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*We humbly ask, O Lord,
 that, honoring how
 the Blessed Virgin Mary
 suffered with her Son,
 may we complete
 in ourselves
 for the Church's sake
 what is lacking
 in the sufferings
 of Christ.*

From The Editor's Desk
NOT JUST STAYING ALIVE!

Recently, in a little nondescript town the senior citizens who had stopped playing the musical instruments which they had loved earlier in life were invited to come along, to blow the dust off their trumpets, and start playing again! Many did this, shyly at first, but then with more confidence. They had great fun together and finally got to the point of giving recitals. Most of all, they began to feel more alive – life had regained its colour. This editorial is about ways to stay alive!

Do you feel the urge to 'blow the dust off your trumpet'? Do you want to live your days to the full and can you allow Him to use your name and tell you personally: "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full, even as you are now? (Jn 10:10) Can you imagine yourself as an autumn leaf which is slowly curling up and falling apart?

By living life as fully as we can, we bring life to those around us, just as they do to us. Certainly, it can be a bother sometimes to get in touch with someone, arrange to meet, dress up and go out. But imagine the two of you as God's works-of-art getting together to see how each is coming along and to encourage one another on the journey! So, don't start moldering yet – leave that to the grave!

As we become more dependent, people have to look after us. We can make their task more enjoyable if we are positive, interested in what they are doing, chatty. People will be attracted to me insofar as I am alive and loving. Even when the lamp of life burns low, I may manage a smile, a wink. People are attracted by love.

Some years ago a group of priests organized a week-long seminar for their companions above 65. They went off to a modest hotel and for a week were facilitated to explore what they'd like to do for the rest of their lives. No matter what each came up with, the first response was "Why not?" The group was dubbed 'the oldies and boldies' - boldies because they were willing to shake the dust off their particular trumpets and be fired with a new enthusiasm and zest for life. Their scriptural theme was: "Behold I set before you, life and death. Choose life!" (Dt. 30:19) They found the week a liberating experience, they laughed a lot and followed through what they had imagined for themselves.

Sitting with the Lord over a mug of coffee in the refectory in the middle of the morning, you might speak with Him as the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin did: *Remain with me, Lord, because evening is approaching (Lk 24:29). May you keep me always young. What better argument for Christianity could there be than an enduring youthfulness drawn from you? For old age leads on to you, and old age will touch me only in so far as you will. A smile, inward and outward, means facing with sweetness and gentleness whatever befalls me. I go forward to meet Him who comes.*

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

ABANDONMENT AND BETRAYALS

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

Jesus, who had committed His life to others, at the most difficult moment of His earthly life found Himself alone, abandoned even by the close friends He Himself had chosen

The path we took as we moved forward in getting to know Jesus and his way of living relationships and affections made us encounter words such as friendship, trust, esteem, respect, valuing each person, authenticity and directness, solidarity, forgiveness and freedom. But our itinerary would not be complete if we did not recognize that Jesus also experienced the hardships and failure of relationships, experiencing loneliness and aban-

donment, misunderstanding and sadness. He who took on our human condition did so to the very end, and if he restored meaning and dignity to our affective experience, it was also because he went through it all, in its light but also in its shadows.

Misunderstanding and miscommunication accompanied the entire earthly story of Jesus. The list of diatribes with the Pharisees and with the religious leaders of



the people would be very long. How can we fail to recall the wail of his villagers who "were scandalized by him" (Mark 6:3). We can imagine that one of the most painful aspects of Jesus' relationships and abandonment of his closest friends, those he had also chosen so that they would "be with him" (Mk 3:14). How can we fail to recall the discussions about which of them was the greatest, made just as Jesus was announcing his coming passion (Mt 20:20-23).

Then there were the abandonments, as in the case of the rich young man (Mt 19:16-22); the ingratitude of the healed lepers who did not return to say thank you (Lk 17:11-19); the loneliness when he made very harsh speeches about bread and those crowds who had eaten and been satiated abandon him; "Will you also go away?" Jesus would say to the twelve who were left alone with him (Jn 6:67). And there were betrayals, as in the case of Judas (Mt 26:20-25) and Peter (Mt 26:69-75); the bitter tears of the one who was supposed to be the rock, well-pleasing to Jesus but the betrayal remained.

He who had dedicated his life to others, at the most difficult time of his earthly life found himself alone. At Gethsemane he wept and sweated in fear while those closest to him could not stay awake (Mt 26:36-46). The crowds who had followed and hailed him now abandoned him and shouted "Crucify him" (Mt 27:23). The climactic moment of Jesus' loneliness was the bitter

prayer he addressed to his Father from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). We know that those were the words of Psalm 22, the invocation of one who while feeling loneliness invoked the One who knew how to be present, but they remained a painful prayer of lamentation.

Jesus was well aware that his words would not only generate bonds of "love and understanding," but also divisions and misunderstandings, "I have come to pit son against father, daughter against mother" (Mt 10:35). And so, we can understand in a new way the words of the beatitudes, "Blessed are the afflicted, for they shall be comforted; blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are the merciful" (Mt 5:47). In these words, we cannot fail to recognize first of all his own experience was also made up of tears, meekness and forgiveness.

To those who had abandoned him, Jesus as an answer, announced and promised that he, the Lord, would never leave them alone: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). At the very moment of abandonment, betrayed affections and loneliness, the evangelist John tells us that Jesus "loved his own to the end" (Jn. 13:1). Therein lay the highest and most provocative lesson: Jesus loved his own to the end not amid the joy and exultation of his entry into Jerusalem, but on the night when he was betrayed. □

IF SALT BECOMES TASTELESS..”

Faith and hope are wonderful gifts, but unfortunately, we have the terrible power to empty them of their efficacy. And at that point, what is it that will give flavour to our existence?

The evangelists report that in his speeches Jesus also used rhetorical questions, that is, questions whose answer is taken for granted or implied. This is not to say that they were idle or useless phrases: the purpose of a rhetorical question is to spice up the discourse and bring out the points of convergence between speaker and listener. Instead of saying, “Is it so,” he asks, “Is it not so?” inviting listeners to assent. But since Jesus was not looking for voters or selling household goods, even his rhetorical questions were not just an attention-grabbing device but an invitation for reflection.

One day he asked, “If salt becomes tasteless, with what will you salt it?” (Mark 9:50). Obviously, this is not a practical question - Jesus is not thinking of a new flavor enhancer. By leaning on what everyone knows - you cannot salt salt - Jesus is trying to make people think about something that is not obvious.

Today we are accustomed to recycling and know that certain objects can find a second use even after they have fulfilled their first function: a broken jug can become a flower vase, a punctured inner tube might provide rubber bands and gaskets, an old newspaper can be good for cleaning glass

What about salt? Sodium chloride has been used since ancient times to preserve food and enhance its taste, but if it lost its

virtue, it would be of no further use. At most it would find a place in the little chemist’s bottles: worthless crystals to look at and keep for small teaching exercises.

So it is with the Christian: it cannot be recycled.

Just as tasteless salt is a nonsense, an irreversible absurdity, so the disciple of Christ who does not taste or cause to taste the newness of the Gospel is a dull beacon, a coin out of circulation, a stuck engine. Something that contradicts its own nature.

Salt gives flavor to all foods, and there is nothing that can give flavour to salt; so the Christian: if he has not found in Christ goodness, beauty, a taste for living, hope ... where will he go to look for all this?

Jesus’ question is an invitation to take the Gospel very seriously: in life there may be so many “foods,” that is, so many occupations, so many goals to achieve, so many good things that can fuel our existence, but each one needs salt, that is, Christ, to be truly good.

