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*Renewed by  
this paschal Sacrament,  
we pray, O Lord,  
that we, who honor  
the memory  
of your Son,  
may show forth  
in our mortal flesh  
the life of Jesus.  
Who lives and reigns for  
ever and ever*

*(From the Common of Our Lady  
for Easter)*

**From The Editor's Desk**

*THE HEART OF THE MATTER*

Can you remember when you first told a lie? It was probably more a half-truth than a full lie, and it was told to avoid punishment or to gain some small treat. Maybe it was an excuse for homework skipped, or a fib to get an extra sweet – *I didn't get one in the first round* – what we used to call an officious lie, something made up more to gain an advantage than out of malice.

A wise observer of children remarked that language serves desire before it serves truth. That is true not just of children. All day long we hear or watch loud advertisements that serve the huckster's desire – *Buy this!* – rather than truth.

We learn to live with advertising lies, and take them with a grain of salt. It is harder to face deceit in close relationships. Words come too easily. Love is shown not in words but in deeds.

I see mothers as they kiss their children goodbye or end a phone call, whispering 'I love you' as they do on TV soaps.

Words were never so freely available as today. The Internet is rife with people who design greeting cards and formulate wishes for you. They are an industry busy at making us feel guilty if we don't send prettily printed sentiments to selected targets...Mother's Day, Father's Day, Valentine's Day...how real is all this?

In a household where money was scarce, most of the family's resources were going down Eddy's throat. Whether sober or drunk, he was abusive to his wife, and bitterly hostile to his children, especially his eldest son. What made this especially hard to bear was that the outside world had no notion of what the family endured. Eddy was at daily Mass and Communion, a respected member of the parish, often called on as a reader at Mass. Among his pals he was fun, the soul of the party.

It was through the shattering of this façade that help came for the family. A friend of Eddy discovered, almost by accident, what was happening at home, confronted him, and triggered a change which took time, but which worked. The gap between the pious parishioner and the drunken home-bully was gradually closed.

It was that gap, between the mask and reality underneath, that brought the strongest words from Jesus – about Pharisees, honouring God with their lips while their hearts are far from him, whitened sepulchres, dirty cups that are clean only on the outside.

*To end with the opposite:* Frank was going to buy a lottery ticket when his friend Jack asked, 'Buy one for me too – I'll pay you later.' So, Frank bought two tickets, and that night one of them won \$ 300,000.

Frank sent the winning ticket straight to Jack. He was clear in his own mind which of the tickets he had meant for Jack, and had no hesitation in honouring his decision. If all of us had hearts as true as that, we would have a wonderful country.

*Fr. Ian Doultton, sdb*

## EVERY CHILD IS A GIFT AND A PROMISE

by Mons Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

*Every child, even before being a choice, is an 'event', a happy event, and calls into play the willingness and acceptance of the unpredictable, which can astonish, but also disturb*

Once upon a time, there were many children, both because there was not much knowledge about birth control, but above all because there was need for many hands for work in the fields. And even when resources were scarce, the arrival of another child was welcomed without too much complaining; we all tightened our belts by giving up something to make room for him too. It was 'natural' that it should be so.

A child, it is said today, must be thought out, planned and scheduled, and even the Church since the years of the Council has spoken of the right and duty of spouses to procreate generously, but also responsibly, and has pointed out to spouses the path of discernment regarding the number of children.

All this, however, does not succeed in eliminating the many fears of the future parents because it is clear that not everything can be planned. Every child, even before being a choice, even the most conscious and responsible one, is an 'event', a happy event, something that happens in the life of two spouses and calls into play the willingness and acceptance of the unpredictable, which can surprise, but also disturb.



The Milanese theologian Giuseppe Angelini wrote a book some thirty years ago that still remains relevant and timely in its insights. He writes: "In the case of generation, the form of the original choice must be that of an open choice. Not, however, indeterminate. Rather, open just as in general a promise is open" (*Il figlio, una benedizione, un compito*, Milano 1991, p. 160). To welcome a child is to be open to the unheard of and the unknown. What emerges is joy and amazement, but also the same question that was asked by relatives and friends before John the Baptist on the day of his circumcision: "What will this child be?" (Lk 1:66).

"The child long before being a free choice of the spouses," Angelini writes again, is "the objective destiny of their encounter or, better still, the mysterious significance of that propitious

design to which they have consented from the beginning" (Angelini, p. 161). There is that term 'destiny' that seems to go against that freedom and responsibility so much emphasised today, but which bears witness to how in the encounter of a man and a woman who love each other there is the totality of each of them, but there is also more, which is that 'third' which is the child who is contained as the promise of that same love.

Angelini points out how the entry of technology into the sphere of procreation has really changed the basic attitudes towards generation, leaving room for the presumption that everything is the result of the couple's choice. The term 'project' has taken over as if everything were linked to the rational decision of individuals. Not that technology is in itself good or bad, but in fact it shapes the forms of human experience, just as the car has

### THE MOUNTAINS

There was a peaceful tribe living in the plains at the foot of the Andes. One day a ferocious band of marauders who had their hideout hidden among the dizzying mountain peaks attacked the village. With their loot they took away was a child, the son of a family from the tribe in the plains, and they took him with them into the mountains.

The people of the plains did not know how to climb the mountain. They did not know any of the paths used by the mountain people, they did not know how to find those people or how to find their tracks in that steep terrain. Nevertheless, they sent a group of men, their best warriors, to climb the mountain to bring the child home.

The men began the climb first one way, then another. They tried one path, then another. After several days of strenuous effort, they had only managed to go a hundred metres up the mountain. Feeling completely powerless, the men from the plains gave up and were preparing to return to the village down below.

As they were about to turn back, they saw the child's mother coming towards them. They saw that she was coming down the mountain that they had not been able to climb. Then they saw that she was carrying the child in a bag behind her back. One of the men in the group greeted her and said: "We didn't manage to climb this mountain. How did you succeed when we, who are the strongest men in the village, could not?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders and said, "It was not your child!"

Bruno Ferrero





changed the perception of space and the telephone, human relations. If a pregnancy arrives unexpectedly, it is called an 'error' and its acceptance demands further steps from the couple.

*Both in the case of the encounter between a man and a woman, as in the reception of a child, there is something that precedes the decision and calls for willingness to accept and obedience to what is happening and that transcends their own choices.*

*Mons. Dianin*

Angelini goes so far as to say: 'The most important question is not how can you have a child? Or how to avoid pregnancy? Instead, it is what it says: how can a man and a woman take such a great decision as bringing a child into the world?' (Angelini, p. 176). Both in the case of the encounter between a man and a woman, as in the reception of a child, there is something that precedes the decision and calls for willingness to accept and obedience

to what is happening and that transcends their own choices.

We cannot think that the choice of a child is only a matter of assessing the concrete and optimal conditions for welcoming him or her; the Church before the responsibility poses the question of generosity, in which we can find love for life and the readiness to seek and welcome with joy something that is offered as a gift and must be recognised as a good. Should this attitude be lacking, it would be inevitable to seek those guarantees that will never be absolute.

Angelini dares to go further and speaks of the decision to bring a child into the world as a 'vow' analogous to what religious make. A man and a woman who consecrate themselves to God promise and at the same time invoke God's help to be faithful to that promise. The vow accompanies the prayer of request and also becomes a promise. In the case of two newlyweds, the demand is to have a child and to be equal to such a lofty task, and the promise opens up to a true religious dedication to what is to come and what is never totally predictable.

Angelini concludes his reflection as follows: 'The fact of being able and having to make responsible decisions about generation cannot erase a basic truth: the coming of a child into this world is in the end always God's work, with respect to which man and woman must dispose themselves in an attitude of humility and service' (Angelini, p.187). □

**THE ASCENSION: MADE FOR THE HEIGHTS**

*by Sr Marzia Ceschia*

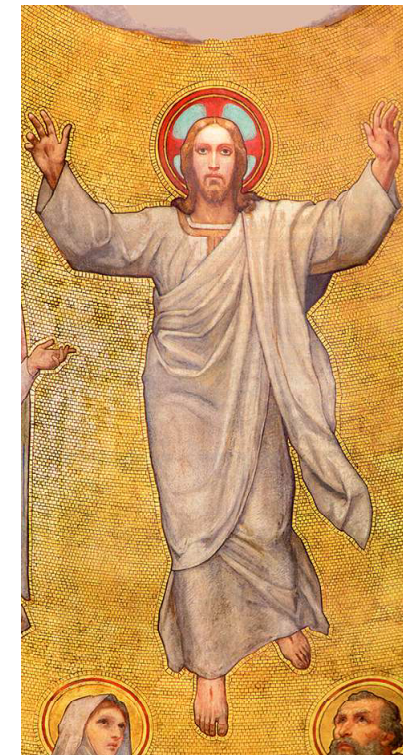
*Christ, though he is up there, is still with us.  
And we, though we dwell down here,  
are already with him*

The celebration of the feast of the Ascension, which was also a civil holiday in many Western countries until 1977, was already instituted in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Opening Prayer that the liturgy proposes to us (Sunday 21 May) guides us in understanding the profound meaning of what we are celebrating: "Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope."

