed several programmes designed to empower the poor and disadvantaged, giving people the skills, confidence and support they need to improve their lives as part of their work in the city. They work across areas including childcare, women empowerment, youth empowerment and HIV-AIDS among others. Here too the experience cannot but be that those who receive will also vie with their benefactors to pass on some of their blessings to others in return. Thus, the chain would hopefully extend well beyond the stipulated week and possibly circle the whole world.

As we remember Wollberg and his almost childlike candidness in wanting to thank the doctors who helped him get back the use of his left hand, could we take a serious look at our lives and pick out one area in which we feel (or even ought to feel) this kind of gratitude to the Lord? How could we express this more meaningfully not just in words, but in actions that will reveal the glory of what God has done for us? Maybe we too could come up with a novel idea to encourage all to share, emulating the "Joy of Giving Week" and doing even better! □



**BEAUTIFUL TO BE A SALESIAN PRIEST!**

*Fr. Jayapalan, CCBI Executive Secretary for Catechetics,  
South Asian Salesian Coordinator for Catechetics*

**A**vocation is God's call and it is with a purpose for His mission. I have experienced his great call for the past 36 years. He has spoken to me through the lives of committed Salesians who lived the spirit of Don Bosco. I was a boy in the Salesian boarding of Don Bosco, Katpadi in Tamil Nadu from 1968 to 1974. Today I am a happy Salesian priest because of the love and care of the Salesians. It was not merely their charitable work but their passionate service to poor youth.

My most moving experience took place when I was not able to pay the monthly fee of Rs. 8 for three years. Every time we went for home holidays, the administrator, Bro. P.K.Antony reminded me about the fees. Once he realized that I was finding it difficult to pay even after three years, one fine day he cancelled all my bills and wrote "Paid". It was the loving kindness of Don Bosco's preventive system that conquered.

As I was completing my Std.XI my Rector asked me what I wanted to become, I had only one reply: 'I want to become a Salesian'.

As Don Bosco said: every boy was brought to the Salesian house by our Blessed Mother, I can also say the same of every Salesian who enters the congregation. She is the foundress and guide of our Salesian congregation.

She gave me a wonderful experience of her maternal intervention at the time of my profession. I was so very confused at the time of retreat before my profession on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1977. My



novice master, Fr. Antony Mampra, told me to go ahead because he found no reason for my confusion. On 24<sup>th</sup> morning I went to the altar of our Lady and after praying to her I asked her never to allow me to trace back my steps. There was no sign on that day and the profession went on. Today, 33 years later, I am proud to say that our blessed mother has been my constant protectress, guide and inspirer.

God has guided me in my life to keep my focus on the poorest, through the material guidance of our blessed mother and fatherly inspiration of our Founder Don Bosco. It has been a wonderful and fulfilling life and mission all along. I have been loved by the Salesians and today I long to be a loving Salesian after the heart of Don Bosco for ever! □

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# THE GIFT I CAN'T HELP GIVING AWAY

by Elissa Kaupisch

*"My mother held onto her faith in Christ through the battle with cancer, never doubting that God had a perfect plan for her life."*

On my living room wall hangs an object that never fails to bring tears to my eyes. It reminds me of a unique gift I received from the lady who molded me into the woman I am today, my mother. It is unique in that I can keep it for myself, yet pass it on to others. Some gifts are like that.

My mother first received "the gift" while she was battling cancer and it became her most constant and vital companion. Through the many years of living with cancer and in the shadows of death, she clung tightly to it.

Despite the cancer and accompanying pain, my mother did not become filled with self-pity nor become self-absorbed. Keeping her own suffering in perspective, she remembered others who were suffering too and reached out to help them. Too weak to stand, she often leaned against her stove, preparing meals for sick friends and neighbours. Loving nature as she did, she also sent cheer to these friends in the bouquets of beautiful, fresh-cut flowers gathered from her garden.

My mother held onto her faith in Christ through the battle, never doubting that God had a perfect plan for her life. Other cancer victims observed my mother's strength and courage and leaned

on her for emotional support. In the midst of her own pain, she lovingly cared for my father who was also suffering from cancer, until the time of his death.

Suffering was a constant companion to my mother. In accepting her own condition, but not dwelling on it, she constantly encouraged others by writing "just the right note" in a get-well card, often including a special scripture for her friend.

It was just a week before her death, and my mother knew her time was fast slipping away: Still focusing on others, her concern was not for herself, but for me. As I was leaving her hospital room one day, she gave me the gift. All wrapped up between two leather covers it came - a special word from God. He had chosen my mother to deliver it to me at this difficult time.

"Elissa," she said, as she lifted my chin, trying to provoke a smile from me. "When you get home, open your Bible and read I Thessalonians 4:13." Confused, I shrugged my shoulders, and said "Okay, Mom. I will." I fought back a tear and hurried out, not wanting her to know how deeply I dreaded leaving her.

When I got home, I read the Scripture: **"Brothers, do not be**

**ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, or grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." (I Thess.4:13)**

The Scripture meant absolutely nothing to me - not then anyway. For years, I had prayed for my mother's healing, and I just couldn't face the possibility of losing her.

My mother did not fight her death. She was ready and anxious to meet her Lord. But for me, it was a different story. I was angry with God. Why did such a loving, caring Christian have to suffer such pain deterioration? Why did it have to be my mother? She didn't deserve it, and I was angry at God for allowing it. The anger did not pass, but time did.

Restless one day; I opened my Bible, and it fell open to the page where I had placed a bookmark - I Thessalonians. I searched for the passage my mother had given me, and carefully read the Scripture again, as well as the verses following it - this time pondering more on the words before me. Suddenly it dawned on me! It was like blinders being lifted from my eyes. I now understood what my mother was trying to say to me. The verse following the one my mother had given me particularly spoke to me: **"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we will believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." (I Thess. 4:14)**

With this revelation and understanding, I felt my anger toward God melting away; I knew He had touched me in a profound and personal way; and that He still loved and cared for me.

It wasn't long, before I had the opportunity to pass on "the gift." Karen, a young mother in my Bible



study group, was going through some very trying times. Her only child, three-year-old Brittany had been suffering from leukemia for about two years. Brittany was in the hospital again, leukemia spreading through her little body, and the doctors were not giving her parents any hope for her recovery. The shadows of death were moving in.

One day I stopped by the hospital to visit Karen and little Brittany, and found that Brittany had been placed in an isolation unit. Her mother had taken a short walk to get some fresh air, and I could not immediately locate her. As I sat in the lounge waiting for Karen to return, I remembered the Scripture my mother had given me - I Thess. 4:13. I felt led by God to share these words of comfort with Karen. I quickly jotted down the Scripture on a sheet of paper.

After my visit with Karen, I slipped her the piece of paper, telling her that the Scripture had been given to me by my mother

before she died, and that I hoped it would give her comfort.

Within a few days, the blond-haired, blue-eyed little girl had yielded her spirit to the Lord. In the midst of her sorrow, Karen found solace in that Scripture. Karen related to me how the Scripture had blessed her family.

Several months later, Karen shared her story with the women of our church. The experience of losing her daughter was a difficult one, but, with God's help, Karen was overcoming her grief. As she was sharing the Scripture I had given her, I noticed several women copying it down on their programme booklets. God's gift was being poured out to more of His people.

Today as I sit in my living room, contemplating that object on my wall, the calligraphied memorial about my mother's life of service to others, tears well up in my eyes. But they are no longer tears of sorrow. Yes, my mother is deeply missed, but my tears have changed to tears of joy and hope.

