

# DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*Almighty ever-living God  
we humbly implore you:  
just as your  
Only Begotten Son  
was presented  
in the Temple,  
in the substance  
of our flesh,  
so by your grace,  
may be we presented  
to you  
with minds made pure..."*

*From the Proper of the Presentation  
of the Lord, 2<sup>nd</sup> February*

Cover:  
**The Apparation at Lourdes**  
by Luberoff



## From The Editor's Desk

### First Offence

The note that came to me late that evening from the watchman was accompanied with the words: "The one of brought this said, 'read it now!'" I phoned immediately and was shocked to learn that Mark, the son of a good family friend, had been detained in school for violently back-answering the teacher in front of an entire class. The principal would see him in the morning. 'This young fellow is heading for big trouble,' the teacher explained, 'but I have a feeling we may be able to catch him in time. Would you please take him out of here and talk to him?'

Ten minutes later I collected Mark and we set off on the long journey home. 'Do you want to tell me what happened?' I asked him gently. 'I don't stay at home anymore,' he replied. 'I spent the first few days in a friend's house, until his mother started asking questions. Then I went to the railway station and slept on the platform for a couple of nights, but it got too cold. After that I slept in the bus stand. Most of the time I was starving, and no one knew but I was attending school for the past week on an empty stomach and that was making me irritable.'

As we approached the house I was beginning to wonder if Mark's predicament was in any way due to parental neglect, but I was soon disabused of that notion. I knew both his parents, they were the salt of the earth. The father, who had been partially disabled in a road accident, now worked the late night shift at a 24hour coffee shop in a nearby hotel. 'I blame myself,' he said, 'I don't see enough of him.'

However, it was Mark's mother, I thought, who seemed to have the sharper insight. Though still only a young woman, she had contracted tuberculosis and was rather weak. She looked very exhausted. 'Mark is very conscious of being the eldest in the family,' she said. 'No matter what we tell him, he feels he has to make up for his father and me. Sometimes he just breaks under the strain.'

Later that night Mark phoned to tell me that his principal would see me together with his parents in the morning. 'Not a man to trifle with,' I warned. 'Just play it straight and tell the truth.' Afterwards, I slipped around to the nearby convent and asked the community to pray hard for a friend in trouble. 'Poor lad,' I added, 'he's up before the principal, another good friend of mine, tomorrow morning.'

Next morning in his office, the principal listened impassively as the story of Mark's ventures and the heroic efforts of his parents were recounted. 'Seems to me,' he commented, 'we have a very serious charge here. But I'm not so sure we have a villain here'. Then, pausing for effect, he completed his judgment in telegraphic spurts: 'First offence but the promise of good behaviour - one more chance, young man!'

*Fr. Ian Doulton sdb*

## UNEDUCATED YET LARGE-HEARTED

*Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss*

**N**ot having had the privilege of an education herself, Tulasi Munda, already as a teenager was inspired by a social worker to become self-reliant along Gandhian lines. The enterprising young lass reasoned to herself that poverty and ignorance would perennially dog their steps unless people were educated. So she decided to remain unmarried and work to educate the children of her native place. She herself had to remain illiterate because there were no schools in the surrounding villages. Nor could her family afford to send her to one, even if there were one available close by. This noble decision of hers resulted in her crossing swords with her own family – but she remained firm in her resolve.

Her first school, which is reckoned as a model in Serenda in Keonjhar district is today a High School sporting also a hostel for children. Single-handed she has ensured that every single one of the twenty odd schools she has started so far is adequately funded. She herself goes pleading with people in different villages asking for both funds and materials and gratefully accepts whatever they mete out to her. She firmly believes that no community can bring about positive results without the direct involvement of people, as many of them as possible. The teachers she employs get a meager salary but, she proudly says of them, dedication is the key! While these teachers need the salaries to



*Tulasi Munda*

maintain their families, they are nevertheless motivated and committed – two qualities which are a must for such humanitarian work. Before crossing even 65 years of age, she has established around twenty schools most of which are located in inaccessible hilly areas in Orissa's tribal belt which had no schools at all before this humble effort of Tulasi. Many of these are conducted under trees or in verandahs of homes and working hours vary according to the convenience of the parents.

### **Efforts Recognized**

Decorated with a Padma Shri (2001) Tulasi has resolutely warded off all overtures from politicians to canvass for them, and even refused a nomination to the Rajya Sabha. Her greatest joy is that, "my humble effort in starting these schools has saved many poor children from ending up as beggars!"

### **Born with a Mission**

When one reads of such a selfless life, one cannot but ask, 'how is it that some people can rise to such

noble heights that even though they themselves don't enjoy the benefits of education, they work tirelessly that others might be blessed with them – but so many other educated people use their education and other gifts only to line their own pockets and that too often by unethical means? It is not just that some people are endowed with pluck and courage and would dare even the impossible. It generally begins with a stray suggestion made by one who fires the imagination of a basically generous do-er. Once the idea takes hold of the person, it is but a matter of time before things begin to happen and an effective plan is evolved. In Tulasi's case all this came about because of inspiration from the social worker who himself was inspired by Gandhi and his passion for the uplift of the average Indian.

If a Gandhi could inspire people several years after his demise, much more would Jesus be the inspiration for a host of projects all over the world emanating from his followers and others alike. For had he not proclaimed, "I have come that you may have life and that too abundantly"? (Jn. 10:10). Besides on the night before he offered his life for sinners, he left for his followers an unforgettable sign of his love, and asked them to "do this as a memorial of Me!"

### **Self-sacrifice Needed**

The important point of this Self-gift of Jesus is that "as often as you do this" you do the memorial, which is a real, *making present again*, the very original sacrifice of Jesus, though in sacramental form. So, the Eucharistic celebration has the

very same power to inspire and draw people as did Calvary – provided the faithful enter into it with an active, intelligent and fruitful participation! For who can 'see' the total selfless self-gift of Jesus - even to the last drop of his precious blood "for the redemption of the many" and not be moved to do something that makes that same redemption present once again in the world of today? So, the inspiration for doing good is very much present in our midst.

### **Lack of Opportunities?**

Could it be then, that there are not enough challenging opportunities around to grab? Or does one even have to wait for the right opportunity to crop up? Could one not create an opportunity as Tulasi did in an area which had not seen a school in all its history?! What seems to be lacking in our celebration of the Eucharist is the 'fire' that comes from a genuine encounter with the Risen Lord. For, as the Gospels portray it, no one can meet the Risen Lord in truth and remain the same old person as before. A clear case in view is that of the two disciples returning gloomily to their village at Emmaus. They had trudged along the entire day, but only as they gathered round the table for their night meal were their eyes opened and they recognized *him* in the breaking of the bread! Not stopping to enjoy and savour their good fortune of encountering Jesus, nor even to rest their weary limbs, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem to share this good news with the rest of the community. And there they, together with the emboldened others, received their

definitive mission - "you are witnesses to these things" (Lk. 24:48).

With these and several other examples before us, why is it that the Christian community is by and large so depressingly inward-looking and pre-occupied mainly with receiving material benefits, healings, witnessing miracles and the like - all of which are somewhat peripheral to the real Christian calling? Jesus has chosen us Christians, primarily 'to be sent' on a mission of sharing God's love with those in need. One does not need to go far to accomplish this mission, for there are opportunities right at our doorstep. The key point seems to be that we are open enough to see what God does for us and be ready to become instruments to bless others.

### **Different Varieties of Seeing**

As we scan the Gospel of St. Luke we come across a strange combination of statements - all sequences to the death of Jesus on the Cross. Luke observes: "When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things" (23:47-49). All saw the very same spectacle, but the Centurion, a Roman officer knowing perhaps nothing of the background of Jesus, saw what happened *and he made an act of faith!* The Jewish crowds who in some way were involved

in the death of Jesus, saw the same events and went home beating their breasts - they *made an act of contrition!!* But Jesus' own friends stood at a distance watching all that happened - and *they did absolutely nothing!!!* They seem to have been simply overwhelmed by what they saw.

Today too, it is often the non-Christians who reach out more spontaneously and generously to the needs of suffering humanity. Yet it is the Christian who will be addressed on Judgment Day with the chilling truth: "I was hungry and you did not give me to eat, thirsty and you did not give me to drink, in need and you did not reach out to me..." We certainly would not want to have such a scathing accusation thrust at us, now or ever, and so we need to ask: "Lord, is there some way in which we can share our blessings with the less fortunate?" We need to listen deeply to the call of the Almighty given to us in the simplest of ways - yet always leaving us free to respond generously and get involved or remain on the periphery and watch others chip in their mite making of their world a far better place to live in.