Forty days after the Lord's resurrection, the disciples saw him for the last time in the flesh: "While they were looking at him, he was lifted up on high, and a cloud took him from their sight" (Acts 1:9). The Acts recounts: "While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them." (Acts 1:10) They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

What happened was not a spectacle that leaves us dreaming, but which opens a way that commits

us right now, on this earth. It is only given to God to ascend and descend at the same time. The Son returns to the Father, the Spirit descends upon man, who does not shrug off the constraints of the earth, but expands those spaces before our eyes in which He has to reveal Himself and in which He is to be proclaimed by every believer: "You will receive



power from the Holy Spirit who will descend upon you, and you will be witnesses of me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Nine days later will be Pentecost: from that moment on, every disciple truly has within himself the capacity to "look down from on high," to have a mentality influenced "from on high," the mentality of the One who ascended to heaven and who through the Spirit, makes us sharers in his intimacy with the Father, in his heart, in his passion, in the Father's desires for "every creature" (Mk 16:15) and "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The solemnity of the Ascension provokes us to rethink and verify our way of experiencing history, making truth about the logic (from "above" or from "below"?) that motivates our choices and prompts us to ask ourselves whether effectively and concretely our faith has not been reduced to "enchantment," to a disengaged gazing at the sky, distorting the meaning of the heights to which God attracts us: not self-satisfied self-elevations, but welcoming "from above" the Power that empowers us to do His bidding, which means to stoop to serve. We were made to live at this level!

The Ascension is all about dynamism, it is propulsive, it challenges and confronts us with the icon of the disciples who immediately "set out and preached everywhere, while the Lord acted with them and confirmed the Word with the signs that accompanied it" (Mk 16:20).

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challenges and confronts us with the icon of the disciples who immediately "set out and preached everywhere, while the Lord acted with them and confirmed the Word with the signs that accompanied it" (Mk 16:20).

The evangelist Luke, compared to the Markan account, adds the details of blessing and joy in his narration: "He led them out to Bethany and, raising his hands, blessed them. As he blessed them, he detached himself from them and was taken up into heaven while they prostrated themselves before him; then they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were always in the temple praising God" (Lk 24:50-53). In the temple, the disciples experienced the foretaste of the destination that Christ, by ascending to the Father, guarantees us: we too - in Him who is the Way - have access to God's space and already here on earth, we live as children and disciples and we can foretaste this "heaven" while waiting to be its inhabitants forever, when - as we confirm in the Creed - He who ascended to heaven "will come again, in glory, to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end".

"Today our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven. With him may our heart also ascend," writes St Augustine, "Why then do we not also labour on this earth, so that we may already rest with Christ in heaven, we who are united with our Saviour through faith, hope and charity? For Christ, though he is up there, still remains with us. And we, likewise, though we dwell down here, are already with Him." □

## MEANT FOR A GREATER PURPOSE

by Anastasia Dias

A chill coastal wind was blowing against the boat as it was turning to dawn. "John, are you sure you are, okay?" his brother asked. John nodded. "You haven't eaten anything since yesterday. Aren't you hungry?" John shook his head. He didn't know what he had been feeling lately. He couldn't understand what was happening around or within him. For him, there were so many questions that were unanswered. "We haven't caught any fish. What are we going to do?" James nudged Peter. "I don't have a clue. I guess we'll just wait a little while longer." "You've gotta be kidding me. We've been here all night and haven't caught a thing. And you're saying we'll waste more of our time hoping to catch some fish," Thomas scoffed. "Do you have better work to do?" Peter asked him. John listened to their conversation. He was physically present but couldn't understand nor did he care to understand what they were talking about. His brother had dragged him here.

It wasn't even his mistake. So much had happened in the past few days, it was hard for John to get his mind around anything. In his confusion John thought that

maybe the others felt that way too. Perhaps that was why they were all acting crazy today.

"Hey, guys, have you caught any fish?" a loud voice from the shore called. Peter shook his head. "Throw your net to the right of your boat and try again," the voice said. "Guys, I'm tired, you do it," a frustrated Peter muttered. Nathanael and Thomas threw the net into the sea; their net

suddenly felt heavy. "Peter, James, John, help, this net is full of fish." The

A little later...when they began to pull up the nets...

My, this is so extraordinary...it reminds me of another catch some time ago... Peter!...I GET IT!!!

IT'S JESUS

You're right! only he could do work such a miracle... Quick my tunic







three of them rushed to help the others. John was distracted by the figure in the distance. "Peter! Peter! That's Jesus!" he exclaimed. Peter jumped into the water and swam to the shore to meet Jesus. The others followed Peter in a boat, to meet Jesus. When they reached, all of them sat and ate breakfast together with Jesus.

We've all heard this story probably a million times. Peter is the hero of this story. He's forgiven, loved and what's more, he has a brand-new purpose in life. He's happy because for once, he's got things going his way. But we don't see anyone else featuring in this story. There is someone significant present whom we have sidelined: John. Throughout the incident John is present. In the boat, on the shore

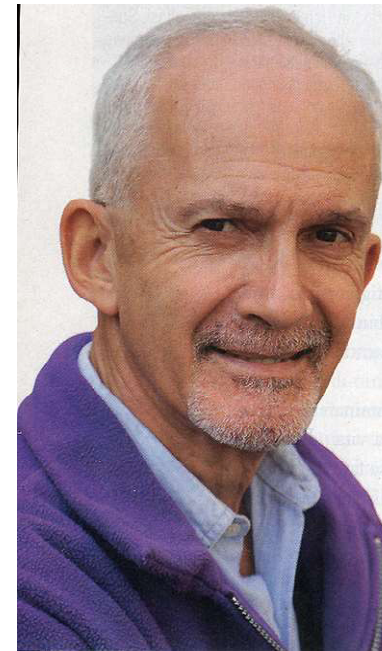
and even when Jesus is talking to Peter. John is confused. Someone he loved deeply was almost lost and has now come back to life. But that person is not fully present with John anymore. John has no clue what he's going to do next. He loves Jesus, he loves Peter too. And Jesus loves Peter and John. John could have felt sad when Jesus focused on Peter and Peter's mission. If I had been in John's place, I'd be jealous of the amount of time Jesus gave Peter instead of to me. If I was in John's place, I would be envious that Peter's received a brand-new mission and what do I have left? Nothing! I don't even have my best friend anymore. But John isn't the type to dwell on these things. He is happy just watching at Jesus and Peter converse. Just like he was when he first met Jesus and at Jesus' transfiguration and when he leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper. He doesn't want to replace Peter. He just wants to feel the presence of Jesus near him. This was why John got a mission of his own because he wasn't in a rat-race with those around him. Jesus entrusted John with a totally different and equally significant mission like Peter. What you and I can learn from this story is to become like John. Instead of competing with those around us, let's choose to focus on ourselves, our talents, abilities and gifts. Let us choose to use these in service of those around us. Let us choose to go beyond competition and our compulsions and serve a greater purpose in this lifetime. Our talents may be dancing, singing, writing, reading or just being who we are, let us use them to make our world a better place for those around us who inhabit it like we do. □

## PAPA RICKY

*"I did not know who Don Bosco was but he, Don Bosco, knew who I was and what I would do for him."*

**P**apa Ricky, that's what they call me here in Ghana; I am a lay Salesian, a coadjutor, for 46 years. Born Riccardo Racca, I was born in Piasco in the Granda Province of Piedmont on 3 May 1954, during a violent thunderstorm, according to my mother, the first of six children (five living), brought up with always little money but with a lot of love, affection and firmness dictated by a simple and deep faith, by my father Giovanni and mother Mariuccia. I started secondary school at the Salesians in Fossano in 1966, before that I did not

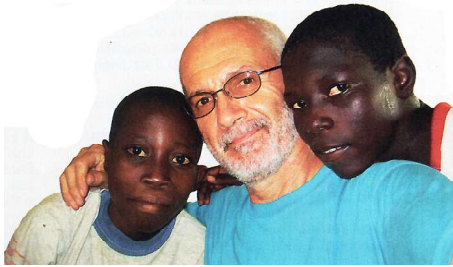
know who Don Bosco was but he, Don Bosco, already knew who I was and what I would do for him. Several years after I became a Salesian, I came across a photo taken on the day of my First Communion. I remembered that good photographer who made me move a little to the right, a little to the left inside the parish church, struggling to find the right background, until he said: stop there! And finally, he pressed the shutter. In that photo there is me in the foreground and Don Bosco in a nice oval picture as the background. An accident? I believe something more.



