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*Grant, we pray,
 O Lord,
 through
 Mary's intercession,
 that we too,
 may at all times
 merit
 to receive
 your grace.*

✚

*From the Common
 of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

From The Editor's Desk
THE INNER VOICE...OF LOVE?

I am writing this piece in the heat of summer. While sitting down on one of the cooler evenings I got wondering about a book-study club that I had just started which took up Henri Nouwen's "Inner Voice of Love" and what came through during the last study session was amazing! *The Inner Voice* was in fact, the conscience that we most take for granted. I want to illustrate this through a story of someone I know.

Silvano (not his real name) was an Italian student in his mid-twenties, who began to take his religious faith seriously only a few years ago. He was a traditional Catholic but he had drifted away during his teenage years. His 'return' came about because he found himself forced into a crisis of choice. It happened like this.

He got into contact with some people who offered him the possibility of quick but dishonest money. The proposal was very attractive and initially he flirted with the idea of accepting.

However, he asked for some time to think about it, and this pause proved to be one of the turning points of his life. He asked himself: if I take this road, what does it mean for my whole future? The answer frightened him – healthily. For the first time as an adult, he awoke to the fact that the quality of his life depended on his own decisions.

Up to now, he had been drifting a lot, as he now realized. In many ways, he had been immature, careless, like someone not yet alert to the dangers. But if he let himself follow this proposal, he felt that something would be damaged in him forever. Then to his surprise, he realized two other things clearly. First, that the decision he was making was one that could influence his whole future and it was perhaps the first major choice of his life. Secondly, and more unexpectedly for him, he saw that he needed to 'sort himself out' religiously.

Thus he came to see that this experience of conscience was , at least for him at that moment, an indirect experience of God. This 'voice' was within him, but it was also larger than him, even beyond him. That's when he admitted to me: "At a certain point I saw with complete clarity that I was not being true to myself. I admitted to myself that this voice of conscience was unmistakable. To my surprise, this voice of conscience was not bossy. It was more like hearing music perfectly in tune. The serenity of the whole experience made me realize that this was, so to speak, a meeting with God. God was not only saving me from a false move, but was showing me how I could return to faith again. It would no longer be a childish relationship. God was Someone who wanted to reach me, and this God was way beyond the behaviour zone. It was a crisis that opened my eyes."

But this experience of conscience that might have caused anxiety and guilt gave way to another stage, Silvano came to trust that he was not alone. He was then able to hand over his life to Someone else, choosing to act as well as he could, and finding a new peace and companionship he had thus far not known.

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

DREAMING OF A CHILD AND LIVING THE WAIT

by Mons Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

All mothers and fathers have dreamt of their child for nine months. A family is not possible without the dream. If one loses the ability to dream, life dims and fades away

Whenever we pray the Rosary, we're praying through Mary, woman, bride and mother. Christians in our communities gather in churches and chapels in many corners of our villages to pray the rosary.

St Therese of Lisieux wrote: "One should not recount things about Mary that are far-fetched or that one does not know, [...] In order for a sermon on the holy virgin to please me and do me good, I must see her real life, not her life as it is supposed to be. It is not necessary to show her unapproachable, to make her virtues stand out, to say that she

lived by faith as we do". (*Last talks*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1997,183-184).

Today we would like to describe the experience of pregnancy as described by Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (168-171). Mary experienced a special pregnancy, the fruit of her yes to God, but still a pregnancy like that experienced by every woman.

This is how Pope Francis begins: "Pregnancy is a difficult but wonderful time. A mother joins with God to bring forth the miracle of a new life." (AL 168). It is



said that a woman 'procreates' a child and the Pope comments on this very special verb: "Each woman shares in "the mystery of creation, which is renewed with each birth." (AL 168). The sweet words of Psalm 138 resound: "You have woven me in my mother's womb."

Every child is 'an eternal project of God the Father and his love'. Every child is known and loved from eternity, even before a woman perceives him present in her womb and already feels she loves him. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you came forth, I consecrated you" (Jer 1:5).

The Pope speaks of each child as an "eternal dream of God" and there is that term 'dream' more appropriate than the term project. God has dreams that man in his freedom often decides not to realise when, for example, he decides to terminate a pregnancy. But every man and woman also dream of a child even before conceiving it. In the same dynamic of conjugal love, there is the promise of a third that is the fruit of their love, but at the same time is beyond and more than their love. "For nine months every mother and father dreams about their child... You can't have a family without dreams. Once a family loses the ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies." (AL 169).

Every child is a dream, but also a mystery. The Pope recalls that thanks to the progress of science today we can know many things about that child growing in the

womb, but "only the Father, the Creator, fully knows the child; he alone knows his or her deepest identity" (AL 170). Motherhood invokes faith and hope, it feels it must rely on the God of life, especially when anxieties and fears inevitably inhabit the heart of a mother and father who ask themselves: "Will s/he be healthy?" "Will we be able to welcome him/her and bring him/her up well?"

Pregnancy recalls the expectation that dwells in the hearts of parents and nourishes that child with good food from the womb. "It is important that that child feels expected" (cf AL 179) of an open, willing expectation, free from any planning about its future, but available to discover it and get to know it with patience and love. "It matters little whether this new life is convenient for you, whether it has features that please you, or whether it fits into your plans and aspirations. For "children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable... We love our children because they are children, not because they are beautiful, or look or think as we do, or embody our dreams. We love them because they are children. A child is a child" (AL 170).

The Pope ends with a wish for pregnant women: "I urge all future mothers: keep happy and let nothing rob you of the interior joy of motherhood. Your child deserves your happiness. Don't let fears, worries, other people's comments or problem lessen your joy at being God's means of

bringing a new life to the world. Prepare yourself for the birth of your child, but without obsessing about it. try to experience this serene excitement amid all your many concerns, and ask the Lord to preserve your joy, so that you can pass it on to your child" (AL 171).

Mary experienced her special pregnancy and we would like to know how she experienced it, but

probably every woman can understand something of what Mary felt and experienced. Beyond all the worries and hardships that every pregnancy entails, we believe that the best comment on her pregnancy she herself gave us: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour because he has looked upon the humility of his servant." (Lk 1,46-48). □

EVEN LOVE HAS ITS OWN FORMULAE



A mother recounts: "I had gone with my two-year-old to visit his grandmother. While we were there, the home delivery man arrived bringing her lunch.

After complimenting my little boy, the man added that he had eight children.

"Eight children!" She exclaimed. "I love my baby so much that I cannot imagine sharing this love with eight." The home delivery man replied, "Love is not divided it is multiplied!" □

MARY MAGDALENE IN GLORY

Paola Curzu

Light clouds accompany the figure of Mary Magdalene carried to heaven by the angels, on canvas painted (in 1620) by the Bolognese painter Domenico Zampieri known as Domenichino.

In St. Petersburg, strolling along the snow-covered Dvorcovaja embankment, one is fascinated by the elegant and majestic Hermitage building. The Winter Palace, the first nucleus of the complex structure we currently admire, was designed by the Italian architect Rastrelli between 1754 and 1762 for Tsarina Elisabeth and was completed after her death. However, we owe the creation of the museum to Catherine the Great. The tsarina, a passionate lover of the arts, had the 'Petit Ermitage' built next to the first

building in which she sought refuge from the hustle and bustle of the court and began to collect works of great value visible only to a select few and purchased on the advice of various European experts. It was soon necessary to build more rooms to accommodate the increasingly rich collection and hence the name Hermitage expanded to five buildings.

Strolling through the museum's splendid rooms, one can admire extraordinary masterpieces by Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Correg-

gio and Caravaggio, to name but the best-known Italian artists. In this gallery of wonders on the occasion of the 22 July feast day, we will pause to contemplate the "Santa Maria Maddalena in gloria" (depicted here) oil on canvas by Domenico Zampieri known as Domenichino.