### **Lift Up Your Hearts**

One of the reasons why we often find ourselves lethargic in reaching out to others is that we do not take our responses at the Eucharist seriously. What exactly do we do e.g. when we say, 'We have lifted them up to the Lord?' What do we really lift up and why? Were we to take these responses seriously, our world would certainly be turned upside down! The simple 'Amen' e.g. at the end of the Doxology really means that we will 'make it

to be so!' We have just sung 'through him... (may) all glory and honour be yours... for ever and ever.' Coming at the end of this statement, it means that 'we will actively see that *all glory* is actually given to God always and everywhere! And if we really did set about fulfilling this promise, how self-obsessed could we be? Would we not be thinking constantly of how we could be of service to others?

Could we be a little more open

at the very next Eucharist we celebrate, listening attentively to what the Lord inspires us to be and to do? It need not be a full-blown project that we launch into, for a journey of even a thousand miles begins with but a tiny 'first' step! "How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? The cup of blessing I shall take and call on the Lord's name." (Ps. 116:12-13). May each of us be inspired to become a blessing for others in return for all that the Lord does for us! □

## walking with the Church



### *A Candle for you, Holy Communion*

*From St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland*

**Q.** *What does it mean when someone says they will light a candle for you? I have had it said to me a few times by a particular person and I am not sure what it does mean, apart from the fact that the person is wishing me well.*

**A.** It simply means that the particular person you mention intends to pray that God will bless you and fill your life with the light that only God can give. 'I am the light of the world.' Our belief in the Communion of Saints teaches us that the entire family of God can assist one another by prayer, that as we can help the souls in purgatory by our prayers, so also we can help one another. Lighting a candle for someone or some intention is a pious and good custom. A prayer in itself, also

reminds us of the need to pray for one another's intentions.

**Q.** *What is the reason for receiving Communion from the chalice as well if, as we believe, we receive the body and blood of Christ when we receive the host? I believe this is the practice on some special occasions.*

**A.** The words of the instruction of the Roman Missal give the answer to this question. It says 'Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds.' This is not uncommon practice when you have a small congregation gathered for a special occasion, but the size of most Sunday congregations would make it impractical for all to receive from the chalice. □

# A DIFFICULT ENCOUNTER

by Andrea Canale

**I**n asceticism we learn to cover the defects of others with a veil of forbearance and to cover our achievements with a veil of modesty... We learn that there is only one enemy that a Christian has to fear and that is himself. And that his first problem is contained in these five words: examination of conscience, sorrow, resolution, acknowledgement and penance."

Fr. Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967), a Florentine priest and educator known for his vast experience said those words. Cardinal Silvano Piovanelli, a classmate of his, often recalled the statement of Fr. Lorenzo, when asked why he had not left the Catholic Church that had sorely tried him, he replied: "And where would I find someone to forgive my sins?"

The "five words" that Fr. Milani mentioned in the quoted passage above describes precisely the Christian sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. It is an inner journey that has recently undergone a phase of unpopularity despite the post-conciliar liturgy that has emphasized the beauty of this sacrament.

Returning to oneself after wandering all over and immersing oneself into one's own conscience so that all superficiality fades away and there is just one choice: good or evil which is both severe and demanding. The Greek word for "Conversion" found in the Gospels is "metanoia," i.e. "a change of mindset") and it affects

the soul to the extent that it can be very painful because it is an amputation of the intimate vices that cling to us. On the other hand - as one spiritual writer, Columba Marmion (1858 - 1923) wrote, "love without penance and sacrifice is a body without a backbone."

Why do we find it so difficult to approach the sacrament of Confession which is the encounter with the mercy and forgiveness of God? We always find a ready excuse to postpone it: a sudden engagement, not dressed well enough or perhaps a headache. For such an important appointment one needs to take time and give due attention but we remember something or other. We seem to take note of it but without specifying a date.

It is an encounter that embarrasses us more than we can bear to admit. We get clumsy and awkward because we are afraid to look bad before someone else. We're afraid that we will be able to hide nothing and then we'll get a *briefing* that might leave a kind of bittersweet taste behind. It's the same and it's different from all that went before. It is a dialogue where only person speaks and the other only listens, that's it.

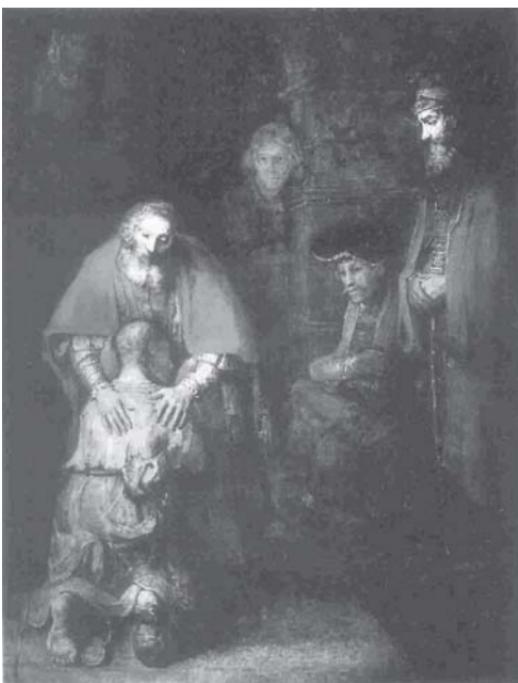
It's like a mirror that reflects our own image, our wrinkles, our tired or sleepy eyes and our thoughts, like photographs no one else has seen, known only to us and to the 'other;' thoughts about our world that only we and no one else knows.

Sooner or later it is an account we must give to the "other" and it is an appointment that we *should* keep. And the outcome is not something totally unexpected. So, we try, for as long as we can, to hold on to the "account books" of our life. To speak about oneself takes courage and humility and from the very beginning we know we will emerge defeated.

There are always a lot of shady sides to our history. We should not have taken the wrong path, a single mistake haunts us. There is something, if we went back to, we wouldn't do. The first step is bringing it out and recognizing it, putting it into words and confessing it.

It's no point living with guilt, it gets us nowhere. We need to accept that it is our weaknesses that make us special people, who might never succeed in correcting our faults, but who will nevertheless continue fighting against them like crazy.

It's the tournament of a lifetime, with its wins, draws and defeats for which we do not blame the referee or the ground. The challenge begins when we admit to ourselves that we can lose. Maybe, we can never accept our weaknesses but we surely can understand them. We should not be afraid to speak about ourselves. So much of ourselves the "other" already knows. When we get to the point at which we try to postpone our Confession we will be reminded of the faces of those who have walked some part of life's journey with us,



*Conversion is a sincere return to the love of the Father, throwing oneself into His arms*

some of those encounters were just casual. There may have been people who have loved us and others we wish we had never met. One or other will either make us suffer or will bring us joy, or regret that we were ever born or we will thank God that some memories endure. How often we would have loved to go back to correct the wrong words we should never have spoken and "un-say" them.

Reviewing ourselves is like watching a movie only that, if we could, we might also like to change the ending. After a Confession there will always be a second part, a remake, with the same actors but with different faces. □

## MATILDE SALEM 1904 - 1961

**M**atilde Chelot was born in Salem near Aleppo on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1904 to a rather well-to-do family. She studied with the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and thanks to their training she developed a love for the interior life. On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1922, at the age of 18, she married Georges Elias Salem, a prosperous businessman. Mons. Isidoro Fattal, the metropolitan-Catholic archbishop of Aleppo advised her husband to open a technical school to train future Christian workers but suddenly on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1944 Georges died. Matilde could start all over again, but she soon discovered her true vocation which was to dedicate herself completely to those around her with greater love. She dedicated herself completely to the grandiose plan left in the will of her husband Georges and began to oversee "*The Georges Salem Foundation*" of which she became the president. Her family would become the poor youth of the city and she equipped herself to truly become a mother to them. In 1947, together with Mons. Fattal she went to Turin to meet the Rector Major Fr. Peter Ricaldone to directly entrust the foundation to the Sons of Don Bosco. She built herself a little house close to the institute. The



Salesians would now become her family. There she hoped to be buried close to her husband. In short, she became the mamma Margaret to the boys of Aleppo. She became a Salesian cooperator, a daughter of St. Francis of Assisi, the co-foundress of the work of Infinite Love. She lived to the full the dynamic Salesian apostolate. In 1959 she was diagnosed with cancer. Responding to the news from the doctors she only said: "Thanks be to God." There followed a Way of the Cross of twenty months. She distributed all her earthly possessions to the needy saying: "I will die in a house that doesn't even belong to me." She died at Aleppo (Syria) in the odor of sanctity on 27<sup>th</sup> February at the age of 56 like her beloved Georges and she rests in the church of the Salesians in Aleppo. Her Cause was opened on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1995. □



**CAUGHT BY THE LOVE OF JESUS:  
FR. DOMINIC SANTAMARIA**

*Confessor and Assistant Parish Priest, Holy Family Cathedral, Kuwait*

**I** am fondly called 'Padre Pio' in Kuwait because of the time I spend in the confessional where God works mightily. People lovingly also call me 'Don Bosco,' since I am surrounded by children when they meet me in the compound. I have baptized around 7517 babies so far, it is an immense joy to be able to give 'JESUS' to them. I am the oldest of five, four brothers and a sister. Great is the joy of my family, that I am a priest of Jesus.

