

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*May the peace
of that Holy Night
fill your heart
and your home
with His Holy Presence.
A Happy Christmas
to you and yours
from the Editor
and the staff
of the Shrine Office*

Cover: "**Christmas at the Shrine of Don Bosco's Madonna, Mumbai**



From The Editor's Desk

Making a difference this Christmas

It is no secret that Christmas is one of the 'loveliest times of the year.' That used to be the case when families gathered together and celebrated the warmth and the love that this season brings. Of recent times, the season has taken on a very different hue. Of course, it is the loveliest time of the year but for very different reasons, sadly for very secular reasons and sadly the baby is thrown out with the bath water...or you might say the baby with the hay and the crib as well!

Christmas should afford us a wonderful opportunity to bring us together so that we can look into the faces of those we love and bid them a 'Happy Christmas!' Especially in our cities, this time of the year has increasingly become an occasion for rampant materialism and me-centredness. In the light of this unfortunate reality, what better occasion than Christmas to pare down your own family's wish lists in the interest of turning our thoughts and our concerns for those more needy than ourselves or taking time off to visit a hospital or a hospice around our city... to bring the Christmas spirit to those corridors of pain and loneliness? Whatever you give will help bring a smile to someone's face and certainly "warm the cockles of the heart" of someone who needs to know that Emmanuel has come – God is with us!

But Christmas should also be an occasion during which we exercise proper use of our time too. For far too many people, the Christmas holidays become such a whirlwind of shopping, office parties, church programmes and other events that by the time Christmas morning finally arrives, many of us are too dazed and exhausted to appreciate it. None of the aforementioned activities is inherently bad, of course, but we aren't doing ourselves any favours if we become so immersed in the hustle and bustle of the season that we neglect to focus our attention on the Child in the manger.

I hope you'll consider putting Christ back into the Christmas that is celebrated in your own home this year. Invest some of that Christmas cash to support an individual, family or organization that could really use it. And invest more of your time in the lives of those who matter most. Instead of making that final trip to the shopping mall for last-minute gifts, perhaps you'll consider staying at home, turning off the TV and phone, and savouring a few hours' worth of Christmas peace and quiet with those you love. *Fr. Ian Douulton sdb*

12. MYSELF: BROKEN AND GIVEN FOR YOU!

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss

Many a time a person may be ready to help generously even perhaps recklessly - but there seems to always be an invisible line, a Laxmi-rekha, which we are generally loathe to cross! No wonder Jesus reminds us, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). However, the Lord does provide us with outstanding examples to keep us sufficiently inspired to accept even this challenge should it come our way. The following true story would inspire most of us.

"I was in church one Sunday when my husband's ex-wife requested the pastor and the assembly to pray for her. She confessed she was a drug addict and pleaded that she wanted to kick the habit. She was crying desperately and claimed she needed God's help because she knew that she couldn't do all this alone. After the service I went to her and introduced myself. She said that she had heard about my marriage to her ex-husband. As we talked she tentatively began to open up about how bad things really were in her life. Both she and her husband were heavy drug users. He was shot and killed in a bad drug deal and she lost everything. Eventually she was on the street and had to sell her body for food and a place to stay with her four children.

Realizing that currently she had

no place to stay I told her that she could come to my place. She was obviously concerned about my husband and his reactions. But after I assured her that I would handle that side of the story, she agreed. While she was getting settled with the children I explained to my husband what happened. He was furious of course, and refused to let her stay with us. Eventually he saw that I was serious about helping this woman and her children and grudgingly agreed that they could stay.

Painful Journey Back

She stayed with us for two weeks during which time I prayed that she would find a job and land on her feet and God was merciful because I was able to get her a job at the company I worked for. She next told me that she had to apply for her deceased husband's social security but had lost the copy of her marriage license after his death. We worked at that too and in less than a month she received retroactive back social security payments - a check for several thousand dollars. With this she found a nice place for her and the children to live. She paid the rent one year in advance, purchased some furniture for the house and also a tidy mini-van.

She continued to work with me on the job for the next seven years. Gradually she settled down to a

respectable life. She remarried and we stayed in touch until I was offered a better job opportunity and had to move away from town. The one thing that seemed to touch her and make a huge difference in her life was that I somehow believed in her innate goodness and that was what helped her get back on her feet."

Flashback of Redemption?

The story told in its bare outline reminds us inevitably of the process Jesus followed in seeking to win us back to the Father. St. John reminds us that it is the Father's love that initiated the entire process. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Jesus too shared in this marvelous love of the Father for every sinner and believing in our innate goodness he accepted the mission the Father entrusted to him. Moved with love, he became like us in all things except the rebellion and ingratitude of sin. He shared our pains and sorrows, and the shame of our backslidings and repeated falls into the same old sins. He accompanied us when like the prodigal son we took on the work of feeding pigs, and shared with us our hunger, even the desire of eating the pods that the pigs ate!

Yet, what kept him going was his undying faith in our inner goodness. Would he not eventually pray on the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do!" How correct he was! He believed that if he could only touch our hearts and make us realize the Father's



delicate love for us that would be sufficient to enable us to return. He welcomed us back into the Father's home and gave us himself as food and drink, so that nourished on his strong convictions about doing the Father's will always, we would find our place back in his Father's embrace. What is more he gave us his own Spirit to be our advocate and to guide us as we retraced our faltering steps towards sanity and human dignity. The greatest miracle he achieved, however, is that he enabled us to believe in ourselves and in our inner capacity to take one steady step after another; and with each growing step to feel the strength of his love coursing through our veins.

In this he was true to his own promise given us through the prophet Joel, "I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you" (2:25). And in the story above, we see how he literally did just that - restored all the lost years, in fact even made them doubly productive! Further, as happened

so beautifully in the story, he eventually lets us go on our own, knowing that now we will never wander far away from him!

Ultimate Goal: Mission

Although this part is not mentioned in the story above, we can be sure that the lady rescued from the snare of drugs would eventually express her gratitude by reaching out to others, bring them back to a saner, more purposeful life. That is how the early Christian community responded to the blessings Jesus brought them. Mark recounts this incident: "As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them" (Mk 1:29-31). Peter's mother-in-law shows her gratitude to Jesus and to the community by serving them, waiting on them as they celebrated the Eucharist in the context of a fellowship meal.

It is helpful to reiterate that Jesus did not (and does not today) call disciples only in order that they may secure their own eternal salvation. Touched and transformed by God's saving grace, they immediately set out as witnesses and missionaries, transmitting the same grace and blessing to many others, in fact, whomever the Lord sent into their lives. Somewhere down the centuries, this whole approach was lost and Christianity was dynamism left, except perhaps in a few enterprising individuals.

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Of course, all this stems from a faulty understanding of the Sacrament of Baptism and the Lord's purpose in calling disciples. And yet, it is so clear in almost all the Call Narratives. Mark expresses it like this: "And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to *be with* him, and to *be sent out* to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mk 3:14-15). The initial 'being with' is only for them to learn what their mission is and how they are to accomplish it successfully. In Luke it is only the missionary dimension that is stressed: "Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people'" (Lk 5:10). They have been called in order to go out and get more recruits. After all, God's one and only desire is that his blessings be available to all his children - or at least that no one

misses out because s/he hasn't heard the invitation. If s/he chooses not to respond that is another question, but the invitation must be given and heard by all!

Very Poor Showing

Given this initial missionary thrust, one would expect that the spread of Christianity should have been far more than what it is at present. And that is as far as numbers go - Christians are not even one fourth of the total world population, and the count in India is a meager 1.3% after two thousand years! Now the point is not that God's loving invitation cannot reach people through means other than the Christian proclamation. Nevertheless if God sends us his own Son with a very special message, one would expect that he wants us to pay more attention to Jesus. Yet, when we shift from 'quantity' to 'quality' we seem to be even further from the goal envisaged by God's only Son.

While there was a tremendous amount of personal investment of oneself into the following of Jesus in the early centuries, notably the centuries of persecution, once the Church settled down after the conversion of Constantine, Christianity gradually followed the path of most other religions, with far greater emphasis on creeds and dogmas than on effective Christian living. It followed the example of earthly kingdoms and soon the Vicar of Christ was seen more as another 'earthly emperor' than an authentic embodiment of Christ's own vision of loving service. It is true that from time to time, all down the centuries, the Spirit has

raised up several eminent personages who worked hard to bring the Church back to its initial calling as the servant messenger of the Father's love and forgiveness, yet even today the greater emphasis is on organization, rules and regulations, external pomp and splendour rather than on the witness of sacrificial love.

Our Contribution?

How could we recapture the dynamism of Jesus and his passionate desire to establish the kingdom of love and peace? For one thing, we need not wait for the lead to come from the higher-ups. The Spirit of God offers even ordinary people several challenging opportunities, as the one mentioned in the story, to launch out on their own. Of course, we Christians could be far more effective if we could work in a more organized manner. But the danger always is that the organizational part will eventually stifle the charismatic and love dimension making the Church into yet another great and powerful NGO.