Domenico (Bologna 1581-Naples 1641), the son of a humble shoemaker, trained with Calvaert and the Carraccis; he was a man of great culture, a lover of music and during his occupation, which he carried



out in various Italian cities, he evoked the legacy of the great masters of the 16th century in a refined and eclectic style pursuing an ideal of beauty and harmony. According to biographers, Domenico was nicknamed Domenichino because he diminutive of stature or the extreme shyness of his character. He worked in Rome at Palazzo Farnese, in the chapel of Santa Cecilia, in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, and in the chapel of the treasure in the cathedral of Naples, exerting great influence on the artistic atmosphere of the city.

In the past, the Church put together in the liturgy the three women mentioned in the Gospel: Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus; the sinner, "to whom much was forgiven because she loved much" and who anointed the feet of Jesus with a precious ointment; and Mary of Magdala, the miraculous possessed woman who walked Jesus to the foot of the cross and was the first eye-witness to the resurrection. Today we commemorate the 'penitent' to whom the Risen Jesus appeared.

In medieval times, Magdalene was often depicted as the "mirophora," i.e., the bearer of the precious ointment, with long, beautiful red hair. During the Counter-Reformation, however, her image as a penitent spread and because of which Domenichino was partly inspired. The precious painting (ca. 1620) was part of the prestigious Crozat collection, one of the most important in France, which was bought in 1772 by the great

Catherine on the authoritative advice of Diderot.

The background against which the figure of the saint stands out is cut in two by the diagonal of the rocky mountain on the right punctuated by green and yellowish patches of bushes painted with broad, sinuous brush-strokes.

The golden hues of the sky thicken into shades of blue that become increasingly intense in the upper part of the painting. Light clouds accompany the figure of Mary Magdalene in flight, supported by angels: the pearly splendour of her complexion, the opulence of her forms emphasised by the draperies puffed up by the wind and the waving of her splendid auburn hair seem to lose all trace of earthly sensuality in her ascent to heaven thanks to the sensitivity of the artist, so attentive to the values of light and shade and to the rendering of moments of suspension, wonder and enchantment. In the left foreground, an angel dressed in red shows the saint's hermit's habit with his right hand and points to heaven with the index finger of his other hand while the one behind him holds the scourge, a symbol of penitential life, and the jar of ointment with which Magdalene perfumed Jesus' feet. According to the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacopo da Varazze, from which the artist drew inspiration, the Saint during the last years of her life spent in solitude was taken up to heaven by angels every day where she was fed at the heavenly banquet. □

THE PAIN OF THE PAST AND THE JOY OF THE PRESENT

by Anastasia Dias

"Bring her here," demanded the bold man. "Be gentle," said the boy next to him, "she's in a lot of pain." "Drag her by the hair," shouted another voice, equally adamant. "Wait, where are we taking her?" asked another. "Don't waste my time asking stupid questions, you fool. Quick, over there," pointed the old man. The woman was shrieking in pain. "Please, please, let me go." "Oh, shut up!" said the old man. "The moment he tells us to stone her, arrest him," the old man whispered and the others smiled wickedly.

A man with a commanding appearance said sternly: "Hurry, get her there!"

"What happened?" the man asked, concerned. The people around him were intrigued.

"This woman, she has been found in questionable circumstances. By law we are ordered to kill her. What do you have to say for this?" asked the old man. "What do you want to do?" the man asked. "We are instructed by the elders to stone her to death." "Okay," the man replied.

"What do you have to say? You seem indifferent," asked the old man, irritated by his calm demeanour.

The man sat down and drew patterns in the sand with the tips of his fingers. The people gazed at him, wondering if he'd work a miracle and make the men disappear or whether he'd come out here to judge. The crowd waited for a few minutes and then an hour...two hours passed by, then three. "Hey, tell us what we should do? We're not here to see you sketching on the ground!" screamed the old man.

"Have you never committed a sin in your life?" the man looked up and countered.

The old man didn't reply. "Any of you who has never sinned, please feel free to hurl stones," the man calmly declared. The people looked at each other. "What is he saying? Has he lost his mind," the old man said under his breath. He was mortified by what he had just heard and quietly slunk away. Slowly, the rest of the crowd dispersed.

The woman and Jesus were now alone. There was only compassion in his eyes when he looked up at her tear-stained face. Then, he told her she could go her way and not repeat her mistakes of the past.



This, here, is a story of real forgiveness and the hope of new beginnings. Jesus could have said: "What in the world is wrong with you? Why can't you be like other people?" or "If you don't learn from your mistakes, I won't be there to help you next time." But Jesus didn't say any of that. He just said, "Let it not happen again."

Sometimes, our present is strangled by our past. We become like the old man and other men; we're punishing ourselves, our bodies and our minds for things we did yesterday, or the day before or ten years ago. This is also the way, we start punishing the people around us, making them feel miserable and unhappy.

I recently met a friend who had gotten over five tattoos in a week. The reason for tattooing her body was because she enjoyed the pain, she was used to it and felt alive because of the pain. Now isn't that sad?

Think about it: Our past is in the past. It's over. Our mistakes belong there. Right now, we can choose to be different, to not repeat our mistakes but instead, to learn from them. There is no need to inflict pain on ourselves anymore; inflicting pain on our bodies and our minds to remind ourselves of our bad choices, failed relationships, unfortunate mistakes and futile regrets. Pain may cause us to realise that we are alive, our heart is still pumping blood and throbbing with it. But that is no way to live. Why choose sadness over joy? Why live with the pain of the past?

This is the moment to choose to accept our mistakes, analyse where they stem from, forgive ourselves and finally to make that choice to

let go. Like the woman, you and I can be human beings, forgiven and brand new. But only if we choose to. The past belongs in the past. You and I do not. We are here right now, brand new. Feel the newness, come alive and see the difference you make in your own life and this world around you. □



PITY THE CHILDREN OF BENIN

Benin is a small country between Togo and Nigeria. The pandemic caused by covid-19 also arrived here. The disease was 'imported,' i.e., it arrived through a European citizen who entered Benin without observing the quarantine period.

Unlike the citizens of the developed countries of America, Europe and Asia, the majority of the population only lives off the little money they make in a day: to prohibit them from going out would still mean condemning them to starvation. Here, problems never come alone...

At Belle Étoile

In Benin only one in five inhabitants has access to adequate sanitation, while there is a very high risk of serious infectious diseases such as malaria, dengue, hepatitis, typhoid and meningitis.

In this context, the most vulnerable were and still are the children. In Benin, 32% of children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition. The situation in paediatric hospitals is difficult, to say the least. Up to three children are admitted for every in-patient bed: in other words, in a room with four beds, 12 families can be found.

A large number of children and young people live on the streets, exposed to all sorts of dangers. Thousands of young people - it is estimated that there are 14,000 little slaves - work in the Dantokpa market in Cotonou as street vendors or more often transporting goods or picking up rubbish.



The most degraded area is the one ironically renamed *la Belle Étoile*, because it is precisely there, on a grassy bed of rubbish, that many people have made their home under the stars. The paradox is that they also have to pay rent for this unhealthy bivouac. The sanitary conditions of these children are very bad: they live in the midst of the rubbish, barefoot, with a real risk of contracting diseases. Hepatitis, tetanus and typhoid fever claim many victims among the children in the Cotonou market.

In addition to the health problem and widespread poverty, there is the phenomenon of children, but especially girls, being trafficked. These are orphan girls who are entrusted to other members of their family of origin: uncles, cousins, grandparents, older brothers... These relatives, also poor, lacking the resources to raise and educate them, exploit them by encouraging child labour, or sell them as slaves for a few tens of euros. But more often the girls are sent to prostitution in the brothels of the capital or taken illegally to Nigeria from where they then take the road to Europe, where they go to feed the street prostitution market. Slave boys, on the other

hand, are taken to the gold mines of Ghana, because they are small and able to enter low, cramped tunnels. And when their breath and lungs are compromised, they are sold back to the fishermen in the Volta delta, embarked on small dugouts and practically forced to live on dugout boats.

“Mamma Margherita”

The number of boys and girls enduring this phenomenon are staggering: over 40,000 of them between the ages of 6 and 17 have been trafficked in the country.