I was born in Goa, India at Mapuca on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1945 and I always longed to be a priest. By becoming a priest I want to go to heaven and also lead others to heaven. Even as a boy I would act as a priest, celebrate a mass and distribute 'paper' holy communion. It was one Holy Thursday night when adoring the Blessed Sacrament that I received the consoling call to go ahead.

At the age of 18 I entered the Seminary in the Holy Land near Bethlehem, the birth place of Jesus. At 25 I was ordained a priest in Jerusalem on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1970 at the Dormition Basilica.

At the age of 25 I was appointed the Parish Priest of the Holy Family Church in Crater, Aden, Yemen. At that time I was also the Vice Principal of St. Joseph's High School, the very school in which I had studied before entering the Seminary.

I arrived in Kuwait on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1973. Since that day I



have been in the Holy Family Cathedral Parish. As I remained in Kuwait during the entire Iraqi Invasion, I received the First Vatican Recognition from Blessed John Paul II. Because of my long stay in Kuwait I also received the Papal Award, "Pro Ecclesiam et Pontifice" from Pope Benedict XVI which means "For the Church and the Pope".

I have never experienced a crisis in my vocation. I find great happiness in the 7 daily canonical hours of the Breviary, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Spiritual Reading, the Rosary, the Eucharist and Meditation.

Each day I invite people to pray "Jesus" as many times as possible. That is why I am known as the Jesus Priest.

I am very happy to be a Priest. May my priestly life inspire at least one reader to follow the priestly calling. □

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# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## ST. AGATHA GOOD WITH THE GOODNESS OF GOD (February 5)

by Mario Scudu (TA/ID)

Some time ago I read a magazine article that said: "Christians, little flock be ready to be martyred" a meaningful title and a challenging one too. Christians in the world are numerically a 'little flock' by global standards and yet their presence and values disturb the rest of humanity for which reason there are some of have paid with their lives for these values. Yet in following Christ one cannot expect a better fate than theirs which does not exclude that supreme witness by martyrdom. Yet in the early centuries this zeal for Christ was a very present threat among the Christians. That was how it happened for the saint we are reflecting on this month: Agatha, the patron saint of Catania. For love of Christ she not only decided to consecrate her virginity to Him but she was also willing to pay the highest price for their faith: giving up her life.

### Unreliable yet Enthusiastic Tradition

Several saints of the early

centuries like Catherine of Alexandria, Lucy of Syracuse, Barbara, George and others have an enthusiastic following around the world, so does St. Agatha. However many historians and scholars are skeptical about the historical information that has been passed down about them to us. In other words, the iconography (pictures, paintings and mosaics) and the devotion to the saints were enthusiastic but the historical information was unsubstantiated. That said, we must add that these saints were not invented out of some devout tradition just to fill the Martyrology which was already full of heroic martyrs. Today we are rather particular about rigorous historical documentation.

Of course, in the case of Agatha, there have been archaeological finds in Catania which support the veneration already a few decades after her martyrdom which occurred around 251 or for others at the end of the century under Emperor Diocletian.

As mentioned above the cult to her was impressive. The first great



*The torture of Agatha*

acknowledgement of her sanctity and a sign of great respect of the Church for her was the insertion of her name in the Roman Canon "in company with Felicity, Perpetua, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia and Anastasia." Her cult was already prevalent in Naples in the fourth century (at the catacomb of St Januarius), and in Rome, Pope Symmachus (early sixth century) named a Basilica on the Via Aurelia in her honour. In the year 1200 in the Diocese of Milan there were no fewer than 26 churches named after her. Agatha is the patron of 44 Italian municipalities and 14 even bear her name. She was also named patroness of Malta (together with St. Paul), as well as of the Republic of San Marino. Even in Spain the cult of Agatha is alive and well so also in Latin America. In Barcelona the chapel in the royal palace is named after Agatha where the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand are buried. Spain is a particularly interesting country. At Segovia, not far from Madrid, according to a beautiful yet curious tradition on

the 5<sup>th</sup> February, the Feast of Saint (Ageda), is the feast of all women. They take charge of the day one is even elected mayor. They order men to handle the household chores on that day. In the Middle Ages too Agatha was invoked as the one who protected the faithful in the case of specific disasters and difficulties.

The sources of information on our Saint come from *the passion of Saint Agatha (Passio Sanctae Agnthae)* which dates back to the mid-fifth century. It has the special structure and has an uplifting and exhortative style while containing some elements that are probably historical.

*Agate* (which means *Good and God*) belonged to a rich and noble family of Catania. She was educated in the Christian faith by her parents who oversaw her education carefully. While still very young she vowed her virginity to Christ, dedicating herself entirely to Him, her present and her future, her good and bad fortune. It seems also that she had become a deaconess. That is how she is depicted in a mosaic of St Apollinaris in Ravenna (sixth century) in which she appears dressed as a deaconess. In the same city there is still a church dedicated to St. Agatha.

### **Face to face with the procurator**

The Roman procurator of Sicily, Quintianus, an imperial official, powerful, domineering and arrogant was infatuated with her - so far there was nothing wrong. But since he could not get her to accept his indecent proposals he abused his political power to try to blackmail her. Forcing an edict from the Emperor Decius he

accused her of slandering the state religion. His first move was to put her in prison. There she was entrusted to a "mistress" whose name was Aphrodisia and her daughters who had very immoral habits and very relaxed morals because she worked in a brothel. The trial proved very severe but Agatha did not give in. Agatha returned disconsolate and she told the governor in fiery tones: "This has been the hardest lava from Etna."

But Quintianus did not give up, and so we now arrive at her trial. The following conversation was reported in the *Passion of Saint Agatha*. Very possibly it does contain some elements that are historically true. They reflect her feelings of courage and constancy in the name of Christ. A few snatches from the dialogue in the style of the time is recorded by the historian Titus Livius.

*The judge: "What is your status?"*

*Agatha: "I am free and of noble birth, as evidenced by all my family."*

*He said, "But if you're free and noble, why do you lead the lowly life of a slave?"*

*Agatha: "I am a servant of Christ and only him will I serve."*

It seemed futile to try and convince her with gentleness and delicate ways. But how would she react to more sinister and refined cruelty? How could she resist? And thus began the various tortures similar to those used on other martyrs. A detail mentioned in the torture of Agatha was that at some point the governor, angry and impatient at such resistance, ordered her breasts to be torn off. The young Agatha responded: "You are a cruel tyrant! You should be

ashamed of yourself mutilating a woman. As a child you suckled at a breast, did you not?" This is a characteristic feature in certain depictions of Agatha. *The Passion* also reports that during the night, while she was in prison after this torture St. Peter visited her and healed her. When the governor asked her how she was healed she replied: "I was healed by Christ."

Quintianus had been defeated by her resistance and so he ordered her to be placed on a bed of hot coals with red hot plates and spikes. Tradition has it that while she was burning the veil that she wore did not burn and for that reason the "veil of St Agatha" immediately became a most precious relic of the saint in Catania. It was even used to stop the lava of Mt Etna whose flow threatened to destroy the villages along its slopes.

During her ordeal there was an earthquake and the frightened people of Catania rebelled against the governor. She was removed from the fire but languished in prison where she died shortly afterwards.

Her relics are preserved in the cathedral in Catania in a silver casket, the work of famous artists. There is also a silver bust with the words "Santuzza" wrought in 1376 which bears (according to tradition) the crown which was a gift from Richard the Lionhearted.

Precisely because of the protection of St. Agatha against the threat of Mt Etna she was named patron of Catania. To celebrate her feast the city has prolonged celebrations from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> of February for this greatly loved patroness of theirs. □

# IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

## Out of the Loop

Mr. Norton was in the hospital recovering from an operation when the nurse on duty received a call from a man who asked how Mr. Norton was doing.

"Oh, quite well. We expect he'll be released in the morning."

"Very good, thank you."

"May I ask who is calling so that I can tell Mr. Norton?" inquired the nurse.

This IS Mr. Norton. The doctors don't tell me anything!"

## Vet Cure

A Veterinarian was feeling ill and went to see her doctor.

The doctor asked her all the usual questions: what were the symptoms, how long had they been occurring, etc.

Suddenly, she interrupted him: "Hey look, I'm a vet - I don't need to ask my patients these kind of questions: I can tell what's wrong just by looking." She smugly added, "Why can't you?"

The doctor nodded, stood back, looked her up and down, quickly wrote out a prescription, handed it to her and said,

"There you are. Of course, if that doesn't work, we'll have to have you put to sleep."

## Rest In Peace

A new business was opening and one of the owner's friends wanted to send him flowers for the occasion. They arrived at the new business site and the owner read the card, "Rest in Peace."

The owner was angry and called the florist to complain.