Jesus’ question is also a warning to guard and protect what we have received as gifts: faith and hope are wonderful gifts, but unfortunately, we have the terrible power to empty them of their effectiveness. We can be so careless and superficial that they become irrelevant to our life choices.

And at that point, what will give flavour to our existence? □

2 NOVEMBER

FEAST OF THE MONTH

ALIVE FOREVER!

All Souls Day

by Gianni Sangalli

There are many who say that after death there is nothing more, but they cannot deny that they too have an irresistible desire to live again, beyond death.

For the believer, there is the word of Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life, whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:25)

But Jesus offers us much more than just “immortality of soul.” He offers us, at the end of time, resurrection, that is human, spiritual and corporeal in its wholeness. “This is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of what He has given me, but that I should raise it up on the last day” (Jn 6:39).

Jesus wants us with our resurrected bodies: “I am going to prepare a place for you. When I have gone and prepared a place for you, I will return and take you with me, that you also may be where I am” (Jn 14:2).

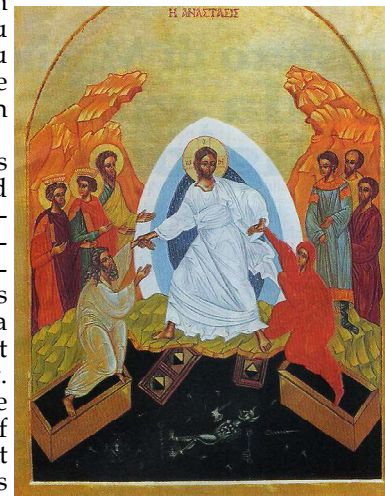
These words mean that God loves us as a Father, who is faithful to his promises. God has given us life as a gift and does not want it to be lost. God’s gifts are without regret; if God creates us, it is not to erase us

from existence after 30 or 70 years. The love of God for his creatures cannot be a temporary choice, limited in time and space; the sign of true love is to never end.

When a man is born, in his destiny there is a relationship, a relationship with God. God brings himself close to man, binds himself to him with an eternal love. St. Paul says, “The Lord is faithful to the choices he makes” (2 Thess. 3:3); therefore, God cannot give life to man just for a little while, for a short period and then reduce him to nothingness. What kind of love would that be? No! The covenant God has made with each of us cannot be broken by death. “Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:8) and God with him does not want corpses, but people: “Our God is

not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

The great Russian novelist, Dostoyevsky, highlights another motive to think in this fashion: “My immortality is indispensable, because God will not want to commit an iniquity and extinguish the fire of love altogether, after it has been kindled by him in my



heart.... I began to love him and rejoiced in his love. Is it ever possible for him to extinguish me and my joy and turn me into nothing?"

God has promised to love me, he has shown me his love in a thousand ways, he gives me himself in the Eucharist the "bread of eternal life," we believe Jesus' words, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...." When we join Christ in the Eucharist, we enter Christ's life, we enter eternal life: it has already begun. Jesus brought the good news that the Kingdom of God and the new world are already inaugurated in Him and in those who are converted and believe: "Eternal life is this, that they may know You, the only God, and Him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ" (Jn. 17:3).

Jesus is life, and those who believe in Him have eternal life, a life that does not fear death and creates real continuity between the earthly and heavenly conditions. Eternal life is being with the Lord. St. John writes: "See what love the Father has for us by letting us be called children of God, and that is what we are!... Beloved, we as of now are children of God, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know, however, that when he is manifested, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:1-2).

We do not know what precisely happens after death, but it is enough for the believer to know that his Saviour, his Lord and Master, stands on the other side of the door, and when it opens one day, he will go to Him with immense joy.

"Those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor ever entered into the heart of man, these has God prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). "Just as the child enclosed in its mother's womb does not imagine the multifaceted spectacle that awaits it after birth, so we cannot understand and describe the ultimate reality in its concrete ways" (Italian Catechism. 1168).

We are born for the resurrection; this faith tells us. "Our Saviour Jesus Christ overcame death and caused life and incorruption to shine through the Gospel" (2 Tim 1:10). "The "means" of the Gospel is not an escape into who knows what lost paradise, but God's love lived out for Him toward His brethren: "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me.... Come blessed!" (Mt 25:31-46).

God's love received is eternal life. This is a thought of joy for us and it is a certainty for our deceased. We will pray for them in this month and feel them closer than ever, because they are alive, fully alive, alive forever. Our life compared to theirs is only a beginning. Here in time is the departure of our journey, but the arrival is in the eternal. Only when we die are we truly born. This is what faith tells us, and our hearts are filled with consolation and hope.

"I believe eternal life, I believe the resurrection of the flesh." "Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). □

EMBRACE YOUR ONE LIFE

by Anastasia Dias

I want something more from this life. I have almost everything one desires. I've achieved so much but, something's still missing. What should I do?" wondered the young man. He got out of his house and wandered into the town and from there he went off to the next town and then the neighbouring towns until he came to this little town. Life had become like this lately. He'd accomplished everything but he didn't feel fulfilled. So he took long walks into the woods, by the river, across neighbouring towns hoping he'd find meaning some-where.

"Are you looking for something?" a young mother asked, cradling her son.

"Nothing" said the young man evasively.

"Have you come to see him?" whispered a boy pointing to

another young man.

"Who's he?" asked the young man.

"I honestly don't know. My mother brought my brother and me here. He's laying hands on some other children."

"Oh," said the young man.

"Maybe, you should go and talk to him," said the youngster.

"Maybe, I should," replied the young man.

As he approached the man, he could sense the kindness in his eyes.

"I think he may have an answer for me," the young man thought to himself.

"Hey, what do you want now?" asked one of the men around him.

"I just want to meet him," he said, pointing at Jesus.

"Ok. Go ahead," said the other man.

"Good teacher, I don't have a sense of fulfilment. What should I do? I want to attain eternal life."

"Why do you call me 'good'? Also, you know the commandments, right? Try following them," said Jesus

"Lord, I have never broken a commandment since



I was a boy. But I'm still looking for something more, some kind of fulfilment I'm seeking God," said the young man in desperation.

"You have everything. You've accomplished everything, and you're so young. But you lack something. Go and sell all you have. Then, come and follow me."

The young man couldn't believe his ears; had tears in his eyes.

There was a pause.... Everything around him seemed to stand still.

It's the end of another year. I feel like that young man.

I've done crazy things looking for a sense of fulfilment. I've also tried changing myself; my thoughts, words, habits...

But it hasn't worked out. Why?

Sometimes, like the young man, I go on long walks, wondering why? I know what the problem is and solution too...but it's hard for me to do it.

I have to 'let go.'

That's the only solution.

But, it's so hard.

Like the young man, I'm so comfortable with my old thoughts, habits, and lifestyle and that's why I don't want to let go.



Yet, I'm looking for a sense of fulfilment.

How is that possible?

Each time I realise this, I have tears in my eyes. Because just like the young man, I'm not willing to part with the old to embrace the new.

I'm habituated to feeling sad and unfulfilled. And, every time I feel like I will change the way I feel, I don't want to let go and I can't part. I just can't part with my old ways. I know people who feel the same way. Friends and family who stay up all night wondering what's wrong with them, meeting people to talk to, going on journeys to think about it and finally they figure out what 'it' actually is. But, they just can't let go. Why is it so hard? Is it impossible? Will I have to live this way? These are questions I've asked, heard and answered.

Is this a problem you face too? You're not alone.

This is the end of another year. As you enter a new year, promise yourself that you will change. That you will, firstly, part with your old self, secondly, accept the new. Third, embrace what comes your way.

That journey may be hard but believe me, it is worthwhile. It is beautiful. And when you have met your new self, you will no longer go on walks, drives or trips seeking to find yourself somewhere along the way. Because you'll already have a brand new 'you;' free from people's opinions of you. Just you. A new year and a new you.