When each Christian, or at least each Christian family begins to realize his/her/its missionary obligations then we will see real powerful examples of the real Christian spirit. The Spirit is willing, but we need more labourers! How about you choosing to volunteer in your own circle of influence, wherever you are or whatever be your profession? The Risen Lord needs to be witnessed to more strongly, if the worship of the Self is to be overthrown, making way for a new heavens and a new earth! □

LOVE BEYOND ALL TELLING

by Brian Grogan, SJ

Christmas is close at hand: its central message is that God is coming into our world because he loves us. The birth of Jesus is a gentle event in one way, but explosive in another: his coming turns everything upside down. Perhaps poets catch the point better than the rest of us: one of them a Latin American, puts it thus: 'I searched for God in the heavens and found him fallen to earth, so now I must search for him among my friends,'

Down to Earth

In the humdrum of everyday hustle and bustle God is speaking to us. He is intervening in our lives. His constant love and concern for us can be seen if we only took the time to cherish his goodness and love in the various events of our own day. After that, we must admit that God is in our material world. God is in everything that is human. God's history and our history merge together through the Incarnation of the Son of God. Our understanding of God, our world and ourselves is transformed no more and no less than an effort to put words on this transformation.

All things New

At Christmas we sense a difference, a newness, an enlightenment regarding the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God and how he is present in the Eucharist. Staying with this awesome thought we will begin to marvel at the manner in which God created the world and how

he reveals himself to our understanding with great spiritual joy and we are blessed with an illumination regarding all that we hold holy and spiritual and we have to admit that everything begins to *seem new to us*. What does it mean to us when everything seems new to us? It's a puzzling question, isn't it?

When Our Lady held her child in her arms, she must have had this sense of 'everything seeming new to her.' God had broken into her life and become its centre. Everything seems new when that happens: a God-event is what brings about the change. The world could seem the same as before, but now that God has entered it, everything is fresh and surprising and has a new meaning.

Everyone is unique

There's nothing boring about any aspect of human life. 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God' (G. M. Hopkins). Humankind is, as it were, 'plugged into God:' the divine current is energizing every detail of human life from conception to death and into the fullness of eternal life. Because of the incarnation, God can be sought and found in all human beings. Ordinary matters matter infinitely!

Can we find the extraordinary hidden behind the ordinary in our own lives? To her neighbours in Nazareth Mary looked like a very ordinary mother, but something extraordinary was going on in her life. The temptation we have is to think that *she* was extraordinarily graced and that the rest of us are

not: the truth is that while Mary has a uniquely intimate relationship with God, God never intended it to create an unbridgeable distance between herself and us. The world is not divided between those who are highly favoured by God and those who are not!

Mary would want to say to any mother, 'Please don't distance me! Indeed, I am unique and have been specially graced, and my Child is the chosen one of God. But you too are unique: you are specially graced, and your child is a chosen one of God also. As I see it, each one of us in the world is singled out for special attention by God and given - if they can receive it - everything they need to play a special role which no one else can play. Let me walk side-by-side with you and let me support you as you journey along the path of your own uniqueness.'

What me? Special?

This Christmas everything should seem new to us. But the primary thing that should be new should be an appreciation of ourselves. We may seem worldly and materialistic, caught up in our own ambitions and our desires for personal honour and glory, this Christmas we should resolve to think differently. When we do this we will begin to realize, in some small way, how close God really is to us, how deeply God loves us, wants us and blesses us.

It's as if we will experience some breathtaking glimpse of the mystery of divinity within ourselves and then in all things human and in the material world too. But this is the mystery of Christmas! The gift is being

offered to us this Christmas as he does each time Christmas day comes around. God isn't hiding it from us. He's waiting to be discovered. Frail and limited and sinful though we may be, all of us are in the process of becoming and being revealed as the daughters and sons of God and everything good in the world is provided for us, while everything that is not good is being worked on by God and turned towards our ultimate good. I'm totally loved by God and God is looking after me in every possible way, and so I can rightly spend my life in seeking and finding God in everything.

Transformations

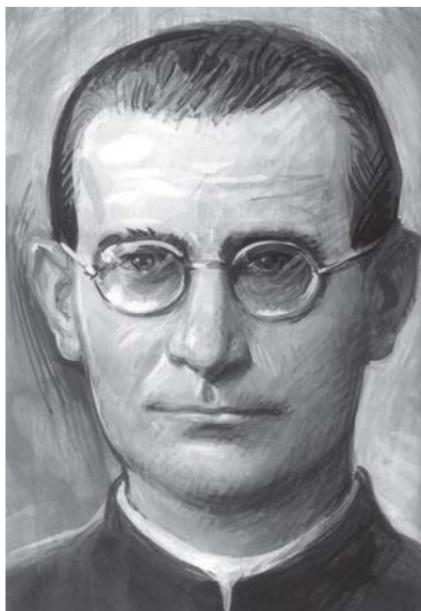
One could go on and on highlighting the many changes that we can make in perspective as we make our inner pilgrimage from our own self-centered little worlds to the limitless world whose centre is God. But the real point is for us to allow God to lead us, with whatever help we can find along the way through our fellow travelers along the same pilgrimage and to the same destination, so that we come to see everything in a new way. Our tiny planet, wending its way among the stars, needs people who love it and its precious inhabitants 'in a different way' which is the way of God.

Christmas encapsulates all that God has in store for us - a human being is divine: God is fully present in a human being and desires to be fully present in each one of us. May you, dear reader, experience in this holy season, *'the love that is beyond all telling'* and may that gift blossom in responding love. □

RUDOLPH KOMOREK 1890 - 1949

Komorek Rudolph was born on August 11, 1890 in Bielsko in Polish Silesia, then Austria. He was the third of seven children of John and Agnes Goch, two deeply Christian parents. At 19 he entered the seminary, where he was compared to St. Aloysius. At age 24 he was ordained priest in the diocese of Breslau. During the First World War was a military chaplain in the hospital and, in his request he was sent to the front. For three years he was pastor at Frystak, where witnessed immense poverty, prayer and apostolic zeal. His confessional was always crowded. At the age of 32 he asked to enter the Salesian Congregation, and in 1922 began his novitiate. He wanted to be a missionary and so, in October 1924 he was sent to San Feliciano in Brazil to care for the Polish migrants who were deprived of any religious instruction. He distinguished himself as an evangelist and an extraordinary confessor. They called him "the Priest-Saint." Like Don Bosco he was exemplary in the way he lived his vow of poverty. It was said of him: "They never saw a man pray so much. His genuflection was worth a sermon and his composure while he was on his knees convinced those who saw him of his extraordinary spirit of piety and mortification."

As a confessor at the Salesian



house of studies at Lavrinhas he was noted for his sanctity. He took classes for 28 hours a week. The nursing home at San Jose dos Campos was the last leg of his 25-year mission. He was glad that the last eight years of his life were spent gently serving those whose lives were ebbing away due to tuberculosis. As a priest he made it his duty to look after all the other patients too. At night he slept on three wooden tables put together. He spent his last days in continuous prayer. He wanted his medication, now useless to be given to the poor who could not procure them. He would not accept either oxygen or water. He died at the age of 59 on 11 December 1949. He is buried in San Jose dos Campos, where his deep piety - his love for the Eucharist and his untiring service of his neighbour - his spirit of penance have been and continues to be an inspiration to generations of the faithful. □



I WENT FOR A PAIR OF TRAINERS AND ENDED UP WITH A VOCATION

Fr. Pascual Chavez, the ninth successor of Don Bosco

Let me tell you the story of my own vocation. I come from a rather large family. I've five brothers and six sisters. Although practicing Catholics, nobody in my family became a priest or a Sister. As a child it had never crossed my mind that I might be a priest. So, what happened that made me change my mind?

I was eleven years old, a pupil in the Salesian school at Saltillo, in Northern Mexico. Quite suddenly my mother became ill, and two weeks later she died. Three days before she died, I sat by her bedside talking to her. Unaware of how ill she was, I was more concerned about persuading her to buy me a pair of trainers (sports shoes). I was really keen on playing basketball at school, and desperately needed a new pair of trainers. I was hoping she would give me the money for them. Her mind was elsewhere, "I've always prayed that one of my sons would be a priest, I have six sons, and so far not one has entered the seminary." I spotted my opportunity, eager to get my pair of trainers, I said to her, "I'm the one you've been praying for." She smiled in contentment and gave me the money for my trainers. She died three days later. What is fascinating is that I went for a pair of trainers and I ended up with a vocation.