While I was teaching at the vocational school in San Benigno Canavese in 1996 the Provincial asked me if I would be willing to help an elderly missionary in Nigeria: I agreed; with the intention of completing my service in a reasonable time and then returning to Piedmont. After about a year, I returned to speed up the preparation of a container of technical materials to be sent to my mission in Ondo, and I met the Provincial who asked me if I had developed a missionary vocation. I told him quite frankly that I hadn't really thought about it, and he said: "Well Ricky, go back to Nigeria and think about it." Almost 22 years of missionary life in Africa have passed since then.

In January 2011, after the death

of my father, the provincial of my religious province, AFW, English-speaking West Africa, to which I belong, asked me to leave Nigeria and come to Ghana immediately, so for almost two years I “completely changed my job”; I mean I found myself running a border work for children, young boys (aged 8 to 15) from very poor families, on the waterfront (Atlantic Ocean), 40 km east of Accra, the capital of Ghana. There I had one of my most beautiful Salesian experiences and for this I am grateful to the good Lord and to my religious superior who trusted me so much.



From September 2012 until today I have been in Sunyani, my current mission, located in Central West Ghana, about 400 km from Accra (8 or 9 hours by bus). It was a beautiful experience, I would even say a very Salesian one, for two reasons: one is the opportunity you have to meet many people, especially lay people, from many public sectors, and to make them aware of our charism and our mission. Second, but no less important, I have often felt the intervention of Divine Providence in my monthly, weekly and even daily budgets. From the very beginning I put a beautiful statue of St Joseph in my office and every evening, even late, before retiring, I entrusted to Him all the accounts.

**What are the Salesians doing here**

The adventure began 26 years

ago with a small group of Salesian pioneers who arrived here in Odumase on the outskirts of Sunyani from Croatia, Germany, India and Argentina. They immediately set to work in the Lord’s Vineyard, Parish, Oratory, Chaplaincies in neighbouring villages, and in less than two years the first young people were even able to start attending technical school studying agriculture and construction. Today, this small school, the DBTI (Don Bosco Technical Institute) accommodates over 600 pupils in 9 sectors/departments; the latest: hotel management (cooking and housekeeping).

The Government-approved parish school relieves us Salesians of many financial burdens, not least the teachers’ salaries, and enables all students to obtain the qualifications necessary to continue their studies up to university.

I can say that today Don Bosco is known in Ghana, despite having only three presences in the country, thanks mainly to the former students present in many areas of the Ghanaian social fabric, also occupying positions of responsibility and prestige. □

**Witnesses in & for Our Times**



**ST. FERDINAND OF CASTILE (May 30)**

In our days, it is very hard to imagine a politician living as a saint. They might do good deeds and perform ostentatious charity but sooner or later the truth about their crookedness comes to the fore. Originally, the idea of the ruler or leader incorporated a strong spiritual element. He/she was not just a political leader but also an example of morality and spirituality. Over the centuries however, this ideal was watered down due to contrasting kinds of leaders that acceded power.



The Church is a splendid mosaic of all sorts of characters. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Church as “the people that God gathers in the whole world” (CCC #752). Since it consists of people called by God, it does not discriminate; all are welcome to be its members. Unfortunately, members of the Church, baptized Catholics are often the ones who discriminate between people: who can be a part of the Church and who can’t, what is acceptable and what is not, whose voice is worth hearing and whose isn’t, what is ‘good’ to read and what isn’t and so on. Don’t get me wrong, some of these actions are done with the intention of uphol-

ding Christian morals but often they turn out to militate against the commandment of love.

Since we are talking about morality, and morality is closely connected with politics, we have before us a political figure who is recognized as a saint – St. Ferdinand III of Castile. His name sounds regal because it is. He was a king, and a great one at that. Ferdinand was one of the greatest kings of Spain. He was not just a good ruler but an upright man and a fervent Catholic.



## MAN OF CULTURE

Ferdinand was born into a highly influential and powerful family. His parents came from two of the most powerful families in Spain. His father, Alfonso IX of León was the son of Ferdinand II, King of León and Urraca, the princess of Portugal. His mother, Berengaria was princess of Castile. She served as queen for a while but preferred that the task be performed by a man since she was not comfortable with leading the army. Hence, upon the death of her father, she ruled for a while in the name of her younger brother but when he died prematurely, she was quick to surrender the throne to her own heir, her son, Ferdinand III.

Ferdinand's father, Alfonso IX wasn't in good terms with the Pope because the Pope opposed his marriage to his first cousin, Theresa of Portugal. Incidentally, his father was also guilty of a similar error: he had married his second cousin. The Pope annulled his first marriage and then Alfonso went on to marry another first cousin, Berengaria, apparently as a sign of peace between the houses of León and Castile. This second marriage was also subsequently annulled for the same reason as the first. Both these marriages, however brought forth a multitude of children and the family history of Alfonso became quite messy. Nevertheless, the abundance of wealth helped keep things civil and ensured that all the children were brought up well.

Clearly, Ferdinand was born with a silver spoon in his mouth but his family situation was not very good. Not only was there tension within, there was tension

with the Church and its authorities as well. Yet, somehow, almost amazingly, this did not have adverse effects on his upbringing. He still grew up a devoted Catholic. This is largely thanks to his mother who was a veritable pillar of faith and strength. Berengaria, despite her royal status and marital issues, was a devout Catholic. Her faith meant a lot to her. It was not merely something she professed in name and on occasion but something she lived and experienced. This is what rubbed on to Ferdinand since he was mostly brought up by his mother after her marriage was annulled.

Ferdinand was greatly influenced by his maternal grandfather, King Alfonso VIII of Castile. Alfonso was a great warrior and a chivalrous knight. He lived a disciplined life and embodied the virtues of a true knight. His fervent pursuit of virtue made a deep impact on the young Ferdinand who consciously and unconsciously imbibed this characteristic. Alfonso was also a defender and support to the Church. With such an eloquent example before him, it is hardly surprising that Ferdinand earnestly desired to be a knight – but not just any knight – he wanted to be a knight of Christ.

On the day he became a knight, Ferdinand prayed, "Christ, my Lord, I am in Thy hands, the same way this sword is in mine. Show me, my King, what Thou wantest of this Thy knight." In the silence between his prayers, he heard a voice saying to him, "I want to make your whole life like a representation and marvelous parable so that the coming centuries may contemplate the war that I, Eternal King and Universal Lord,

wage against the powers of darkness, to conquer the entire earth for my Father. Ferdinand, you will be the noble and considerate king who leads his vassals in this great enterprise, the courageous and mortified king who, above all others, charges ahead in the midst of danger and endures the strain of hard work and the fatigue of battle. You will be the generous and magnanimous king who in victory does not worry about his treasures, but distributes the spoils among his faithful knights."

## KING OF UNITY

Ferdinand ascended to the throne at a controversial point in Spanish history. His father was due to become the King of Castile in addition to León, after the death of the King of Castile. However, the Pope annulled his marriage to Berengaria, and thus lost him the claim to the throne. Berengaria's younger brother, Henry I was supposed to take over the reins but due to his untimely death, the responsibility fell on Berengaria who quickly handed it over to Ferdinand. Alfonso, his father, was furious because he felt cheated. Ferdinand's first act as King was to defend his position and kingdom against his own father and a rebel group of Castilian nobles.

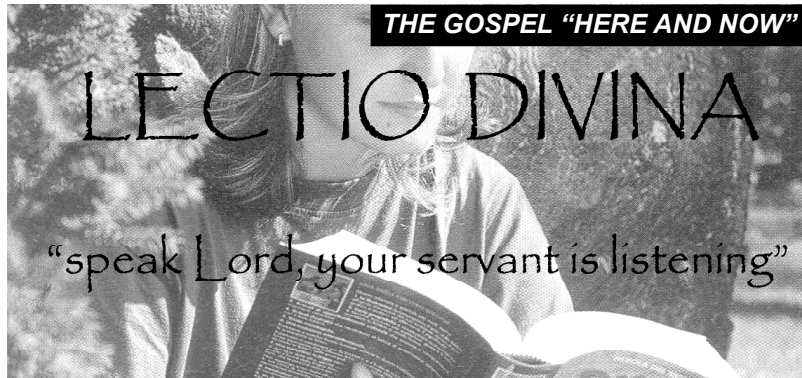
However, the combined wit of Ferdinand and his mother proved to be too much for the angry challengers to contend with and they succeeded in fending off the opposition. Berengaria acted as a guide to Ferdinand and mentored him in the art of monarchy. Faith was obviously a big part of their lives and so their policies were in keeping with Christian principles. Ferdinand was loved

as a king. He was careful not to burden the people with taxes. He was sensitive to their needs especially to the poor and weak.