Make the most out of these last two months and embrace life with open arms. □

PASTORAL ECOLOGY IN THE ANTILLES

The Salesians of Don Bosco by the extension of their charism teach their youngsters a love for the environment

Through his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* Pope Francis expresses what the position of Christians must be with respect to the issue of Integral Ecology and reminds us that "we ourselves are earth," not taking care of our common home means not taking care of ourselves, denying a quality present and a sustainable future to more than 10 percent of the world's population, which in turn is composed mostly of young people.

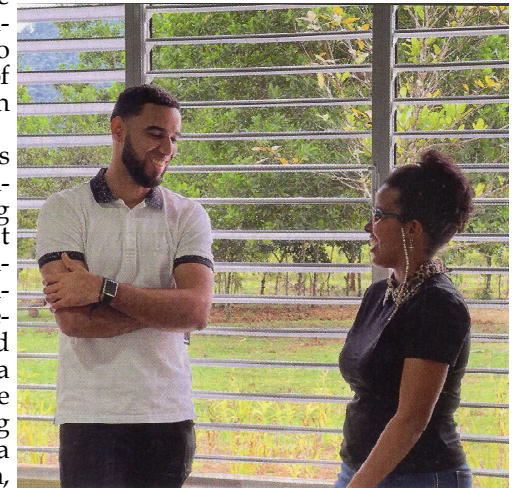
The Rector Major and his General Council were explicit about the Congregation's commitment to the protection of Creation and the accompaniment of young people toward a sustainable future with the goal of "translating the encyclical *Laudato Si*' into the daily action of each Salesian and each Salesian work."

The education of girls and boys in ecological conversion, the safeguarding of Creation and the respect for and promotion of environmental policies in Salesian facilities, from concrete action oriented toward good practices, becomes a process of cultural change and a preparation of young people for citizenship in a world that belongs to them, here and now.

A wounded land

In adherence to this policy, the Salesian Province of

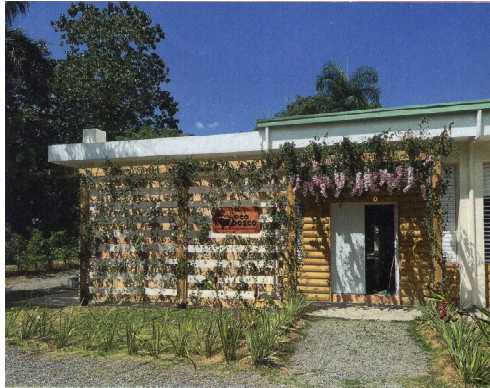
the Antilles (ANT) so that the educational, pastoral and political project to protect nature and the environment in the countries that compose it, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico, may be realized, has established a specific sector for ecological pastoral care. The islands that make up the West Indies, in the Caribbean region, are located in an area of high vulnerability to the effects of climate change such as rising temperatures, sea level rise, droughts that generate low water availability, variability of rainfall and increase in the intensity and frequency of hurricanes and reduced crop yields, earthquakes, disruption and fragi-



For 2023, the Salesians of the West Indies, intend to focus their resources on strengthening the ECOBOSCO Environmental Training Center, located 40 minutes from Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic

lity of ecosystems.

The development of green projects managed by the Salesian Don Bosco Foundation, including the project promoted by the ECOBOSCO Environmental Training Center plans to achieve measurable goals, through the resources of public and private entities, that can create replicable models of reference for all the countries of the province.



For this purpose the Salesians plan to build 15 "green" cottages within the year in which they can house up to 8 boys each

ECOBOSCO

The main functions of ecological pastoral care are multiple and cover every level of intervention: to promote the commitment to and defence of integral ecology, so that the call to action of *Laudato Si'* becomes part of the educational-pastoral action. The ecological initiatives are carried out by Salesian sectors and works which consolidate strategic alliances with the main public and private actors in the field (ministries, universities, NGOs, foundations, companies, civil society); study environmental problems in the countries belonging to ANT and coordinate the position approved by the Provincial and his Council; administer and manage the use of the Salesian Center for Environmental Formation ECOBOSCO, as well as support its programs and proposals.

In particular, the Salesians in the West Indies, for 2023 intend to focus resources on strengthening the ECOBOSCO Environmental Training Center, located 40 minutes from Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Re-

public, in an intensely wooded area, recently recognized as a National Park, where young people can have direct contact with nature and where a concrete and determined commitment to care for the environment and protect the country's natural resources is made. The ECOBOSCO Center accommodates some of the most disadvantaged boys who do not have the resources to reach it every day, the Salesians plan for this purpose, to build within the year 15 cottages inside which they can accommodate up to 8 boys. In addition, the Salesians' goal for the year is also to cut down on energy consumption by installing solar panels.

The ECOBOSCO boys are trained in the environmental field with 6 meetings a year at which they develop a critical sense regarding the urgency of equipping themselves with useful knowledge to become themselves actors of a cultural change in the direction of safeguarding the common home, thus the very humanity that inhabits it. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. ROSE DUCHESNE

NOVEMBER 18

Ian Pinto, sdb

God has given each of us a vocation. Some of us discover our vocation and live fulfilled lives while others struggle to find where they belong and end up being restless and unsatisfied. Discovering one's vocation is one of the most fundamental things each of us must attend to. Sadly, the way our society functions, the way our education system is set up, the emphasis is put on achieving success rather than on discovering one's vocation. No amount of success can compensate for discovering who one is called to be. Money, fame and power can only bring about a temporary sense of satisfaction but in the long run it leaves a person empty.

St. Rose Philippine Duchesne discovered her vocation as a teenager. She was born into a wealthy French family and went to a convent-school. Her family was very influential and her cousins went on to hold high political offices like that of the President and Prime Minister of France. The environment of the convent-school facilitated the discovery of her vocation. She felt called to the religious life. Jesus said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the



Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:24). This was in the context of the rich man who kept the commandments but wouldn't let go of his wealth and possessions. Rose had no such qualms of conscience. Her family's wealth held no influence over her. She desired to be of service to the poor and needy and felt that doing so as a religious nun was the best way.

FROM STUDYING TO LIVING IN THE CONVENT

When she turned 18, she informed her family that she felt

a call from God to join the religious convent. Her father was upset and would not give her permission. But Rose persevered. Despite family opposition, she entered the Visitation of Mary convent.

The tidal wave that the French Revolution caused destroyed the Church in France. Many priests and religious lost their lives and churches and convents were abandoned or destroyed. Rose's community was also dispersed and so she could not complete her novitiate. It seemed that she had mistaken her choice of vocation. She returned to her family but continued to nurture her Divine call. She spent the next nine years carrying out charitable works while trying to reunite the dispersed sisters and re-establish the convent. She even tried to use her family's wealth to repair the convent but was not successful.

In 1804, she heard about a new congregation, the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She presented herself before the foundress, Madeleine Sophie Barat and was accepted along with a few other novices of the Visitation convent. The Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus much like the Visitation sisters were dedicated to the education of girls. Rose wanted to serve God by empowering girls but she also developed a strong urge to work as a missionary. She became fascinated with the idea of working among the indigenous people of America. She wrote a letter to Mother Superior Barat expressing her missionary desire and narrating a vision she had while

praying: "I spent the entire night in the new World...carrying the Blessed Sacrament to all parts of the land...I had all my sacrifices to offer: a mother, sisters, family, my mountain! When you say to me 'now I send you,' I will respond quickly 'I go.'"