A few days later I went to my teacher, and simply told him that I wanted to become a Salesian priest. Of course, I didn't mention my mother's prayers. I never referred



to the incident until fourteen years later, on the day of my ordination, when I said to my father and my brothers and sisters, "Perhaps you would like to know why I became a priest." And I told them about the trainers.

To have a vocation means to discover that life has a meaning. A vocation gives life a direction, a powerful energy to reach out to new horizons. I believe that the most common crisis among young people today is not their addiction to drugs or to alcohol, or their confusion in the area of sexuality, but rather, the lack of meaning, direction, and motivation in their lives. They feel tempted to enjoy to the full only the present moment, to experience moments of strong emotions, or to give in to a life of indifference. □

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

Witnesses in & for Our Times



LOVE EVEN IF IT'S DARK ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS (1542-1591) (DECEMBER 14)

by Mario Scudu (TA/ID)

The cumulative greatness of a man is really measured by the way he faced his supreme hour: his transit from this mortal life to "the other shore" to God. The moment of death: that moment of the final choice, of the end of the "crisis" that scares us all. On his deathbed John of the Cross asked for something more "cheerful" to be read in place of the prayers for the dying. He specifically asked for a few verses from the Song of Songs, that beautiful and overwhelming poem from the Old Testament (which he knew so well). Wasn't he perhaps going to meet Love itself? After the reading John's earthly journey came to an end as he whispered the words: "into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit." That meant he commended himself to the God who is Love Himself. Some years earlier he had written the poem "**Tear down that canvas for a sweet encounter.**" That was what death meant for him: a "sweet encounter" with God's Love. He had spent all his 49 years for God.

Together with St. Teresa of Avila he founded the Discalced



Carmelites. He was born at Hontoveros, Old Castile, 24 June, 1542. He died Ubeda, Andalusia, 14 Dec., 1591. John de Yepes, youngest child of Gonzalo de Yepes and Catherine Alvarez, poor silk weavers of Toledo, knew from his earliest years the hardships of life.

The father, originally of a good family but disinherited on account of his marriage below his rank, died in the prime of his youth; the widow, assisted by her eldest son, was scarcely able to provide the bare necessities. John was sent to the poor school at Medina del Campo, where the family had gone to live. There he proved to be an attentive and diligent pupil; but when apprenticed to an artisan, he seemed incapable of learning anything. Thereupon the governor of the hospital of Medina took him into his service, and for seven years John divided his time between waiting on the poorest of the poor, and frequenting a school established by the Jesuits. Already at that early age he treated his body with the utmost rigour; twice he was saved from certain death by the intervention of the Blessed Virgin. Anxious about his future life, he was told in prayer that he was to serve God in an order the ancient perfection of which he was to help bring back again. The Carmelites had founded a house at Medina. There he received the habit on 24 February, 1563, and took the name of John of St. Matthias. After profession he obtained leave from his superiors to follow to the letter the original Carmelite rule without the mitigations granted by various popes. He was sent to Salamanca for higher studies, and was ordained priest in 1567; at his first Mass he received the assurance that he should preserve his baptismal innocence. But, shrinking from the responsibilities of the priesthood, he determined to join the Carthusians.

However, before taking any further step he made the acquaintance of St. Teresa of Avila who had come to Medina to found

a convent of nuns, and who persuaded him to remain in the Carmelite Order and to assist her in the establishment of a monastery of friars carrying out the primitive rule. He accompanied her to Valladolid in order to gain practical experience of the manner of life led by the reformed nuns. John was offered a small house and there he resolved to try at once the new form of life, although St. Teresa did not think anyone, however great his spirituality, could bear the discomforts of that hovel. He was joined by two companions, an exprior and a lay brother, with whom he inaugurated the reform among friars on 28 November 1568. John of the Cross, as he now called himself, became the first master of novices, and laid the foundation of the spiritual edifice which soon was to assume majestic proportions. He filled various posts in different places until Teresa called him to Avila as director and confessor to the convent of the Incarnation, of which she had been appointed prioress. He remained there, with a few interruptions, for over five years. Meanwhile, the reform spread rapidly, and, partly through the confusion caused by contradictory orders issued by the general and the general chapter on one hand, and the Apostolic nuncio on the other and partly through human passion which sometimes ran high, its existence became seriously endangered.

John was ordered by his provincial to return to the house of his profession (Medina), and, on his refusing to do so, owing to the fact that he held his office not from the order but from the Apostolic delegate, he was taken prisoner on the night of 3 December, 1577, and carried off to Toledo, where he

suffered for more than nine months close imprisonment in a narrow, stifling cell, together with such additional punishment as might have been called for in the case of one guilty of the most serious crimes. In the midst of his sufferings he was visited with heavenly consolations, and some of his exquisite poetry dates from that period. He made good his escape in a miraculous manner in August, 1578. During the next years he was chiefly occupied with the foundation and government of monasteries at Baeza, Granada, Cordova, Segovia, and elsewhere, but took no prominent part in the negotiations which led to the establishment of a separate government for the Discalced Carmelites. After the death of St. Teresa (4 October 1582), when the two parties of the Moderates under Jerome Gratian, and the Zelanti under Nicholas Doria struggled for the upper hand, John supported the former and shared his fate. For some time he filled the post of vicar provincial of Andalusia, but when Doria changed the government of the order, concentrating all power in the hands of a permanent committee, John resisted and, supporting the nuns in their endeavour to secure the papal approbation of their constitutions, drew upon himself the displeasure of the superior, who deprived him of his offices and relegated him to one of the poorest monasteries, where he fell seriously ill. One of his opponents went so far as to go from monastery to monastery gathering materials in order to bring grave charges against him, hoping for his expulsion from the order which he had helped to found.

As his illness increased he was removed to the monastery of Ubeda,

where he at first was treated very unkindly, his constant prayer, "to suffer and to be despised", being thus literally fulfilled almost to the end of his life. But at last even his adversaries came to acknowledge his sanctity, and his funeral was the occasion of a great outburst of enthusiasm. The body, still incorrupt, as has been ascertained within the last few years, was removed to Segovia, only a small portion remaining at Ubeda; there was some litigation about its possession. A strange phenomenon, for which no satisfactory explanation has been given, has frequently been observed in connection with the relics of St. John of the Cross: Francis de Yepes, the brother of the saint, and after him many other persons have noticed the appearance in his relics of images of Christ on the Cross, the Blessed Virgin, St. Elias, St. Francis Xavier, or other saints, according to the devotion of the beholder. His beatification took place on 25 January 1675, the translation of his body took place on 21 May of the same year, and his canonization on 27 December 1726.

Being everything for God

For him detachment and renunciation was not as important as love – it meant love for Someone. He asks us to leave the little loves behind so that we can possess the greater Love which in fact is the Love of God who is Love in the Trinity. - To a nun who had written to him mentioning the difficulties that she encountered, he replied: "Think of nothing because everything is designed by God and where there is no love put love and receive love," a very good piece of advice even today, for everyone. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Lumberjack

A man comes up to the owner of a lumberjack business and says, "I need a job and I think I'm pretty good."

The owner replied, "Okay, show me what you can do, chop down that redwood over there." The man said okay and left. Five minutes later he came back and was done. The owner was shocked and asked, "How did you chop that tree down so fast?"

The man said, "I got a lot of practice in the Sahara."

The owner replied, "You mean the Sahara desert?"

"Yes" he said, "or at least that's what they call it now."

Wedding Cake Verse

A couple was arranging for their wedding, and asked the bakery to inscribe the wedding cake with "1 John 4:18" which reads "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.*"

The bakery evidently lost, smudged or otherwise misread the noted reference, and beautifully inscribed on the cake "John 4:18" ..."*for you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband.*"

Freezer Order

I have my own system for labeling homemade freezer meals.

Forget calling them "Veal Parmigiana" or "Turkey Loaf" or "Beef Pot Pie."

If you look in my freezer you'll see "Whatever," "Anything," "I Don't Know," and, my favorite, "Food."

That way when I ask my husband what he wants for dinner, I'm certain to have what he wants."

Curve Hand

A guy was on the side of the road hitchhiking on a very dark night and in the middle of a storm. The night was rolling on and no car went by. The storm was so strong he could hardly see a few feet ahead of him.

Suddenly he saw a car coming toward him and stop.