Perhaps his greatest achievement was bringing about peace and unity between Castile and León. However, upon his father's death, Ferdinand laid claim to his father's kingdom. In his will, Alfonso had bequeathed his kingdom to his daughters from his first marriage. Ferdinand was able to reach an agreement with them to surrender the leadership of the kingdom in exchange for a sum of money and sizable properties. His mother played a vital role in securing their consent. They signed a treat – the Treaty of Benavente on December 11, 1230 and Ferdinand became the first King of both kingdoms since his great-grandfather, Alfonso VII.

Ferdinand fought many wars and conquered many lands mostly from Muslim rulers. He helped emerging mendicant orders find lands and set up monasteries across his territory. He himself joined the Third Order of St. Francis.

He was canonized a Saint by Pope Clement X in 1671. Even while he was alive, he was looked upon by his subjects as a saint. People openly venerated him and many made pilgrimages to his tomb to pray and seek favours. Interestingly, his body remains incorrupt. It is preserved at the Cathedral of Seville and is open for veneration. He is the only king to be blessed with such an honour. This bears testament to the kind of life he lived. Truly he was a man of God: "All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). □



## TO THE LIGHT BY THE HAND OF CHRIST

by Carlo Broccardo

**O**n the second Sunday of Easter, which this year is celebrated in the month of April and which is Divine Mercy Sunday, we heard the famous passage of St Thomas. It is easy to understand why on this day: because it is precisely eight days after the Resurrection that Jesus meets Thomas. On Easter Day, in fact, when the Risen Christ had appeared to the disciples, Thomas was not there.

The first part of the episode we are now reading is thus set on the day of Jesus' resurrection: that same day when Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb in the morning and found it empty. Desperate, she had run to the disciples; who, having ascertained that there was no body of Jesus in the tomb, had gone home more or less convinced. Instead, she remained, weeping, searching, pleading; and finally, she met the Risen One. Jesus calls her by name: "Mary"; and that is peace.

So when Jesus appears to the disciples on the evening of that same day, it is not the first time

he shows himself to his own. He enters the house and brings peace: "Peace be with you", is his greeting. "And the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord". The meeting of the risen Jesus with his disciples is a very strong experience, full of great joy: they recognise Jesus crucified (he has the signs of the passion), from him they receive the gift of the Spirit and from him they are sent on mission. The first community of disciples is really picking up speed, it is now on the path of faith, it accelerates; but then Thomas arrives; he immediately pulls the handbrake and says: stop everyone!

"I don't believe," says Thomas. Wow! Coming from one of the twelve apostles, these words are very loaded. Worse still if we think of when he utters them: after Mary Magdalene and all the other disciples had already met the Risen One. What they ask of Thomas is not a leap in the dark; all his friends are there to assure him: 'We have seen the Lord'. But apparently, he does not trust

them: "Unless I see in his hands the sign of the nails and put my finger in the mark of the nails and put my hand in his side, I do not believe."

How many times does the verb "to see" return in these verses! John says that the disciples rejoiced at seeing the Lord; then they say to Thomas: we have seen the Lord; but he retorts: if I do not see, I do not believe. Everything is about seeing. Moreover, if we go back to the disciple who with Peter went to the tomb, it is also said of him that he "saw and believed" (20:8). And if we then take a step back again, to the

events of Jesus' public life (i.e., the first 19 chapters of the Gospel), we realise that this is the normal way of believing! People see Jesus' miracles (they see his glory, John says) and believe in him; the disciples see Gestures and believe in him. Thomas does not see and does not believe.

Pay attention because we are at the most important point of the whole passage: our episode, in a nutshell, tells us that this way of believing no longer works! We can no longer base our faith on 'seeing'. It is Jesus who says this, when he finally meets Thomas and he, as if nothing had happened, makes the most beautiful profession of faith in all the Gospels: 'My Lord and my God' (20:28). But Jesus immediately clarifies: "Because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are those who believe though they have not seen" (20:29).

This is no small thing, because we would all like to be able to see, we would like to have proof. Instead, a certain measure of 'not seeing' is part of life; it is the basis of faith in God and trust in the people we love. If we want to be blessed, Jesus says, that is, if we want to be happy, we cannot only accept what we can touch with our hands; we must trust, believe that God is present even if our senses do not perceive him. □



(Detail) *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, a stupendous masterpiece by Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) Anversa, Musée des Beau-Arts



# Quiet Spaces

## LIKE CHILDREN IN THE PRESENCE OF A GIFT

*Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, May 20, 2014*

**I**n his homily at Holy Mass Pope Francis commented on St John's account of Jesus' words to his disciples in his farewell discourse (Jn 14:27-31): "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you".

Pope Francis began: Peace "is the gift that [Jesus] leaves before going away," and he explains "not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

Therefore, "the Lord gives us peace: it is his gift to us before he goes to his Passion." The Pope noted, however, that Jesus warns his disciples "that [his] peace is not that which the world gives. It is another peace." The Pope then asked: "What is the peace that the world gives?"

He replied by describing three aspects of the peace the world gives: First, "it is a bit superficial;" second, it is "a peace that does not reach the depths of the soul;" and third, "it is a peace" that procures "a certain tranquility and also a certain joy," but it reaches only "a certain level."

One type of peace that the world offers is "the peace of wealth," which leads one to think: "I'm at peace because I have everything organized, I have enough to live on for my entire life, I don't have to worry!" This idea of peace begins with the conviction: "Don't worry, you won't have problems because you have so much money!" However, Jesus himself reminds us "not to trust in this peace, for with great realism he tells us: look, there are thieves, eh! And thieves can steal your riches!" This is why "the peace that money gives you is not permanent."

The Pope then added: let us not forget "that metal corrodes ... a crash in the market and all your money is gone." The peace which money gives, he said, is therefore "not secure," and only "a superficial and temporal peace."

To help us understand, Jesus himself describes the ephemeral peace of that man "whose barns were all full of grain" and who thought about putting up others so that he might take a rest "in peace, calmly." But the Lord told him: "Fool, this night you will die!" That is why the peace that comes from wealth "is useless" even if "it helps."

Another peace the Pope continued, "is that of power." It leads us to think: "I have power, I am secure, I command this, I command that, I am respected; I am in peace." This was Herod's situation, but "when the Magi arrived and told him that the King of Israel had been born," at that very moment "his peace immediately vanished." It only confirms that "the peace of power does not work: A coup takes it away from you immediately!"

A third type of peace "that the world gives" is vanity, which leads us to tell ourselves: "I am esteemed, ... I am a person that all the world regards and when I go to receptions everyone greets me." However, the Pope said, this too is "not a definitive peace, for today you are esteemed and tomorrow you will be insulted!"

"Think of what happened to Jesus," he said. "The same people who were saying one thing on Palm Sunday, on Good Friday were saying another." Therefore, "the peace of vanity does not work," because it is "temporal,

superficial and not secure".

To understand what true peace is, we need to return to the words of Jesus: "Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." What is the peace that Jesus gives? "It is a Person; it is the Holy Spirit," the Pope explained. "On the day of the Resurrection," in the Upper Room, Jesus' greeting to his disciples was: "Peace be with you, receive the Holy Spirit." Therefore, Jesus' peace "is a Person, it is a great gift." For "when the Holy Spirit is in our heart, no one can take away our peace. No one! It is a lasting peace!"

In the face of so great a gift, what is our task, Pope Francis asked. We have to "guard this peace", he said. It is "a great peace, a peace that is not mine: it belongs to another Person who gives it to me as a gift, another Person who is in my heart, who accompanies me throughout my life and whom the Lord has given me."

"How do we receive the Holy Spirit's peace?" First "we receive it in Baptism, for the Holy Spirit comes, and also in Confirmation, for the Holy Spirit comes." And then "we are to receive it as a child received a gift." In fact, "Jesus said: unless you receive the kingdom of God like a little child, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Thus, "one receives the peace of Jesus without conditions and with an open heart: as a great gift." And "this is the peace of the Holy Spirit." It is ours "to guard, not to cage it, to listen to it, to ask for help, for he is within us."

To possible objections that "there are so many problems about," the Pontiff replied with Jesus' words: "Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." In fact, it is the Lord who comforts us: "If you have this peace of the Spirit, you have the Spirit within you and be aware of this, do not let your hearts be troubled, be secure!"