After he had told the florist of the obvious mistake and how angry he was, the florist replied,

"Sir, I'm really sorry for the mistake, but rather than getting angry, you should imagine this, 'Somewhere there is a funeral taking place today and they have flowers with a note saying, 'Congratulations on your new location.'"

## Cure For Lateness

Bob had this problem of getting up late in the morning and was always late for work.

After a few weeks of this, his boss was mad and threatened to fire him if he didn't do something about it. So Bob went to his doctor, who gave him a pill and told him to take it before he went to bed. He got a great night's sleep and actually beat the alarm in the morning. After a leisurely breakfast, he cheerfully drove to work.

"Boss," he said, "The pill my doctor prescribed me actually worked!"

"That's all fine," said the boss, "But where were you yesterday?"

## Prayer Positions

Three preachers sat discussing the best positions for prayer, while a telephone repairman worked nearby.

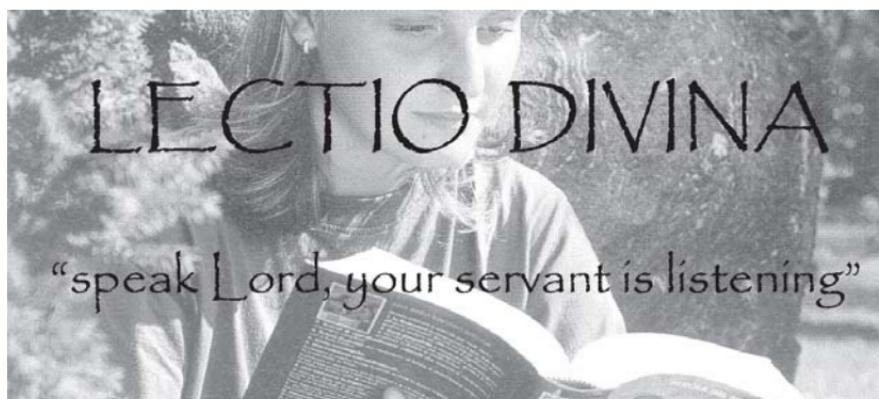
"Kneeling is definitely best," claimed one.

"No," another contended. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven."

"You're both wrong," the third insisted. "The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor."

The repairman could contain himself no longer.

"Hey, fellas," he interrupted, "the best prayin' I ever did was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole." □



## THAT NONE MAY BE LOST

*by Marco Rossetti*

"**F**orgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Mt 6,12). That was what the Lord taught us to say when he taught us the 'Our Father.' He offers us the most sublime measure of forgiveness which is the same measure we ought to offer others. Being well aware of this the Lord felt the need to define forgiveness more precisely, giving his first lesson on mutual forgiveness in the so-called "Sermon on the Church." In fact, who among us does not need to be helped to love those who, in one way or another, behave in a manner not in keeping with the Word of God and the teachings of the Church? How should we react/respond to such people? Then, on the other hand, how would we like to be treated if we were to break the harmony in the community? No "little one" who has been scandalized, (Mt 18.6 to 9) or led astray into sin and lost has like the lost sheep been sought out and found (Matthew 10-14). No brother who has erred and gone

astray, has been corrected and readmitted to the community (Mt 15-18). These are Christ's words; this is the style that his followers must adopt.

### **That None be Lost**

We shall dwell a little more in depth on the text of these short verses from Mt. 18:15 - 18. They describe the teaching of Jesus on the theme of unity and fraternal harmony. The impression one gets is that we are faced with a cold disciplinary norm but that would be so if they are not taken together with the next section on effective prayer (vv 19-20). The latter, in fact, has the ability to motivate and give new spirit to those standards. Matthew, thus composing this small section of his Gospel, shows us that he understood perfectly what Jesus was interested in: not prescribed rules about legal action against an erring brother, but rather a call for a serious commitment to restore him to fraternal harmony at all costs. This is indispensable, Jesus says, if we want our

Christian communities to be places where He is present and where our prayer is heard. Without unity and without a sense of harmony the Father will not give us what we pray for (v. 19)!

Reading verses 15-16 we learn how and what treatment should be measured out to a person who has not acted appropriately. Note also the purpose of this attention: to "regain" one's brother which is the expression whereby all the joy that comes from fraternal correction has achieved its end (cf. Mt 18:13).

Correction should always aim at rekindling the desire to change and be reaccepted so that charity should reign over everyone and everything: this is an expression of genuine concern for others and is the manifestation of the desire to give the erring one the possibility of new life.

The words of Jesus go on, until it touches a dramatic situation of failure to restore harmony (v. 17). In this sad case one must declare that the erring brother has placed

himself outside the community for refusing to listen and accept the repeated attempts that have been offered to help him. This is clearly an extreme situation, which will hopefully never come to pass.

### **"Guardians" of One Another**

To grow in love and harmony so that none gets lost; that's the point! But how is this done? We give here below some verses from which we may learn what Jesus means by fraternal correction in the spirit of reconciliation (Matthew 5:23), forgiveness (Matthew 6:14), being non-judgmental (Mt. 7:15) and tolerant (Mt 13:24). In short, we must learn to grow in harmony without ever breaking the commandment of love. Our goal to maintain harmony is a difficult goal; we should learn to be "guardians" to one another (Ez 33, 1-9). How wonderful it would be if we become people who are ready to stretch out our hands to help one another to live better and holier Christian lives? If we

did this everyday, we could really build a reconciled community, because there would constantly be, in our lives, a desire for harmony.

Only if every person becomes the focus of my personal attention there will be harmony and we would have a real community elevated by prayer, enlivened by the presence of Christ being constantly blessed by the Father. □



*Two hands clasped in greeting is always a sign of harmony of peace and reconciliation*

## A SIMPLER AND MORE

by His Holiness P

*On Sunday 27 February, 2010, before leading the recitation of the Angelus with the faithful gathered in St Peter's Square, the Holy Father commented on the so-called "Second Isaiah" and the need to trust in the Providence of the heavenly Father "who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field and knows all our needs". The following is a translation of the Pope's Reflection, which was given in Italian.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of the most moving words of Sacred Scripture rings out in today's Liturgy. The Holy Spirit has given it to us through the pen of the so-called "Second Isaiah". To console Jerusalem, broken by misfortunes, he says: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is 49:15). This invitation to trust in God's steadfast love is juxtaposed with the equally evocative passage from the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus urges his disciples to trust in the Providence of the heavenly Father, who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field and knows all our needs (cf 6:24-34).

This is what the Teacher says: "Therefore, do not be anxious, saying 'what shall we eat?' or 'what shall we wear?'. For the Gentiles seek all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all".

In the face of the situations of so many people, near and far, who live in wretchedness, Jesus' discourse might appear hardly realistic, if not evasive. In fact, the Lord wants to make people understand clearly that it is impossible to serve two masters: God and mammon [riches]. Whoever believes in God, the Father full of love for his children, puts first the search for his Kingdom and his will. And this is precisely the opposite of



## THE MODEST LIFESTYLE

*Pope Benedict XVI*

fatalism or ingenuous irenics.

Faith in Providence does not in fact dispense us from the difficult struggle for a dignified life but frees us from the yearning for things and from fear of the future.

It is clear that although Jesus' teaching remains ever true and applicable for all it is practised in different ways according to the different vocations: a Franciscan friar will be able to follow it more radically while a father of a family must bear in mind his proper duties to his wife and children every case, however, Christians are distinguished by their absolute trust in the heavenly Father, as was Jesus. It was precisely Christ's relationship with God the Father that gave meaning to the whole of his life, to his words, to his acts of salvation until his Passion, death and Resurrection. Jesus showed us what it means to live with our feet firmly planted on the ground, attentive to the concrete situations of our neighbour yet at the same time keeping our heart in Heaven, immersed in God's mercy.

Dear friends, in the light of the word of God of this Sunday I ask you to invoke the Virgin Mary with the title "Mother of divine Providence". To her let us entrust our life, the journey of the Church and the events of history. In particular, let us invoke her intercession so that we may all learn to live in accordance with a simpler hard work and with respect for creation, which God has entrusted to us for safekeeping.

In today's Gospel Jesus invites us to trust in the provident care of our heavenly Father and to seek first his Kingdom and its righteousness. May his words inspire us to see all things in their true perspective and to live our lives in joyful faith and sure hope in God's promises. Upon you and your families I invoke the Lord's abundant blessings! □



## THE ROAD OF PAIN

*From Fr Ian Douulton's collection of stories*

**S**uffering! pain! They fall upon, our days like a night that cuts out the sun of all happiness. But if we are patient, if we wait, we will begin to see a meaning in the shadows.

Often in the midst of our darkness we receive, like a candle, the power to understand that this suffering of the body is blessed: sometimes it is necessary to prevent an even greater tragedy. This happened to Fran Harrison as she tells it in the story of her husband.

"My husband, Kurt is in the hospital. He has been there for three months and when people come to visit me they speak of him, saying things like: "How terrible!" Then they look at me strangely and they wonder why I am not upset. Why? I can even smile, and I can't explain to them. I know the worst thing in the world for Kurt. This is not it! There was a real tragedy once."