Now I understand the significance of my mother's final gift to me. She helped me focus, not on death and sorrow as many of us are prone to do, but on the gracious gift of eternal life from our Heavenly Father to those who believe in Him. Yes, Mother, I look forward with eagerness to that time when "we will be caught up in the clouds with those who have fallen asleep to meet the Lord in the air and we will be with the Lord forever." (I Thess. 4:17)

And as for me, I will continue to pass on this loving message of comfort to others, because God's gifts are like that. This Scripture from God is one gift I just can't help giving away! □

## walking with the Church

### *Candles, Distractions and Basic Christian Communities*

*by St. Martin's Messenger*

**Q.** *Why do we use candles at Mass and at other religious ceremonies?*

**A.** The Romans used candles for a number of civic and religious occasions. However lights have been used by every religion as far as mankind can remember. Light, and especially from a flame, signified for humankind life, hope, joy, divinity - almost everything that we consider good. The early Christians placed them in front of tombs of deceased members of the Christian community and also in front of the images of martyrs and other saints. They symbolise Christ our light and hope in our future resurrection. Candles have been used at Mass since the 7th century.

**Q.** *I get really distracted in prayer. As a matter of fact I never seem to be able to pray without distractions. Is there any point in continuing to pray?*

**A.** Let's begin with asking a few fundamental questions. The first is, What is prayer? For most people it is 'saying' prayers,



reciting formulae that they were taught or that they like from some source. In other words, they either are using memory or a book to pray. There is nothing wrong with this but I would prefer something better. I regard prayer as dialogue or conversation with God. For me there are two parts in prayer: I listen to God speak to me and I reply to God. Don't rush in and say you never heard God speak to you. He speaks to you in the Bible which you hear at Mass or read. Did you ever try to speak to him, discuss the reading?

He can speak to you in the news you hear around you. You speak with your family and neighbours about the news; why not speak to God. Think of how Moses and Job, and many others, spoke to him. He can speak to you about his will for you in sickness, losing your job, problems in the family and so forth. But why think about the bad things; why not add the good news about your family; the son/ daughter who passed an examination, one who got a good job, the birth of a baby?

The next question, what is it that you are looking for in prayer? Many people look for consolation. They want to 'feel good'. They are 'in' prayer for what they can get out of it. They babble on and on and never give God a chance to interrupt. The Bible tells us about the man who went up to the temple to pray and "said this prayer to himself!" (Lk. 18:9-12). He was not really

addressing God as he praised himself. He was greatly consoled as he listened to himself! I might call his 'prayer' a 'prayer of distraction' but it was not prayer at all.

The third question is, When do you pray? Most persons pray when they are ready, not when God is ready or when he calls. To be ready they have to be in the right mood. But why not pray in every mood. For example, if you have just lost your job, why not pray, discuss it with God, then rather put off praying for the rest of the day or for ever? Why 'punish' God who is waiting as a friend to hear from you? Or do you pray only for yourself and your needs and never think of accepting God's will when he does not 'answer' your pray your way?

And my final word, because I do not have the space, is keep trying to converse with God. Do not be discouraged. The reward of speaking with God as a friend is eternal life.

**Q.** *What are 'basic Christian communities'?*

**A.** A missionary once spoke of basic Christian communities in his parish in Uruguay. They are described as local groups of Christians who try to revitalise their church by worshipping and studying the scriptures together, by using their personal gifts in the service of others, and by becoming involved in common social action in their communities. The South American Bishops at their meetings in Colombia in 1968 and in Mexico in 1979 encouraged the formation of these Basic Christian communities. □

# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## ST. MARTIN OF TOURS 317-397 (NOVEMBER 11) YOUR WILL IS MY INHERITANCE

by Mario Scudu (TA/ID)

**H**e was not just another saint, he was one of the most outstanding saints in the great history of the early Church, especially in the Church in France. He was called the "Apostle of the Gauls" because of his efforts to evangelize and organize the Church in that region. Because of his wisdom and his zeal he was held up as a model for the entire Gallic region. Although he was born a Roman in what is today, Hungary (then called Pannonia by the Romans) he is considered predominantly a French saint (a bit like St. Francis for Italy). For this reason, the name Martin is very common in many European countries. His cult spread swiftly throughout France and Italy too, where many churches were dedicated to him. This phenomenon is observed also in Spain, England, Holland and of course in Hungary as well. In Germany he is honoured in one of the most beautiful Romanesque churches (the great church of St. Martin at Cologne). The poet Fortunatus was right when he wrote: *"Where Christ is known, Martin is honoured."*

### First A Soldier of Rome Then A Soldier of Christ

Martin was born on the border between Hungary and Austria, of pagan parents. His father was a military tribune, and commanded a garrison of soldiers that guarded the borders of the empire. He was soon transferred to Northern Italy, specifically to Pavia where little Martin grew up. His father, a professional soldier dreamed of his young son having a brilliant career in the Roman army. The battlefields and compact cohorts of legionaries seemed to fascinate the young lad. That was why he was called "Martin" meaning "dedicated to Mars" the god of war. The youngster's military dream did come true but it would take a very different turn because he would become a Christian and later a bishop. Martin's association with Christianity could at best be defined as curious. He met a family friend who was a Christian and the ten-year old boy was captivated by the Christian way of life. At twelve he became a catechumen, and committed himself to live by the Gospel commandment: love of God

and of neighbour. Later his Christian friends advised him to return home (from where he had run away). He loved his parents very much and did not want them to suffer such grief. His father forgave his simple adolescent impulsiveness of putting his duties as son over that of a soldier. He was destined for the army and there was nothing more to be said. Roman law was firm and so Martin was bound. He was 15 years-old and at the right age to enlist. After donning the uniform of a soldier he became a member of the cavalry and was sent to Gaul, specifically to Reims and Amiens. One night while he was on sentry duty he saw a poor man freezing in the cold. Martin drew his sword and cut his cloak in two and gave half to the poor unfortunate. It is true that he was forced into military service but nothing prevented him from practicing his faith and of expressing his love for God and his neighbour. It was said that the next night in a dream (or apparition?) Martin saw Christ surrounded by his angels who said: "*Martin, who*

*is only a catechumen, covered me with his robe.*" That famous incident was immortalized by various painters such as Giotto and Simone Martini (Assisi). In 339 at age 22 he was baptized but his long military service ended only around 356 when he was released from his contract to Rome. He was now free to be a soldier of Christ, his new commander. He did not have to use his strength to conquer empires but through love and solidarity he could reach out to his neighbour.

After his discharge, Martin went to Poitiers to meet Bishop Hilary who had probably encountered him as a soldier. Martin was captivated by him. Hilary was a learned man, a true pastor and a staunch defender of the Christian Faith against Arianism but precisely because of his courage, he was sent to the East into exile. In the absence of his spiritual master, Martin returned to Pannonia where he converted his mother and proceeded from there to Milan. There he founded a hermitage near the city and lived there as a monk. That was always his dream but he was chased away from there by the Arian bishop Assenzius the new bishop after the death of Dionysius. Having been banished he fled from Milan and sought refuge in Liguria on the island of Gallinara where he built a hermitage once more. He was informed that Hilary had returned from exile (the Arian leaders of the East found him unbearable for his astuteness). When Martin returned to Gaul, to Poitiers he was happy to meet Hilary again and it was there that he proposed to ordain Martin a deacon and a priest with a view to succeed him. It was thus that he tried to groom Martin to become his successor.