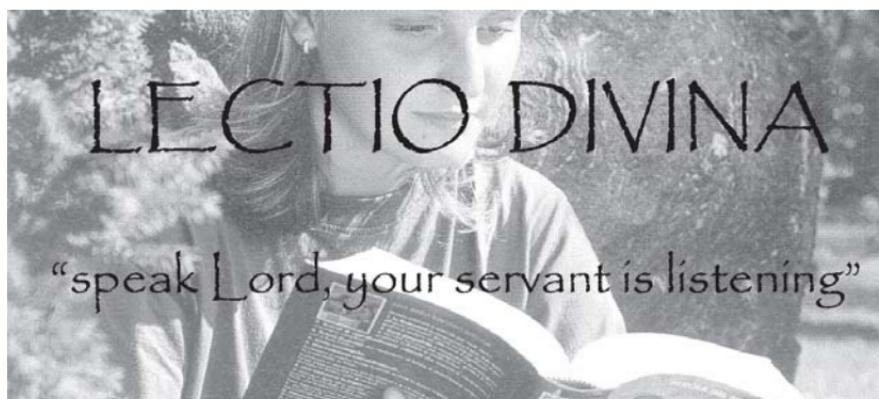
Without thinking about it, the guy got into the back seat, closed the door and then realized there was nobody behind the wheel! The car started slowly; the guy looked at the road and saw a curve coming his way. Scared, he started to pray begging for his life. He hadn't come out of shock, when just before he hit the curve, a hand appeared through the window and moved the wheel. The guy, paralyzed in terror, watched how the hand appeared every time right before a curve.

Gathering his strength, the guy finally jumped out of the car and ran to the nearest town. Wet and in shock, he went to a restaurant and started telling everybody about the horrible experience he went through.

A silence enveloped everybody when they realized the guy was serious.

About half an hour later, two guys walked in the same restaurant. They looked around for a table when one said to the other, "Look John, that's the dummy who got in the car when we were pushing it

About half an hour later, two guys walked in the same restaurant. They looked around for a table when one said to the other, "Look John, that's the dummy who got in the car when we were pushing it." □



THE TAX COLLECTOR'S SHOCK

by Marco Rossetti

Near one of the main roads that link Galilee to Damascus, along the shore line of Lake Tiberias, is Capernaum. It was an important little town with its Greek influence due to its proximity to the Decapolis and the largest settlement between Tiberias and Magdala. It was the residence of the Roman garrison (Mt. 8: 5-13) and a customs outpost.

Jesus chose to go and stay there (Mt 4, 12) after the unfortunate events that took place in Nazareth (Luke 4: 16-30). That was how Capernaum became "his city" (Mt 9, 1). Those who might have visited the archaeological remains there must have been charmed by the white stones of the synagogue, the well-carved structures that are practically preserved intact. They still seem to reecho the words of Jesus and the recall memory of the miracles that he performed there.

The word of pardon

The words and deeds of Matthew the evangelist - whom

Mark and Luke called 'Levi' - form a lengthy section in his own gospel (Mt 4, 23 - 9, 35) because understands, better than most, that Jesus is the Messiah in whom God approaches sinners and forgives them. It was no coincidence that Matthew chose to couch his encounter with the Nazarene between the story of the miracle of the paralytic (to whom Jesus said: *Your sins are forgiven you...get up, take up your bed and go home!* Lk. 9, 2.6) and the banquet at which Jesus scandalously associated with public sinners and boldly proclaimed: *"I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Mt 9, 13)

In short, if the Pharisees had not yet understood well enough who Jesus really was when they witnessed the fact that he had forgiven and healed the paralytic, they should have recognized him when he summoned a sinner and mingled with a group of them addressing them with much compassion while he sat at table with them. From the sequence of the three stories there emerges one strong message: Jesus is the God

who forgives and makes “sick” “healthy” so that they are able to stand up and follow him.

The word of summons

The “good news” that the Pharisees did not pick up was the Good News that Matthew not only heard and wrote about - but what he also experienced. He heard Jesus say: “Follow me” while he sat at the tax counter and he got up and followed him. He even invited Jesus to his own house (Luke 5, 29-32) for a banquet where he wanted to experience a sense of fellowship! Was it not wonderful that Matthew wanted to speak out without hiding the fact that he was a publican and what was more, he was a tax collector, (considered – by definition – a thief who connived with the Romans) who wanted revel in Jesus’ gift of mercy? That was what the Pharisees did not understand. The “follow me” said to Matthew and his prompt response becomes a precious model for those who wish to take the words of Christ seriously.

The word of newness

The “follow me” that Christ said is first of all the nucleus of the call to the Christian life and also the call to every other vocation in the Church. It is Christ, in his great love for us, who takes this initiative. He sees us and he calls us (v. 9a). What should we do? Let us learn from the evangelist himself: “he got up and followed him.” (v. 9b) We should have the same disposition: to accept the Word and respond to it... it means nothing else but to be with Christ!

The Word of Jesus to Matthew reiterates that any call that the Lord makes is an imperative to



abandon our stability and our security and follow him along a path that is ever-new and ever-changing.

The narrative context in which the command is written suggests that it is in our hearts and minds that the biggest changes need to be made. It is not easy to write one’s name on a list of sinners or to write it on a list of the righteous ones! Yet without this sincerity and humility, how can the Lord become our physician to take out of us the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh? This is just what he yearns to do: “I will remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh” says the Lord God of Israel, “that they may walk in my statutes, observe my laws and practice them, and they shall be my people and I will be their God.” (Ez. 11, 19-20).

Without a change in one’s interior disposition, how can one experience the pardon that comes from a true life in Christ and a genuine participation in him? □

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN

What, according to His Holiness

In Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God himself, God from God, became man. To him the Father says: "You are my son". God's everlasting "today" has come down into the fleeting today of the world and lifted our momentary today into God's eternal today."

So began Pope Benedict XVI's Christmas homily on that holy night in 2005. He went on: "God is so great that he can become small. God is so powerful that he can make himself vulnerable and come to us as a defenceless child, so that we can love him. God is so good that he can give up his divine splendour and come down to a stable, so that we might find him, so that his goodness might touch us, give itself to us and continue to work through us. This is Christmas: "You are my son, this day I have begotten you!"

The Holy Father went on: "God has become one of us, so that we can be with him and become like him. As a sign, he chose the Child lying in the manger: this is how God is. This is how we come to know him. And on every child shines something of the splendour of that "today," of that closeness of God which we ought to love and to which we must yield to.

The Pope has described Christmas as a great light, which is perceived only by those who are alert but it remains unknown to those who are distracted. It is the duty of those who are watchful to bring the bright light of Christmas to them.

Christmas, a great light

Benedict XVI recalled the "Book of the Prophet Isaiah: 'Upon the people who walked in darkness a great light has shone.' (Is 9:1) ... The breaking of God's light upon a world full of darkness and unsolved problems." The Pope continued: "Light means knowledge; it means truth, as contrasted with the darkness of falsehood and ignorance. Light gives us life, it shows us the way."

"But light," the Pope went on: "as a source of heat, also means love. Where there is love, light shines forth in the world; where there is hatred, the world remains in darkness. In the stable of Bethlehem there appeared the great light which the world awaits. In that Child lying in the stable, God has shown his glory - the glory of love, which gives itself away, stripping itself of all grandeur in order to guide us along the way of love."

Christmas, the light seen by the watchers

The Pope makes a further clarification: "Only those who are vigilant will be able to see the great light of Christmas and perceive its extraordinary value and treasure it in their lives."

So, how watchful were they? The Pope pointed to the shepherds in the

GOD BECOMES A BABY

ess, *Benedic XVI, is Christmas*



cave in Palestine: "In the world of their time, shepherds were looked down upon; they were considered untrustworthy and not admitted as witnesses in court. But really, who were they? To be sure, they were not great saints, if by that word we mean people of heroic virtue. They were simple souls."

But the Pope added: "They were people who were watchful. This was chiefly true in a superficial way: they kept watch over their flocks by night. But it was also true in a deeper way: they were ready to receive God's Word through the Angel's proclamation. Their life was not closed in on itself; their hearts were open. In some way, deep down, they were waiting for something; they were waiting for God. Their watchfulness was a kind of readiness - a readiness to listen and to set out. They were waiting for a light which would show them the way. That is what is important for God."

The darkness of not listening to God

"God loves everyone," the Holy Father continued: "because everyone is his creature. But some persons have closed their hearts; there is no door by which his love can enter. They think that they do not need God, nor do they want him. Other persons, who, from a moral standpoint, are perhaps no less wretched and sinful, at least experience a certain remorse. They are waiting for God. They realize that they need his goodness, even if they have no clear idea of what this means. Into their expectant hearts God's light can enter, and with it, his peace." Hence this is Christmas wish of the Holy Father to all committed believers: He "gives his peace to us so that we can carry the light of peace within and give it to others."

The Light for others

Benedict XVI reminds us that: "The light of Bethlehem has never been extinguished. In every age it has touched men and women, 'it has shone around them.' Wherever people put their faith in that Child, charity also sprang up - charity towards others, loving concern for the weak and the suffering, the grace of forgiveness. From Bethlehem a stream of light, love and truth spreads through the centuries. If we look to the Saints - from Paul and Augustine to Francis and Dominic, from Francis Xavier and Teresa of Avila to Mother Teresa of Calcutta - we see this flood of goodness, this path of light kindled ever anew by the mystery of Bethlehem, by that God who became a Child. In that Child, God countered the violence of this world with his own goodness. He calls us to follow that Child."