St Paul also "told us that in order to enter into the Kingdom of heaven it is necessary to pass through much tribulation." Experience confirms that "we all have many of them, both greater and smaller. All of us!" But Jesus' peace assures us: "Let not your hearts be troubled." In fact, "the presence of the Spirit enables our hearts to be at peace, aware but not anaesthetized, with that peace that only the presence of God can give".

If we want to know where we find our peace, the Pope suggested that "we ask ourselves several questions: Do I believe that the Holy Spirit is within me? Do I believe that the Lord has given him to me? Do I receive him as a gift, as a child receives a gift, with an open heart? Do I guard the Holy Spirit's presence within me so as not to sadden him?"

However, the Pope said, there is also a question that signals the opposite: "Do I prefer the peace that the world gives me, the peace offered by money, power, vanity?" He added: "these 'forms of peace' are always accompanied by fear": the fear that they will end. Instead, "Jesus' peace is definitive: we only need to receive it as children and guard it". The Pope concluded with a simple prayer: "May the Lord help us to understand these things." □

## LIFE RETURNS

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, *sdb*

The sun behind the mill was setting in a glorious blaze of glowing gold. Sitting on the stone, old Matthew, with his motionless, unblinking face, strained his eyes, listened to the rustling of the leaves, the swooshing of the grass: the wind that lightly bent the vigilant poplars on the embankment and came to brush against him, seeming to caress him like the caress of loved ones he could no longer see: the breeze went right to his soul, seeming to him like the caress of loved ones he could no longer see: whispering words of comfort.

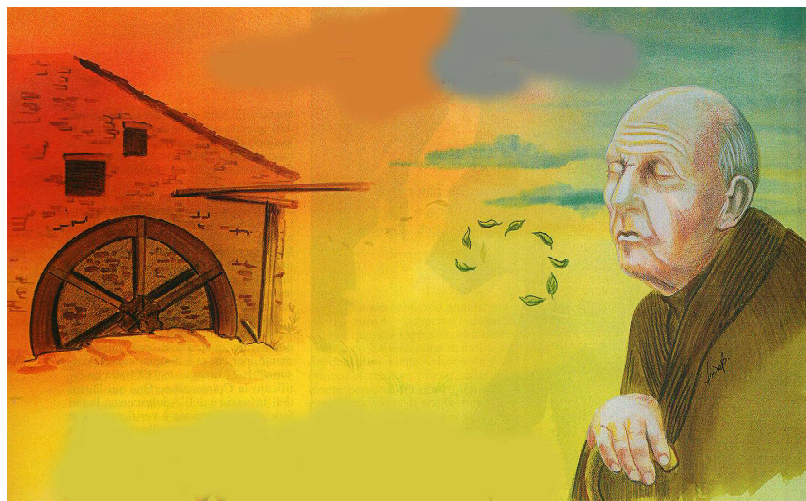
The abandoned mill was silent; the wheels had not turned for ages: the cylinders were all covered with moss and the water passed through the old sluices in thin trickles.

This was the blind man's favourite place. It was here that he would spend hours at a time,

straining his ear to the thousand voices that rose from the lonely countryside, while waves of memories of his beautiful years wrapped his heart in throbbing tenderness of nostalgia and regret.

Matthew saw himself as a man once more, when he led the mule laden with grain from his farm to the mill. Every day of work was as bright with joy as if it were a feast day. It dawned to brighten his soul with such vividness and impetuosity that his misfortune was almost it rose to the flower of his soul with such vividness and impetuosity that his misfortune was almost unbearable.

Despite his advanced age, he felt the vigour of his youth: the inaction to which his loss of sight had condemned him humiliated him so much that he yearned for death; the tender care of his family gave him no comfort. He disdained the help of his dau-



ghter and granddaughter. He was often brusque towards them: as if they were somehow responsible for his misfortune. Let him be, let him be free to go where he pleases: what did his life matter anyway? What was he doing in the world anyhow? He was a nuisance, a good-for-nothing, useless; it would have been good if they were to be rid of him as soon as possible. The estates prospered more and more: they were in good hands, those of his son and son-in-law, tireless workers like himself. This gave him satisfaction, but that could not stop him from thinking that it would be better to end up struck dead in his place of work, like his father, good soul, electrocuted in the field by a lightning strike.

\* \* \*

A long deep sigh came out of the old man's chest, while a sound of rapidly approaching footsteps drew him out of his sad meditation. And immediately, Irene's little laboured, thin voice reached his ear.

"O naughty grandfather! What are you doing here alone? Mummy and I have been looking all over for you! It's dinner time, you know!"

He stood up without leaning on the stick and his hand sought the little girl's and remained there trembling like the wings of a lost bird, caressed in the warmth of careful fingers.

"Why did you run away again today?" the little girl went on.

"You know, everyone gets upset when they come back from the fields and don't find you in the house!"

"I needed air," the old man replied, breathing hard. I was

choking, in our kitchen.

"But couldn't you just sit on the farmyard bench?"

"No, Irene: I need more space, the expanse of the fields, of my fields! I'll die if I don't go back. Tomorrow, at dawn, you will take me there. I must go there to do the sowing. You will say nothing to anyone, if you want to be good to your poor grandfather. Will you?"

"Yes, Grandpa," the little girl confirmed firmly and simply.

The old man clasped her hand with a pressure that said all his gratitude; then he impetuously raised his arms, already all relieved with desire.

They walked slowly down the path, following the along the river bank.

In the swiftly falling dusk of the autumn day, the air had become pleasantly chill. The waters sang their wild song, as they surged against the moss-covered boulders, curling into capricious swirls of foam. Far away, the village bell tower was slowly tolling the Angelus chimes.

The old man grew emotional, although he could not find the words that brought serenity to his faith as in the days when he paused at work; when, turning his gaze to the wide green expanse he could feel God's abiding presence as the sun beat down with glorious light from above.

He said to his granddaughter:

"Tomorrow, take me to large Lower Field on the other side of the river. When everyone has left, the two of us will go down there. No one will see us, no one will know anything, except when it is over. Do you promise?"

"Yes, Grandpa, don't doubt it."



He breathed hard: a smile brightened his dull face.

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The sun was barely getting out from behind a thick veil of fog as Matthew and the little girl reached the field beyond the river.

The damp, ruddy brown earth had the appearance of quiet power, almost an awareness of its secret virtue.

The old man gasped a little, but felt as strong as ever.

The farm, his farm was around him, it was in his heart, it still spoke to him through the friendly whisper of the trees as in the days of his distant youth. The air of the new day seemed to him like a breath of resurrected spring, as if the song of the sun rose from the clods of earth to brighten his soul with joy.

Matthew clearly saw again, as if his eyes were still open to the light, the hill in front of the field was reddish with oaks and golden with chestnut trees on the still dazzling green drape of meadows.

"It's a good day," he said with a slight tremor in his voice. "Jemma, my child, take my hand and lead me to the far end of the field."

The little girl immediately squeezed her grandfather's left hand, sensing that, with that gesture, she was about to accomplish something beautiful, something great, and she is all proud of it. She remained motionless for a moment as if waiting for a signal; she pinned

her gaze on the old man's face as if he could still read the excitement in her eye.

And behold, far away, the church bells, which the night before had rung the Angelus, give a sign for the first Mass, swaying faintly in the morning mist.

The old man listened: for him, those bells had the voice of a blue sky, voices that seemed to him to chime to herald a period of imminent sowing.

"Let's set off," he ordered in a firm and happy tone.

And he began to move: a little uncertain and hesitant at first, then more and more sure and confident.

In the cadenced swaying of his body, his thick leather boots sank into the clods and carried away a soft fat pear, while his left hand found support in that of his granddaughter who, with her arm stretched out to give him all possible help, guided him along



the straight furrow.

The blind sower rummaged with his right hand inside the bag containing seed: his contact with the grains was as sweet and blessed to him as the beads of a rosary. Matthew filled his fist with them, then with a broad, solemn gesture, he tossed them around the field.

Once again, he felt in communion with his good earth that he was proud to have cultivated for so many years, making it ever more beautiful and fruitful.

His heart now beat in his chest

with a quiver of wings; a warm wave of light, one that had been missing from the pupils of his eyes; the light descended to enliven him with purest joy: the joy of all those who prepare the harvest they will not see, for the fields of the future.

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At midday, when the distant church bell rang, the blind man, exhausted, yet happy, reverently bent his head and moved his lips, which found the words of gratitude and a prayer. "Thank you, Lord!" □

## THE CIRCLE OF JOY

One day, not long ago, a farmer came to the door of a monastery and knocked rather boldly. When the friar who was porter opened the heavy oak door, the farmer, with a smile, showed him a magnificent bunch of grapes.

"Brother Porter," said the farmer, "do you know who I want to give this, most beautiful bunch of grapes from my vineyard to?" "Maybe to the abbot or some other priest in the monastery." "No, to you!"