## A Trap to Make Him Bishop

His reputation as a bishop, a spiritual master and eloquent preacher soon spread beyond the walls of his monastery. It reached Tours. The Christians of that city were desperately trying to find a bishop. Knowing that Martin could not be bought they tried subterfuge. Commissions, investigations, consultations and even high-level discernments, what times! Then one of them came begging him to come and visit his wife who was ill. After much coaxing Martin conceded and went. It was a trap to ambush him. *He was accompanied and led to the Christian community of Tours where even some bishops were present. They were not very edified with what they saw - to have Martin as a colleague "looking so pitiful with dirty clothes and disheveled hair"... Moreover they were very disturbed by his long history as a Roman soldier. But the people wanted him* so he was finally ordained a bishop in 371. He fulfilled his duties with great dedication, authority and apostolic courage "without abandoning his commitment to his monastic discipline. In fact he went to live in a hermitage called Marmoutier not far from Tours. There he became famous for his transcription of the Bible. Many disciples joined him and all of them lived in poverty, penance and prayer. He was never at a loss to live his Christian life seriously. *Martin became a great teacher of the spiritual life and he had the exceptional ability to recognize the true from the false even the diabolic.* The devil, who constantly tormented Martin, presented himself in the form of an illusionist disguised as Christ.

This was a very strange Christ, all decked-up and well-dressed like a trendy model. Martin gave him one glance but refused to prostrate himself before him. The Devil screamed and said: "So? You do not recognize your Saviour?" Martin replied: *"The Lord Jesus did not say that he was coming robed in purple and decked with jewels. According to me I will believe in Christ only if he comes with the marks of his suffering and his cross."* The devil left in disgust.

Martin was a great bishop who watched over his diocese, making numerous pastoral visits, preaching, visiting the sick, exorcising those who were possessed, defending the poor and the victims of injustice whenever there was need. He courageously challenged political authorities and those who arrogantly oppressed the weak and downtrodden. Auxentius, the Roman legate was appointed to clean up Gaul and Spain of all political adversaries. The zealous and efficient legate reached Tours with a large group of prisoners intending to hold a cruel spectacle of torture, trying to make them "sing." When Martin heard this he presented himself at the imperial palace. Nothing is known about what happened but we know the result. Auxentius did not carry out his cruel threat but instead he became Martin's friend and a great benefactor of the people of Tours and the rest of Gaul. That was truly a miracle. His apostolic activity continued unabated and like a good soldier he fought for the kingdom of God up to that glorious day when he hastened to meet his commander, Jesus Christ in the year 397. □

# IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

## Reading Glasses

I took my 5 year old grandson to the optometrist to pick up his new glasses. The glasses were prescribed "to help him read and be able to see the computer better".

When we got back home, he got on the computer to play a game. In a few minutes he called me and said there was something wrong with his glasses.

I asked him what was the problem and he said, "I still can't read."

## Fate

A young pupil asked, "Master, what is fate."

"Ah, my son, it is what has brought great nations together. It has made the world a smaller place in which to live. It has inspired men of worth to work endless hours. It will some day enable men to span the universe and light years of travel will soon become mere seconds in time."

"And that, my master, is fate?"

"Oh, fate! I thought you said freight."

## Dog Growth

A distraught dog owner called his vet pleading for an immediate appointment. He explained that his dog had a large growth or swelling near the corner of its mouth. The vet told him to bring the animal right over.

When the man came in, the vet examined the dog as the man stood by, anxiously waiting. At last the vet turned to him and asked, "Do you have any children?"

"Oh, good grief, is it contagious?" the man gasped.

"No," the doctor answered. "It's bubble gum."

## Rustic Dining

As a trail guide in a national park, Danny ate with the rest of the seasonal staff in a rustic dining hall, where the food left something to be desired. When they were finished with their meals, they scraped the remains into a garbage pail and stacked the plates for the dishwasher.

One worker, apparently not too happy after his first week on the job, was ahead of Danny in line. As he slopped an uneaten plate of food into the garbage, Danny heard him mutter, "Now stay there this time."

## Store Safety

While attending college, I worked evenings at a retail store. On slow nights my co-worker Susan would often sing along with the radio while we did paperwork or restocked merchandise.

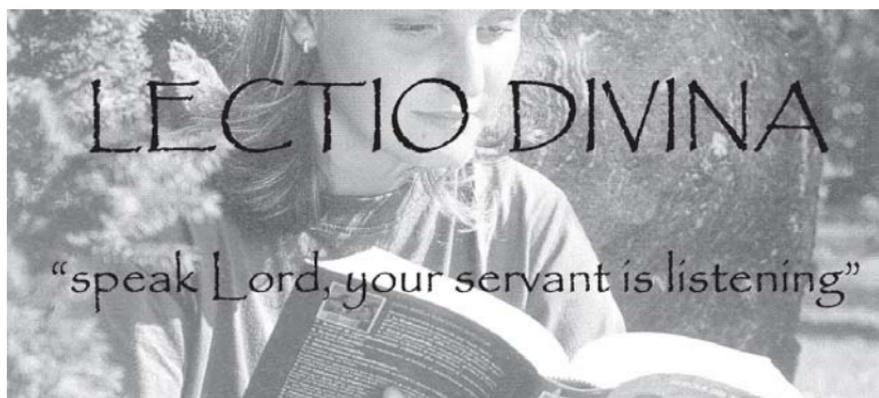
One evening as the manager was leaving I expressed my concern to him about our safety, being two women working alone at night.

"Oh, you'll be fine," he said, waving of his hand. "If you see anybody who looks suspicious, just warn him that Susan knows karaoke."

## Finally

As a professor at the Air Force Institute of Technology, I taught a series of popular courses on software engineering. The programme was highly competitive and difficult to get into, but one student made our decision whether to accept him quite simple.

When asked to fax over his college transcript, the student told me, "Well, I would, but it's the only copy I have." □



## THE STRUCTURE OF THE LECTIO

by Stefano Martoglio

**T**he Word of God is God himself. He is truly a person. St. John writes: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the *Word was God*. He was, in the beginning with God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We saw his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father full of grace and truth (Jn. 1, 1-2.14). It is the Word of God who explains this to us: "No one has ever seen God: it was the only Son of the Father who has revealed him to us" (Jn. 1, 18).

The Word that became flesh and lived among us was the "seed" that God had "sown" in the Scriptures. What we now need to know is what does this "seed" contain? The parable in Luke's Gospel does this masterfully. Just recall the conclusion: "This is what the parable means: the seed is the Word of God. The seed that fell along the path stands for those who hear; but the Devil comes and takes the message away from their hearts in order to keep them from believing and being saved. The seed that fell on rocky ground stands for those who hear the message and receive it gladly but

it does not sink deep into them; they believe only for a while but when the time of testing comes, they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear; but the worries and riches and pleasures of this life crowd in and choke them, and their fruit never ripens. The seed that fell in good soil stands for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until they bear fruit" (Lk. 8, 11-15).

With this parable the Lord gives us an all-inclusive method to understand the "*lectio divina*."

The first thing to remember is that "*lectio*" nourishes and nurtures the Word of God like a seed that is already sown in the human heart. This seed also is composed of various elements: its outer coat - its skin and its kernel, that part of the seed which contains the power to germinate. Let us now apply these components to the Word. The outer coat or the skin could be the literary styles of the various books of the Bible and the particular period of history from they originate. The kernel of the seed

is what our minds understand and it can only be grasped when we allow it to take root in us over time.

The Bible is the story of salvation, which is why the Word of God is read in Church. None of us is the Church alone; none of us hears the story alone.

We notice the power of the seed as it begins to grow: "The Kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There is it!'" because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17, 21).



Try to make a comparison: the outer shell is the *Lectio* and the content of the seed is the *meditatio*, the germ of the seed is *oratio* and finally the power of germination is *contemplatio*.

The *contemplatio* is not primarily a human activity. It is first of all the work of the Holy Spirit who nurtures within us a "taste" for the Word. This Holy Spirit vigorously enlightens us to understand the Bible. "Above all else however, remember that no one can explain by himself a prophecy in the Scriptures. For no prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were under the control of the Holy Spirit

as they spoke the message that came from God." (2 Pt 1, 20-21).