The Holy Father concluded: "God seeks persons who can be vessels and heralds of his peace. Let us pray that he will not find our hearts closed. Let us strive to be active heralds of his peace - in the world of today." □

Short story for the young and the young at heart

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO RUDOLPH

by Fr. Nicholas Knight, SJ

Of course, he did not always have a red nose. He only acquired it shortly before that famous meeting with Santa. Nor was it the worst of his troubles, because the other reindeer did not confine themselves to calling names. In fact, the story of poor Rudolph is a much sadder story than you think. And it is amazing how few people bother to find out what really happened.

Very Peculiar

First of all, his appearance was rather strange. He had the most peculiar eyes and people were always taken aback when they met him. One of his eyes would be looking over their shoulder while the other was looking at their right toe.

But that wasn't all. His ears were enormous that some people thought he was an oversized rabbit who had grown antlers. Those ears were so long they used to get in the way of their antlers, or else the antlers used to get in the way of his ears; he could never decide which. Then there were his big buck teeth which stuck out in all different directions.

Apart from his eyes, his ears and his teeth, which only affected his appearance, he had two further peculiarities. One of them concerned his right fore leg which was shorter than the other three. This meant that he was not able

to walk straight and instead of running he would ho hoppity hop. There was also his asthma which made it difficult for him to pull a sleigh, though he never let that stop him doing his fair share of work.

Mind you, whenever Rudolph was on the sleigh team, things used to move very slowly, but, as one of the wise old reindeer pointed out, it is better to have a slow team than no team at all.

Made Fun of Him

That line of argument made little impression on those reindeer who were the same age as Rudolph. Every chance they got they gave him a very hard time indeed. They used to kick the ankles of his three longer legs and then they would laugh, claiming they were doing him a favour by trying to make all his legs the same length.

They would also pull at his ears. And, as if that wasn't enough, they would tell him that an ordinary nose looked out of place beside those peculiar eyes, ears and teeth. That was when some of them got the cruel idea of fetching a can of bright red paint. Then they held poor Rudolph down and daubed his nose with it.

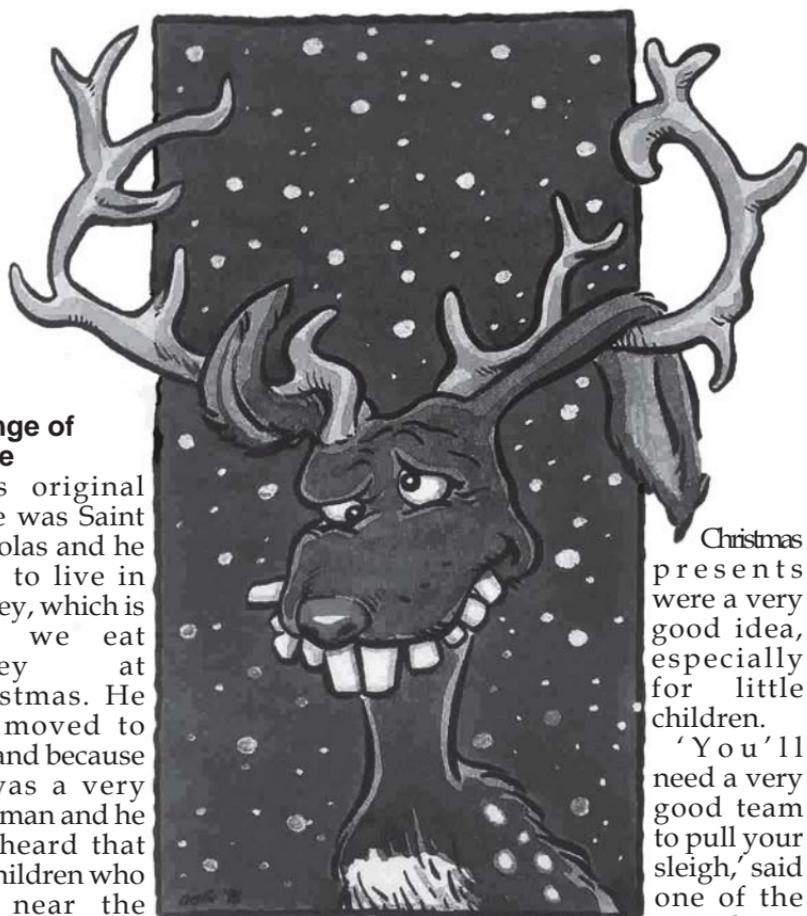
While they were doing this Santa arrived in Lapland, which is the place where all the reindeer live.

Change of Name

His original name was Saint Nicholas and he used to live in Turkey, which is why we eat turkey at Christmas. He had moved to Lapland because he was a very kind man and he had heard that the children who live near the North Pole were

having a very hard time of it. He wanted to cheer them up and to give them Christmas presents.

When the reindeer met Saint Nicholas they thought his name was very odd. They also found it very hard to say, so he suggested that they call him Santa Claus instead. And so it was. Then they all gathered around while he explained his idea of giving Christmas presents to little children. None of the reindeer, of course, had ever heard of Christmas, but they all agreed that



Christmas presents were a very good idea, especially for little children.

'You'll need a very good team to pull your sleigh,' said one of the reindeer,

'because it will be carrying a very heavy load'. He was saying this because he was one of the strongest and fastest reindeer in Lapland and he was confident of being on the team. Then another reindeer remarked: 'I will be able to pull your sleigh all on my own, because I am by far the strongest and the fastest reindeer in Lapland and I have a certificate to prove it.'

Santa Goes Searching

Santa explained that no strength

was needed because presents, especially Christmas presents, weighed nothing at all. He also said that speed would not be necessary, because his sleigh was able to travel through the air in no time at all. What he did need, however, was a reindeer who knew where all the children lived and how to get there. Now reindeer are very well acquainted with children and they always know where to find them, so that was no problem. Any reindeer could do it.

Santa suggested that it might be useful to have a reindeer who could look in two directions at one time, because the sleigh would be moving very quickly indeed. He also suggested that big ears might be helpful for a reindeer to keep his balance in mid air. That is when he caught sight of Rudolph's freshly painted nose. 'And', he said, 'a shiny red nose would be very helpful when it is dark and foggy, as it often is on Christmas Eve'.

They Began to Cry

This was too much for the other reindeer. They all volunteered to have their noses painted and then they pointed out that Rudolph would frighten the children with his buck teeth. Of course, they didn't realize that Santa comes when children are asleep, so there would be no danger of them being frightened, no matter how ugly Rudolph might be. In any case, they had an awful cheek to be saying things like that, because many of them were even uglier

than Rudolph!

It was beginning to look very likely that Rudolph would be asked to pull the sleigh. Naturally, he was very pleased, but all the others were sad and they started to cry. 'It's not fair!' they said, 'Why can't we be like Rudolph?' When Rudolph heard this he started to cry, too, because he was very kind. He said he would never be happy pulling the sleigh while all the other reindeer were unhappy.

Santa's Story

Then Santa told them a story about a little boy who lived in heaven with his Father. His Father made the world and they both loved it very much. It made them sad to see the way people hurt each other so they decided that the Son would be born of a woman. Her name was Mary and she gave birth on Christmas day in a place called Bethlehem, which is not far from Turkey. She called her son Jesus and, as he grew up, he felt particularly close to those, like Rudolph, who suffered at the hands of others.

When they heard this story all the reindeer began to realize that they had been very cruel to Rudolph - very cruel indeed. Then Santa made a suggestion. He said that he would let the reindeer themselves on who should guide his sleigh on Christmas Eve. Without even pausing to think, they made their choice immediately, and that night Rudolph was the happiest reindeer in all of Lapland.

What gift do we bring?

John M. Cunningham OP

At the end of the fourth century, homilies and feasts in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary began to appear more and more. One of those who made an important contribution to this development of devotion to the Mother of God was St. Proclus of Constantinople and he ranks among the best preachers of the Greek Church in the fifth century. In 429 he preached a famous sermon in which he praised the Virgin Mary as Mother of God. Indeed, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (509) teaches 'Mary is truly Mother of God since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself.'



In another of his homilies Proclus

addresses the Mother of God 'O fruitful Virgin, who conceived from heaven! O Mother, who bore the salvation of all mankind! O womb in which the decree of our liberation was composed!' With these words he reminds us that God the Son became man 'for us and for our salvation.'

To understand the words of this great preacher, it is important to remember that it is not birth from the Virgin Mary that makes Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is God the Son from eternity. However, God the Son who existed from all eternity took flesh in time and was born of the Virgin Mary: 'Christ, who before the ages was born God from the Father in a divine manner, is - born of the Virgin by a birth that accords with her. In heaven He came forth from the Father, without being divided from the Father. On earth He comes forth from the stainless Virgin, without her suffering any loss of virginity.'