Fran thought she knew the man she married. She did not expect Kurt to be perfect. Fran herself admitted that she was not perfect. His occasional stubbornness showed manly independence and his blunt way of speaking came from his complete honesty. So they were married and the first month was wonderful. The honeymoon and then weeks of fun as they house-hunted together. It was exciting to decide between the English cottage and the ultramodern bungalow. Then one evening Kurt came home and

started pulling suitcases out of the closet. "You know, if we pack all night, I think we can make it." He told her that he had bought a new house. She had no choice. "I took the one in the country." Fran was hoping it was not the one that the real estate agent told them it would take a fortune to fix up. Kurt promised to fix it up and promised it wouldn't cost any fortune. Fran was upset and blurted out through her tears: "Kurt we have been planning this together and now it's like being shoved into a house." Pat came the reply: "I know what I'm doing, you leave this to me. I'm paying for the house." That was the end of the conversation.

Fran cried when she saw the house. A pile of clapboards sprawled in a tangle of weeds. But in a month Kurt had the place shining inside and out. He gave Fran everything she wanted for herself and the house. He was even religious. At least, he went to church faithfully every Sunday. Still, Fran felt vaguely unhappy without knowing exactly why. Perhaps it was because of the way Kurt always spoke of the place as 'his' farm and 'his' house. He blueprinted the future in his own mind and nothing anyone said ever changed a line of his plan.

The third year they were married, Kurt and Fran had a baby. Fran thought that at last there was something that she could call 'ours.' From the time Peter was in the cradle, Fran said:

"He was mine only to feed, dress and bathe. He was Kurt's to spoil and turn into a stubborn defiant little boy, expert at getting his own way with his mother." Kurt boasted: "Like father, like son."

When Peter was five years and three months old, Kurt came in from the fields one day. He asked immediately for Peter. "He's out in the orchard with the Hanley boys," replied Fran. Kurt said that he had come from there and Peter was not there. Fran was irritated. She had told him to stay with the boys till it was time for lunch. The first place to look for him was where he was not supposed to go, down by the duck pond. Just as they were walking towards the pond, Fran let out a shriek. "In the pond, in the pond!" she screamed. Kurt found him at the bottom of the pond. He wasn't breathing. Kurt worked on him for an hour before they got a doctor. The doctor said Peter must have been dead when Kurt brought him out. Kurt wouldn't believe it. He worked for almost another hour.

At the funeral he gave no sign of grief. The next Sunday when Fran got ready for Church, she missed Kurt. He was sitting by the duck pond. He was draining the pond. Fran asked when he would be ready for Church: "When God gives me back my son" was the sarcastic reply. "If this is what he calls a square deal" Kurt went on. Fran couldn't stop him. "Look, I did my part, this is what I get! I'm through. From now on, I'm not asking and I'm not giving." Fran recalled that he never set foot in church again, he never prayed.

When he found the farm

running smoothly, he bought another run down place and then a third. He made most of the repairs himself. He used to be away from the house for weeks at a time. He worked in his own world all alone. Fran circled the outside, trying to break through.

One evening a light plane landed in the meadow and Kurt stepped out of the plane. He had bought the plane for crop dusting. Surely he could do with some help. But he wanted to do everything himself and the way he wanted it. He needed no one else's suggestions.

Fran at least wanted to help him with the book-keeping but he would not allow her. "No thanks, I don't need any help," was the standard reply to anything. All he asked Fran to do was to phone George Greenwood and tell him that he had no time to go to any meetings. The people in the county were planning on starting a cooperative and finding that Kurt was one, of the most successful farmers in the county, they could do with his help. All he said was: "If I can work that hard, so can they." Fran mused: He doesn't seem to need or want even my love." Everything grew quiet between them. He wanted to wipe out all traces of Peter, so he removed the duck pond too and wanted to plant a crop there. Fran was hurt and all that Kurt said was: There's no more vacuum in my life. I outgrew that long ago. Fran pleaded: "What about me?" "Go and ask God next Sunday." Came the cold reply.

Fran ran into the house. From inside she could hear the plough clatter. Kurt was fighting another battle in his war against God. He

would think he had won at last: a man who had shut out Faith and friends, even the memory of his child and now his wife. Fran believed that she had no reason to live like a servant in that house where she had no right to give or receive a gesture of love. To live with one who was a stranger to one's heart was worse than being alone.

She decided to leave - like Kurt would have done, without discussion or tears. Fran decided to leave on Sunday. It would wipe out all suspicion. Friday afternoon, Kurt crop-dusted. As Fran and Mr. Harris, the new helper stood in the front porch watching the plane begin its descent, the engine flew off and the small aircraft burst into flames before it touched the meadow just outside the garden. Fran saw Kurt running towards the house, his clothes all in flames. He stumbled and rolled in the mud to put the fire out.

The doctors allowed Fran to see Kurt on the third day. He was covered with bandages except for his eyes and his mouth. He looked up at her and then turned his head. She came every day to the room and stayed as long as they would let her. He gave no sign. He said nothing until the fifth day. He asked if she had talked to the doctor who had said that he would be well again. "All crippled and scarred if I ever use my legs and arms." Kurt sounded bitter. He knew Fran was lying. So he asked again. The doctor had actually not been able to tell how bad or how long. Kurt grew irritable and screamed at her to go home!

So he lay there for three more

days. The nurses said he never asked for anything. He had to be fed, washed, turned in bed. He could move less than a newborn baby but he would never ask for help. Then on the ninth day he spoke to Fran through the bandages: "You've come every day, why?" Fran replied: "You're my husband." Then with his eyes turned to the ceiling he continued: "You know... it came so sudden...the crash. One minute I could fly a plane and I was flying. The next, the same way it happened with the boy. "Fran said softly: "We never know. We never know, Kurt, when.." Then he hesitated and said: "Will you will you...will you give me a drink of water?" Fran was shocked that he asked! She gave it to him, her hands trembling with emotion. Now will you kiss me?" Then he cried: "Oh Fran! Fran!" She held him in her arms like a child while he continued to cry. She kissed him like a lover lost and found like a husband who has returned.

"That was the tragedy," Fran said. "I wish I could explain something of this to people who think that being shattered physically is the worst thing that can happen to a man. Kurt's body may be in bandages. But his spirit is healed. Only a blow like this could make him realise the truth that our life lies entirely in the hands of God. Someday Kurt will get well, but already he is gentle. He has found a peace which he never knew in the pride of his sound body. Now Kurt and I both thank God that this thing happened. That by the road of pain that bought him back to happiness." □

# FAILURE

by Dough O'Shea OP

"I have no fear at all of failing," he told me calmly, I remember. I made no reply, I could think of nothing that such a person would need or care to hear. That kind of self-confidence was beyond me. But then he said, "I don't mean that I expect to succeed; in fact I expect to fail, but I have no fear of failing."

This, of course, put an entirely different complexion on it. He was talking about a complicated move in the internal adjustment of his family. It strikes me now that his attitude was the firmest of all foundations for fearlessness. If I feel I must always succeed I will always be afraid of failure. I have noticed, for example, that teenage boys in their strutting season are the most fear-filled people of all; they must not fail in their friends' eyes. If the fear and denial of failure can remove us so far from reality, there has to be some kind of redemption in failure itself. Perhaps if we regarded it as a routine matter, as perfectly normal and ordinary, the fear of it would not paralyse us so much.

An intimidating word, 'heroic'! Please come down a few notches! To my mind, success is greatly overrated. It can have a trivial meaning. You could look successful because you have never taken any risks or attempted anything much: you could be a highly successful businessman in a company producing Christmas crackers. People become dull when they give their lives to dull things, when they don't risk themselves any more. There is often a kind of obtuseness about successful people, even



when their achievements are real: this is because success is a very poor teacher. Failure is in many ways the best teacher of all: it makes you more alert; and you always learn something, perhaps especially humility; it gives you knowledge of your own limitations. People who know a lot of failure are usually the most human of all.

A holy man said to me once that the temptations of Jesus in the desert were temptations to be less than deeply human: they were temptations to be a magic man, or famous or powerful like an emperor. He rejected them all and chose the most vulnerable human way, God's way. By human reckoning, this way of love turned out to be a complete failure: crucifixion was meant not only to kill the body but to wipe out all memory of a man; anyone passing by as he died that afternoon would have seen nothing but failure. How is failure redeemed? It is redeemed, the Christian faith asserts, by all our definitions of success and failure being turned upside down.

My definition of success is my definition of myself, even if I never mark up to it: there is always this hidden definition of the self. If I were free of the egocentric self I would be free, by the same token, of worldly definitions of success; I would not be defending an ego, an idea of myself - a full-time and difficult job - and therefore I wouldn't mind whether it sank or swam.