Her desire would be fulfilled only 12 years later when the Bishop of Louisiana sent out an appeal to congregations of educators to help out in the evangelization and education of Native Indian and French children in his diocese. Rose wholeheartedly took this appeal to Mother Barat who granted her permission. Accordingly, she headed the first missionary band of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Before leaving for America, she wrote to her cousin Josephine, who had studied with her in the convent-school of the Visitation sisters: "When my thoughts revert to what I am leaving in France—all that is dear to me—I put them aside, being intimately convinced that, as I have desired only one thing—to answer God's call and abandon myself to His Providence—so the voyage and the trials ahead will never be as great as the help I may confidently expect from him."

She along with 4 other nuns set up a convent at St. Charles in Missouri. It was essentially a log cabin and so the missionaries had to struggle with amenities as they braved the weather and other challenges that pioneers usually face. Learning English was one of the hardest tasks the missionaries had to do besides struggling to

maintain contact with their mother house in France since St. Charles was so remote.

A MISSIONARY EDUCATOR

In spite of the challenges, Rose forged ahead. She set up the first free school in the region. Within 10 years, she had established 6 convent-schools catering to girls from Missouri and Louisiana. But life was not easy at all. The sisters had to adjust to the severe weather, the lack of space and the absence of privacy, shortage of food and drinking water, threat of forest fires, lack of financial support and the rough manners of the people. There is no doubt that missionary work is tough and demanding. Young people might have the strength to endure hardships of this kind but it is nothing short of praiseworthy when middle aged and seniors do the same or even better. This was the case with Rose; she was nearly 50 years old when she went to America! Her achievements are thus, all the more remarkable.

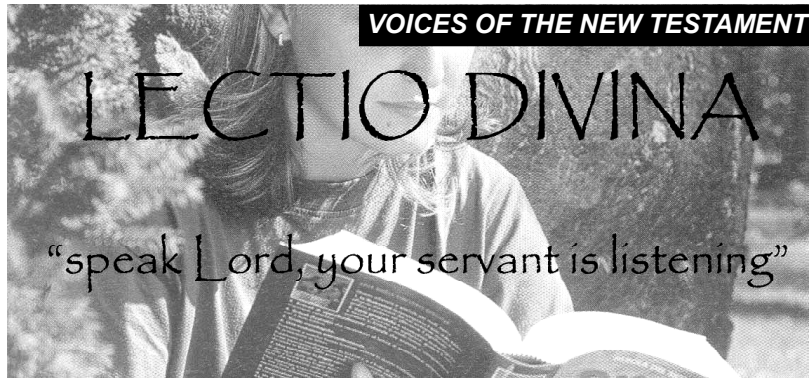
Rose and her sisters endeavoured to educate the children in reading, writing, math and the basics of the Christian faith. Even though their work was continuing, it was by no means successful. They had plenty of financial troubles and found it difficult to sustain their schools. Most of the schools she founded were struggling financially but the grace of God kept them running.

As she grew older the weight of administration and directing the works of the Society in America began to press down. She asked to be relieved from admin-

istrative duties. When she turned 72, a new mission was being opened – a presence among the Potawatomi tribe of Native American Indians. The Jesuit head of the mission requested that Sr. Rose join them saying: "She must come; she may not be able to do much work, but she will assure success to the mission by praying for us. Her very presence will draw down all manner of heavenly favours on the work." While many thought she would turn down the request owing to her advanced age, she eagerly volunteered to go thereby fulfilling her lifelong desire to serve the Native Indians.

She lived there for only a year before she returned to St. Charles due to poor health, but that was sufficient time to spread the fragrance of her holiness among the Native people. She spent long hours in prayer on account of which the Indians called her *Quahkah-ka-num-ad* meaning 'Woman who prays always.' While the other missionaries taught and worked, she prayed. The Indian children would playfully sprinkle bits of paper on her habit as she sat in contemplation and would come back later in the day to find the paper as they left it on her habit.

Rose Duchesne died in 1852 believing that she had failed as a missionary. However, the impact she made on the people she worked for especially the Native Indians says otherwise. She probably failed as an administrator but she was a successful witness of the Gospel and in the final analysis, it is the latter that counts. □



THE CRAFTY STEWARD

by Carlo Broccardo

In a parable that is hard to forget, as it tells of a scam planned in grand style and carried out with cunning, Jesus invites us to have courage, to take risks and to get cracking.

The character we meet again is the protagonist of a parable, surely the strangest in the entire Gospel according to Luke. He has no name: he is usually known as "the dishonest steward," but it would be better to call him "the crafty steward." Let's see why right away.

Jesus' account begins by presenting us with a dramatic situation: in two lines, we are told that this fellow is accused before the master of being a cheater; the consequence is not long in coming: immediate dismissal. Well, not exactly immediate: first he has time to gather his things and get his accounts in order. Then he has to disappear. But it is precisely in this short interval that our protagonist uses his wits and admirably overcomes the difficulty.

Do you remember the younger son in the parable of the "merciful father"? Left without money and forced to starve, he comes to his senses and makes the decision to

return home. The dismissed steward is much like him: he too, having reached the darkest depths of tragedy (he no longer has a job), starts thinking, "He said to himself: what shall I do, now that my master is taking away my stewardship?"; and in pondering he finds a solution: "I know what to do so that when I am removed from the stewardship, there will be someone to take me into his house!" In the difficulty, he devises a solution.

A German scholar, J. Ernst, called the steward's plan "a swindle designed in grand style and carried out with expert perfection." He is indeed a genius, too bad he puts his skill to use in the service of evil. But let's look more closely at what he does: he calls his master's debtors and to some he gives a 20 percent discount, to others as much as fifty. The figures are not small: experts calculate that a hundred barrels of oil were the product of 140 olive trees, while

a hundred measures of wheat the fruit of 42 hectares of land. He didn't discount a few cents.... he practically gave his master's debtors a bag full of money! So, he can be assured that when he is fired, and it is now a matter of days, he will knock on their doors and find someone to take him in and feed him. It is no wonder, with all he has given them!

Let us note the details of the operation, the result of an evil but extremely shrewd mind: by halving the debts, he in fact gives his master's money to others; but he does not even touch the receipt in which the amount is changed with a finger: "take your receipt" he tells the debtors "sit down and write it out!" In the end, when the master finds out, no one can accuse him of anything. Truly clever, our steward!

He's so clever that the master himself, when he notices what has happened, can only praise him: "The master praised the dishonest steward says Jesus, because he had acted shrewdly." Let us note well, lest there be any misunderstanding: he does not praise his dishonesty or even pass over it (Jesus says it well: the steward was dishonest!); but one cannot but be amazed at such shrewdness.

Why does Jesus tell this parable? Why does he invent the story of a dishonest but cunning steward? To say to his disciples (and therefore to us): who knows how



it is; but about the things of this world everyone is shrewd, like that steward; while for the kingdom of heaven you take your time, you are as if asleep. Of course God's mercy is great in the end, and none of us will be received into the eternal dwellings because of his merits (but because of Jesus'); and it is equally true that the world is in God's hands, God is guiding it with his wisdom on the paths of Peace. But this does not mean that we should sit back and wait, hoping that problems will solve themselves. In a parable that is hard to forget, Jesus invites us to have courage, to take risks, to get busy. If there is something I can change, in my family or in the Church or in society, if there is something I can contribute to, it must be done. Hoping that everything will work out as if by a miracle is not according to the Gospel passage we have heard. □

Quiet Spaces

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS GRATUITOUS, IT IS FRIENDSHIP

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Friday, May 20, 2020

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we see that in the Church, in the beginning, there were times of peace. It says that many times: the Church was growing in peace and the Spirit of the Lord gave it growth (see Acts 9:31). Moments of peace. There were also moments of persecution, beginning with the persecution of Stephen (see Acts 6-7), then Paul the persecutor, converted, but even he persecuted... Moments of peace, moments of persecution; there were even moments of turmoil. And this is the theme of today's first Reading: a moment of turmoil (see 15:22-31). "We have heard that some from our number," the Apostles write to the Christians who have converted from paganism, "we have heard that some from our number who had no mandate from us have upset you - have disturbed you - with their teachings that have disturbed your peace of mind" (v. 24).