In a Christmas sermon St. Proclus observed that at the birth of Jesus Christ 'all creation brings gifts to the Child - The earth offers a crib, - the cities offer Bethlehem, - the shepherds offer a hymn of praise, - the East offers a star, - the Magi offer their gifts.' What gift do you bring? □

MARY IN THE CATECHESIS OF DON BOSCO

by Gianni Asti

Everything began with a Hail Mary

The first catechism lesson

Perhaps, the first prayer that we ever learned was the Hail Mary and it was also the first Catechism lesson through which we learned to know and love Jesus.

Did you know that the phrases of the Hail Mary were actually beautiful biblical texts that form the backdrop to the great mystery of the Incarnation; the Angel's announcement to Mary and later her visit to her cousin Elizabeth?

Subsequent expressions have their references to the history of the Church, in particular to the Council of Ephesus where Mary was proclaimed Mother of God.

We may also see a reference to the Communion of Saints and their role as our intercessors, beginning with Mary who is our Mother and who is constantly prays for us now and at the hour of our death.

Perhaps, the one who taught us this first prayer did not realize its theological implications but he or she knew, for sure, devotion to Mary was the sure way of coming to know Jesus.

That was also the influence that Mamma Margaret (Bosco) had on little Johnny who was informed that he was consecrated to Mary from his birth. She taught him to recite the Angelus and to pray the Rosary. She made him recite with his friends thus making them devotees of Mary too.

During his childhood and his



CHARACTERISTICS

DON BOSCO'S

teenage years Johnny Bosco's devotion to Mary consisted of the popular local Marian devotions of Castelnuovo, Chieri and Turin: Our Lady of the Rosary, the Madonna of the Castle, The Virgin of the Scala, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Grace, Our Lady of Consolation (*the Consolata*) and especially the majestic Lady who came to him as his Teacher, the one he saw in his dream when he was 9 years old.

That was how he came to know and love Mary as a child, a teenager and a young adult and that was how Don Bosco approached Marian devotion too. That should be the devotion that sustains every Christian, especially youngsters giving them a sense of commitment and security which they often lack.

When he presented Mary to his boys, especially to those who were poor and needy, he presented her, first of all as a mother. She would be a mother who would love them because they needed the presence

of a mother. Later, during the years of their adolescence, she would be presented as the Immaculate Conception. She would teach them a fascination for the virtue of purity because they were also tormented by their struggles with impurity. Later he presented her as their helper, the one who would assist them to face the difficult moments in their lives.

Everything began with a simple catechism class

He began his ministry as a young priest with the Hail Mary. That was how he began his first official Catechism class for the sixteen-year old Bartholomew Garelli, the orphan apprentice bricklayer from Asti whom he met in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin on December 8, 1841. Don Bosco admitted that it was that simple Catechism class that initiated all his work. *"Blessings from heaven rained down as a result of that Hail Mary that was prayed with fervor and much good will."*

His Marian Catechesis was characterized by Mary's role in the plan of salvation. That devotion became a short cut teaching them about the love of God the Father and a friendship with Jesus.

On the 15th June 1864 he told his boys who were preparing for the feast of Our Lady of Consolation: *"We are making the novena of Our Lady of Consolation. Let us win Her protection by putting ourselves in God's grace. We need God's help if we want health of mind and body and success in our exams. To obtain these favours, let us go to Mary, but let us remember that to deserve Her intercession, we must show that we are Her true sons who hate sin and keep it at a distance! She will generously grant us temporal and spiritual favours; She will be our guide, our teacher, our*



The placard that Dominic saw in Don Bosco's Office

mother. All God's gifts will come to us through Her." (EBM, 7, 406)

The salvation of souls

Even as he zealously sought to catechize his boys there was an anxiety for the salvation of their souls. That was his obsession. When Dominic Savio entered his office for the first time he was struck by the placard with the inscription: *"Da mihi animas coetera tolle"* (Give me souls and take away the rest.) He was in the business of saving souls.

Don Bosco, the youth expert, knew that devotion to Mary would greatly assist youngsters who were innately weak and fickle-minded. She would be close to them in their struggle to abstain from sin just as she would be close to Don Bosco in his apostolate. Mary is that strong woman who helps the youngster to dominate his passions that run riot at this stormy age of his life.

Through his catechesis and his devotion to Mary, Don Bosco urged the youngster to examine his life while he introduced him to the person of Mary, the Immaculate Conception also invoked as the Help of Christians. He was aware of the yearning for purity that the Immaculate inspired in the heart of the youngster which motivated him to make of his life an offering of sacrificial love to her.

Even at that age his better boys understood this concept. One such boy was Michael Magone who

grew in holiness thanks to his devotion to Mary. He became not only a model and ideal student but his affection for Mary led him to avoid grieving his earthly anymore. His spirit of sacrifice grew daily more and more. Dominic Savio strove to make of his life an act of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Even though it was edited by Don Bosco, article 21 of the Sodality of the Immaculate (that he founded) was a courageous and unstinting programme for a Christian:

"To have a sincere, filial and boundless trust in Mary; a particular tenderness towards her; a constant devotion that will help us to overcome any obstacle; to tenaciously keep our resolutions, urge us to love our neighbour and do all our duties to perfection." (Bosco Giovanni, The life of the Youngster Dominic Savio, p. 75 - Italian)

Devotion to Mary Help of Christians

Much later in his ministry Don Bosco presented devotion to Mary help of Christians not only as a help to his boys but also to the Church and of all Christians. This was what he said in a conference that he gave to the Cooperators on eve of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians in 1883 when he returned from a very successful trip to France:

He showed them that Mary loves and cares for youngsters. Mary loves the little ones because she is our mother; mothers love their children and their infants. She loves them because they are not yet adults. She loves them because children are innocent and because they are so easily seduced and therefore so much more worthy of her compassion, support and

protection; because they remind her of the young Jesus as he went through his infancy, youth and adolescence beneath her gaze.

That is why Mary loves and encourages all those who look after the spiritual and material well-being of the young and she intercedes for special graces on their behalf.

"Look at this church," he exclaimed. "Just a few years ago it was a field of corn, beans and potatoes. We needed a church in which to gather the nearby young as well as the many further away. Well then, since the church was meant to benefit the young and teach them the holy fear of God, Mary came to our aid in marvelous fashion and caused it to rise, I might say, through the power of miracles worked in favour of those who personally contributed." (EBM 16, 222)

Miracles continued to take place long after the construction was completed and so he went on: *"Neither did Mary's wonders cease with the completion of the building. Indeed, they keep happening more often than before. They bring tears of tenderness to the eyes. More recently, in France, wherever I went, I was told of unexpected healings, of lawsuits and other discords coming to an end, of longed-for conversions and many other graces granted through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians, to people who made themselves benefactors of poor youth."* (EBM 16, 222)

These are comforting thoughts for those who dedicate their lives to educating young people: parents, catechists and priests who use Marian devotion as one of the privileged means to teach youngsters about God. □



walking with the Church

Collaborative Ministry, the Three Kings

From St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland

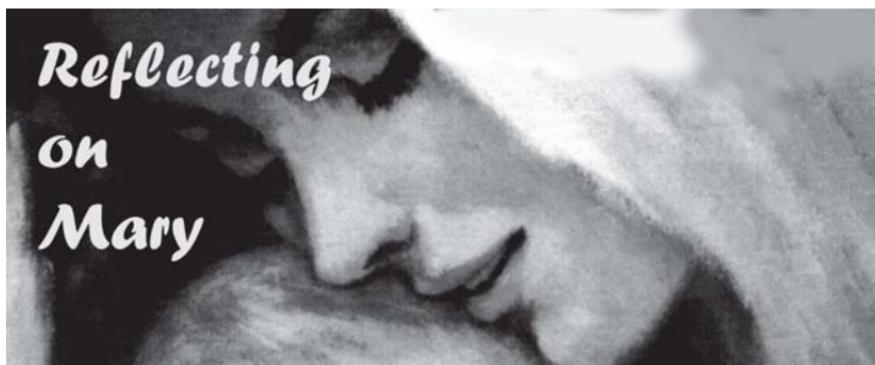
Q. *What is collaborative ministry? I heard a priest mentioning it in a sermon. Could you explain?*

A. Collaborative ministry means simply that everyone has a part to play in building up the Church. Baptised into Christ and members of the Church, of the body of Christ, we have all been called by God to be missionaries – to help in preaching the gospel of Christ. We realize now that we are all responsible for our Church, that we all have our contribution to make, that we should all be concerned about the Church. Everyone should pray for the good of the Church. All are called to give witness to their faith by the way they live their lives. Some because of their talents or their life circumstances are called to further service such as becoming lay Ministers of the Eucharist, Ministers of the Word, catechists, involvement in youth groups or Community centres for the elderly, helping in the administration of the Parish, and so on. Bishops, priests, religious, lay people work together for the good of the whole Church. This is what collaborative ministry is all about.