### The End Is the Beginning

The first thing to do when listening to the Lord when we sense his consoling presence through meditating on his Word, is to enter the "room" of our hearts and close the door: "When you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen, and your Father, who sees what you do in private will reward you" (Mt 6, 6).

The door of the heart will not close securely unless it is fastened by four bolts which are the so-called "cardinal" virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. That is the first step that the Holy Spirit takes: "Wisdom will never be at home in a deceitful heart that is a slave of sin. Anyone who is holy has learnt to stay away from deceitful people. He will not stay around when foolish thoughts are being expressed; he will not feel comfortable when injustice is done" (Wis. 1, 4-6).

**Prudence:** is necessary. Indeed, not everything that comes to mind comes from the Spirit therefore the Word must be read with "the Church."

**Justice:** by ourselves we are unable to understand everything. We must knock, seek and ask for help.

**Fortitude:** there are several things that are more attractive. Doing the *Lectio* takes much effort.

**Temperance:** is necessary for us to do the *Lectio*: just because we can go through magazines, surf the television and read newspapers we cannot pretend that we will find it easy to take the time to open the Bible. □

DEDICATED TO  
THE FAITHFUL  
DEPARTED

Quiet

## OUR PRAYERS FOR THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

*On Sunday, 2 November 2008, the Holy Father introduced the recitation of the Angelus with the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square for All Souls Day. The following was the Pope's reflection translated from the original Italian.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Yesterday the feast of All Saints brought us to contemplate "your holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother" (Preface, All Saints). Today, with our heart still turned toward this ultimate reality, we commemorate all of the faithful departed, who have "gone before us marked with the sign of faith and who sleep in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer 1).

It is very important that we Christians live a relationship of the truth of the faith with the deceased and that we view death and the afterlife in the light of Revelation. Already the Apostle Paul, writing to the first communities, exhorted the faithful to "not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since", he wrote, "we believe that Jesus



*The Pope delivers the Angelus Reflection from an open window overlooking statues of Saints who have gone before us.*

## ERS ASSIST UL DEPARTED

*pope Benedict XVI*

died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (I Thes. 4:13-14).

Today too, it is necessary to evangelize about the reality of death and eternal life, realities particularly subject to superstitious beliefs and syncretisms, so that Christian truth does not risk mixing itself with myths of various types.

In my Encyclical on Christian hope, I questioned myself about the mystery of eternal life (cf. *Spe salvi*, 10-12). I asked myself: "Is the Christian faith a hope that transforms and sustains the lives of people still today?" (cf. *ibid.*, n. 10). And more radically: "Do men and women of our time still long for eternal life? Or has earthly existence perhaps become their only horizon?"

In reality, as St. Augustine had already observed, all of us want a "blessed life", happiness. We rarely know what it is like or how it will be, but we feel attracted to it.

This is a universal hope, common to men and women of all times and all places. The expression "eternal life" aims to give a name to this irrepressible longing; it is not an unending succession of days, but an immersion of oneself in the ocean of infinite love, in which time, before and after, no longer exists. A fullness of life and of joy: it is this that we hope and await from our being with Christ (cf. *ibid.*, 12).

Today we renew the hope in eternal life, truly founded on Christ's death and Resurrection. "I am risen and I am with you always", the Lord tells us, and my hand supports you. Wherever you may fall, you will fall into my hands and I will be there even to the gates of death. Where no one can accompany you any longer and where you can take nothing with you, there I will wait for you to transform for you, the darkness into light.

Christian hope, however, is not solely individual it is also always a hope for others. Our lives are profoundly linked, one to the other, and the good and the bad that each of us does always affects others, too.

Hence, the prayer of a pilgrim soul in the world can help another soul that is being purified after death. This is why the Church invites us today to pray for our beloved deceased and to pause at their tombs in the cemeteries. Mary, Star of Hope, renders our faith in eternal life stronger and more authentic, and supports our prayer of suffrage for our deceased brethren. □

*Short Story*

# STRENGTHENED BY ANGELS

*by Sharon Wilkins*

**M**om, where's my black jacket?" my teenage daughter asked as she joined me in the kitchen while I prepared school lunches.

"I don't know, Jennifer. Wherever you left it," I snapped abruptly, finding it difficult to think about anything but cancer.

Tomorrow! My mastectomy is tomorrow. The thought consumed me as the fear and helplessness that came with this disease roared like a ferocious lion inside me.

My thoughts were interrupted again as my other daughter Melissa exclaimed, "Look at my hair, Mom. My bangs need cutting. I can't go to school looking like this."

She held a pair of scissors in her hand.

"Sit down, Melissa, and give me the scissors," I said halfheartedly.

While trying to focus on cutting her soft blond hair, the thought occurred to me that some day I might not be alive to do this. Tears filled my eyes.

"Are you crying?" she asked. "What's the matter, Mom?"

"It's just that I'm glad to be your mother," I spoke softly. I finished cutting her bangs and took my daughters to school.

When they left the car, I kept thinking about my husband of twenty-three years and our girls.

Returning home, I joined my husband for a cup of coffee on the patio before he left for work.

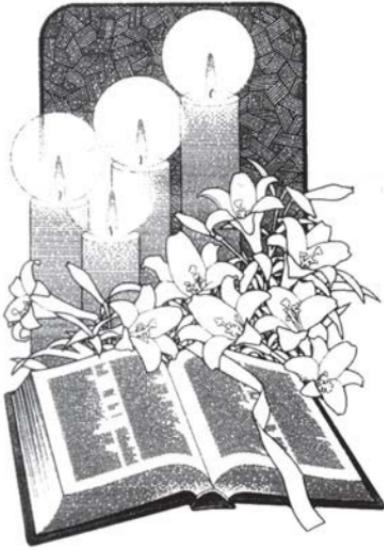
"You're going to be all right, honey," he reassured me as his tender arms embraced me like a comforter. "We can bear this. After all, we have the Great Physician with us."

Finally alone, I kept wondering: If I die, who will take our daughters shopping for just the right outfit for their first date? Who will help them learn the importance of friendship, if I am not able to be their friend? Who will support my husband during the tough times, like when he loses a job? And who will help him find the simple things, like mayonnaise in the refrigerator?

Many thoughts paraded through my mind. I had supported friends when cancer had invaded their lives, but now I had to accept the fact that this was not someone else's nightmare - it was mine! For years, God has been my companion, but I'd never been terrified enough to fully "trust in the Lord and be of good courage."

The silence of our home was not a welcomed relief from the demands of my children. I was alone - alone with my thoughts, which kept overflowing like a broken faucet. I curled up in my favorite chair and reached for my Bible. I desperately needed solace.

My fingers slowly turned the pages, groping for words of strength and peace. I stopped in Luke and began reading the



passage about Christ praying in the garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but Yours be done." An angel from Heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. (Luke 22:42-43) I had read these verses many times but never realized God sent an angel to comfort His son.

"This is what I need," I spoke aloud. "You sent an angel to strengthen Your son. Please give me something to hold on to today. I need an angel."

Routine household chores failed to free my mind from fearful thoughts. I needed a diversion and decided a trip to the market would help. At the store, my grocery list helped me focus. What a relief to think of practical needs like milk, bread and butter. I headed for the cookie aisle to stock up on our daughters' favourite cookies so they would have them

while I was in the hospital.

Reaching for the package, I recognized a friend and fellow teacher from years ago.

"Hi, Pat," I tried to sound cheerful.

"Sharon, how are you?" she asked as she steered her cart closer to mine. It was strange how the depth of the question, "How are you?" had changed. It was no longer just a lighthearted social greeting.

"Do you really want to know?" I asked as the knot in the pit of my stomach tightened.

"Of course I do," she replied sincerely.

"They found cancer in my left breast, and I'm going to have a radical mastectomy tomorrow morning. I'm not sure how far the cancer has spread." I fought back tears.