"To me?" The porter blushed with joy. "Do you want to give it to me?"

"Of course, because you have always treated me in such a friendly manner and you have always helped me when I needed your help. I want this bunch of grapes to bring you some joy." The simple joy he saw on the porter's face thrilled him too.

The brother porter kept the bunch in plain sight all morning. It was truly a gorgeous bunch. Suddenly he had an idea. "Why don't I take this bunch to the abbot so he too has a little joy?" He took the bunch and brought it to the abbot.

The abbot was genuinely touched and pleased. But he remembered that there was an old sick friar in the monastery and he thought: "I'll take this bunch to him so it might pick him up a bit." So, the bunch made another journey. But it did not stay in the cell of the sick friar for long. In fact, he thought the bunch would delight to the brother cook who sweated over the stove in the kitchen and so he sent it to him. But friar cook took it to friar sacristan (to bring him some joy too), who took it to the youngest friar in the monastery who took it to another and then to another. Until, from friar to friar the bunch of grapes came back to the friar porter (to bring him some joy). So, the circle was complete...a circle of joy. (Bruno Ferrero)

*Don't wait for someone else to start. Today, it's up to you to start a circle of joy. A tiny spark is often enough to detonate a huge explosion. Just a spark of goodness and the world will begin to change.*

*Love is the only treasure that multiplies by division; it is the only gift that only increases the more you subtract from it. It is the only company in which the more you spend, the more you earn; give it away, throw it away, spread it to the four winds, empty out your pockets, shake up the basket, turn the glass upside down and tomorrow you will have more than before.* □

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 40

by Michele Molineris

### 193. A double miracle (1871)

At Mornese in 1871 Mary Help of Christians performed a miracle at the hands of Don Bosco. Here is the narration, as dictated by the one who received it, Bianchi Jerome of Mornese, who had seen one of his sons healed from gangrene the year earlier.

In 1871 he "as suffering from sciatica, which from time to time forced him to stay in bed for seven or eight days without being able to eat. The illness reached the point where he sometimes thought he was dying, and lasted about seven months. As Don Bosco was in Mornese, he dragged himself to the boarding school not far away, experiencing excruciating pains while walking.

When he was in Don Bosco's presence, he asked to be healed. Don Bosco advised him some prayers, blessed him, adding that if he had faith in Our Lady, he would be infallibly healed.

Bianchi, still not content, asked him when he would be healed. Don Bosco replied: "The sickness will begin to recede from this point on, but be courageous... The sickness will still bother you from time to time; but don't lose heart."

"But when will I be healed?"

"On All Saints Day you will be perfectly healed."

It was in the month of August. And indeed, it was, and on All Saints Day, November 1, he was perfectly healed.

His well-being lasted perfectly for ten years. When this was over, the pains returned, though not as strong as before, and Bianchi returned to Turin in January, on the eve of the feast of St Francis de Sales.

Don Bosco blessed him again, suggesting a prayer and adding: "In March this year you will write to me that you are cured."

In fact, when he left, he fell asleep in a quiet and contented slumber, because after Don Bosco's blessing he had felt the pains wane. In the month of March he was perfectly healed."

The manuscript also had this detail: "Note: good doctors, his friends, at the time of these two illnesses had visited him several times a day; and although they used electric shocks, morphine injections, and chamomile tea, they had brought him no relief. After the two blessings he no longer used any medicine; rejecting it. He said that Our Lady and no one else should heal him" (M.B., X, 596).

"Bianchi Jerome of Mornese had a little boy only five days old whose arm was broken while bandaging it. The arm swelled and suppurated on both sides of the elbow. The doctors delayed the operation at first, hoping that nature would bring out the bone fragments, but that left him crippled.

Don Bosco came to Mornese in the last days of April. His mo-

ther brought him to bless the boy and, while she made a generous offering (her bridal gold) she asked him to tell her on which day he would be cured.

Don Bosco smiling replied: "Since you are generous with Our Lady, I firmly believe that you will be heard, and that at the end of May the child will be cured. Meanwhile, pray.

The illness lasted with the same severity throughout the month of May; on the very morning of the month's closing feast the arm was suppurating as before, without any improvement. The family had gone to the parish for a feast day mass. The mother and father-in-law, Jerome's father, had remained at home.

Suddenly, as the noon bells rang, the little boy began to move, to shake all joyfully, and with his infirm arm, which he had never moved before, he tried to remove the veil covering the cradle. Jerome's father ran to call his daughter-in-law; she came and beside herself, with amazement, saw that the arm was perfectly healed, without any trace of the opening of the wounds, with the bone whole, healthy and without blemishes.

He lived two years more healthy, slender, and with an openness of intellect beyond his years. His mother called him the son of Our Lady, and he died of an in-testinal inflammation" (M.B., X, 619).

### 194. A prediction yet to come

### true (1871)

On the ridge of the spire of the bell towers of the basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin there are two angels in different postures. One holds a flag with a date on it: 1571; this is the date of the victory achieved by the Christian forces, united against the Turks, who had set out to conquer Europe; the other poses in the act of offering a crown to the Immaculate Conception, which tops the basilica's main dome.

But this was not the case in the beginning. This second angel also held a flag over which only the beginning of a date was etched in indentation, where the tens and units were replaced by two dots; thus: "19...." Fr Lemoyné, who lets us know, says he read that date and also tells us why it was not put: because it smacked of presumption and the prediction would not have pleased everyone. The fact remains, however, that in this twenty-year period that separates us from the year two thousand, Our Lady must bring back a victory against evil, which at the time was represented by the Muslim heresy, similar to the one she won against the Turks in 1571 at Lepanto.

In 1571, the Turks, proud of the fall of Cyprus into their hands at the expense of the Venetians, had directed the prows of their ships, with intentions far from peaceful, against Europe. However, at Lepanto (a city in Greece), they had run into the Christian fleet,



set up at the behest of St. Pius V, which not only halted their advance, but literally destroyed them, with no hope of regrouping.

With the other flag, which Don Bosco had replaced with a crown so as not to be accused of being presumptuous, he wanted to protect the Christians against another coalition that would be organised by his enemies in due course, but by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and from which they would also be victorious with the help of Our Lady. Some twenty years to go before the end of the century, and no one can deny that the conditions for such a cataclysm were already in place.

Since the victory of Lepanto was not without foundation attributed to the protection of heaven and the Blessed Virgin, whom all Christians invoke with the recitation of the Rosary, so the Church instituted the feast of the Holy Rosary, which is celebrated throughout Christendom on the first Sunday in October, and by express order of Pius V, the words: *Maria, auxilium christianorum, ora pro nobis* (from M.B., IX, 583) were added to the litany of Loreto.

### **196. Five hundred Lire is too much! (1871)**

On 26 October 1871, a number of distinguished professors and men of letters gathered at the Oratory to discuss the authors to be published in the monthly association of Italian classics, the *Biblioteca della Gioventù*; a

pleasant meeting, which had already been held since 1869, i.e., since the association had begun.

On that day, Fr Albera left, together with two clerics, for the opening of the house in Marassi (Genoa). On their way to greet the saint, to hear another good word from him and to have his blessing, they heard him exclaim: "So go to Genoa and open a hospice for the poorest and most abandoned young people!"

"But how will we do this, by what means?" observed one of those departing.

"Don't worry about anything; the Holy Father sends you his blessing, put all your trust in the Lord; he will provide. When you arrive, you will find accommodation where you will begin your mission.

Fr Albera, who was external prefect of the Oratory, had put aside some money for the initial expenses. Don Bosco asked him if he needed anything.

"No, Don Bosco, thank you; I already have five hundred lire with me." "Oh, my dear! You don't need so much money! Won't there be Divine Providence in Genoa? Don't worry, Providence will think of you too, don't worry!"

Withdrawing a few lira from the drawer, just what was necessary for the journey, he gave it to him, taking back the five hundred (M.B., X, 190).

### **197. Don Bosco falls asleep in the company of the Hon. John**

### **Lanza (1871)**

On 22 June 1871 Don Bosco was received in Florence by the Minister of the Interior, Giovanni Lanza, whom he had already met in 1865 in Turin. He had to sound out the intent of the government regarding bishop appointments, unofficially in the name of the Holy See. Don Bosco had another conversation with him before he left for Rome with almost all the ministers, who had to prepare the way for the king, expected for his solemn entry on 2 July. Don Bosco also went to Rome, where he had the opportunity to confer with Pius IX, who declared himself against concessions that would be humiliating to his dignity.

It would therefore have been an act of good policy on the part of the minister not to put obstacles in the way of the exercise of his spiritual authority. Instead, the *exequatour* came and the negotiations lost ground. They were not abandoned, however, and the minister's hearings continued so as to leave no stone unturned on the part of the Holy See.