What happened? These Christians, who had been pagans, believed in Jesus Christ and had received baptism. And they were happy: they had received the Holy Spirit. They went from paganism to Christianity without any intermediary stage. Instead, those People who were called "Judaizers" sustained that you could not do that, that if someone had been a pagan they had to become Jews first, a good Jew, and then become a Christian, so as to be in line with the election of the People of God. And these Christians did not understand this. "But why? Are we second-class Christians? We cannot go directly from paganism to Christianity? Didn't Christ's resurrection dissolve the ancient law and bring it to an even greater fullness?" They were disturbed and there were a lot of discussions among them. And those who wanted this were people who had pastoral arguments, even some moral ones. They sustained that no, you had to make the passage in this way! And this put into question the freedom of the Holy Spirit, and the free gift of Christ's resurrection and grace. They were methodical, and also rigid.

Jesus had said about these people, these teachers, these doctors of the Law: "Woe to you who traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him worse than before (Mt 23: 15). These people who were "ideological" had reduced the Law, the doctrine, to an ideology: "you have to do this, and this, and this..." A religion of prescriptions, and thus they took away the Holy Spirit's freedom. And the people who followed them were rigid people, people who did not feel comfortable, they did not know the joy of the Gospel. The way of following Jesus to perfection was through rigidity: "You have to do this, this, this, and this". These people, these doctors, "manipulated" the consciences of the faithful, or they made

them become rigid, or they would go away.

Because of this, I repeat this many times, and I say that rigidity is not from the good Spirit because it puts into question the free gift of the redemption, the free gift of Christ's resurrection. And even in our own times we have seen some apostolic organizations that seem to be quite well organized, who work well..., but all of them are rigid, everyone is exactly the same, and then we have learned about the corruption that was inside, even in the founders.

The Spirit of God is not where there is rigidity, because the Spirit of God is liberty. And these people wanted to force these passages, taking away liberty from the Spirit of God and the gratuitousness of the redemption: "to be justified you have to do this, this, this, and this...". Justification is freely given. Jesus's death and resurrection are gratuitous. You do not pay for it, it cannot be purchased: it is a gift! And these people did not want to do it that way.

The path is beautiful [the way they proceeded]: the Apostles gathered together in this council and in the end they write a letter that says this: "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden" (Acts 15:28), and they put these obligations and a few common sense moral ones so as not to confuse Christianity with paganism, abstaining from meet offered to idols, etc. And in the end, these Christians who had been disturbed, gathered in an assembly, they received the letter, and "when they read it, they were delighted with the encouragement it gave them" (v. 31). From turmoil to joy. The spirit of rigidity always brings turmoil. "Did I do this all right?. Did I not do that all right? Scrupulosity. The Spirit of evangelical freedom brings you joy because that is exactly what Jesus did by His resurrection: He brought joy! Our relationship with God, our relationship with Jesus is not a relationship of "doing things": "I do this and You give me that". A relationship like that - forgive me, Lord - commercial. No! It is free, just like the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. "You are my friends" (Jn 15:14). "I do not call you slaves, I call you friends" (see v. 15).

Let us ask the Lord to help us to discern the fruit of evangelical gratuitousness from the fruits of non-evangelical rigidity, and that He might free us from every turmoil caused by those who put the Faith, the life of Faith under detailed prescriptions, prescriptions that have no meaning. I refer to those prescriptions that have no meaning, not to the Commandments. May He free us from the spirit of rigidity that robs you of freedom. □

THE NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

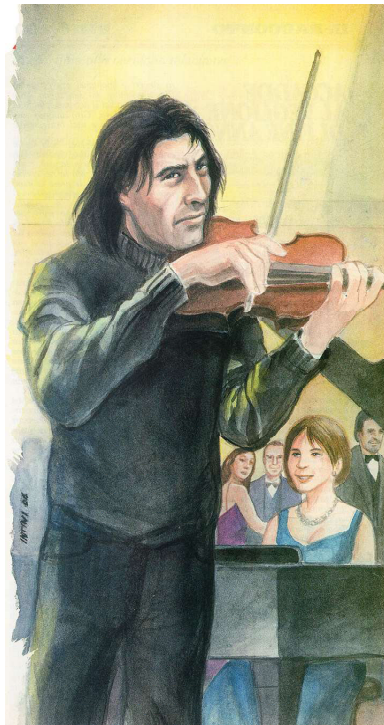
He sounded so angelic, that was his only distinction. For everything else, Andrea Val was not really held in any regard. Rather ugly: many thought he was very insensitive. Conscious of his poor physical appearance and his lousy luck he lived alone and very wretched. Once, he tried earnestly to approach some friendly soul and was cruelly rejected.

He had tried piously to approach a befriending heart once; he had been cruelly rejected; he felt even more miserable. In that unhappiness he became only meaner, incapable of feeling anything friendly or happy. He knew neither hate nor love, his soul was dark, cold and impenetrable.

For days on end, he just played his violin. Music was his life. He loved his old violin. It was like his trusty, invisible friend; he loved it like a living creature. Andrea would confide everything to his violin; the sorrows that tore at his soul like caged beasts. The hopes he nurtured sometimes sprouted fervently but he ruthlessly crushed them. They seemed to be illusions that made him dizzy, like flights of unachievable fancy pervading his modest life.

He could talk to his violin about anything and he could make it vibrate and quiver, it even seemed to moan with pleasure. The music seemed to be commanded by his fantastic hand. He could bring it into existence whenever he wanted. It expressed the emotions of his heart and soul. It was

only then that Andrea felt like a genius! That joy made him proud. He could have stomped around on the music scene and look down on all those who envied him as they surrounded him. He would look down with demure contempt. His music was far superior and he knew he was capable of more and better music. Then, looking around he could see everyone mesmerized under the spell of his music that had the shivers of dreams, the throbs of ecstasy. But Andrea did not want to compose anything: he did not want to disclose his secret to these ordinary people. It was his modesty



coupled with a peculiar pride. He wanted to enjoy his music alone and it was only for himself that he would improvise as he listened to the sublime notes that hammered about in his brain in response to fantastic imagery and feeling. Then he would go on improvising. And in those moments, he did not seem like the same person so transfigured by noble passion. He was creating something in the pain of that creation he felt the pain of ecstasy.

In that hour of sublime music no one had ever seen the fury and ecstasy on that ugly and gaunt face of Andrea Val.

That evening Andrea was unable to refuse the invitation. The Marquis Del Giglio had earnestly begged him to come to the New Year's Eve party and Andrea went. Silent, bearish and apprehensive. There was not an admiring glance from the women from the high society, nor from the Who's Who that had packed the hall. Silk suits, tuxedos and bow ties. Perfumes. Andrea Val looked out of place in his jeans and black sweater with his shoulder-length raven-black hair. His ugly face was marked by bitter creases.

He knew being there, no one would care about him and that made him sad despite their deliberate indifference. A hundred women, one more beautiful than the other, one more witty than the other fluttered lightly like so many multi-coloured butterflies filling the party venue with grace and gaiety. No one, precise, no woman's gaze rested on him with any vague hint of interest, or love or at least a sliver of kindness.

Andrea Val played on with a heavy heart

He frantically ran his bow over the taught string of his violin giving each new piece an admirable interpretation. Each composer was interpreted with special and unique charm. Andrea Val's deep set dark eyes opened into the void and the bitter crease at the corner of his mouth became more accentuated. He face contracted with a quiver of fervour.