Pat listened intently as I shared my diagnosis and biopsy experience.

"Do you remember Bert Seacat?" she asked while softly touching my shoulder. "She's a teacher, too."

"Yes, I do," I answered. "We taught at the same elementary school. I haven't seen her in twenty years."

"Well," Pat continued, "she had a double mastectomy ten years ago, and she's just as feisty as ever."

I pushed my cart closer to Pat. "She is?" Hope began to flicker within me.

We reminisced for a while and then we both continued shopping. I quietly thanked God for the encouraging news Pat shared about our mutual friend. My heavy burden of anxiety began to lift. I no longer felt limited to my



shopping list and began to feel a sense of freedom.

A few minutes later, I made my way to the front of the store and looked down the row of fifteen checkout aisles. I saw Pat again, ready to unload her groceries. I steered my cart behind her.

We started to talk, but my eyes looked beyond her to the woman paying for her groceries. A strange feeling came over me. I looked closer. No, it can't be, I thought, as the woman turned, looked at me and smiled.

"Hi Sharon," she said sympathetically. "Pat was just telling me what's going to happen to you tomorrow morning."

"Bert Seacat," I replied, almost

breathless, as tears filled my eyes.

"I'll unpack your groceries, Sharon," Pat offered. "Go and talk with Bert."

Bert put her loving arms around me and my fear began to melt away. "You can do it, Sharon," she encouraged. "You can do it!"

I dried my eyes while she began sharing her experience. "I thought I was going to die. I wondered how my husband and I would be able to accept the loss of part of my body. Many times, I thought my children might be left without a mother to love them. But look at me now!"

she exclaimed. "I had both breasts removed. Do you like the ones I had reconstructed?" she chuckled, pulling her shoulders back.

"Your groceries are ready now," Pat interrupted.

"Remember, Sharon," Bert insisted, "you can do it! Call me anytime. I want to help."

After paying my bill, I walked out of the grocery store a much different person than when I had entered. Never before had I ever felt so loved by God. My body was filled with His peace.

Standing by my car, I looked up at the clouds. "Thank you, God, for two special angels. I know I can do it! I can face tomorrow." □

# THAT MOST BEAUTIFUL OF THE VIRTUES

by Gianni Asti

In the previous articles we have referred to several virtues. We shall now dwell on this virtue to which Don Bosco gave so much attention and offered several of his admonitions.

In the prayer book that he wrote for his boys this was how he introduced this virtue: "Every sign of virtue in youngsters is like a precious ornament that renders them dear to God and to people but the queen of all virtues is the angelic virtue that is so precious to youngsters who preserve it. They are likened to the angels of God in heaven even while on their sojourn on this earth: *"They shall be like the angels of God in heaven"* Our Lord said.

This virtue is like the hub around which all the others gather and are preserved and unfortunately if this virtue is lost, the others are lost as well." (*Il Giovane Provveduto* or The Companion of Youth - sadly only in Italian)

In fact, the virtue of purity is a manifestation of God's love for humankind, the sign of his presence in our lives.

## The Splendour of Pure Youth

In a dream Don Bosco was given a glimpse of heaven. There he saw youngsters who had practised this beautiful virtue. His guide led him through a meadow bedecked with various scented flowers and there he beheld a vision of youngsters



ADVICE TO HIS BOYS

DON BOSCO'S

who had preserved their baptismal innocence:

"The shepherd said to me: 'These boys have preserved untainted the lily of purity. They still wear the spotless robe of innocence.'

I stood entranced. Nearly all wore floral wreaths of indescribable beauty. Each flower was a cluster of thousands of tiny, brightly hued florets of unbelievable charm, each with more than a thousand colours...

The boys wore ankle-length garments of dazzling white embroidered with flowers like those in their crowns. Sparkling light radiated from these flowers that bathed the boys in brightness and reflected their comeliness.... Never could I imagine such a fascinating, bewildering spectacle in heaven itself!

Yet that is not all. The sparkling flowers in the boys' crowns and their dazzling garments were mirrored in the flowers and garments of their companions. Let

me add that the brilliant countenance of each boy blended with those of his companions and, in reflection, increased its own intensity a hundredfold, so that those beautiful faces of innocence were clothed in blinding light; each boy mirroring the loveliness of his companions in unspeakable splendour! I recognized some boys who are now here at the Oratory. Could they see but one-tenth of their present beauty, I am sure that they would endure fire and torture or the cruellest martyrdom rather than lose it? (EBM 8, 362-363)

Purity is a reflection of the beauty, holiness and grandeur of God in human beings, especially in youngsters. They experience in advance, as it were, what they would be like at the final resurrection in heaven.

The beauty and charm that these youngsters exude is extraordinary but they give the impression that it is no big feat. In the course of our interaction with these youth, who are often so preoccupied about the shape of their bodies, their looks, the clothes they wear, their hair styles or the makeup they use, they forget the beauty and the elegance that their faces radiate when they live in the grace of God.

We have certainly seen the radiant faces, the sparkling eyes and the candid smiles of newly weds or of novices who are entering upon their new lives or new priests who have lived intimately with God as they prepared for their ordination.

This virtue is fundamental when one is preparing to live his/her vocation well. It is the guarantee of one's total fidelity in love.

If a youngster lives this virtue of purity positively it becomes easy for

him to be faithful to prayer, to his duties, his studies, his employment or obedience to his parents. He becomes more outgoing towards his friends, to the poor, to little children, to the elderly and to the sick too.

### **O Innocence! O Penance!**

"Once I could tear myself away from this heavenly vision, I asked my guide, 'Are these the only ones who never lost God's grace?'"

'Well,' he replied, 'don't you think that their number is quite so large? Furthermore, the lads who have lost their baptismal innocence can still follow their companions through the path of penance.'

And this was the final piece of advice Don Bosco gave his boys:

*'Oh fortunate souls who have not yet lost the beautiful virtue of purity redouble your efforts to preserve it.'*

'Guard your senses, ask often for the assistance of Jesus and Mary, visit Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament, go often for communion, be obedient and pray ceaselessly. You possess such a beautiful treasure; it is so wonderful that even the angels envy you. Like our Saviour Jesus Christ said, be like the angels.'

And to those who had lost the virtue of purity he suggested:

"And you who have had the misfortune to lose this virtue do not be discouraged. Prayer, frequent and good confessions, avoiding the occasions of sin; visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to help you recover this virtue. Make every effort and do not worry, victory will be yours because God never refuses you his grace."

From this exhortation we infer that the virtue of purity is above all a gift to be continually implored for from the Lord with prayer, frequent

communion and confession, if not daily at least monthly.

### A True Martyr

Don Bosco had another beautiful vision of youngsters living in purity. It was in a dream that he had at Lanzo Torinese in 1876 when he saw Dominic Savio. This was how he described it:

"I watched in silence and I smiled. How beautiful he was!

He was draped in a special robe, a white tunic that descended to his feet; it was all interwoven with gold and diamonds. A broad red sash girded his waist...His head was crowned with roses; his hair flowed over his shoulders and gave him such a wonderful and charming aspect that he looked...he looked...like an angel!"

As he began to talk to Dominic Don Bosco asked him the significance of the white robe he was wearing. A heavenly chorus responded on Dominic's behalf:

"These are those who have girded themselves with mortification and have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb."

But why the red sash around the waist asked Don Bosco once more, to which they replied:

"They are those who have preserved their purity and they follow the Divine Lamb wherever he goes."

Don Bosco went on:

"I understood the red band, the colour of blood. It was the symbol of great sacrifices made, strenuous efforts almost to the point of martyrdom to preserve

*the virtue of purity and to keep themselves chaste for the Lord. It was also a symbol of penance undertaken to purify their souls of sin."* (from the Life of Dominic Savio written by Don Bosco).