Q. *Why do you sometimes see the Three Kings or the Three Wise Men of the Epiphany as white, black and yellow? Were they kings or astrologers?*

A. Thank you for your question. Originally they were pictured as astrologers but since the middle ages they have been portrayed as Kings. A Benedictine Priest called the Venerable Bede, a historian and doctor of the Church, who lived in the 8th Century in England, considered the three representatives of the three continents. So, we often see them as white, black and yellow. According to the medieval legend their bones were deposited in the Cathedral of Cologne the 'City of the three kings.' □





JESUS WELCOMES MARY INTO HEAVEN

by Maria Ko Ha Fong, FMA

The dogma of the Assumption seen through the eyes of a Chinese

On November 1, 1950 Pope Pius XII defined the dogma of the Assumption of Mary (*Munificentissimus Deus*) as a dogma of faith. It declared that as a consequence the singular bond that existed between Mary and her Son Jesus, she was assumed into heaven and was welcomed by her risen and glorious Son to that "place" that he had prepared for all his disciples and for those who wished to follow him. Before leaving this world, Jesus explicitly said: "I go to prepare a place for you. When I go and prepare a place for you I shall return to take you with me, because where I am you also shall be" (Jn. 14, 2-3). It is only right that His mother, because of her intimate union with her Son and her intense part in the mystery of Salvation was the first to be taken to be close to Him and be the first to share His glory.

I think that for the culture of East Asia and in particular the Chinese, the declaration of this dogma of faith is very difficult to accept. In traditional Chinese ethics, loyalty

(zhong), filial love (xiao) and benevolence (ren) are the fundamental concepts that harmonize human relationships, in the little circle of the family, in society, in the state and throughout the universe.

Applying these principles determines the proper functioning of the family, society and the political system. In particular, the ideal of filial love is rooted in the hearts and minds of Chinese and Asians. The rite of worship of ancestors, was not immediately understood by the missionaries and unfortunately, that gave rise to a century and a half of conflict (from the beginning of the seventeenth century up to 1742), concerning the deep filial love that the Chinese had for their parents and their ancestors.

Filial love: the root of all virtue

For Confucius, filial love was the starting point of the journey to wholeness and perfection. In fact, the word *xiao* appears more than seventy times in the Sayings of Confucius. The Master believes that anyone who does not

practice *xiao* in the family will be unable to practice *ren* and *zhong* in his relationships outside the family. *Xiao* is not just the fulfillment of duties or formalities or the duties of one's obligations, it must emerge from within one's heart and should be a spontaneous expression of one's love and gratitude.

Among the classics of Chinese literature is the *Book of Filial love (Xiao Jing)*. It was probably composed during the Han Dynasty (II-I century BC.) by an unknown author. The book begins like this: "Filial piety is the root of all virtue."

From his childhood, every Chinese knows the 24 inspiring stories of filial love. It is a collection of 24 historical examples of people who practiced in exemplary manner the *xiao* to his Parents, especially towards his mother. Among these stories, there are some of persons who, having been sustained by a mother's love achieved great success after having endured many hardships and once they reached the pinnacle of their success they exalted their mother attributing to her the highest honour.

In the Chinese catechisms and other popular books of Christian doctrine artistic representations of the Assumption of Our Lady are commonly presented as Mary in the act of an encounter: Mary meeting Jesus. Mary is welcomed into glory by Jesus. It is the Son who welcomes the mother with joy, reverence and affection.

Together In Paradise

Here is a personal experience that I would like to share. I come from a family steeped in the Buddhist tradition. My father, as a young student came to know some Italian Salesian missionaries and was converted to Christianity. My mother came to the faith through her father and was baptized a few days

before her wedding, in fact, to be more precise she received five sacraments in the span of two weeks. I was baptized as a child. When I was six years old, my grandfather died, and died a Buddhist. At that time I had been taught that only those who have been baptized could go to paradise. When mourning for my grandfather I was saddened more than anything else for that fact that he had not been baptized. I asked my father earnestly: "Is it true that in Paradise we shall all be really happy?" To his affirmative reply, my confusion increased even more. "But how can you be really happy in Paradise if Grandpa won't be with you? How can you have perfect happiness if your father isn't with you?" A few years later, my paternal grandmother converted to Christianity. We were the ones who enrolled her in the class for catechumens. Among the reasons we gave her was the most effective one: "We will all be together in Paradise as there is unlikely to be two different Paradises."

Certainly the motherhood of Mary was not the sole basis of her assumption. The relationship between Jesus and Mary was much more than filial piety. However, this strong sense of family bond allows the people of Asia to contemplate Mary in the presence of the glory of Jesus which also includes the glory of his mother. In this sense, the assumption of Mary has a marked Christological perspective and it is beautiful to contemplate on the love between mother and Son which is stronger than death and beyond time and space. □

NEWSBITS

ITALY

"Monasteries are vital; they clean society of inhumane ideas, especially today, when the social climate is polluted by economic interests." From the monastery of Certosa which transmits the spirituality of his fellow countryman, Saint Bruno, to the world, Joseph Ratzinger set out the rules for exiting the current moral crisis. "Our societies' environment" needs to be "cleaned up" because it is "polluted" by an "inhumane mentality" "dominated by economic interests." During his meeting with a number of people outside the Serra San Bruno's Certosa monastery, which has been entrusted to the Cistercians, Benedict XVI explained that monks and monasteries play a crucial role in "cleaning up" society.

"Just as, during medieval times, the monasteries here had been cleaning plants used to clear up marshland, Pope Ratzinger said after greeting the Archbishop of Catanzaro-Squillace, Monsignor Vincenzo Bertolone, and the mayor of Serra San Bruno, Bruno Rosi, today, they clean up the environment in a different way: indeed, sometimes, the air we breathe in our societies is not healthy, it is contaminated by a mentality that is neither Christian nor humane because it is dominated by economic interests, concerned only with worldly things and lacking a spiritual dimension."

In a climate like this, "not only is God marginalised but also our neighbours, and no effort is made towards a common good." Monasteries, however, are "models of a society that puts God and fraternity at the centre of everything and we are very much in need of this in today's world." The Pope's appeal to believers to engage in a new public

effort, has stirred political debate.

CHINA

Vatican Insider has learned that Beijing has drawn up a blacklist of around 20 names, most of them priests, that it considers to be linked to the Holy See in one way or other, and whom it does not want to allow into the country in reprisal for the Holy See's actions.

Since June, it has blocked 9 Catholic priests from entering the mainland, even though they all had valid visas. Four of the priests are Italian, four are of Chinese origin, and one is French. Most are living in Hong Kong.

Seven were blocked at border control points on the mainland, and had their entry visas cancelled without explanation. Two were stopped at Beijing's international airport, had their visas cancelled and were put on the next flight back to where they had come from.

News of these latest retaliations circulated in diplomatic and Church circles over the summer months. Several of the priests have opted for anonymity, or chosen not to speak publicly about their experiences lest they prejudice their future chances of returning to China, or further aggravate the situation. The Holy See too has not commented on this.

The first to break the news was Father Franco Mella, 62, an Italian missionary who resides in Hong Kong and has been a regular visitor to China over the past 20 years. A well known social activist and fearless defender of the right of abode of children of migrant workers born in the mainland to reside with their families in Hong

Kong, he was blocked from entering the mainland at Shenzhen in the southern province of Guangdong, at the end of July.

Likewise, the French priest, Bruno Lepeu, Superior of the Paris Foreign Missions in Hong Kong, where he has lived and worked for the past 17 years, was prevented from entering the mainland in this same period. He reported that his entry visa has been cancelled in a recent publication of his institute.

Four priests of Chinese origin were also refused entry to the mainland, including Peter Choy Wai-Man, Professor at the Centre for Catholic Studies of the Chinese University in Hong Kong. Their visas were cancelled at the frontier, without any explanation.

The case of the Italian priest, Gianni Criveller, is somewhat different. A recognized international scholar on the history of Christianity in China, he was granted a visa to work as an academic in Beijing, and was engaged in a major research programme at one of the city's prestigious universities. Returning from a visit to Hong Kong, late July, he was blocked at Beijing's international airport, held there overnight, and made take the first flight back to Hong Kong next morning, again without an explanation.

Respect for the elderly has long been part of the traditional Chinese culture dating back at least to the time of Confucius (557-479 BC), but sadly this noble tradition too was sidelined as Beijing struck back at the Vatican.