A beautiful petite girl, half hidden and self-absorbed fell silent in mid-sentence during an animated conversation and she stared intently at the musician. Her brown eyes glazed with tears. Perhaps she could understand the very personal torment, the deep inner loneliness of that poor, loveless young man. She could feel it, she who was also alone, orphaned, poor and starved of affection.

She was Magdalene, the niece of the Marquis del Giglio. She was kept in his house purely out of kindness, not charity; more like a maid of the marquis than a relative.

It was understandable that she was unhappy. Through the many conversations at the marquis' mansion, she had heard of Andrea Val and that he was even described as a monster; ugly in face and possible in soul. She saw now that of course; he was not handsome. He had a pale aspect with gaunt features and immensely feverish eyes. But Magdalene thought that Andrea's ugliness was a hundred times more preferable to the obnoxious and cheap lustre of the empty and

gallant men she knew. What harmonious inner beauty Andrea must possess! Was it possible that such a man could be as mean and insensitive as was rumoured? She felt a most vivid attraction that was not compassion.

She stood up determinedly and walked up to him.

"May I accompany you?" she asked with a slight tremor in her voice as she sat down at the piano. I know I play badly...but I put my soul and passion into it...like this...is it ok?"

Andrea Val winced, looking at those magnificent velvety eyes and he replied dryly: "Go ahead...if you like."

Be he seemed to ignore her. During a pause of a few bars, he discovered Magdalene's music was not bad, in fact, it was good, warm and vibrant. It even had soul. He saw that tears rolled down her slender face. Behind them the ladies and the young men were smiling at the irony... commenting on the boldness of the young lady who dared to accompany Andrea's music. He



suddenly broke off and burst into sarcastic laughter which sinisterly resounded around the hall. Everyone turned to the pair in bewilderment. But they quickly calmed down and Andrea resumed playing.

"He's crazy!" the audience mumbled among themselves, "one can't be an artiste without a streak of madness." Magdalene, on the other hand, felt a sense of resentment and fear. In the meantime, desserts were being served at the tables around them.

"Why did you laugh?" Magdalene asked Andrea sternly, "in that unkind and provocative way?"

She had a mischievous little smirk as she sank his dessert spoon into the super-sweet mousse while he sipped the liqueur and without looking up, he replied:

"Because... for a moment I deluded myself ...That I felt a soul vibrating together with mine... But it could not be true, and so I laughed at myself, at you and I laughed at everyone. All of us are deluded. Everything is false and vulgar, even love. All life is but horror, sadness, deception"

Feeling more loquacious, he dished out all his pessimistic theories on to her, mocking irreverently every noble ideal of life. Magdalene leapt to her

feet; her face flushed and her eyes aflame and her voice harsh. She berated him harshly while the bystanders suddenly turned silent to watch and listen. Then, realising that she had humiliated him, she turned around and ran out of the hall leaving him alone. For a moment, Andrea Val was breathless and speechless. He bowed his head, resting his hands on the coffee table. He felt deep pain, was very mortified. No one, never, had ever spoken to him so firmly about love. No one had dared to address him, to rebuke him like the little velvet-eyed Magdalene. How had she been able to stir up that storm in his parched heart? But he did was not resentful and felt no aversion for her. Far from it. Something was happening in him that he could not explain.

Even when he had dreamed and hoped to feel her close to his soul through his music, he felt he wanted her, because he loved her so... But who was this child? Why did she care so much for him? Why did her words still ring in his ears like tumultuous and tender music? Those phrases not only hurt him but they blessed him.... There was a huge scramble within him. And now Andrea Val could no longer contain the flood of feelings overflowing from his spirit. He felt that he could love her, there was no doubt about that. Indeed he already loved her. He understood that she alone was the one girl who could restore light and warmth to his life. But he was afraid of deluding himself. He wanted to laugh sinisterly, but he couldn't. He was in pain. Or was he enjoying it? He was in

love! He felt weak, like a lost child. He got up and stealthily left the table.

Like a man spellbound he climbed onto the stage. He snatched up the violin and gripped the bow. Notes rushed spontaneously to his fingers. He trembled; at first only a timid melody of sweetest notes, which then grew impetuous and intense, then mild again. A whirlwind that subsided, died and was reborn more ardently. It was wonder. Magic.

The couples had all stopped talking and looked at the musician who, absent and oblivious, continued enraptured by his own inspired music. It suddenly turned quiet and soft, became like light and gentle as a breath, graceful as a smile, and in that joyful stillness it gradually died away.

There was a pregnant silence. Everyone seemed to be holding their breath, then all of a sudden, vigorous, frenzied clapping erupted sincerely and spontaneously and woke the improviser out of his dream. Only then did Andrea Val notice the crowd watching him. He turned around a bewildered look on his face and abruptly he exited the hall.

Magdalene was crying, alone ecstatic in the antechamber. Andrea Val, passing almost in a rush, bumped into her, and was about to go leave. But he recognized her and retracing his steps, he took her cold hands and rested his feverish forehead on them.

The dawn of the New Year was about to break. The party was

ending. Hubbub was ending and the fatigue was setting in. Andrea Val and Magdalena were the only two left alone in the antechamber. Suddenly trembling, he offered her a sheet of paper crammed with hastily sketched notes.

“Miss Magdalene, this is for you – it your music, only yours. Please accept it. It is my first composition.”

Magdalene took the paper and read, “Prelude for Love.” Shuddering she replayed the music she had heard only a short while earlier. That feeling was a miracle. Andrea Val had improvised for her, played for her, dedicated the piece to her.... She remembered the harsh phrases she had shouted at him and she was quivering with shame and embarrassment and remorse.

She lifted her eyes: Andrea



Val’s face was now relaxed, smiling, tender and absolutely unrecognizable. The immense black eyes did not look as they always did as if into a void. They sought hers. They plunged with delight into her moist pupils. She smiled through her tears because they were now both weeping out of love. Andrea Val asked her for nothing. Those tears were a most eloquent answer. He was giving Magdalena a gift of his music, giving her a gift as one offers a heart. But Magdalene did not know that it was precisely her harsh words that had miraculously changed Andrea Val’s heart. They had opened its latent springs of tenderness. Thus, she had inspired a wondrous prelude and made him a happy man.

The air was cold and the night gave way to morning, New Year’s morning. A few stars stood out from the velvet mantle of the sky.

Andrea Val took Magdalena’s hands in his own and slowly placed there – not his forehead, which was now serene and pleased, but a fervent kiss, marking the beginning of a great love. Two hearts had found each other, united, and shining in a radiant halo, as if on golden wings of music happiness had descended. The New Year had just begun. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 46

by Michele Molineris

213. They weren’t always roses (1875)

Lawyer Luigi Succi, the owner of a steam-powered pasta factory in Turin, a man well known for his Christian virtue and charities, begged Don Bosco in 1875 to put his signature to a transaction at the Bank to withdraw 40,000 liras. Knowing him to be rich in income and having received benefices, Don Bosco relented. Three days later Succi died, the promissory note expired, and Don Bosco sent word to his heirs.

“We were at dinner,” deposes Card. Cagliari at the trial, when Don Rua came in and told Don Bosco that the heirs do not know nor want to know about the promissory notes. I was sitting next to Don Bosco. He was eating soup, and I saw that between one spoonful and the next (note that it was the month of January, and the refectory had no heating), drops of sweat were falling from his forehead onto the plate, but he was not distressed and did not interrupt his modest refreshment.”

So, then there was no way to make reasons understood, but he had to be paid. It was not until about ten years later that he got back almost the entire sum secured with the endorsement of his signature (*M.B.*, XI, 212).