In one of these audiences the minister began to make his observations, but Don Bosco, who was very tired - who knows how much work he had done in those days when he had no secretary at his side! - He fell asleep and the minister kept quiet and let him rest peacefully. As soon as he was awake, after a bit of laughter at what had happened, they resumed

their discussions, and Don Bosco was not long in seeing that they were looking for any pretext to drag things out.

As he was leaving the audience, Buscaglione, the Grand Master of Freemasonry, the dispatcher of the Stefani agency, entered, and Lanza asked him: "Do you know who that priest was who left here just now?"

"I saw him, but I didn't look at him!" "It was Don Bosco!" "Don Bosco? oh I've known him for a while." And the minister told him how he had fallen asleep in his high chair.

At one of the aforementioned audiences, we do not know whether in Florence or Rome, Lanza asked him about the Valdocco Oratory and proposed opening a house of correction for disruptive and abandoned youngsters, in this or that religious house.

"You would have to crush the friars or the nuns," Don Bosco observed. "You could easily settle with the Holy See!" "But why, Your Excellency, did you not tell me that to found this institute there was such and such barracks, on such and such street, such and such number, or such and such a square?" "Your Excellency, I thank you for your kind proposal, but Don Bosco already has too many crosses, and then, with the cross on his chest, he would no longer be poor Don Bosco, and he would no longer dare go begging for alms for his boys!" (M.B., X, 435).□



## MARY AND SACRED SCRIPTURE (2)

Giovanni Zappino

In the previous month's article, we recalled that there are five "Marian" passages in the Old Testament quoted from chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*. Now let us read what exactly the Second Vatican Council states on this subject:

- "In this light, she (= the Mother of the Redeemer) is already prophetically foreshadowed by the promise, made to the ancestors, who fell into sin, about victory over the serpent (cf. Gen 3:15).

- Likewise, this is the Virgin who will conceive and bear a Son, whose name will be Emmanuel (cf. Is 7:14; Mic 5:23; Mt 1:22-23).

- She (= the Virgin Mary) prevails among the humble and the poor of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from Him.

- And finally, with Her "exalted Daughter of Zion", after the long wait for the promise, the times were fulfilled and a new Economy was established, when the Son of God assumed human nature from Her, to free man from sin by the "mysteries of His flesh"



*The woman will crush your head  
(Gen 3, 15)*

(*Lumen Gentium* 55).

Thus far the doctrinal text of the Council Constitution. The perspective, according to which we must read the quoted passages, has already been indicated earlier by the Council, in these words:

"These first documents, as they are read in the Church and are understood, in the light of further and full revelation, progressively bring more and more into light the figure of a Woman," mysterious and extraordinary: the Mother of the Messiah.

Let us now examine these text one by one:

### 1<sup>st</sup> Text: Genesis 3,15

(*cited by the Council*)

The prophecy, made by God himself, to our progenitors and to the serpent, immediately after the first sin, the first transgression, has been called, since the mid-17th century, 'PROTOEVANGELIUM', i.e., first promise of salvation, first glad tidings. We hear it read in the first reading of the Mass on Immaculate Conception Day and it is regarded as the first prophecy of the Old Testament, the queen of all prophecies! A woman, with her offspring (seed) appears victorious over the serpent.

We can now legitimately ask ourselves: who is that 'Woman' spoken of in the prophecy? What about Eve? And Mary? And Eve and Mary together?

The faith of the Church ultimately points back to Mary, because the 'offspring' of the woman who will overcome the serpent (= Satan) is Christ the Redeemer, thus the Woman, spoken of, is the Mother of the Redeemer.

If - as many scholars think - the drafting of the text is to be placed at the time of the exile (6th century), verse 15 may appropriately be considered a reinterpretation of Is 7:14.

The Woman in this case is a very specific person: the expected



*"The Virgin will conceive a son  
and he will be called Emmanuel"  
(Is 7, 14)*

Mother of the Messiah. Such, however, appears in the light of the New Testament, where Mary is designated by the appellation "Woman" (cf. Jn 2:4; 19:26) and especially by the entire Christian Tradition.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Text: Isaiah 7,14

Two kings, the king of Damascus (Aram) and the king of Samaria (Israel), invade Judea and threaten to exterminate David's royal line to put Tabeel's son on the throne.

The king of Judah (Ahaz) is seized with terror, but instead of putting his trust in God, he places it in human succour and seeks alliances with Assyria. Then God sends the prophet Isaiah to reassure him that the iniquitous plan of the two kings will not succeed. Isaiah, to confirm what



he has said, invites Ahaz to ask God for a “sign,” but the king hypocritically refuses “so as not to tempt God”, actually because he does not believe in God.

Despite the king’s rejection, God confirms his faithfulness to David and promises that he will preserve David’s royal lineage and deliver it from impending danger. The pledge and sign of this is the virginal conception and birth of Emmanuel from David’s lineage. Despite the unfaithfulness of men, there will be an heir for David.

St Matthew, in his Gospel, punctually records the fulfilment of this prophecy. This is why the text of Isaiah can be read as a Marian prophecy.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Text: Micah 5,1-4**  
(*And you Bethlehem...*)

The prophet Micah adds a remarkable circumstance to the prophecy of his contemporary Isaiah: the place of the future Messiah’s birth, namely Bethlehem of Ephrata in Judea.

With the words ‘until she who is to give birth gives birth’ the prophet Micah surely alludes to Isaiah’s prophecy about the Virgin who conceives and gives birth to a son called Emmanuel.

Micah’s text, with its reference to the woman who gives birth and to peace, can therefore be considered a “reinterpretation” of Isaiah’s text, which remains the fundamental text. The fulfilment of this prophecy of Micah was also recorded by Matthew, in his Gospel, in the context of the episode of the Magi.

In conclusion, by reading these early documents as they are read in the Christian community and



“And you Bethlehem, from you will come who will rule over Israel.” (Micah 5, 1-4)

as they are understood, in the light of the full revelation that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we learn to know the Virgin Mary from the very beginning of divine revelation.

We understand, therefore, what the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches in No. 488: “God sent his Son (Gal 4:4), but to prepare a body for him, he wanted the free co-operation of a creature. For this reason, God from all eternity chose a Mother for his Son: - a daughter of Israel, a young Jewess from Nazareth, in Galilee, - “a virgin betrothed to a young man of the house of David, named Joseph. The virgin’s name was Mary” (Lk 1:26-27). Cf. Lumen Gentium no. 56 □



**SR. BERNADETH GEIGER, PINA, A WIFE AND MOTHER**

*Emilia di Massimo & Nicole Stroth*

**Sister Bernadeth Geiger FMA**  
*A Daughter of Mary Help of Christians*

I was born on January 18, 1985 in Tyrol (Austria) and grew up with two brothers and a sister. Having completed my studies in food technology, at the age of 21 I decided to volunteer in Cambodia, with the Daughters of Mary help of Christians. In 2007 I joined the Institute. As a social worker, I worked from home in Stams, Tyrol. I am currently in Magdeburg, Germany with two sisters with whom I share the educational mission at a youth centre.

**How did you realise that the consecrated life was your vocation?**

The conviction to consecrate myself gradually grew. I matured in an environment that was deeply steeped in religious traditions. As a child I was active in my parish in Austria, and as a teenager I was the leader in my

youth group. The choice of religious life was, next to marriage, a life option. Certainly, an uncommon choice, but for me it was normal to respond to His call. Every doubt and uncertainty I felt helped me to verify whether consecrated life was, or was not, my true path.

**What does it mean to you to live chaste, poor and obedient, considering today’s culture, which, in many ways trends in the opposite direction?**

As a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, living according to what the religious vows propose means being in relationship with Jesus and with one’s neighbour like he did.

To live chaste is to love God and neighbour, a visible and concrete sign of the Lord’s face. It is also to live a simple life, which does not need much and, through the vow of poverty, is fully available to others. Obedience is for me to be open to the signs of the times and to respond according to my vocation as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

**A year ago you made your perpetual vows in the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Did you**



**consider well what it means to give your life to the Lord forever?**

My decision to consecrate myself definitively to the Lord matured during my years of formation, years during which I pondered the choice well and put down solid roots to be faithful to the Lord forever. I also considered the possibility, since we are human, of falling in love, but this can also happen in a couple, I believe the problem is not so much falling in love as renewing one's love every day, especially in the most difficult moments.