I take the things that grip me and I give them a good gallop, not minding much whether I succeed or fail. So help me God! □

# DON BOSCO'S EARLY SCHOOL DAYS

## 2

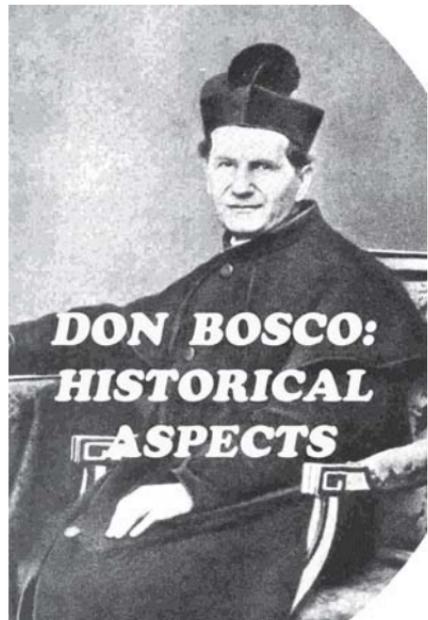
by Fr. Elias Dias

Once the great artist and sculptor Michelangelo saw a piece of marble thrown on a rubbish dump, he took it to his studio, chiseled at it with great care and brought out of it a beautiful angel. For some, education means teaching someone only to read and write or to learn the skills of a trade but real education means bringing out the best in one's students. Despite the several difficulties that Don Bosco encountered his education brought out the best in him.

Young John Bosco's early school days could not be compared to a bed of roses. The road he traversed as a child in pursuit for an education proved to be a bumpy one marked by frequent twists and turns. He was often stalled by unforeseen roadblocks but despite these disheartening setbacks, John's great desire to study and his firm determination prevailed over the frustrations that constantly dogged his quest for an education.

### Education in Northern Italy

Before the Napoleonic period (1898-1813) there was no compulsory public education in the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont. Fortunate children received a primary education in some small local private schools usually run by a priest. Other children just learned from their elders to read and write who had acquired those skills from others.



But illiteracy was commonplace and only the clergy and the elite were educated. Napoleon realized the value of the school system and made primary education compulsory. This idea was carried over into the Restoration Period thereafter. In 1822 King Charles Felix, as part of a comprehensive school reform, decreed that elementary schools be established in every municipality. All children over 7 years of age were compelled to attend the local municipal school. These schools were tuition-free and locally financed. In spite of this the children of peasants attended school only during (winter) the "dead season;" during the rest of the year they worked on farms.

Becchi was located in the municipality of Castelnuovo and therefore John had to enroll at Castelnuovo. That entailed walking 5km four times a day.

Margaret tried to enroll him at Capriglio, where Fr. Joseph Lacqua ran a school. But Fr. Lacqua refused to admit him because of the law of "Regie Patenti" (Educational law) but because Marianna, Margaret's sister worked as Fr. Lacqua's housekeeper he enrolled her nephew in his school. So, in November 1824 John was admitted. In this saintly priest he was fortunate to find an understanding teacher and a caring priest. He advised John on many issues. It was at this time that John was introduced to the Sacrament of Confession and he subsequently received his first Communion on Easter Sunday March 26, 1826 at Castelnuovo.



*This is the road from Becchi to Castelnuovo which John traversed twice a day.*

### **The Dream of 9**

The famous 'vocational dream' that John had at the age of 9 must have taken place during this period. John Bosco saw a crowd of boys playing, fighting and not a few were swearing. He immediately rushed into the crowd and tried to stop them with blows. A dignified personage appeared and said: "Not with blows but by gentleness and love will you win them over." "But who are you?" "I am the Son of Her whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day" At that moment John was confused when a majestic lady appeared. All the children disappeared. In their place he saw all types of wild animals. "This is your field of work. Make yourself humble, steadfast and strong. And what you now see become of these animals, you must bring about in my children." The wild animals changed into lambs and John began to cry: "I don't understand." The lady went on: "In due time you

will understand". In the morning he shared his dream with his family. His grandmother advised him: "Don't pay any attention to dreams."

The dream probably occurred towards the end of June (1825) around the time of the feast of Sts Peter and Paul, patrons of the village Parish Church, when liturgical texts such as "Feed my lambs, Feed my sheep" could have provided those images. Or it could have occurred in connection with the feast of the Annunciation (March 25) with it's the mention of the Angelus prayers that were alluded to in the dream. The pastoral images could also have been suggested by preachers who gave sermons in preparation for the Jubilee year 1824 that was mandated by Pope Leo XII. The theme of the Jubilee was the pastoral ministry of the Pope,

bishops and priests among the people. Just before the narration of the dream Don Bosco had spoken about his studies, his ability to organize youngsters and his qualities of leadership. The idea of becoming a priest must have been given to him by Fr. Lacqua and confirmed by his mother. Though this dream occurred several times and made quite an impression on him, he never told it to anyone. It was only in 1858 when Don Bosco had an audience with Pope Pius IX that he told the Holy Father about the work he was doing for youngsters. The Holy Father then asked him to write down all the extraordinary happenings that had taken place in his life. Fr. Joaquim Berto wrote down this dream and Don Bosco corrected it in 1870. Fr. John Bonetti first brought it to the attention of the public in his work *Cinque Lustris* in 1892. Fr. Lemoyne incorporated it in the *Biographical Memoirs* in 1898 and Fr Rinaldi celebrated the centenary of this great event in 1925.

### **John leaves home**

On February 11, 1826 Margarita Zucca, John Bosco's grandmother died. Anthony Bosco the step-brother of John Bosco assumed the role of the head of the family. He began to assert his dominance and wield his authority irresponsibly. He did not want John to study because they were a family of poor farmers and couldn't afford an education. John was now threatened with physical harm by his step-brother and so Margaret suggested that they divide the estate but she was unable to do so because Anthony was still a minor and so Margaret decided to send her son, John, away from home.

In the winter 1827 John was sent to Serra, the home of his maternal grandparents and uncles in near Buttigliera D'Asti at the farmstead of Canfora. He was warmly received but had to leave that place because there was no work. At home the situation of strife remained unchanged and so in February 1828 Margaret sent John to the Moglia Farm near Moncuco. Mr. Louis Moglia was not eager to keep John on the farm but his wife Dorotea Phillipello, Margaret's good friend, requested her husband to help the boy. That was a period of relative peace. He took care of the stable and did some light work on the farm. Fr. Nicholas Moglia one of the uncles of Mr. Moglia gave him some classes. Canon Francis Cottino, realizing the situation and acknowledging the aspirations of John approved and encouraged his weekly attendance at the Sacrament of Penance and Eucharist. Staying on the farm was not suitable if John was to pursue his education and so after two years his maternal uncle Michael Occhiena brought him back home.

Pope Leo XI died in 1829 and his successor Pius VIII proclaimed a special jubilee to implore God's blessings on his Pontificate. The reader should not confuse this jubilee with the jubilee of the Holy Year of 1825. In preparation for the jubilee in 1829 the Parish of Buttigliera had organized a Triduum (*three days of prayer and sermons*). Fr. Calosso from Murialdo and John Bosco from Becchi attended the Triduum. It was on November 5, 1829 that Fr. Calosso met John. He was struck by John's enthusiasm and intelligence. He invited Margaret

and John to visit him and soon John was taking lessons at the rectory with Fr Calosso. At first John attended classes early in the morning, returning to the field to work during the rest of the day. This arrangement seemed to satisfy Anthony only for a while but he could not be placated. Eventually John moved in with Fr. Calosso, becoming a full-time student and servant of Fr. Calosso. The good priest was determined to see to his education. On November 21, 1830, however, suddenly Fr. Calosso died of a cerebral hemorrhage, at the age of 75. He left behind a sizable sum of money for John's studies but sadly, he could not use it.

### **Parting ways with Anthony**

Early in 1831 the Bosco estate was divided. Anthony began to live separately. He was married to Anna Rosa on March 22, 1831. Margaret, Joseph and John stayed at the *little house* of Becchi. Sometime later Joseph moved to a farm in Sussambrino. He took over the Matta farmstead as a tenant-farmer in partnership with Joseph Febraro. That was when Margaret and John went to live with him. On March 18, 1833, Joseph married Maria Calosso.

Just before Christmas 1830 John enrolled at the public school in Castelnuovo. This was the first time he would be attending a regular course of studies. In the beginning he attended school from Becchi but later managed to find lodgings with a tailor named Roberto. Roberto was a singer who specialized in Gregorian chant and staying with him, John learned tailoring and Gregorian chant. At first John brought his own food from home and ate it in a corner of

the shop but when it grew too cold to go back home he preferred to remain hungry and sleep on an empty stomach. Finally he became a boarder for a small fee which Margaret paid with some produce from her farm at Becchi. John also learnt the skills of a blacksmith from a certain Mr. Evasio Savio.