We are moved by the thought of Dominic Savio's struggle and before him so many young saints among whom was St. Aloysius Gonzaga, a real model of innocence, whom Don Bosco proposed as a model for his boys.

Our boys and teenagers today are also called to live the life of true martyrs. They should vehemently commit themselves to fight against pornography on television, to overcome the temptation to surf their computers for some obscene content.

They should reach that stage where they can turn down the invitations of their friends and peers to participate in some ambiguous entertainment laced with loud music, alcohol or other stimulants that could deprive them of their innate modesty and self-composure.

Don Bosco will have more suggestions for us in the forthcoming issues. □



## NEWSBITS

### SENDHWA – INDIA

Solar power, thanks to a Catholic nun's farsightedness, has become a blessing for leprosy patients in central India.

"Now, there is light in our homes and our lives," says Supal Apsingh, a long-time resident of Harsh Nagar (city of joy), a community of leprosy patients, in Sendhwa village in Khandwa diocese, Madhya Pradesh.

Some 92 of 95 houses in the enclave now use solar power because of the efforts of Sister Julia Thundathil, an Augustinian nun, the 50-year-old Hindu reported.

"We are happy because we can sit together and share stories and ideas for longer periods at night, which was not possible before," Apsingh added.

Another resident, Jagdish Lodhia thanked the Church for helping them experience "the luxury of electricity in our huts". He also said he was touched by Church people's concern for those rejected by others in society.

The Augustinian nuns have looked after these residents since 1985. However, the community

came into existence some 40 years ago when some leprosy patients began living together and sharing their earning from begging.

Some Christian lay people helped develop the community before the nuns came, Apsingh said. "Without the Sisters' help, I would not be alive," he said, adding that his wife and four children had chased him away after he contracted the dreaded disease.

Rona Baba, 75, the newest resident, said his seven children threatened to kill him if he didn't leave the house. "I feel comfortable here," he said, as he was being treated by some nuns.

Sister Thundathil said several generous people and a nearby company helped raise funds for the solar energy project. She said she is looking for similar help to light up other houses.

She said she opted for solar power because of frequent power cuts in the state. She also said she was shocked when a woman died after her hut caught fire from a kerosene lamp in a nearby village.

Sister Thundathil says she plans to introduce solar power to other villages to encourage people to use self-reliant techniques for energy instead of 'cursing' the state electricity board.

### HUE - VIETNAM

Poor workers from Hue archdiocese in central Vietnam say they need more material and spiritual support from the local Church. Thirty years ago, Joseph Nguyen Van Hoai was given 30 dong (0.2 cents) by his parish priest to buy a bicycle to make a living.



*Sr. Julia treats one of her patients*

Ten years later, he bought a motorbike and works as a motorbike taxi driver for a living.

"I am grateful to the local Church for giving me an opportunity to support my family during that turbulent time" following the fall of Saigon in 1975 to communist forces, Mr. Hoai told UCA News. However, that help was not enough. "I have to work very hard and still can only afford to live in a dilapidated house," he said. His children are studying and his wife suffers from tuberculosis, he added. The 55-year-old father of four said 100 local poor people received money from his parish and that some have repaid the loan so that others may be helped.

But many still live in poverty and the parish never asks those who have done better in life to return the money, he added. Mr. Hoai suggested that the local Church set up vocational centres for children from poor families who cannot afford to pay school fees, to help them escape poverty in the future, he said.

Agnes Nguyen Thi Van, a 50-year-old farmer, said it is difficult for many farmers from her parish to attend liturgical services at their church since they have to harvest crops and cultivate the land.

"Priests from rural parishes should adjust service timings during harvest time so that we can actively attend church activities," Ms. Van said. Mr. Hoai and Ms. Van were among 150 bricklayers, carpenters, dressmakers, farmers and motorbike taxi drivers who attended a gathering of manual workers, held recently at Hue archdiocese's Pastoral Centre and attended by Archbishop Etienne Nguyen Nhu The of Hue and his

Auxiliary Bishop Francis Xavier Le Van Hong and nine priests. *UCAN*

### **TANGERANG - INDONESIA**

"Laypeople in the Jakarta archdiocese increasingly need to assist priests in their pastoral work as fewer clergy minister to more and more faithful," says an Indonesian priest-lecturer.

Father Martinus Harun, a lecturer at the Jesuit-run Driyarkaya School of Philosophy in Jakarta and a Franciscan who served the Jakarta archdiocese from 1971, told about 400 laypeople who attended a seminar on May 2nd on the role of priests that the imbalance in the number of priests and laypeople was growing.

"When I first served in Jakarta, there were only 25 parishes with 70,000 Catholics," he said. Now there are 60 parishes with about 400,000 Catholics served by 250 priests. This means there is just one priest for every 1,600 Catholics in Jakarta archdiocese.

"Some parishes have a disproportionate number of priests and laypeople. "This can lead to exhaustion in priests," he said.

Besides celebrating Mass, priests also serve the sick, help those in need and lead funeral services, which can be done by laypeople, he pointed out.

Father Antonius Benny Susetyo, executive secretary of the Indonesian bishops' Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs listed reasons priests leaving the priesthood due to dissatisfaction, immature vocations, conflict with superiors and interest in women.

The most important thing, he said, was that laypeople and priests should work together and trust each other. *UCAN* □



## REFLECTIONS ON THE "HAIL MARY"

(exegetical & inspirational) Part I

by Fr. R. Loehrlein, SM

*Chaire! Kecharitomene, ho Kyrios meta sou.* "Hail, full of grace, The Lord is with you."

If you read the Bible in Greek and you come to Luke 1:28, you can read the words of Love from the Holy Spirit to the virgin of Nazareth, spoken by the angel and recorded for us by St. Luke. Luke recorded for us in Greek these words of the angel, "*Chaire! Kecharitomene, ho Kyrios meta sou.*" From those words we have our prayer to Mary as we say, "Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you." What are we to make of this? What did Luke intend to say when he wrote this greeting of the angel Gabriel? What does "Hail, Mary, full of grace" mean? Do you know what you are saying to her?

First, Luke tells us that the angel was sent to a virgin of Nazareth, named Mary. That in Hebrew is a name of love, *Myriam*. The first woman in the Bible with that name was born in Egypt with her brothers Aaron, and Moses. And just as their names are Egyptian in origin, we can suppose her name, *Myriam*, also originated in Egypt. In Egyptian the name *Myr* means "Beloved." And

the suffix, *ia*, would refer to Yahweh. This much we know about the virgin of Nazareth now betrothed to Joseph. Her name, *Myriam*, means she is "The Beloved of Yahweh."

What then is this message from the Holy Spirit to His Beloved? "*Chaire! Kecharitomene, ho Kyrios meta sou.*" *Chaire!* is a beautiful greeting that the Greeks used. "Rejoice!" they said to one another, just as we say, "Hi, how are you?" Now they weren't necessarily telling someone to rejoice, even though that is the literal translation of the word. The question "How are you?" usually doesn't imply to most of us that you should tell them exactly how you are. Sometimes though, "Good Morning!" will be a wish of well being from the heart, like "Merry Christmas!" So, what did the angel say to Mary in that greeting? It wasn't written down in the original language. In the language of Mary, the usual greeting would have been *Shalom!* which is translated as "Peace!" But Luke doesn't give us, *Eirene!*, the Greek word for "peace". He wrote

"*Chaire*," which means "Rejoice!" So, the question among scripture scholars is this: What was the angel trying to say to Mary, to greet her or to give her a message, to say "Hello!" or to say "Rejoice!"?