This is why the Salesian missionaries, present in Cotonou with two presences, one of which is evocatively named “Mamma Margaret” - Don Bosco’s mother - aimed at street children, have launched a vaccination campaign and an initiative to raise awareness of hygiene and cleanliness issues. In addition, every day the Salesians approach many youngsters living on the streets to offer them shelter, education and learning a trade that will enable them to leave the street. Together with the Salesian sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have for years been running a project that offers night-time protection, socio-professional reintegration and family reintegration to minors in a vulnerable condition in the Cotonou market.

At Mamma Margherita’s home, children between the ages of 10 and 17 can sleep, are trained to improve their future and feel safe. A workshop for sewing and motorbike maintenance has been equipped and is functioning, offering vocational training that enables them to enter the world of work and improve their living

conditions.

The Slave Coast

Benin was once called Dahomey, and was known for the quality of its slaves. One hundred years after the end of the trade, slaves are still the country’s main export product: only the age (today they are children), the means of transport (the car) and the destination (Nigeria) change. Traffickers look for them in the large markets of the capital PortoNovo, Cotonou and Sèmè-Kraké, which are swarming with street children. Sometimes they manage to convince their parents to sell them. They leave the poorest villages, promise well-paid work, take the burden of a mouth to feed off the family. Sometimes it is the parents themselves who get in touch with the traffickers to get rid of one too many children. Nigeria, beyond a volatile border, is a huge country, rich, without control and without morals: the demand for slaves is always high, free arms in homes, shops, fields, mines.

A repentant trafficker recounts: “In the ghettos of Cotonou, everyone has their own speciality. Ours was taking children. We would take them at night, from among the street children in the neighbourhood, or from out-of-the-way villages. Then, always at night, we would take them to the forest where the Nigerians would meet us. There is no control there, you can go from Benin to Nigeria quietly. The Nigerians would come by car, load up the children, drop us the money and goodbye until the next time. I don’t really know what they were doing with all those children. We would just take them” .□

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. ANTHONY OF KIEV (July 10)

Ian Pinto, sdb

THE PATH OF CONTEMPLATION

I’m certain you are well versed with the story of Jesus visiting the house of Martha at Bethany. On one occasion, Jesus went to spend some time with them and Martha busied herself with serving him and the disciples while Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him speak. At one point, Martha gets upset that Mary is not helping be a good host and serve the guests, and complains to Jesus. He replies saying she has chosen the better part (Lk 10:38-42).

Up until recently, I always believed that this incident pointed to the two basic paths in spirituality: The Active dimension represented by Martha and the Passive or Contemplative dimension represented by Mary. Both of them are equally important and have their own unique contribution to make to the spiritual life of individuals who practice them and to the larger community. Jesus favouring the passive over the active was understood as prioritizing Jesus over our work, giving importance to prayer time in the midst of a busy day, recognizing that



being a disciple and listening to the Master comes before being an apostle and doing the work of the Master, and so on. However, recently I was doing a study on spiritual theology and the professor brought to my attention a gradation that exists in the spiritual life. I always believed the active and passive were two, equal dimensions of the spiritual life but he pointed out to me that the

passive is graded higher than the active.

At first, I was not ready to concede the observation but gradually I saw sense in what he was saying. His argument was that the passive is greater because through it one participates more fully in the Paschal mystery because one's life consists of a daily surrender of everything from freedom of choice to freedom of movement. He contrasted the life of a cloistered religious with that of an active religious like myself. Even though we are both doing what is pleasing to the Lord, the contemplative's life represents the life of Christ more closely than my own, because in the total surrender of their life, they imitate the total surrender of Christ during his Passion, Death and Resurrection. Hence, the way of contemplation is higher than the way of action.

Anthony of Kiev was born in Liubech, Ukraine in the year 983. He was baptized with the name Antipas. He was taken up with the idea of serving God and offering one's life to Him. Since we have so little information about him, it is hard to say what influenced him to make this decision. Leaving behind home and family, prospects and wealth to follow the Lord was as radical in his days as it is in ours! Many people admire those who have given up family and wealth to pursue a vocation as a priest or religious brother or sister but not many feel inspired enough to emulate that choice.

Biographers say, Antipas left home as a young adult in order

to become a monk. He wandered about looking for a suitable monastery to join. His wanderings brought him to Mt. Athos in Greece. The journey is over 1500 kms and so it must have been long and hard. But Antipas did not diminish his resolve. He submitted himself to the Abbot of the Monastery and was accepted. On joining, as was the custom in those days, Antipas changed his name to match that of a patron saint - and so he became Anthony after Anthony of the desert.

Anthony, despite his age, immersed himself in the spiritual quest for virtue and holiness and practiced monastic discipline with devotion. His fellow monks marvelled at his commitment and spirit of surrender. After a few years, the Abbot, under the inspiration of God, commanded Anthony saying, "Anthony, it is time for you to guide others in holiness. Return to your own Russian land, and be an example for others. May the blessing of the Holy Mountain be with you." Ever the obedient monk, Anthony packed up and left for his homeland.

LOVE FOR MONASTIC LIFE

On returning to Kiev, Anthony sought out a monastery to reside. None of the monasteries he visited came close to imitating the spirit and rigour that was characteristic of the Monastery on Mt. Athos. Discouraged with what he found, he retired to the forest and found a cave which he made his cell. Gradually, his fame as a holy person and wonder worker began to spread in Kiev and beyond, and people began to come



Kiev - Perchersk Lavra (Monastery of the Caves)

to him for advice and blessing, and some even sought to imitate his lifestyle. By the middle of the 11th cy, he had so many disciples that it was not possible anymore to accommodate them in the cave. They needed a proper monastery.

The prince of Kiev, Izyaslav granted to the monks the land of Mt. Beretsov. There the foundation stone was laid for the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra (Monastery of the Caves). This monastery would go on to become the cradle of Rus-



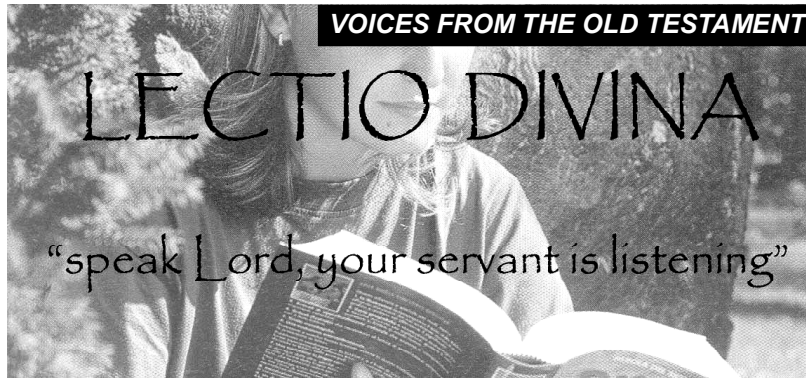
St Anthony of the Caves -Kiev

sian monasticism. The other monasteries that existed were inauthentic in as much as they were founded under the tutelage of the King. Anthony was the pioneer of Russian monasticism. His originality lay in combining the monastic discipline practiced at Mt. Athos with the Byzantine (Middle Eastern) monastic tradition. Despite establishing a monas-

tery, Anthony preferred the solitary life and so he appointed one of his followers as Abbot and left the monastery to live in a cave that he dug himself.

Shortly before his death, he called together all his followers and gave them final instructions. He charged them with keeping his body hidden after his death. The monks did as he desired. After he died around 1073, he was reportedly buried in the cave where he lived. However, no relics have ever been found. Following his death, many people made pilgrimage to his cave to ask for his intercession and quite a few reported that they received healing.