### **The Cowherd from Becchi**

John was now well over 15 years old and he found himself in class with much younger boys. His previous education and cultural development had been rather sketchy. The clothes and the shoes he wore were those of a "cowherd" from Becchi. In spite of this the first four months of school were a happy experience for him. This was largely due to the fact that his teacher, Fr. Emmanuel Virano gave him opportunities to showcase his character, intelligence and prodigious memory. John saw in Fr. Virano an understanding father. But in April 1831 Fr. Virano was appointed pastor of Mondonio and Fr. Nicholas Moglia a 75 years old priest took his place. He already knew John at the Moglia farm and had even given him some lessons in Latin. Apparently incapable of maintaining discipline and extremely prejudiced, he dismissed the "*cowherd from Becchi*" as a dunce and a hopeless case. He humiliated him at every opportunity and even allowed the class to torment him. John pleaded with him to be given him an opportunity to attend his Latin class but the priest's response was cruel and demeaning. John left the school and stayed at the farmstead at Sussambrino. □

# Reflecting on Mary

## UNDERSTANDING MARY THROUGH LOURDES

by Enzo Bianco

**F**or a long time there has been an accusation that has been leveled against Catholics: "You exaggerate your devotion to the Madonna. You almost consider her divine and very easily believe in apparitions." About five years ago, Pope Benedict went to Lourdes to celebrate with the Catholics of France the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes.

Just pondering on the words of the Pope at Lourdes will help us to understand who Mary is for us and for our protestant brethren too.

At Lourdes, in 1858, Our Lady, through Bernadette, reminded the Christians of our time - among other things - of the extraordinary fact of her Immaculate Conception.

On September 14, 2008 Pope Benedict XVI visited Lourdes. At the esplanade of Massabielle overflowing with praying faithful, his

homily at that Mass recalled the words of that significant event: "The beautiful lady" reveals her name to Bernadette: 'I am the Immaculate Conception.' Mary thereby discloses the extraordinary grace that she has received from God, that of having been conceived without sin, for "he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness" (cf. Lk 1:48). Mary is the woman of this earth who gave herself totally to God, and who received the privilege of giving human life to his eternal Son. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me" (Lk 1:38).

So, Mary, through her Immaculate Conception, is placed by God at the beginning of the plan of Salvation. She freely defers entirely to God.

At Lourdes, Pope Benedict found words of wonder and joy about that first step, the redemption of us featherless bipeds who worry so much about



planet Earth. He said of Mary: "She is beauty transfigured, the image of the new humanity. By presenting herself in this way, utterly depending on God, Mary expresses, in reality an attitude of total freedom, based on the full recognition of her true dignity."

He adds: "This privilege concerns us too, for it discloses to us our own dignity as men and women, admittedly marked by sin, but saved in hope, a hope which allows us to face our daily lives."

Therefore hope: "The message of Mary" the Pope goes on, "for all men and women of our day, whatever their country of origin. I like to invoke Mary as the *star of hope* (*Spe Salvi*, 50). On the pathways of our lives, so often shrouded in darkness, she is a beacon of hope who enlightens us and gives direction to our journey. Through her "yes," through the generous gift of herself, she has opened up to God the gates of our world and of our history."

Therefore the Pope invites us: "In the silence of prayer, be prepared to confide in Mary, who spoke to Bernadette in a spirit of respect and trust towards her."

Respect her? Oh, Yes! Perhaps the Pope was alluding to a particular aspect of the apparitions: The Virgin, addressing Bernadette, the young peasant girl, she spoke respectfully in her dialect out of respect. She said, for example: "*Boulet aué era gracie de bié t'acipenden quinze dies?*" which is: "Would you be kind enough to come here for fifteen days?"

So the Pope praises the girl unconditionally: "Bernadette is the eldest daughter of a very poor family, with neither knowledge nor ability and in poor health. Mary chose her to transmit her message of conversion, prayer and penance, which fully accords with words of

Jesus: "What you have hidden from the wise and understanding, you have revealed to babes" (*Mt* 11:25).

In fact, just as with children, Mary initiated Bernadette to God's plan.

Think of the events in Palestine that followed one another: The Annunciation, the Divine Motherhood, the Queen with an apron, the Wise Woman at Cana, the Mother of Sorrows at Calvary, the Mother who was given to John by Christ at the foot of the cross, the Queen of the apostles in the cenacle, the Virgin assumed into heaven. And then, in the subsequent history of the Church, today as yesterday and so tomorrow, Mary is the Help of Christians.

These are the stages of Mary's full cooperation in the plan of Redemption; the New Woman, the first to be redeemed and the first Christian. Once more, she is always vigilant and active in the plan of God that is unfolding in the world.

"Now," explains the Pope, the Madonna "accompanies us with her maternal presence amid the events of our personal lives, our family lives, and our national lives. Happy are those men and women who place their trust in him who, at the very moment when he was offering his life for our salvation, gave us his Mother to be our own!"

The Pope concludes: "My dear brothers and sister, may the Mother of the Lord... always be honoured fervently in each of your families, in your religious communities and in your parishes! May Mary be for all peoples the Mother who surrounds her children in their joys and their trials!" And the Holy Father concludes with a prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope and to love like you. Show us the way to the kingdom of your Son Jesus! Star of the sea, shine upon us and guide us on our journey! □

## NEWSBITS

### TAIWAN

Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi, who turned 90 in December 2011, has many reasons to celebrate.

Apart from his many contributions to the faithful in Taiwan, he also witnessed one of the most important events for the Church in recent times, the signing of an agreement on higher education that normalized qualifications between the Holy See and the Taiwan government.

On the basis of that historic agreement, Taiwan will now recognize 161 pontifical universities and academies around the world.

In other words, titles and degrees conferred on students by Fu Jen Catholic University's theology department will be recognized locally.

The prelate also took the opportunity to turn his birthday into a fund-raising opportunity.

The event, held on December 5, 2011 and hosted by Kaohsiung faithful, raised money for the Mount Beatitude complex, a pastoral centre that reached the end of its first phase of construction last year.

"I don't want to leave a heavy burden to my successor Archbishop Peter Liu Cheng-chung," Cardinal Shan said.

Archbishop Liu described the project as the third of three dreams of Cardinal Shan and urged the faithful to help fulfill them.

But the influential prelate continues to battle with poor health. He was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2006.

During the Mass, Cardinal Shan

knelt in front of 400 people in attendance and asked for forgiveness.

"I invite you to pray for me, to give thanks to God and to beg for His forgiveness of my sin. I also beg forgiveness from every one of you for not being perfect."

This gesture of humility caught many Catholics by surprise and moved them to tears. Cardinal Shan said following the Mass that his cancer had inspired him to do a lot more for the Church than he had accomplished during his 60 years of priestly service.

Cardinal Shan also began a series of life lectures after his cancer was diagnosed, and they have earned much respect from local society.

"Cardinal Shan is a legend in Taiwan. His life story inspires many people," said Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou after he presented the prelate with a gift during Mass at the Holy Rosary Minor Basilica-Cathedral in Kaohsiung last month.

*From UCAN News*

### NEW JERSEY, USA

Maryrest Cemetery, one of the 10 Catholic cemeteries owned and operated by the Newark Archdiocese, has a new section dedicated to natural burials and green funerals.

It is believed to be one of the first Catholic cemeteries in the state to reserve grounds for eco-friendly burials.

Andrew P. Schafer, executive director of the archdiocese's cemeteries, said the green burial site was developed in response to consumer requests and is part of a

multiyear, multimillion dollar renovation and expansion of Maryrest.

Cemetery officials had planned to make the option available later this year but pushed plans ahead after getting word from Robert Prout, director of Prout Funeral Home in Verona, about a family who was requesting a more natural burial for their father.

After meeting with Prout and the family at Maryrest, Schafer agreed to accommodate their request. Despite the winter weather, cemetery workers prepared a section of the cemetery for a natural burial service.

Prout, who is a national speaker on natural burials practices, which includes the use of biodegradable caskets, credits Schafer and the Newark Archdiocese for allocating green burial space as part of the cemetery's renovation plans. (CNS)

#### VATICAN CITY

Pope Benedict XVI condemned the use of violence, especially when the name of God is used to justify aggression against others.

"Violence against Christians in some countries has provoked the indignation of many people," especially because the recent hostility has been perpetrated during "the most sacred days" of the Christmas season, he said after his Angelus address to pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square Jan. 10, 2011. Though the pope did not specify which countries he was referring to, Christians have recently been targeted in Egypt, Malaysia and Iraq.

Seven people died in a drive-by shooting in the southern Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi as they were leaving the Virgin Mary

Church after Christmas Eve services Jan. 6.

In Malaysia six churches have been firebombed since a court ruled that the word "Allah" can be used by non-Muslims as a term for God. The word for God is "Allah" in both Malay and Arabic, though some in the predominantly Muslim country of Malaysia said the word should be exclusive to Islam.

In Iraq, where a Christian church in Mosul was targeted in late November, another church was bombed Dec. 23.