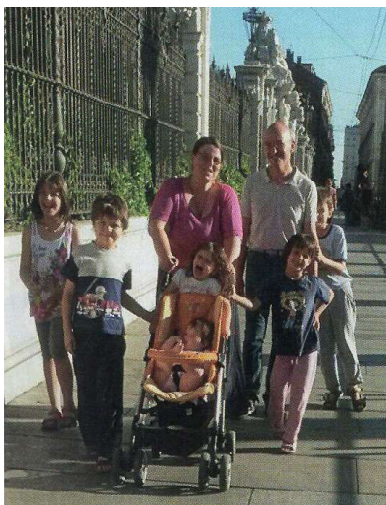
**If you had to address a message to young people about vocation, what would you tell them?**

Vocation concerns everyone. We are all called to fulfil God's dream in the world. It is necessary to seek what it is that will make one truly happy. One cannot seek the meaning of one's life alone: the Lord reaches out to us through the ordinary circumstances of everyday life, especially through the people we meet. It is through them that he reveals to us His plan of love.

**PINA Wife and mother of six wonderful children**

Vocation for me is to constantly adhere to the Lord's plans; it means to want to trust Him; to trust that what He has chosen for me is much more beautiful and fruitful than what I would have chosen for my life.

Fr Luigi Maria Epicoco says: "vocation is not settling down, but setting out." My vocation is actually fulfilled day by day by reaffirming my absolute trust in



the Lord and realising that I lend Him my arms and my body, but the rest is all his doing.

It is a great thing to collaborate in a small way in God's creative work: it is a miracle that cannot be described, it is absolute communion with God who has chosen me six times to bring six new creatures into the world. And I continue to give birth every day to these six lives that have been entrusted to me by the Lord!

I believe that my vocation lies in the Lord entrusting these lives lies to me. That is why I do not believe that vocation, at least for me, is a packed 'package' that one has to find and put into one's own life. It is a dynamic thing that is done by two, with God proposing something and man freely choosing whether to accept. □

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**IN A CHEERFUL MOOD**

**Nothing at all**

Judge: "Have you anything to offer the court before sentence is passed on to you?"

Prisoner: "No, your honour, my lawyer took my last penny."

**Safe as safe can be**

The four partners of a business went out for dinner together. Just when they sat down the senior - most partner said: "My goodness, I've forgotten to lock the safe."

"Why worry?" one of the others said: "All four of us are here."

**Not guilty**

Judge: "You admit you drove over this man with a loaded truck?"

Truck driver: "Yes, your Honour."

Judge: "And what do you have to say in your defence?"

Truck driver: "Your honour, I didn't know it was loaded."

**So obvious**

Jim: "Do you know that my brother has been going round with only half a shirt on his back?"

Tom: "No, where's the other half?"

Jim: "On his front, of course."

**Straight talk**

Lady: Where's the 12.30 train?

Porter: "Go to the left and you'll be right."

Lady: "Don't be cheeky, young man."

Porter: "All right, lady, go to the right and you'll be left."

**Some consolation**

"Since he lost his money, half his friends don't know him any more."

"And the other half?"

"They don't know as yet that he has lost it."

**Getting ready**

"What's the idea of the Greens taking French lessons?"

"They have adopted a French baby and want to understand what she says when she begins to talk."

**Quite satisfactory**

Shopman: "Do you find the alarm clock satisfactory?"

Customer: "Yes but it wakes the parrot, the parrot whistles to the dog and the dog barks until we wake up."

**Too dirty**

Tommy: "We're playing the game, dad, and I'm the detective. How can I disguise myself?"

Dad: "Wash your face. Nobody will recognise you then."

**Hygienic**

Two strangers in a train compartment were in friendly conversation. The windows had been closed by the previous occupants, and the talk had drifted to the subject of ventilation.

"I make it," said one, "an invariable practice to advise people to sleep with their bedroom windows open all the year round."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the other, "it is easy to see your profession."

"Indeed, and what do you think it is?"

"It's fairly obvious that you are a doctor."

"Not at all," retorted the first, very confidentially. "To tell you the truth, I'm a...burglar." □



# SAY IT FIRST!

Bruno Ferrero

He was a big burly man with a thunderous voice and rough manners. She was a sweet and delicate woman. They were married. He did not let her want for anything, she looked after the house and brought up the children. The children grew up, got married, left. A story like many others...

But when all the children were settled, the woman lost her smile, became thinner and paler. She could no longer eat, and before long she could no longer get out of bed.

Her husband was worried, and had her admitted to hospital.

Doctors and then renowned specialists came to her bedside. No one could discover the kind of illness. They shook their heads and said: "But?"

The last specialist took the big man aside and said: "I would say ... simply... that your wife no longer has the will to live.

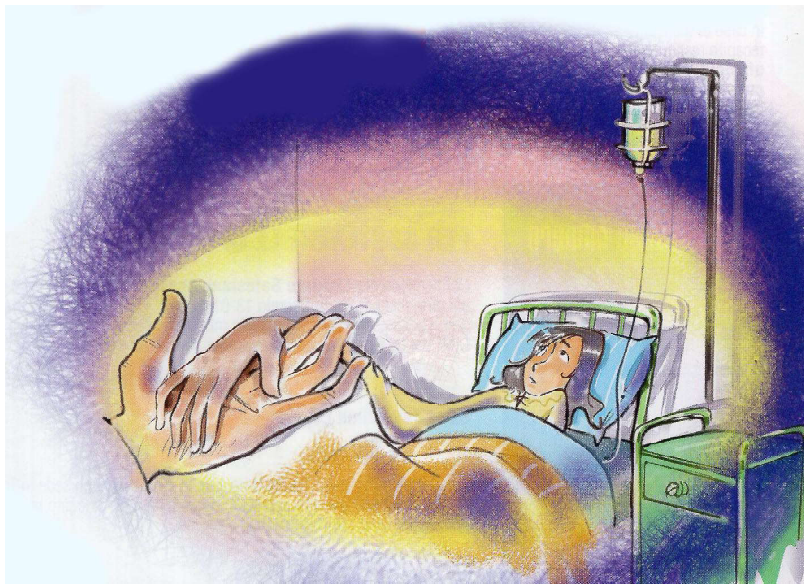
Without saying a word, the big man sat down beside his wife's bed and took her hand.

A thin little hand disappeared into the man's big hand.

Then, in his thundering voice, he said decisively: "You will not die!"

"Why?" she asked, in a faint breath.

"Because I need you!" "And why did you not tell me this



before?"

From that moment, the woman began to improve. And today she is fine. While doctors and specialists continue to wonder what kind of illness she had and what extraordinary medicine had made her recover so quickly.

*Don't wait till tomorrow to tell someone you love them. Do it now. Don't think, "But my mother, my son, my wife... already knows." Maybe he knows; maybe she knows. But would you ever get tired of hearing it? Don't look at the time, pick up the phone: "It's me, I want to tell you that I love you". Squeeze the hand of the person you love and say: "I need you! I love you, I love you, I love you..." Love is life. There is a land of the dead and a land of the living. What distinguishes them is love. □*

## MARY, MODEL OF DIVINE WORSHIP (Marialis Cultus 16-17)

We wish to examine more closely a particular aspect of the relationship between Mary and the liturgy—namely, Mary as a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries. That the Blessed virgin in this field derives from the fact that she is recognized as a most excellent exemplar of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ, that is, (she is) closely associated with her Lord, invoking Christ and through Him worships the eternal Father.

Mary is the attentive Virgin, who receives the word of God with faith, that faith which in her case was the gateway and path to divine motherhood, for, as Saint Augustine realized, "Blessed Mary by believing conceived Him (Jesus) whom believing she brought forth." She said, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me" (Lk. 1:38). It was faith that was for her the cause of blessedness and certainty in the fulfillment of his promise: "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk. 1:45). Similarly, it was faith with which she, who played a part in the Incarnation and was a unique witness to it, thinking back on the events of the infancy of Christ, meditated upon these events in her heart (cf. Lk. 2:19,51). □

### LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I unwittingly got myself involved in a serious problem with my friend and his family and I was finding it difficult to come out of it. The problem was complex as my friend's family was involved. I prayed the devotion of 3 Hail Marys to Mother Mary along with 3 Memorare and was delivered from this problem safely. *Elvis Pink*

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MAY 2023

*For church movements and groups*

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### **MARY WAS THERE**

I am a 36-year-old mother of twins who are 4 years old now. My left eye had an injury last year in August 2018. The cornea got torn, and it took one week for the wound to heal, and another week for my eyesight to get back to normal. In the month, March, 2019, my right eye suffered a similar injury while my daughter was playing, this time, a more serious one. There was a lot of pain, swelling and redness, and I wasn't able to see with that eye for a few days. I feared I would go practically blind. Even after a week when the wound had healed, my sight was not very clear. In the following week my eyesight gradually improved came back to normal again. I am very grateful to Jesus and Mary. *Rose Kurian*

**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.

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