He is venerated as a saint by the Eastern Orthodox Church and in the Roman Catholic Church. The former celebrates his feast on July 10 while the latter keeps it on May 7. □



THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

by Carlo Broccardo

Towards the end of July, a beautiful coincidence awaits us this year. On the 31st of the month we will in fact remember Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, who was born in Spain at the end of the 15th century and died in Rome in 1556; while on the previous day, Sunday 30th July, we will hear as our first reading the dream that the young Solomon had in Gibeon, a village just under 10 km from Jerusalem. What do Ignatius of Loyola and Solomon, who lived two and a half thousand years and several thousand kilometres apart, have in common?

Let us begin with St Ignatius. Among his many merits, he has that of having written the famous Spiritual Exercises in which he gives very useful instructions on how to make discernment, that is, how to distinguish what is good from what is bad, what should be done from what should be avoided in everyday life. I will be forgiven by those who know St Ignatius well if I oversimplify his insight so much, but I was only



interested in highlighting the centre of it: in order to do God's will, one must first know it! And it is not always easy to understand how to behave, to choose well, to take the right path. Who among us has never experienced this struggle?

Let us now move on to Jerusa-

lem shortly after 1000 BC. The great king David was succeeded by his son Solomon. It was not an easy succession, as the first book of Kings tells us, because by the time David had become old, more than one pretender to the throne had come forward; in the end, thanks to the manoeuvres of David's wife Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan, Solomon was anointed king.

But it was not an easy succession also because David had been a great king, the first true king of the people of Israel: the one who had defeated his enemies, unified the northern and southern tribes (who had always been on not too friendly terms...), established the capital of the kingdom in Jerusalem. David will forever remain 'the' king, the best, the ideal, the one loved by God. All the best to those who are to take his place! It is all too easy to make comparisons and say that the predecessor was better....

Solomon was aware of this. That night in Gibeon, in a moment in which dream and prayer become confused (if he dreams, it means he is asleep; yet he talks to God: he listens, he answers, he asks), Solomon says it clearly: "Well I am only a boy; I do not know how to regulate myself. Your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a numerous people whose numbers cannot be calculated nor counted'. It is not so much a question of age: Solomon has already married Pharaoh's daughter and been anointed king; he is not so inexperienced with court life. And he feels small for the task in front of him. Inadequate. Like

Moses, who says: "I am not a good speaker..." (Ex 4:10); like Jeremiah, who defends himself against God's request by saying, "I cannot speak, for I am young" (Jer 1:6).

God makes Solomon the most tempting proposal in the world: "Ask me for what you want me to give you. Ask what you want and I will give it to you. How to answer such a question? He could have asked for long life, or military might to defeat all enemies, or even boundless wealth. Instead, he asked only one thing: 'Grant your servant a meek heart'. If we look at the Hebrew text, there is a more concrete expression: Solomon asks for "a heart that listens", a heart that knows how to listen. In other words, he says to God: make me able to listen, "that I may know right from wrong".

This is where Ignatius and Solomon meet. No one is born an expert, no one knows everything (apart from the know-it-alls; but it is better not to have anything to do with them...). Blessed are those who are humble, who know how to listen to God and others, to life and history. Because we all have a vocation that is greater than ourselves: what father or mother can say, from the moment their first child is born, that they are already capable of being a parent? Or what priest at his first parish is already the perfect parish priest? What religious enters a monastery who already knows how to pray? It could be a good exercise: to repeat every day, like an ejaculatory, the words of Solomon: Lord, give me a heart that listens; make me a person capable of listening. □

Quiet Spaces

NEVER SPEAK ILL OF OTHERS

Pope Francis' homily on Wednesday, March 27, 2013

Is 50:4-9; Mt 26:14-25

Speaking ill of someone means selling them. As did Judas when he sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. In his brief homily at the Mass celebrated on the morning of Wednesday, March 27, in the chapel of St. Martha's guest House, Pope Francis took his inspiration from the gospel passage from Matthew, which foretells Judas' betrayal. The pope warned against malicious gossip. Succinctly and explicitly he said: "Never speak ill of other people." Present at the celebration, as by now is customary, were some Vatican staff.

The pope gave them a reflection on the action of Judas, one of Jesus' friends, who didn't hesitate to sell him to the chief priest. "Jesus becomes like merchandise: he is sold." He was sold at that moment, he stressed, and also so many times in the market of history, the market of life, in the market of our lives. When we choose the thirty pieces of silver, we let Jesus go.

When we visit an acquaintance and the talk turns to backstabbing and malicious gossip, according to the pope, "this is selling," and the person we are talking about "becomes merchandise." "I don't know why," he said, "but there is a murky enjoyment in gossip." We start by saying nice things "but then comes the gossip. And we begin tearing the other person to pieces." And we should realize that every time we behave like this "we



are doing the same thing Judas did." When he went to the chief priests to sell Jesus, his heart was closed, he had no understanding, no love, and no friendship.

And so Pope Francis returned to one of his favourite subjects, forgiveness. "We think about and ask for forgiveness," because what we do to the other person, our friend, "we do to Jesus. Because Jesus is in this friend." And if we realize that our talk can harm someone, "let us pray to the Lord, let us speak with the Lord about this, for the good of the other: Lord, help him." It isn't for me, he concluded, "to carry out justice with my tongue. Let us ask this grace of the Lord."



When we visit an acquaintance and the talk turns to backstabbing and malicious gossip, according to the pope, "this is selling," and the person we are talking about "becomes merchandise."

At the end of the celebration the Holy Father became absorbed in prayer at the back of the chapel. But he was waiting at the exit for all who were present to greet them one by one: as always, he had a word for everyone, an encouragement, a smile and good wishes for Easter. □

THE STARS ARE SHINING TONIGHT

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

As a child, when the evening was warm, Lisa always liked to sit on the bench in the little garden. She fantasised about great and impossible things. In the growing twilight shadows, the magnolia, had a gentle clarity about them that spoke only of innocent things that made it easier for the child to dream.

The mother, seeing her daughter so alone and absorbed, called out to her:

"Lisa, what are you fantasising about on that bench? Can't you see it's getting dark?"

"Yes, mother. I'll be right there."



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Don Bosco's Madonna

But she wouldn't move. She came in much later, her face pale, but serene.

"What are you doing all alone all the time?" her mother would ask, without raising her voice, because she didn't like to scold her cold and quiet daughter.

Lisa looked at her, but thought of something else. She then replied as dreamily:

"You know, Mum, tonight the stars will shine!"

The young girl would have liked to specify her thought more clearly, but she could not. What she felt, remained imprisoned in her heart and she could not find

words to express herself, because words sounded hollow.

The long trail of stars had a sweet, powerful and mysterious call to her: they were truly little lights that lit up the sky brightening the path for all those who were straying in the course of life. A sure guide for those who know how to proceed with their faces turned upwards, oblivious of all the toil, but also a tough path that could not be traversed in crowds, but only in the solitude of their souls.

Now Lisa has grown up and no longer reflects on the stars. Yet there is someone who

has really lost his way along the long course of life. Lisa knows this and fears for him, and yet there is nothing she can do.

The girl lives with her mother and a distant cousin of her mother: Madame Emilia. Mama's cousin is an old lady with already snow-white hair: the result of the sorrows of long nights spent crying and praying. She has a son and it is as if she did not have him because he's always far away. He is a restless, turbulent spirit. He has the same temperament as his father. A temperament greedy for freedom and impatient of any shackles, even the comfortable one of affection. Because every chain has a gold ring and a halter, and if the gold means a smile, the halter that immediately follows it means suffering. This, her son told her one day, trying to explain all the confused and disparate feelings that were stirring within him. His father too was often away from home, leaving his wife and little Francesco alone. It has been some years that the father had been laid to rest in the village cemetery. But the son continued his father's restlessness and impatience. Short phone calls, a few brief messages: the only things that brought him closer to his mother. Between them there were towns and cities that divided them: sometimes even the sea.

Madame Emilia, to lighten her loneliness and sadness had asked Lisa's mother for hospitality, and spent her days waiting for some news of her son, in the anxious hope of some possible return. She only revived during his brief 'stopovers':

"Francesco, you won't go away now, will you? It's just you and

me. We can live together very happily, if you want. You and me: just our family."