When St. Jerome translated Luke's Gospel from the Greek to Latin, he understood that the angel was saying, "Hello!" and he translated *Chaire!* with the greeting that Romans gave to each other, Ave! He didn't write Gaude! which means "Rejoice!" because he didn't think the angel was telling Mary to rejoice. He believed the angel was just politely greeting her. And when the Bible was translated from Latin to English, the translators used, "Hail!" not "Rejoice!" But today there is a discussion among scholars about the intention of the Holy Spirit, a discussion begun by some French Catholic Bible scholars. They believed that the angel was to tell Mary to rejoice.

The Hebrew people have a beautiful word for greeting someone, *Shalom!* And it was a proper way for the angel to greet Mary, for *Shalom* carries the meaning of great blessings from God. The gospels tell us that Jesus frequently greeted his people with this blessing of *Shalom!* And the translations give us the word "Peace!" For example, John's Gospel (20:19) tells us that when the risen Jesus greeted his disciples, he repeated his greeting, "Peace be with you," Jesus is the one who brings God's peace, and here he breathes his Holy Spirit of peace upon them. However, at other times the greeting *Shalom!* Is translated as a simple greeting, "Hail", as when Judas greets Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:49). When Mary's child was born the angels praised God in front of the shepherds of Bethlehem, saying, "Glory to God in high heaven, peace

on earth to those on whom his favour rests." And Mary is certainly one of those on whom the favour of God rested. In the phrase *Kecharitomene* we are going to see that the angel addressed Mary as a "highly favoured daughter." So, *Shalom* would be a proper greeting of the angel to Mary. Therefore, we could rightly greet Mary with *Shalom* when we pray, "Peace, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you." However, which is it? Is *Chaire* a translation of the greeting *Shalom*, or is it a message for Mary to rejoice?

When St. Paul wanted to summarize the works of the Holy Spirit within us, he wrote, "The Kingdom of God is ...a matter... of justice, peace, and that joy that is given by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). In Luke's Gospel, when the angel appeared to Zachary in the temple and gave him the message concerning the son his wife would bear for him, the angel promised, "Joy and gladness will be yours, and many will rejoice at his birth" ... "and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb" (Lk 1:14, 16). The evidence is that the Holy Spirit brings joy into the hearts of people. Finally, Mary herself, once she was pregnant, professed to Elizabeth, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk 1:46f). Whether or not the angel was to tell Mary to rejoice, this girl did rejoice with her whole being.

But as I said, when Jerome translated *Chaire*, he wrote *Ave*, because he believed that the angel was politely greeting Mary. And in English we have "Hail!" *Ave* is also a good greeting. What does it

mean, and where did it originate? Ave is a greeting that came into the Latin language through the Roman soldiers who picked up the word in common parlance as a way of greeting one another. It originated in a Semitic language from the land of Palestine, the homeland of Mary! And it meant, "Health!-May you be in good health!" And that was translated into English as "Hail!" You may be surprised to learn that "Hail" means the same as Ave, "Health!" Our present English word comes from a Middle English word, Heil, which came from an Old Nordic word, "Heill," which was an adjective and it meant "healthy, unhurt, entire, well, whole." (Go look in your dictionary.) It was used as an acclamation for some great person, like a king, as in the Bible, "Hail, King of the Jews!" though, there, it is used in scorn. There the soldiers did not mean that they wanted Jesus to have health. They were mocking him. So, instead of "Hail Mary," you could pray to Mary, "Health! Mary." That is a good message for Mary who will bear Jesus. When you think about it, you might find yourself smiling. That's good. She brings joy into our lives. You might just hear her say to you one day with a big smile, "Hail!- To your health!"

So, from three different languages we have three different words that express the angel's greeting: Peace! Rejoice! and Health! Each carries its own message. They are all good. What did the angel mean to say when he greeted this young woman? What do you want to say to her when you greet her? The occasion of the visit was a great moment in history, because God became man. Therefore this is no ordinary meeting, it was no ordinary greeting.

Whatever the intent of the Holy Spirit in the first word of the greeting, the second word has an even greater intent: *Kecharitomene*. St. Jerome translated it into Latin as, *Gratia plena*, and we have it in English as, "Full of Grace." But what does the Greek mean? How should we understand it? Do you see the word "charism" buried in the Greek? "Charism" is the Greek word for gift or favour.

A literal translation of *Kecharitomene* is hard to make in English, but it would be something like, "O woman so completely transformed by God's Grace!" or "O highly gifted daughter!" This verb is so rare in Greek that it is used only two times in the New Testament. This verb ends with "óò," and it is a causative verb. First, *Kecharitomene* means that it is being said to a woman or girl. Second, this type of verb is said to be causative, that is, "it indicates an action which effects something in the object" (Ignace de la Potterie, SJ, translated by Bertrand Buby, SM, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, (Alba House, NY, 1992) p. 17). The favours of God were not just given to her; they caused her to be whom she was. It means that she was a highly gifted individual. The favors bestowed upon her by God and their effects in her caused admiration in the angel. She was indeed Full of Grace.

The early Church Fathers and later on the Church's theologians began to see in the Greek phrase and in its Latin translation, *gratia plena*, a reference to sanctifying grace. She had the fullness of Grace. But what did Luke understand? Moved by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke coined a word

that has come down to us and can be applied to no other person than the Virgin Mary. While this verb is used twice in the New Testament, this particular form of the verb is said only about Mary. Mary is the *Kecharitomene*, the "young woman so highly gifted." Fr. Raymond Halter, SM, wrote, "This is her new name in the Kingdom of Heaven. This name came to her from God and from no one else and is strictly reserved to her." The angel says this not because she will bear the Son of God as her child if she accepts, but the angel says it because she was already seen to have the grace of God in an abundant way. This led the early Church Fathers to consider Mary to be the all-holy one, not because of her maternity, not because of her virginity, but as a virgin before motherhood she was seen to have become by the Grace of God all that she could be. She was a totally transformed human. There was in Mary the virgin a fullness of God, even before she conceived the Son of God. She was one with her Divine Spouse, even before she was espoused. She was totally prepared for what she was now called to do. From this Greek word, *Kecharitomene*, therefore, we can understand how the Church has come to proclaim that Mary was conceived immaculately. And we can understand why Mary would tell St. Bernadette at Lourdes that, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Why was Mary so troubled? The Scriptures do not say, but is it because God the Holy Spirit had bestowed upon his Beloved a new name: "*Kecharitomene*, *Myriam Kecharitomene*"? Through the angel the Spirit said to Mary, "Rejoice, My Beloved, O Most Gracious woman." This name was Mary's white stone, "upon which is inscribed a new name to be known only by the one who

receives it" (Rev. 2:17). Mary had received this Gift at her conception, but it is now revealed to her at her espousals, shortly before she will conceive her firstborn son. This doesn't sound scary, but the next words conveyed a message which could put fear into her.

*Ho Kyrios meta sou*—"The Lord is with you." "The LORD is with you" was no ordinary greeting. In the Old Testament it was said when a command was given to carry out a difficult, and even impossible task. It was said to Moses who must go back to Egypt and lead God's people to freedom (Ex 2:12), and to Joshua when he was to lead the people to cross the Jordan and conquer Jericho (Jos 1:9), and to Gideon who would drive out the hordes of the Midianites (Jg 6:12). Now Mary was chosen to carry out God's command. Today biblical scholars agree that Mary was maybe 12 or 13, at the beginning of her puberty when she was espoused to Joseph. But she was totally prepared. *Kecharitomene*. She was going to be asked to do something impossible and perhaps even dangerous. The command she was going to hear was awesome! She would bear a child who would be the Messiah. How did she react? She posed a question, "How is this to be done, since I am a virgin?" What did she mean? Caught up in the Mystery of God, her heart was virginal. She had not taken a vow, but in her heart she had entered into the New Covenant with God. And her heart's desire was confirmed by the answer of the angel: she would remain a

*(continued on pg. 32)*

**LOVING CHILDREN TO  
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

My heartfelt thanks to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Loving Mother Mary for the gift of a lovely baby girl to my sister Genevieve and also for protecting my sister from all dangers.