In mid-September, the Chinese authorities blocked the 86-year old Italian missionary priest, Angelo S. Lazzarotto, from entering the country. He had travelled from Milan to the Chinese capital with a large group of pilgrims but was refused entry at Beijing's international airport even

though he had been granted a visa two weeks earlier. He was obliged to take the next flight back home, three hours later. An unpleasant ordeal for a man of his age! Fr. Lazzarotto is a distinguished China scholar with many friends in the mainland. He has visited China every year since 1978. This was the first time he was refused entry.

UKRAINE

Some **Ukrainian** MPs have prepared a draft law "On the concession of the status of politically repressed Church to the **Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church**". According to the Greek Catholic Church's website which has published the Parliament's message, the **Supreme Rada**, Ukraine's single chamber parliament, has decided not to deal with the question immediately. The draft law's explanatory notes affirm that the Greek Catholic Church has suffered persecution and all kinds of trials under **Ukraine's** Soviet regime. The project aims to "establish historical justice in relation to the Greek Catholic Church and to recognise its status as a victim of the political repression, legally assigning it the rights it is entitled to." The **Ukrainian Orthodox Church** in communion with the **Patriarchate of Moscow**, expressed its opposition to the project as it had done on other occasions in the past, quoting **Taras Shevchenko**, a Russian-Ukrainian poet, as it accused the Greek Catholic Church "of causing a great deal of tears and bloodshed." □

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

My friend Joe Gomes' wife had a very severe heart attack, at once I prayed the Hail Mary very devoutly, my friend could get the doctor's help immediately and she was saved. A thousand thanks to Mother Mary who comes to our aid immediately in time.

Fr. Victor D'Cruz, Belgaum

My son met with a very bad accident and his car was totally damaged. It was a miracle he escaped without a scratch. We are sincerely grateful to Our Lady for her protection. Our family is devoted to Our Lady and we pray her Rosary daily and celebrate her novenas regularly.

LDS, Mangalore

Thank you dear mother Mary for all the graces and favours received.

Mrs. M. Gaughan, UK

Thanks to Our Blessed Lord and Our Blessed Mother for helping my daughter get her work permit card.

N. Paul, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Don Bosco for the gift of our son for which we are sincerely grateful.

Clarence & Sophia Fonseca

After praying to Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians, miraculously the swelling on my body disappeared.

Devotee

Thank you for curing both my sisters and always continue to protect us.

S.D. Sabamati, Mumbai

My heartfelt thanks to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mother Mary for protecting me from a serious road accident.

M. Dodd, Pune

My sincere thanks to Our Mother Help of Christians for all the blessings poured on our families. Dearest Mother, continue to protect and bless us especially all the children in our families.

Mr. & Mrs. Sebastian Pinto

While I was away from my island because of treatment for a respiratory problem which turned out to be nothing my two children with a friend took my car (with my permission) and were involved in a bad accident. The car was written off and couldn't be used any more. But my children and their friend came out of this accident safe and sound with only a few scratches. Thank you Mother Mary for saving my children and their friend! I always keep my prayer books and the Madonna magazines in the car and they were not damaged. I believe it was Mother Mary who protected them. I am grateful to Our Lady for a safe operation of my husband too.

Mrs. Catherine Lablache, Seychelles

Our sincere thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for granting us good health and for all the favours received. Always keep us in your love.

Cassy Pinto, Canada

I am sincerely grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby girl to our daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Brigit Joseph, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for the favours received and the blessings bestowed on our family my niece Hazel, through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Please continue to intercede for us.

Mr. L. Rangel, Goa

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.*

I went through th**Don Bosco's Madonna** from a neighbour and read the wonders that happened through the recitation of the three Hail Marys. I too started saying the 3 Hail Marys every morning and night. Through this prayer Mary blessed me with a baby boy after 13 years. My husband who was suffering was cured. My son whose motor functions were not coordinated was cured. *Mrs. Benzela Michael, Tuticorin*

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for curing my eyesight through the recitation of the three Hail Marys daily in the morning and night. Mother Mary I also thank you for blessing my family in all my needs. *Godfrey Vaz, Australia*

I am extremely grateful for the many blessings that my family and I have received through the recitation of the Rosary. Most recently, I had lost my job as my company closed down operations. Through Mother Mary's intercession, our family was able to manage the challenges over a seven month period and I have now been able to get a new job. *Noel Saldanha*

On a mild rainy evening, along with my friend, Mr. Joseph Crasto, seated in the front seat of my car that was parked on the side of a road, we were talking. While we were in the midst of a vital discussion, I suddenly noticed a truck approaching from the opposite direction skidding towards its left and within no time I heard a crashing sound. I could feel the car being dragged away and also noticed sparks of fire over my head. We both ducked quickly. When I opened my eyes I saw the roof of the car completely crushed and touching the head rest of the front seat. We both jumped out through a small opening in front windscreen. The speeding struck had skidded to its left, hit the roadside hillock and swerved to our side, completely smasking the car and further trapping it underneath and between the nearby compound wall. The car was totally destroyed, miraculously there was not a single bruise to both of us though the trauma was shattering. The statue of Mother Mary on the dashboard of my car protected us in this disastrous accident. I am indebted to mother for our 'rebirth.' *Edwin S. Colaco, Goa*

Thank you dear Mother Mary for all the graces received through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys. Mother please continue to intercere for my husband and our child. *D. Estibeiro, Goa*

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

Thank you dearest Mother Mary, St. Dominic Savio and Don Bosco for all the favours granted to me and helping me have a safe flight from Melbourne to India recently.

Mrs. Sheila Clarke, K.K. Nagar, India

My son wanted to go to the USA for higher studies, but his visa application was rejected. Both he and I were very disappointed. I prayed to Our Blessed Lord and St. John Bosco to help give my son hope and enlighten the mind of the visa officer and lo and behold his visa was approved when he reapplied. I think this is a great miracle and God Almighty has favoured me through the intercession of St. John Bosco, because I believed that it is difficult to get a visa once it is rejected. I am very grateful to St. John Bosco.

Francis D'Souza, Mumbai

My gratitude to Mary help of Christians and St. John Bosco for the favours received.

Mrs. L. D'Souza, Mumbai

Our thanks to dearest Mother Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco for the blessings bestowed on my family.

Mrs. Thelma D'Souza, Goa

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco for many favours granted especially for curing my daughter who used get a problem with her eyes and for curing the abscess in my mouth.

A.J. Noronha, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for all the graces received.

Cella Petras, Trichy, TN

I had lost my gold chain while I was on a holiday. We regularly pray the Rosary and on the 3rd Day I recited the 3 Hail Marys and I found the gold chain. My sincere thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco.

L. Pinto, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and all the saints for many favours granted. Dear Mother protect and bless my family always.

Mrs. Glynis Saldanha, Mumbai

Dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio our sincere thanks for the many favours granted.

Sunny Kulangara, Mumbai

We are thankful and grateful to Our Blessed Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio who heard our prayers and blessed us with a son. I have conceived after a long time.

Philomena & Nelson Miranda

My grateful thanks to the Lord Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the favours granted to my family, especially for the twin baby girls to my daughter and for good health in the family.

V.H. Miranda, Dramapur

Many thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby boy.

Michael Rodrigues, Goa

My sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for curing me from my hand muscle tear without a surgery. I prayed the 3 Hail Marys faithfully.

Auria Afonso,

Goa

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



My daughter (Sonia) was childless for the last 7½ years, I was praying to Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio regularly and I promised Our Lady I would acknowledge my grace in your magazine. *Mrs. Maria Lira Martins, Goa*
My sincere and grateful thanks to St. Dominic Savio and all the saints for blessing me with a son and a normal delivery.

Valerie Fernandes, Mumbai
My husband, my daughter, my grandson and I were returning home at 10.30 pm. On the highway our auto-rickshaw fell into a pothole and we were flung up. The vehicles behind us were speeding by. We were safe and I am grateful to St. Dominic Savio for protecting

us from any danger.

Mrs. Enid Pinto, Mumbai

My belated but sincere thanks to St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a grandson, whom the doctor had predicted would be mentally challenged, but to the contrary, he is an intelligent child for his age. He is now 2 years and 8 months old. *Mrs. C. Coutinho, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby boy and for a successful delivery.

Isabel Francis Mascarenhas, Bhusawal

My sincere gratitude to the Holy Trinity, Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for helping my son secure a good percentage in the CET exam and getting admission in an Engineering College of his choice. We prayed the three Hail Marys regularly.

Dorothy Fernandes, Goa

My sincere thanks to our Blessed Mother, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for all the blessings and favours received. Please continue to bless us.

Mrs. E. Soares, Mumbai

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

DECEMBER 2011

Holy Father's General Intention: *Peace among all peoples: that all peoples may grow in harmony and peace through mutual understanding and respect.*

Missionary Intention: *Childred and youth: That children and young people may be messengers of the Gospel and that they may be respected and preserved from all violence and exploitation.*