"You're right, mama. I am such a wretched son. I won't leave you anymore. I only want you to be really happy, me and you..."

"You'll see, we'll get back to the old days, like when you were a child..."

He leaned down till he touched her hands that lie limp in her lap:

"Of course, mama. It will be lovely. I will really forget myself and become small again as I was then..."

And he tenderly kissed her hands, while his eyes meet Lisa's pure face. The two young people smiled at each other. Francesco would have liked to say many things, perhaps because her eyes were a safe deep gulf of peace, but he feared his words could bind him forever. The next day the spell was broken. And again, the suitcases were out of the wardrobe.

"Mama, it's no use. This house is not for me. I have to get away from here..."

The lady's face was distraught as if an immense shadow had suddenly darkened it:

"Where do you still want to go, my son?"

"Who cares? Wherever there's fun..."

"Ungrateful son!" she would have liked to say, but her lips remained mute. Two tears slowly roll down her cheeks and her hands trembled so much that they could not caress Francesco's head.

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Don Bosco's Madonna

Madame Emilia could hardly move from her armchair. The slightest effort was enough for her to become breathless. Her legs were so weak that they barely supported her. Constant dizziness made everything around her swirl. And in that repeated swaying, her son's face manifested several visions: faces that were laughing or sad or anxious; faces that had a dark shadow in their eyes: the shadow of one who wants to live against the simple laws of nature and anxiously seeks happiness. But the laughing face of happiness don't show up at the door of one who has no home. And this Madame Emilia and Lisa well knew this.

"Lisa, I feel that I'm going to die. It would be sweet to me, though, to be able to die with my head on my son's shoulder because then I wouldn't care if I left forever...."

"What a thing to say!" She instead, should live a long time to finally have the joy of being near her son. He will return one day, never to leave again. When he's tired and disillusioned. And she'll welcome him with her arms stretched out in love and her face with a wide smile for him, so that he understands what a mother's smile means."

"It's only a dream, Lisa. I think all this is only a dream. And yet, in spite of everything, I still delude myself.... In the dream I often see you, too, with him, Lisa. That would be nice, wouldn't it?"

She pales but she murmurs through her lips:

"That would be nice!"

But she doesn't add that it's only a dream that she also nurtures. Yes, it would indeed be very nice to be able to proceed along the path of life with her hand affectionately clasped in his. But in the inexorable passing of the months, nothing changed and she finds herself traversing life's long path all alone. At times she was so distressed by it that she wondered, breathlessly, whether she might only have to dream for the rest of her life, be-side that mother who always hoped, because hope was the only thing that never dies in a mother's heart.

One day, after a showdown with Madame Emilia, Lisa wrote an email to Francesco. All the bitterness in her emerged in those lines. How can a son, even in his most blind selfishness, not sense the anguish that reverberates in a mother's heart? How can he not understand that pain also kills, and if these deaths go unpunished by men, God's justice will condemn and punish?

Francesco received the email at a time when he was feeling very embarrassed and ashamed with himself and tired. It was not the tiredness that comes from a long journey accomplished, or the tiredness that comes after great pain, but the tiredness of one who no longer believes in joy and who no longer has a faith.

Lisa's email gave him a glimpse of all the misery into which he had fallen. It was just as if the girl, standing before him, stretched out an accusing

finger towards him. Francesco felt the accusation and could not escape it. The weight of guilt weighed down inexorably. The lack of all faith and ideals had made him weak as someone who had always broken everything through his indifferent recklessness just to satisfy his fierce selfishness. Even his mother's heart broke, and he did not even realise it. And now, perhaps, it was too late to mend it. A sob arose from deep within, until it bursts into a deep, terrible cry....

An unexpected message announced Francesco's arrival. Madame Emilia, was sitting in her usual armchair, trembling with impatience and Lisa, beside her, tried unsuccessfully to distract her, to make the wait less burdensome.

"Lisa, this sudden return is a good omen. Francesco will never go away again; I can feel it. He will stay with me. My baby!... Who knows what has brought about this return?"

The girl smiled faintly. She did not mention the email. She wanted that tender mother's heart to believe that her son was spontaneously coming to her, driven only by his impulse.

"Lisa, you know, I will bounce back as I did before. If Francesco is near me, I will get well immediately. My illness is only the distance I am from him."

Her breath, ragged from the pangs of anticipation; the woman was now silent. Lisa too, gripped by the same anxiety, fell silent. And in that deep silence, which united them even more, there was suddenly the sound of the

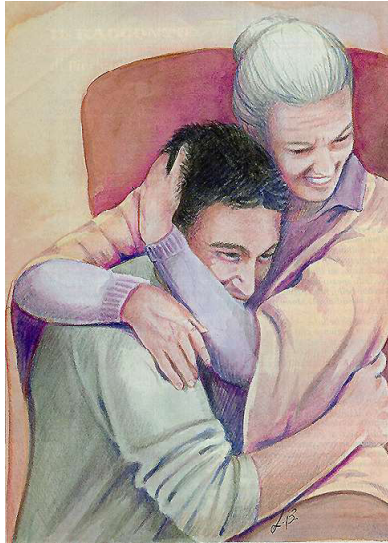
gate to the garden opening, then Francesco's loud voice calling: "Mamma!"

Madame Emilia would have liked to get up impetuously from the armchair, to run anxiously towards her son, but Lisa's firm hands held her back:

"No, he must come here, he!" murmured the young lady softly. He must kneel down, ask for your forgiveness...."

The woman's heart beat furiously, but she tried with a supreme effort of will to smile so that her son could see that smile





at once and overcome all his emotions.

Francesco hurried up the few steps and with a thump opened the door. The woman still wanted to get up, and Lisa still held her back. Francesco hesitated for a moment on the threshold. His mother's face appeared pale, suffering, and yet transfigured by joy. The grave sob from a few nights earlier caught her throat again:

"Mama!" he cried in an excruciating spasm, and fell back down beside his mother, and buried his face in her knees. Mama, forgive me!"

She clasped him to her heart, cradling him convulsively, leaning towards him:

"My child! My baby!"

"Mummy, how I have hurt you! And you've always been so good..."

She kissed him, with a repressed sob, on her face, in her eyes and on her lips a smile, so

that her son would say nothing more. He was close to her; he would not go away. She had found him at last, her child! Could there be a greater happiness in the world?

"Don't cry, Francesco. You are here with me now, in my arms!"

"I have made you cry so much, mamma. I will never forgive myself..."

"But now you've also given me great joy, and for this joy all suffering is forgotten..."

They were united, mother and son, in one embrace and one cry. They said nothing more because any words, even of love and joy, would be stifled in that great burst of affection and emotion.

Lisa, stood beside them, her eyes filled with tears. Her hand slowly went up until it touched, in a shy caress, Francesco's head, still bent against his mother's knees. That gesture gradually clarifies in her a distant memory. The white magnolia in the garden. The long caravan of stars. The motionless vivid lights did not lie. A man got lost, and they made him find his way again. A slow walk, which was made when one is macerated by some great pain, but which always leads him to a safe harbour.

As if, dreamily caught in a strange spell, she then said:

"Even tonight, the stars are shining!"

He heard the words. But he did not understand. Puzzled he lifted his face and looked at her. Lisa smiled pensively. She would be close to him, hand in hand, on that new journey, but she would never tell him that the stars, tonight shone for him with the sudden brilliance of a miracle. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 42

by Michele Molineris

201. I will not leave here until you have blessed my child (1871)

On 24 May 1871 Maria Rogattino entered Don Bosco's room holding her blind child by the hand. Many people were present and she had no qualms about throwing herself at his feet exclaiming: "Pity a poor mother. After many prayers God deigned to grant me this child, but now he is trying me, taking away his sight little by little. The doctors, after treating him and operating on him, have ended up telling me that there is no longer any remedy and that I must resign myself to seeing him blind. I have tried to resign myself, Don Bosco, but I have not succeeded; the sacrifice seems too great for me. I cannot persuade myself that God wants to allow such a misfortune, to the detriment of an innocent child... I am the unhappiest woman on earth!"