*Eric J. Chelvarayan, London*

I am deeply grateful to the Holy Spirit and Our Blessed Mother. I was diagnosed with ovarian cysts and was very frightened having heard stories of others who had suffered the same problem. I prayed fervently and the following month, the cysts disappeared. I am also grateful my father had a successful brain surgery after having been diagnosed as having a large blood clot in his brain.

*Rubina Gonsalves, Bangalore*

Thank you, Mother Mary for saving my husband and me and two of our neighbours from a terrible accident when the front tyre of our vehicle burst. We have a rosary in our car and I believe Our Lady saved us because of it.

*Mrs. E. D'Souza, Pune*

My heartfelt thanks to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians for the gift of life and all that God has done for me.

*M.W. Dodd, Pune*

I had just got into a rickshaw and as it turned it was hit by a speeding car. I had my Rosary and prayer book in my pocket. All that happened was that I had a fractured collar bone and a bruised arm. What was most important was that I was able to walk out of the rickshaw and make my way to the doctor. Much to my relief I found our milk-boy who rushed to my assistance. Mother Mary was there to protect me and grant me the joy of seeing my grand children who were born on the 20th May this year. I'm most grateful dearest Mother.

*Colleen Traynor, Mumbai*

**REFLECTIONS ON THE 'HAIL MARY' PART 1** (from pg. 31)

virgin and by the power of God - she would become the mother of the Son of God. She was a virgin but espoused to Joseph. Mary knew the danger of accepting God's plan. She would have to trust God completely, because she needed the prudence of Esther when explaining to anyone how she became pregnant. In Nazareth it was forbidden for couples engaged to be married to have a child before marriage. The Law was severe against any girl who was found pregnant before marriage (Deut 22:20-21). Would she have to fear most those whom she loved the most: her parents and her spouse? Being a prudent

girl, Mary confided her Mystery to her parents and to Joseph, her spouse. And the villagers? "The LORD is with you, Kecharitomene." It was the Grace of Kecharitomene that had prepared her heart to be disposed for whatever God wanted. We can see that her heart, full of joy, was caught up into God's designs when she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." With awe of her Elizabeth would later say, "Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled."

*(to be continued in the next issue)*

## 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.*

Our sincere and heartfelt gratitude for the many blessings and favours received through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys. Please continue to intercede for our family.

*Michelle Marie Albert, Malaysia*

Thank you, dear Mother Mary for a peaceful and wonderful wedding.

*Doreen Ivy, Abu Dhabi*

Thank you, Mother Mary for generously blessing me and my family.

*Flynn Pinto, Dubai, UAE*

One day I had gone to collect my son from school. On the way back he wanted to buy some sweets from a nearby shop. I first refused and he wouldn't listen so I agreed and we both got on my bike. I stopped and told my son to cross the main road which was rather busy. I saw that an oncoming bike was about to go into him when I shouted and he looked back at me. Just at that time the bike passed by without even grazing him. I am so grateful to Mother Mary for saving my son. I always make my son wear the scapular. I always pray the "three Hail Marys." *Babuti* Our sincere thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco for blessing us with a beautiful and healthy baby boy, Shaun Jason Dominic through the intercession of the three Hail Marys.

*Shanthy Rajesh, Bangalore*

Our sincere thanks to Infant Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for helping my daughter find a life partner and for the safe delivery of my daughter-in-law of her second baby boy all through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

*Mrs. J. Silveira, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother for blessing me with a normal healthy baby girl and for a safe delivery. Thank you dear Mother all the favours and blessings received.

*Mrs. Rachel Martin, France*

My brother and sister-in-law, Bruce and Amneeta were gifted with a child Natanya after 7 years. Suddenly a month later the child contracted meningitis. Our entire family had recourse to the three Hail Marys and the baby was healed. We are sincerely grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the graces granted to us.

*A Devotee*

Thank you dear Mary Help of Christians for the graces and favours received. (i) My son's success in his MBA and a raise in his salary; (ii) My sister's pension problems solved.

*Celine Rodrigues, Mumbai*

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

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco for all the favours I have received. *Sandra DeSouza, Canada*

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco for the immediate relief to my three and a half year old grand daughter who was unable to swallow due to a severe throat and ear infection. *A. Colaco, Goa*  
My sincere and heartfelt gratitude to Our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary Help of Christians and all the other saints for all the favours I have received. I fell and bruised my knee and it took two months to heal. I am grateful that it has now completely healed.

*Helen B. Nazareth, Mumbai*

Thank you, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for all the favours that I have received.

*C. D'Cruz, Goa*

My sincere gratitude to Our Lord, Our Blessed Mother and all the saints for the many favours I have received. *Mrs. H. Binny, Australia*  
I am grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and all the saints for all the little and not so little favours granted to me.

*Sandra DeSouza, Canada*

Our grateful thanks to the Infant Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for a special favour received.

*Mrs. Ingrid D'Souza, Karwar*

My sincere thanks to the Most Holy Trinity, Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and the other saints for a safe delivery and for blessing my daughter with the gift of a baby boy.

*M. D'Souza, Mumbai*

My sincere gratitude to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and all the Saints through whose intercession I have received many miracles.

*A Devotee, Mumbai*

My grateful thanks to Mother Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for helping my daughter conceive after four years of her marriage and for the gift of a baby boy.

*Matilda Dias, Mumbai*

My heartfelt gratitude to Mother Mary Help of Christians for helping my daughter pass her Std. X board examinations with a first class. Dear Mother Mary be our help now and always.

*Mrs. Flora Mendes, Goa*

I am grateful to Our Lady for helping me secure a good job.

*Christopher, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to our Blessed Mother for all the favours received. Please continue to shower on us your blessings and keep us in your care.

*Rosie Wang, Kolkata*

During my mother's cataract operation it was noticed that she had a retinal detachment. It was operated immediately. Even after the surgery it seemed there was no hope of her regaining her sight. We prayed to Our Lady Help of Christians and today she can see and even read perfectly well with that eye. Thank you Mother Mary for this miracle.

*Mrs Helen Pinto, Nerul, Navi Mumbai*

## THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



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

I am sincerely grateful for the gift of a baby boy and a safe delivery. Thank you, Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio.

*Mrs. Luiza Pinto, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks and gratitude to Our Almighty Father, Jesus Christ, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for helping my son secure a job in the Middle East. May they always guide and protect him. My youngest son too has passed his BA examinations with excellent marks. For all these favours I am most grateful.

*Mrs. Philomena D'Souza, Goa*

It was on 7th September 2009 that I got pregnant. Throughout the pregnancy I wore the scapular of Dominic Savio and on 20th May 2010 I was blessed with twins. We have named them Yohan and Simone. Thank you dearest Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio and do continue to bless our home.

*Elvis and Chhaya Traynor, Mumbai*

Our heartfelt thanks to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for helping me to secure an admission at a good college.

*Pacellia Mendes, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother and St. Dominic Savio for the safe and normal delivery of my daughter-in-law and the gift of a healthy boy.

*Mrs. Elsie D'Souza, Mumbai*

### APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

NOVEMBER 2010

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### **MARY WAS THERE**

One afternoon my daughter and her two girls were sitting and cutting some paper while I was cradling their little baby brother. I had allowed him to kiss the picture of the Sacred Heart and then signed them all with the sign of the cross on their foreheads. A few minutes later my six year old granddaughter in her excitement bent over the bannister and fell from the top floor. All of us rushed downstairs screaming. We found her at the bottom completely unhurt. It was certainly a miracle of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians.

*Mrs. S. P. Selvam, Chennai*

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