214. Redoing the test (1875)

In 1875, when Don Bosco was leaving for Genoa to accompany the missionaries, Mr. Cerrato of

Asti, a great benefactor of the Oratory, a holy man and already advanced in age, had come specially to attend the farewell service. He entered the train.

In his home town, prompted by the Lord’s charity, he had founded a small house similar to that of Cottolengo, when he was younger; but he needed nuns, who would take care of its smooth running. Two days earlier in Piacenza he had dealt with the daughters of St. Anne, who gave him good hopes, but nothing was concluded.

In Turin, with a note from Don Bosco, he had presented himself to Can. Anglesio, superior of the Cottolengo, but even there he had had only good words and nothing more. Now, he was already sitting in the railway coach to return to Asti; the coach was already beginning to whine and whistle, when suddenly Don Bosco said to him: “Get out, get out; go try again with Can. Anglesio; finish things.”

Cerrato obeyed and descended. He barely had time to put his foot on the platform, and the train began moving took off. He had not yet left the station when he ran into a gentleman looking for him, to hand him on behalf of Can. Anglesio a note that went thus: “Come, perhaps we may conclude everything at once concerning what we had been talking about.”

He went to the Cottolengo that same evening, though it was nine o’clock, and in the twinkling of an eye things were concluded. Anyone in his place would have ascribed Don Bosco’s word to a higher power; all the more did he, who had, for so many years held Don

Bosco in the highest esteem and a veneration that bordered on devotion (from *M.B.*, XI, 501).

215. A Priest, but not in the world (1875)

Don Vacchina in 1875 was in the fifth grade of secondary school in Valdocco. In one of the last exercises for a happy death he was ruminating to himself about his decision and did not know which way to turn. At other times Don Bosco had told him: "Study, pray, then we will decide."

But the days passed and that later day never came.

That morning, therefore, among the many people crowded around Don Bosco for confession, Vacchina was the first and he had prepared well for it. But Don Bosco made him wait last. With everyone gone, he blessed him, from the left where he was, made him pass to the right, and heard his confession. When the confession was over, the young man broke the ice and asked about that blessed decision. The advice he receive was to become a priest but not in the world.

Then, if there is no difficulty," he said, "I will gladly stay with here with you in the house."

Don Bosco replied, "I am very pleased. You see, I have always loved you, I have always been your friend, although I have not shown it to you. Study, pray, set a good example...."

"He told me more," wrote Don Vacchina, "He spoke with such charity, that I wept, received communion alone at nine o'clock and

forgot the bread and the longed-for salami."

It was well known that Don Bosco, after the soul, thought of the body at the exercise of a happy death; the whole man had to be nourished on the days of grace (*M.B.*, XI, 267).

216. On Sunday You will attend Mass (1875)

Don Bosco went about doing good. Certain stages of his life were marked by miraculous events.

We recall two prodigious healings that occurred during the usual visits that the saint used to make each year to the college of his predilection; the one that he founded in Mirabello Monferrato, and then (in 1870) which was moved to the nearby village of Borgo San Martino.

The event, which occurred in the year 1875, was told to us by an old man from the village (a certain *Pietro Cornelio*) and confirmed by other witnesses.

Don Bosco had been with the local parish priest, Don Barbano, paying a friendly visit to lawyer Patrucco. As he returned to the college, the people, who had come out on the road to see him and greet him, bowed reverently as he passed by, asking for his blessing.

A poor woman (Luigia Pasino) immobilized by paralysis in her legs for about two years had been unable to take a step. She wanted to be taken to the street, where the saint would pass.

When Don Bosco approached

her, she exclaimed, "Bless me! Bless me!"

Don Bosco paused, taking a fatherly interest in the pitiable case.

"How are you, good woman?"

"You should know! I haven't been going to Mass for so long!"

"And why?"

"Because I can't walk: my legs are paralyzed.... Don Bosco gave her the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. "You will go to mass on Sunday."

"Me? But how will I be able to go to church, if...?"

"So, we are agreed: Sunday... Trust in Our Lady, and... courage!"

The following Sunday Luigia Pasino was able to leave the house and go to the parish church to attend Holy Mass.

She was healed!

Old Cornelio, ending the narration of the prodigy, confirmed its veracity by protesting emphatically: "And this is true, as it is true that I've been baptized!" (*Cassano G., Le lezioni di un santo*, 208).

217. Excommunicate! (1875)

Don Bosco was hounded wherever it was hoped he could be approached. This kind of indiscretion, of which in such cases no one is ever scrupulous, caused an incident on the evening of June 1, 1875. Don Bosco was late hearing the confessions of the artisans and then went for a late dinner.

Wandering around the court-

yard were two pious ladies who were administrators of a hospital in Bologna. They had come to Turin for the feast of Mary Help of Christians and to confer with Don Bosco. When they heard that he was in the dining room, they went there at once to see him.

"At this late hour?" Don Bosco exclaimed, as soon as he saw them appear.

"We summoned up courage to come here and try to have a minute to talk to you."

"Don't you know that at this hour enclosure is in force?"

"No, we did not know that; but if you wish we shall leave," said one of the ladies.

"Besides, it was Father Rua who let us in," objected the other.

"Well, I shall not turn you away, but please think of the penalty you might incur by violating this law."

There were about ten people present and the two ladies were even more embarrassed. We do not think that Don Bosco had any serious intention of threatening them with canonical censure despite the chronicler's remark, that "although the words were not harshly spoken, they were not accompanied by his usual smile." Never before that evening had a woman ever set foot in the dining room during or after supper time. Anyone acquainted with Don Bosco's scrupulous reserve will understand that this episode could not have ended in any substantially different manner. (*E.B.M.*, XI, 291).□



THE HIDDEN “YES” OF THE VIRGIN MARY

by Silvio Longobardi

The seal of a path

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38): were the words with which Mary welcomed the angel’s announcement and surrendered herself to God. That event was undoubtedly surprising because it opened an absolutely unthinkable horizon. The evangelist emphasized the Virgin’s amazement before a proposal that exceeded all human expectations, but she also high-lighted the inner freedom with which she

accepted the vocation to motherhood. “How shall this come to pass?” (Lk 1:34): the divine light, even when expressed in the extraordinary form, did not suppress the creature’s freedom. Her coming there was not the result of an emotional outburst, but was couched in awareness.

That day everything changed; Mary found herself catapulted into a story she never imagined. And yet, what happened in Nazareth was the seal of a journey; it was



situated in the groove of a “here I am” that the Virgin had uttered from an early age and had always guarded with loving fidelity. “My Lord you are and in you alone is my good” (Ps. 16:2): with these or other words Mary offered her life to God, choosing him as the only Good and she decided to live every fragment of her existence under the gaze of the Almighty.

The decisive choice

The Presentation in the Temple of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Nov. 21) celebrates this hidden “Here I am.” From a historical point of view, this liturgical memorial does not seem to have any reliability, even though the document that mentions it, the Proto-Gospel of James, dates back to the second century. This text was intended to answer the questions of believers who found the Gospels too meagre about the Mother of the Lord and wished to know other and more specific details of her biographical story. The historical criticism was more than justified; indeed, it is hard to imagine that a three-year-old girl was taken to the Temple and raised there until puberty.

And yet it was a very ancient feast, celebrated in the East since the 6th century; and later entered the Western liturgy. It was a tradition that belonged so intimately to the *sensus fidei* of the people of God that it could not be downgraded to just a devotional memory.