Here the weeping took away her speech, and she could not continue. Don Bosco let her give vent to her sorrow for a while, then with exquisite kindness he gave her words of comfort and of Christian resignation, concluding: "Have you already prayed to Our Lady to heal this dear little angel? And do you not know that God may have allowed his infirmity, by your trial, to make him the subject of his mercies and to glorify his Mother Mary? Therefore, commit this favour to Mary Help of Christians; and persuade yourself that what the surgeons cannot do, she will be able to do. It is not with this that I advise you to desist from lavishing on your child all the cures that you

think opportune, but I want you to be persuaded that the efforts of men will be to no avail, if you do not make God this generous and most powerful intercession. Now, all graces, according to St. Bernard, pass through the hands of Mary! Let it not be a misfortune for you to turn to her with some novena of prayers, and with some sacrifice. I can assure you that, if it is good for the child's soul and for your own, God will heal him."

Having said this, Don Bosco wanted to say goodbye to her, but the poor mother insisted: "I will not leave until you have blessed my little boy. A friend of mine assured me that as she was ill, she made an effort to come to you to be blessed; and from the moment she was blessed and she began to get well. And why should I hope that the same will not happen to my child? If the shadow of St Peter alone was enough to heal the most desperate sick, to straighten the crippled, to restore sight to the blind, why will I not equally hope for the blessing of another minister of the Lord?"

The saint looked at her for a moment, amazed at such trusting insistence, and then exclaimed: "You are deceiving yourself! It is not from me that you must expect a blessing, but from God, through the powerful patronage of Mary Help of Christians. I am but a weak instrument in the hands of the Lord!"

But the good woman insisted so much that Don Bosco made the child kneel down, blessed him, gave him a medal of Mary Help of Christians, and dismissed her, urging the mother to trust. The mother left almost certain that she had obtained the longed-for grace, and she was not disappointed. In

fact, she returned to the Oratory, presenting her healed son to the saint, who said to her: "Try to give a good and holy education to your little one, who has been made a sign of such great favours from heaven; this is the most beautiful proof of gratitude that Mary Help of Christians expects from you! See to it that he grows up in the fear of the Lord, reverent to the Church and its ministers, and if God ever calls him to serve Him more closely, do not betray his vocation, but consecrate him to Him!" (M.B., X, 163).

202. Do you know how to play?

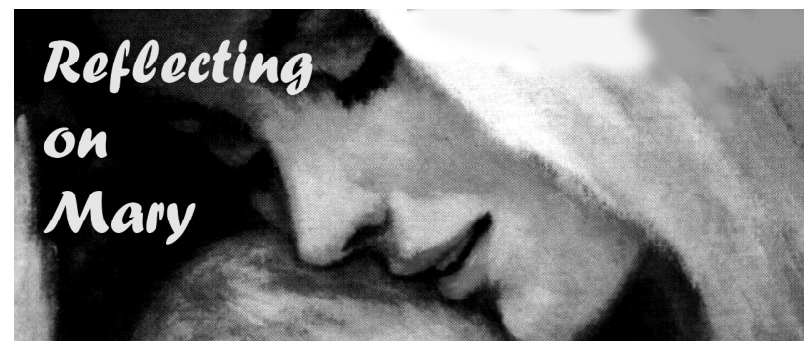
In June 1872, the young Count Cesare Balbo, nephew of the writer of *Le Speranze d'Italia*, and son of Count Prospero - a valiant soldier who came with another son to teach mathematics at the Oratory, and at the end of each month made an offering to Don Bosco, telling him to... pay his fee! - He had married Countess Maria, daughter of Countess Gabriella Corsi and last descendant of the Counts Billiani of Cantoira, who helped Don Bosco with the translation of a few files for the *Catholic Readings*.

And Don Bosco gave his spouse a copy of the *Companion for Catholics* with this dedication: "To Count Cesare Balbo - with cordial good wishes - of steadfastness in Catholicism - of stable health to him - and to his new wife - of perseverance in the good to both - on 4 June 1872 - humbly offered - the Author."

On the 17th August, after a brief stop at Mathi, Don Bosco was in Turin; on the 19th he left for Nizza Monferrato, where Countess Corsi, whom he deservedly called by his mother's name, had again insistently invited him. For several

years he went to spend a few days at the *Casino*, to rest a little in that solitary and cool holiday location, to the benefit of his health, and to work at the same time without being disturbed. The newlyweds, who usually lived with Countess Gabriella, although they had a palace in Nice, gave him a big party.

On these trips that Don Bosco made to Nice, Count Caesare had the opportunity to admire more and more his singular virtues, among which was the intuition he had to understand at first sight the character of anyone presented to him. "One day," the account was by Marquis Filippo Crispolti, "an extremely poor boy who had been made almost moronic due to extreme poverty, was brought to the saint in the hope of handing him over to him. Don Bosco pat-ted him and asked what he knew. The boy, in the rambling answers he gave, made it clear that he knew nothing about anything." Don Bosco replies: "Do you even know how to play the slider?" The unhappy man's eyes flashed with delight. Then the priest, with the air of someone who had made a valuable purchase, turned to the onlookers and said seriously: "This is for me!" And he accepted him. Several years passed, when Count Balbo was told of the visit of a Salesian, unknown to him. He received him and saw before him a priest with a striking presence, lively in conversation and an appearance full of wit. He said: "You don't recognise me: I am that boy who in such and such circumstances was accepted by Don Bosco at his home in Nice." In short, Don Bosco had read well into the poor boy's features and had succeeded in making of him a man fit to run a very important college (M.B., X).



GOD WORKED IN MARY and works in each of us

by Mario Galizzi

You already know the story of the annunciation of the angel to the Virgin, but I invite you to reread and meditate on it in the Gospel of Luke Ch. 1:26-38.

On this wonderful Gospel page there is a messenger: the angel Gabriel. Only four times does his name appear in the Bible: twice in the book of Daniel (8:16; 9:21) to announce the messianic times, i.e., the times of salvation; and twice in the Gospel of Luke (1:19, 26) to proclaim that the messianic times, i.e., the time of the Messiah has begun. Whoever hears his name already knows that salvation is being spoken of, which is possible only to God. Sent by God, he says that now salvation begins and he comes to say this to a virgin, to Mary, who is called a virgin twice at the beginning of the story. This means, as we shall see, that this word has its importance. But let us listen to

what the angel says to Mary: "Rejoice, for God has filled you with grace." I know you are not used to hearing this translation. Usually, you are used to hearing



something trans-lated from Latin: "Hail, full of grace. It is not a bad translation, but I prefer to give full force to the original: "Rejoice, for God has filled you with grace." *Rejoice!*

This is the meaning that the Greek-speaking *saints*, the Fathers of the Church give to the word of the Gospel and they also give it in those messianic proclamations in which it recurs. It speaks of God coming to meet man to save him. Faced with his action full of goodness, mercy and forgiveness, we cannot but rejoice, not jump for joy.

Let us continue to say *Hail, full of grace*, but let us remember that that Hail, full of grace, is an invitation to rejoice. And then let us ask ourselves: Why do we say full of grace? For a very simple reason: Because *God has filled her with grace*. Because God has already acted in Mary. Mary only knows this now that the angel tells her, but God did this long before, without Mary knowing it. It is the angel who tells her.

Let me explain myself, and to explain myself I must speak of what God has done for us. I will read with you a text from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. When the CCC explains what God has done in the past in Mary it says: "The Father blessed her with every spiritual blessing in heaven in Christ ...in him he chose her before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love."

We read the text of Ephesians 1:3-4 in the feminine singular, and from this it is clear that God thought of Mary even before the creation of the world; God chose her by looking upon his Son and

caused her to be holy and spotless in his sight... But what is said here about Mary, the Bible text says about all of us, about all human creatures and therefore also about Mary who is a human creature in the full sense of the word.