Pope Benedict emphasized that "There can be no violence in the name of God, nor can one think of honouring him by offending the dignity and freedom of other people," he said.

The pope also condemned the poor living conditions, exploitation and violence immigrants are subjected to.

"An immigrant is a human being, who is different only because of country of origin, culture and traditions, but he or she is a person to be respected and is someone who has rights and duties," he said.

He said people are often tempted to exploit immigrants in the work world and in how they are forced to live.

"Violence must never be the way to resolve difficulties," he added.

The pope said lying at the heart of the problem of violence against immigrants and religious minorities is the lack of respect for the human person. "I ask you to look at other people's faces and discover that they have a soul, a history and a life; they are a person and God loves them just as he loves me," he said. (L'OR) □

**LOVING CHILDREN TO  
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Thank you, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for saving me from a serious accident at the Churchgate road crossing.

*Mrs. Nataline D'Souza, Naigaon, Vasai*

Thank you dear Mother Mary for protecting us from a house fire caused by a short circuit.

*Tresa Shebin Thomas, Thane (W)*

I was in excruciating knee pain and I called out to Our Blessed Mother constantly reciting the three Hail Marys. Thank you Mother Mary for blessing me and protecting me always. I thank you also for curing my son of a terrible ear ache where the doctor feared that surgery would be necessary.

*Devotee*

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary for helping my son to enter his final year B.E and for all the other favours received through the recitation of the three Hail Marys.

*Mathew Cardoz, Mumbai*

Thank you Mother Mary for the miraculous cure of my grand daughter Amisha,

*Philomena Fernandes, Mumbai*

Thank you, Mary Help of Christians for a speedy cure and a successful operation.

*Roselyn Carnelio, Mumbai*

Thank you, Mary Help of Christians for the gift of a job and for keeping me in good health.

*Jasmine Lobo, Mumbai*

I wish to thank Jesus and Mother Mary for helping our daughter to get a job so quickly after completing her studies abroad. It was a miracle through the most precious blood of Jesus and the powerful intercession of Mary for THE LORD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS. I also thank Jesus and Mother Mary for keeping us in good health and for many other favours that we have received over the years.

*Mr. & Mrs. A.T. Sequeira, Mumbai*

Sweet Mother Mary we have come a long way through our 45 years of married life. It's been a journey of a sweet fragrance in spite of all the setbacks, difficulties and the tragedy of losing our first baby. But the joy of knowing we have an angel in heaven, we feel blessed. Sweet Jesus and Mother Mary has blessed us with three jewels, two sons and a daughter. Their very first entry from the hospital was a visit to the Crypt and today we bring our grand-kids too. May be a bit late, but nevertheless we have come. Thank you, Mother for all the blessings, gifts and every joy. Do keep us all under your mantle blue.

*Colleen and Gerald Traynor, Mumbai*

It was September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 the birthday of our loving Mother Mary. After celebrating her feast and coming back home our van was it by a motorbike. Neither vehicle was damaged. Our Lady was present there to protect us from severe danger. Sincere gratitude for your protection, dear Mother.

*Shimmy Francis, Kerala*

During her two pregnancies my wife had two miscarriages. After praying to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio she the conceived and was blessed with twin girls whom we named Sennely and Gail. They are now 12 years old. Thank you Jesus and Mother Mary for the favours received.

*Franklin D'Costa & Family, 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 gratefully acknowledge the power in the recitation of the three Hail Marys. Many thanks to Our Lady and the Infant Jesus for all the graces bestowed on my family - for keeping the children away from harm for great success in their academic fields and innumerable blessings received.

*Shernaz, Mumbai*

My mother accompanied me to school every day, in fact, I never went anywhere alone, but once I had to go to school alone and it was raining. I was afraid. I prayed the three Hail Marys as I was crossing a bridge which collapsed just after I had crossed it. I could have been injured but my Mother Mary was there.

*Sonia Baby, Thodupulai, Kerala*

My deep thanks to our dear Mother Mary for four major favours received by my family through my daily praying the three Hail Marys honouring the power, wisdom and loving mercy she received from the Blessed Trinity. I continue this devotion and hope for her loving help and guidance in the future too.

*Marie D'Souza, New Delhi*

Thank you Mother Mary for all the favours and graces granted. I recite the 3 Hail Marys when I am in trouble and Mother Mary has always been there for me.

*Almeida, Mumbai*

Our grateful thanks to the Holy Trinity, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for, through the recitation of the three Hail Marys you blessed our son Gilfred and his wife Bryoni with the gift of a healthy baby girl though she had a diabetic problem during her pregnancy.

*Voicy and Evaristo, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother for the many blessings and favours received through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys.

*Felicia, Mumbai*

My heartfelt thanks to Our Lady and the faithful recitation of the three Hail Marys for the numerous graces I received.

*Mrs. J.A.L. Glover, Rajahmundry, AP*

My most grateful thanks to Mother Mary for several favours received through the recitation of the three Hail Marys. *Mrs. I. Wadhvani, Mumbai* Through the recitation of the three Hail Marys my son did well in his Std. X exams. Thank you dearest Mother.

*C. Netto, Mumbai*

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

Thanks to Our Lady, and St Don Bosco for my Mum's tests showing no signs of malignancy. Our prayers were heard and once again a miracle was performed.

*Ms. R. James, Australia*

My sincere thanks to the Infant Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery.

*Jennifer Mendes, Goa*  
Thank you Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for granting my son (with a disability) to secure a 1<sup>st</sup> Class in his SSC and for helping him get an admission in a nearby college.

*Winnie Monteiro, Mumbai*

Thank you Mother Mary and Don Bosco for helping my son pass his engineering exams with a first class and helping him get a good job.

*Sheeba Joseph, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Jesus Christ my Lord, the Holy Spirit, Our Blessed Mother and all the blessed saints for saving my left eye miraculously after a freak accident.

*Majorie Mascarenhas, Mumbai*

Due to Divine Intervention of the Infant Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio my sister Lily D'Cruz who underwent a critical eye surgery where the doctor did not give much hope of vision, miraculously got back her vision. We all remain grateful for the grace we have received.

*A. Noronha, Mumbai*

My grateful and sincere thanks to my Lord Jesus, by beloved Mother Mary and Don Bosco for granting my son a negative head MRI report. I'm also very grateful for all the graces received. Please continue to bless my family and keep us under your care.

*Mrs. Filomena Pinto Rebelo, Kuwait*

Thanks Mother Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio who blessed us with the gift of a baby girl after many years.

*Pascoal and Annie Raposo, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for curing me from my sickness.

*Mrs. M. Mascarenhas, Mumbai*

Belated but sincere thanks for the many blessings and favours received from Jesus, our Lord, through the intercession of Mother Mary and all the saints.

*C. Gomes, Mumbai*

Our sincere thanks to Mother Mary for taking care of me during my surgery and all the favours granted to me. Thank you dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the gift of a lovely baby boy. Please keep him always under your care. My sincere thanks for all the favours received and for answering our prayers. Please continue to shower on us your blessings and keep us in your care.

*Charmaine, Crasto and family, Goa*

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

*Clyde and Gillian Fernandes, Mumbai*

I am grateful to Our Lady and St. John Bosco for saving my leg. I am still able to walk.

*Constance Pereira, Mumbai*

## THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Loving thanks to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the blessings bestowed on our family - for the sustained excellent academic performance of our children in the exams at the school, college and post graduate levels, for success in the PG Medical examinations and for good job placements.

*Shernaz, Mumbai*

Belated thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of our grand daughter Isabella.

Keep us all under your mantle and protect us always. *John & Brenda Mendes, USA*

On 17th August 2009 during my eighth

month of pregnancy I delivered a still born baby boy. I was in total shock and after that the doctors advised me not to have a second child as my health was still bad. I was depressed and developed a blood pressure problem. I was sad because I would never be a mother again. But I did not lose my faith in Jesus and Mother Mary. Somewhere in my heart I knew that my faith would win. One day when I visited my gynaecologist he told me that I could plan to have another baby. I did face a lot of problems during my pregnancy, there was less blood and less fluid, for which reason, the doctor advised an early delivery which had to be caesarian. The doctors gave us a few dates, one of which was our wedding anniversary. On 11th November 2010 our baby was born, a healthy baby boy, and I am grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio. My son's name is Mariano.

*Louisa & Niegel D'Abreo, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Our Heavenly Mother and St. Dominic Savio for interceding with Our Lord for the safe delivery of a healthy baby boy to our second daughter in April 2011 also to our eldest daughter who finally gave birth after five miscarriages.

*Maureen Hobkirk, Australia*

Thank you, dear Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby girl after 9 long years to my son.

*Mrs. Celine D'Mello, Mumbai*

### **APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER**

FEBRUARY 2012

**Holy Father's General Intention:** *That all peoples may have access to water and other resources needed for daily life.*

**Missionary Intention:** *That the Lord may sustain the efforts of health workers assisting the sick and elderly in the world's poorest regions.*