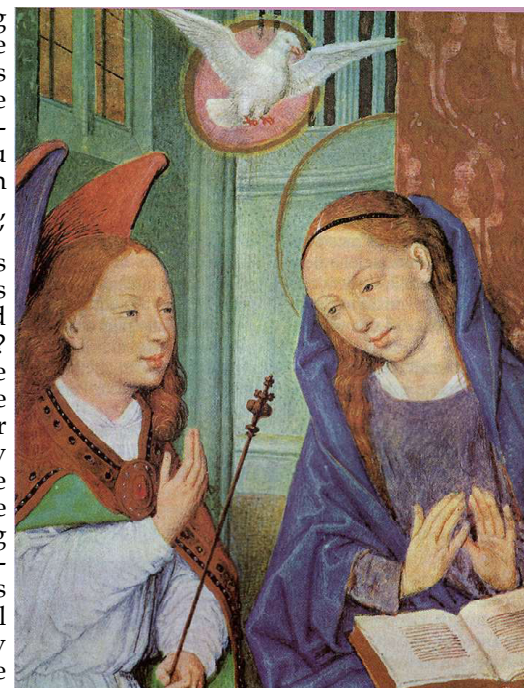
But let us hear the text again in its originality, because it helps us to understand Mary, and to see her as one of us, to feel her as our own. Paul's text says: "God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heaven in Christ and in him (i.e. looking upon his Son) he chose us - that is, loved us - before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight... to be his children... and this to the praise and glory of his grace with which he has filled us in Christ (Eph 1:3-6).

The angel said to Mary: "for God has filled you with grace"; of us it is said: "the grace with which God has filled us in Christ." The same verb used to speak of Mary is also used when speaking of us. And this only occurs in these two Bible passages. God's love for every human person is immense. One listens to these words and stands there astonished. One feels in communion with Mary, but one wonders, and we will do so over the next few days: Why not imitate Mary who welcomes God's love within herself? But now let us dwell again on this verb *filled with grace*. St John Chrysostom speaking to Christians says: "It is a grace that has been given to us, one might say: the wonderful grace that God has given us. Well, God has transformed us with this wonderful grace, he has made us his children." And another Father of the Church, Sophronius of Jer-

usalem, addressing Mary, explains the filling of grace as follows: "No one like you has been sanctified.... No one like you has been purified in antecedence, that is, saved in antecedence." For if we ask ourselves when God filled us with grace, when did he fill Mary with grace? Bible in hand, the answer is this: for us He did it on the day of our baptism; for Mary much earlier, and the Holy Spirit acting in the Church will bring about the full knowledge of the truth, as Jesus says, and will make it clear that Mary was filled with grace from the first moment

of her existence, Mary is the Immaculate Conception; holy from the instant she was conceived in her Mother's womb.

And here we come to a very important question, which concerns Mary and us. Why did God act this way in Mary? Why did he act so in us? What purpose did God have? The answer is here in the Bible, in the Gospel page we read; it is encapsulated in these three words: The Lord is with you. This phrase occurs many times in the Bible; the last to utter it is Jesus: "I will be with you until the end of the world" (Matt 28:20). Now this phrase is always uttered in the Bible, when God is about to entrust a person with a very difficult mission, one that exceeds human strength.



A Mission

God always gives the graces, the strength, necessary for the fulfilment of a mission. We have been given the mission to be holy and spotless in his sight, that is, to live overcoming evil and doing good, to spread the Gospel by bearing witness to it. For this God has filled us and continues to fill us with grace. None of us can say that we do not have the strength within us to avoid evil. He gave Mary that fullness of grace, not to make her privileged, but only because the mission that awaited her surpassed any other mission entrusted to men. The text we have read says that God calls her to be the Mother of the Messiah, the mother of his eternal Son, the mother of the author of grace himself. This entailed for Mary

the requirement of an unparalleled immaculacy, immaculate in her very conception; the true image of that woman who was first created by God. Eve was created without sin, then sinned. The Immaculate conception is the true ideal of every woman before God, ready for the mission that awaits her. The angel points it out to her: 'You shall conceive and bear a son, whom you shall call Jesus.... God the Lord will give him the kingdom of David his father ... and his kingdom shall have no end'.

Two things Mary certainly understood when she heard the angel's words: 1. God called her to be Mother of the Messiah; 2. The Mother of the one who would be the Saviour. This second aspect made her realise that her mission concerned the good of her people, indeed of all mankind, because in the Messiah God would pour out his blessing on all peoples as he had promised to Abraham. Mary felt she was called to motherhood and to live her motherhood for the good of all, of us all. Mary understood even more at that moment the meaning of the immense grace with which she was filled; for grace is participation in God's merciful action. Mary understood that God was calling her to live her mission for the good of all humanity and to live it in charity. From that moment on, Mary was called to love us in her Son, to feel us in her Son, to live God's infinite love... And such was her tension of grace that she could no longer fail to feel the ideal of complete virginity, because she had to fulfil her mission full time... And the Lord through the

angel made her feel that she was in tune with him and announced to her that she would be a Mother by remaining a Virgin. He says to her: "The Holy Spirit will descend upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with his shadow, therefore he who will be born holy will be called the Son of God."

These are words of unique density. Mary no longer appears only in the light of God, but of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Mary is enveloped in the light of the Trinity, whose intimate life is love, and it is a diffusive love that wants, through the Spirit who is love, to extend itself to the whole of humanity. The Father in his love for us wants to give us his Son as Saviour through Mary; God-the-Son, in harmony with the Father already loves us and for this reason he takes on human nature in Mary and becomes man, becomes like us, our brother. God-the-Spirit unites us all in a communion of love.

Everything in Mary is God's work. That is why she is Mother-Virgin; that is why he who will be born holy (in his giving birth he does not lose his virginity) will be called Son of God. It is not only the Father who so loved the world as to give us his Son; it is also Mary who gives us Jesus. She gives him to us at birth; she gives him to us on Calvary when she fully becomes our Mother.

Let us conclude: Looking at Mary in her immaculacy this evening, we cannot but feel part of her mission; we too are called from eternity to be holy and immaculate in charity. □



FR. GIORDANO PICCINOTTI

Director: Opera Don Bosco

O. Pori Mecoi

Please introduce yourself

My name is Giordano Piccinotti, I was born in Manerbio (BS) on 23 February 1975, son of Serafino and Maria. A Salesian since 1998 and a priest since 2006. I come from a simple family, my parents always taught me to be genuine and to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow. I spent my childhood years in my village, Faverzano, between the family, the oratory and the church.

Here I learnt the love of the oratory and Don Bosco, thanks to my parish priest at the time, Fr Gianni. The desire to become a priest, the desire to be in a cheerful environment led me from the Salesians to Don Bosco in Brescia, where I attended vocational training courses and at the end of the training, I immediately found a great job. The next step was military service, a tough but deeply enriching experience for a small-town boy like me. At the end of my military service, I asked the Provincial at the time, Fr Francesco Cereda, to join the Salesians of Don Bosco, from that moment on a fantastic adventure began and the Lord showed me concretely what it means to receive a hundredfold.

My journey continued in the pre-novitiate in Bologna, where I completed my high school studies, then in Pinerolo in the novitiate, the post-novitiate in Nave,



the practical training in Sesto San Giovanni, and the theology in Rome, which ended with a licence in spiritual theology. After priestly ordination, my first obedience was to the Helvetic Institute in Lugano, as bursar, then in 2011 to the provincial bursar's office, and since 2012 also to various Foundations that raise funds for the Salesian missions. I am a happy Salesian.

How did your vocation originate?

Without a doubt, my vocation was born in contact with people who were happy to serve the Lord. I think of my grandfather Piero, who died at ninety-eight, who taught me the value of prayer. I think of my town's diocesan parish priest, Fr Gianni Piovani, the love he always had

for St John Bosco. He spent the hot summers in the Brescia lowlands organising summer activities and school camps for us boys. I think of my parents and the witness of love and fidelity, lived in everyday life. They taught me the value of sacrifice, of charity, of free service for the little ones and the poor. My vocation is deeply linked to the people and life of my land.

What is your current assignment?

I currently manage three foundations: the *Opera Don Bosco nel mondo* of Lugano (Switzerland), the Opera Don Bosco onlus Foundation of Milan, and the *Fondazione Don Bosco in Der Welt Stiftung* of Schaan (Liechtenstein). These foundations are involved in fundraising for Salesian missions around the world.

What are some of the most beautiful achievements?

Every achievement is a miracle made possible by benefactors, facilities, Salesians, children and a lot of prayer. So, every project is the most beautiful project! One of the most beautiful realisations is certainly that of distance support, which gives us the opportunity to support several thousand children all over the world. The concrete support of so many families who for many years (some even more than twenty) have ensured that children can attend school and also have a small food supply.

In December, we inaugurated the new bakery in Dekemhare, Eritrea, where five hundred children can not only get their daily bread but also learn how it is

made.

In January, I blessed the kindergarten of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Hlaing Thar Yar on the outskirts of Yangon in Myanmar, where the Salesian Sisters work in an orthodox Buddhist neighbourhood, characterised by great poverty and many other problems.

In Sri Lanka, a very beautiful and up-to-date project has now been completed: thanks to a major industrial group, young people from the Metiyagane region will be able to attend civil engineering courses in the new institute, built with modern technology. There are also many other projects...

What are your plans and dreams?

Life does not belong to me, it is in God's hands, and as far as my projects are concerned, the Help of Christians usually takes care of them. The desire I carry in my heart is only to do His will through the mediation and creative intelligence of the Superiors. As a son of Don Bosco, I deeply believe that every man has the right to have a chance for redemption, human, social and spiritual. Every man is entitled to a 'new opportunity'. As a son of Don Bosco, I deeply believe that every man is entitled to a chance for redemption, human, social and spiritual. Every man is entitled to a 'new opportunity'. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Impenetrable Defence

An officer in the army was giving a talk to his soldiers before going into war. This was one of the first things he said to them: "Now, you must be very careful, because the enemy has a new weapon which can pierce one inch of wood, so keep your heads down."

Equine Positives

"Photography is a strange business," mused the young man. "Because it develops negatives, I presume?" queried the young woman, with a queer accent on the word 'negative.' "Not exactly, that. But, as an example, the other day I had my picture taken in my riding clothes, with my whip in my hand. And today I received a letter from the photographer, stating that the pictures were all mounted and ready for me.

Class Clarity

The teacher was more than disappointed, she was annoyed. Not a boy in the class could name two birds she had drawn on the blackboard. "Come now," she pleaded, in a final effort, "one of them is a robin and the other is a thrush. Can any boy tell me with is the Robin?"

A voice droned up from the last boy in the back row: "The one beside the thrush, miss."

Horticultural Charity

A rather stupid young fellow saw a sign which read: "Ring the bell for the gardener." He walked up and pulled the cord. A red faced

man soon appeared and inquired what he wanted. "Are you the gardener?" asked the young man. "Yes, what do you want?" "I saw the sign there, so I rang the bell and now I'd like to know why you can't ring the bell yourself?"

Hair-raising Guarantee

Client: "Do you give a guarantee with this hair-restorer?" Barber: "Guarantee sir? WHY, we give a comb free with every bottle."

Tools of the Trade

The family and their guest had just staid themselves at table. "Susie?" said the mother, "Why didn't you put a knife and fork at Mr. McKlunk's place?" "He didn't need any, mother," replied Susie, "You said he eats like a horse."

Air of Confidence

Pilot: (after landing in a tree) "Sorry, but I was trying to make a new air record." "Farm Hand: "Well, you certainly did; you're the first person to climb down that tree without climbing it."

Celestial Therapy

A pianist, who was undergoing an operation, asked the doctor if he would be able to play the piano when he recovered. Doctor: "I won't guarantee you that." Pianist: "Why?" Doctor: "Because the last fellow that went under this operation was playing the harp twenty-fours later." □

THE LAZY FALCON

A great king was presented two falcon chicks as a gift and hastened to hand them over to the Master of Falconry to be trained. After a few months, the master told the king that one of the two falcons was perfectly trained.

"And the other?" asked the king.

"I am sorry, sire, but the other falcon is behaving strangely; perhaps he has been struck by a rare disease, which we are unable to cure. No one can move him from the branch of the tree on which he was perched on the first day. An attendant has to climb up every day to bring him food'.

The king summoned vets and healers and experts of all kinds, but none could make the falcon fly. He charged the members of the court, the generals and the wisest advisors with the task, but no one could get the falcon off its branch.

From the window of his suite, the monarch could see the falcon motionless in the tree, day and night.

One day, he had an edict proclaimed in which he asked his subjects for help with the problem. The next morning, the king opened the window wide and, to his amazement, saw the hawk flying superbly among the trees in the garden.

"Bring me the author of this miracle," he ordered. Shortly afterwards, a young peasant was presented to him.

"You have made the falcon fly? How did you do it? Are you a magician, by any chance?" the king asked him.

Intimidated and delighted, the young man explained:

"It was not difficult, Your Grace. I simply cut the branch. The falcon realised it had wings and began to fly." □

Sometimes, God allows someone to cut off the branch we are tenaciously attached to, so that we may realise we have wings.



LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My niece noticed a gland on her back recently; her medical reports confirmed that it was a benign lymphoma. My nephew too has these glands on his arms. Through all this it is my usual practice to recite the Three Hail Marys daily in the morning and at night for guidance and protection for the whole family. Thank you dearest Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph for taking care of all our needs and for the many favours received through your powerful intercession. Please bless my niece and nephews with suitable life partners.

P. D'Souza, Bombay

My belated thanks to Our Blessed Mother Mary for the safe delivery of my girl child.

K. J. Antony Koothattukulam, Oliyappuram

Thank you Lord Jesus and Mother Mary for giving my daughter a life partner.

Anna Dias, Goa

My sincer thanks to Mary Help of Christians and Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy to my daughter Ruena after eight years from the first child, and a safe and normal delivery at that.

Agata Vaz, Goa

After praying fervently for years, the wish that my son becomes a Catholic has been fulfilled. It came about in the year 2019. My son also got married to a good Catholic girl in the month of January this year. I am thankful to Abba Father and Mother Mary Help of Christians for the favour granted. Mother Mary, continue to bless and protect my family.

Mrs June Achar, Pune

As I was getting down the steps I slipped and fell badly on the steps, as a result my vision became blurred. After some time I regained consciousness but my back was badly hurt. Thank God I did not hurt my head on the steps. I was miraculously saved. I thank God that I was saved and my vision became clear again. This was all due to the faithful recitation of the Three Hail Marys and the prayer to the most precious blood.

Gerry Miranda, Goa

I most sincerely thank Jesus, Mary, St Joseph and all the saints for saving me from a terrible fall down the stairs and saving me from COVID.

Mrs Fila Dias

Thank you dear Jesus and Mary for all your blessings.

A Devotee, Colaba, Bombay

Thank you Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for taking care of my nephew Sharam while recovering from surgery.

S. D. Zalmati

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

JULY 2023

For a Eucharistic Life

We pray that Catholics may place the celebration of the Eucharist at the heart of their lives, transforming human relationships in a very deep way and opening to the encounter with God and all their brothers and sisters.

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MARY FOR US

My younger brother had climbed the roof of the house (rather high) to fix the plastic sheet to stop a leakage on our neighbour's house. he had almost finished the job but slipped and fell from that height. It was on Wednesday 10th August 2022. Our Heavenly Mother was there and saved him from any mishap. He did hurt his head and had to have three stitches and multiple fractures of his ribs which the doctor said would heal with time and medication. Thank you dearest Mother, for saving my brother with your presence and powerful intercession. Bless him with good health in mind and body and help him recover from the shock. I trust, Mother dear, that you will be there for him during his follow-up tests.

From his loving family.

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay. The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail)). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

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

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