The liturgical reform wished to preserve this event because, beyond its historicity, it makes it possible to emphasize an essential dimension of Marian spirituality that belongs structurally to the life of every baptized person and that St. John Paul II expressed in these terms: “Mary lived and exercised her freedom precisely by giving herself to God and accepting God’s gift within herself” (*Veritatis splendour*, 120). This was a decisive choice, the first fruits of an existence in which everything acquired the flavour of grace. From childhood the Virgin had been completely immersed in God and she could repeat with all sincerity the words of the psalmist: “Blessed is he who dwells in your house: singing your praises without end” (Ps 84 (83), 5). Mary lived in God’s house and made her life God’s dwelling place. She therefore teaches us to seek God’s will with all our hearts. This is the first and most important rule for making life a pilgrimage to the holy mountain. This is the robe of baptism, the one that everyone must wear and guard with utmost care, despite frailty, as an indispensable prerequisite of every other vocation.

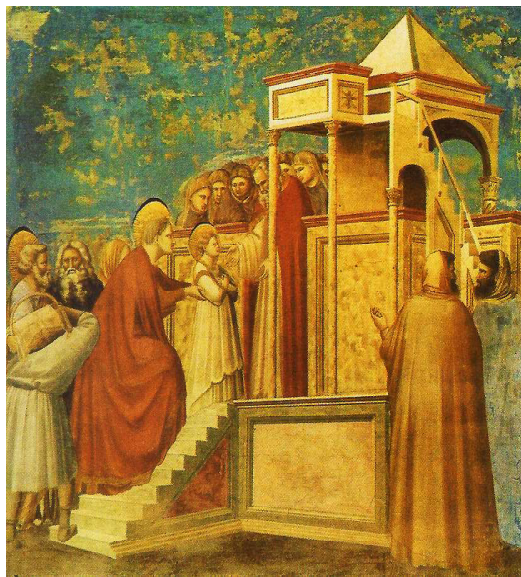
Little witnesses

Seeking God and living for God from childhood appears scarcely reasonable in our eyes. And instead, in order to disprove that culture of suspicion that too often denies faith in the

The evangelist emphasized the Virgin’s amazement before a proposal that exceeded all human expectations, but she also highlighted the inner freedom with which she accepted the vocation to motherhood.

name of an alleged rationality, in recent years the Lord has gifted the Church with the experiences of children who, despite their precocious age, have given an exemplary witness and have faced illness with a faith that has moved and challenged so many adults who, despite the maturity of their years, are unable to say a full and convinced yes.

An experience like so many others, is that of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. Her testimony was even more significant because she went through the rigorous and critical research of the canonization process. In her most famous writing - *The Story of a Soul* - the young Carmelite recounted that at the age of nine she expressed to the Prioress of Carmel her desire to wear the monastic habit: "After listening to my great confidences the good Mother believed in my vocation, but she told me that they did not accept postulants of 9 years of age and that one had



to wait until 16... I resigned myself despite my keen desire to enter as soon as possible" (*Story of a Soul* 26v). As the years went by, that desire did not lose its momentum; on the contrary, it became stronger and stronger. Overcoming all resistance Teresa managed to fulfill her dream at the age of 15. We certainly cannot doubt this vocation and the light that the good Lord had sown in her from her earliest years.

Holy naiveté

An experience such as this call for serious reflection on the current context of education, family and the Church. The weak witness of adults (priests and parents) does not sow faith in the hearts of the little ones and does not allow them to choose God with that holy ingenuity that we find in the lives of the saints. We need a surplus of grace: Mary, faithful Virgin, pray for us. ☐

Mary lived and exercised her freedom precisely by giving herself to God and accepting God's gift within herself. Until the time of his birth, she sheltered in her womb the Son of God who became man...
Veritatis Splendor #120



FR. PAUL OLPHINDRO LYNKOT The Salesian "Promised Land"

by O. Pori Meconi

Can you introduce yourself?

I am Fr Paul Olphindro Lynklot, SDB. I was born on 28 January 1968 in the town of Mawlai Phmmuri, in the state of Meghalaya, India. My parents, whom I remember fondly, were Benedict Olphindro Lyngrah and Isidora Lynklot. I am the last of nine children: I have four brothers and four older sisters.

Why did you become a Salesian?

I have loved the Salesian way of life since I was a child. I was born, received baptism and the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist in the Catholic Church of St Dominic Savio in Mawlai, a Salesian parish. I started my schooling in the Sacred Heart Primary School, in the parish

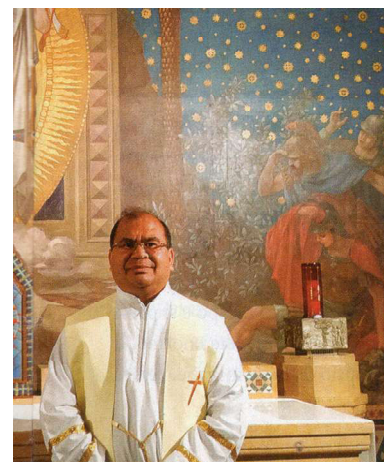
complex, and then attended secondary school in the same institute. I knew the Salesians from my childhood. I love Don Bosco and his charisma of being with young people.

How did your parents react?

My parents were very supportive. My mother was very simple and loving woman. My father was a Salesian Cooperator, with a responsible role in the church; he was a very devout person who prayed a lot. Both of them, with my brothers and sisters, accompanied me.

You are a very young Provincial Inspector. How do you live the hope that has been placed in you?

On 13 December 2017, while I was attending my spiritual retreat at Siloam, (a retreat centre on the outskirts of Shillong) Fr Angel Fernández Artime, our Rector Major, called me from Rome and asked me to take on the responsibility of becoming Provincial of the Province of Shillong. I asked him to allow me to pray before making a decision and he agreed. I stood before



Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament and asked the Holy Spirit to enlighten me and Mary our Mother, to help me. The next day, when the Rector Major asked me again, I replied: "Thy will be done" and then I said: "Yes." I have great trust in God. I offer Jesus everything I have. I know that the Holy Spirit inspires and guides me. I entrust myself fully to Mary Most Holy our Mother, and to her intercession with the assistance of Don Bosco our father, founder, teacher, friend of the young. Last but not least, I have full confidence in the members of my Provincial Council. I also nurture deep affection and great hope for every brother in the Province of Shillong.

Shillong is a city written in Salesian history. What do the Don Bosco Museum and Mary Help of Christians Cathedral represent for the city's inhabitants?

The Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures (DBCIC) is a famous museum known for its emphasis on preserving the culture of the various tribes and communities in North East India.

In addition to all this, the museum organises exhibitions; it also has a library, the **Otto Hopfenmueller Library** which holds various books and resources related to various aspects of North East India and the local indigenous peoples.

The **Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians** in the city of Shillong is the main place of worship for Catholics in the Shillong Archdiocese. It was built by the Salesian Congregation in 1936 after a fire destroyed the first church dedicated to the Divine Saviour,

was blessed in 1946 and solemnly dedicated in 1973. It is one of the oldest churches in the archdiocese and in the whole of north-east India.

What are the most important achievements of your Province?

The Shillong Province, which was established only eight years ago, has achieved a lot. We have many local vocations from Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and also from other states in India. Above all, I am moved by the Salesians' spirit of sacrifice, commitment, unity, dedication and work hard. Many of them serve in the Church and the Congregation. They are all instruments of God's love for young people and all kinds of people.

What is the general opinion about the Salesians?

The Salesians are highly esteemed. People really consider them men of God and appreciate their service, their commitment, the dedication they show and the sacrifices they make.

How do you see the future of the Salesians in India?

There are many vocations to Salesian life, but we have to work together as Provinces of South Asia. We must share the resources of each province and work for a united Salesian mission. We must be generous with the Church and the Congregation. We must commit ourselves to the young Indians to try to improve their condition and accompany them to help them realise their dreams. Evangelisation is still open and we must all commit our hearts, heads and hands to the service of this goal. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Twin Tongues

In Leipzig where about one-third of the street names have been changed since the Russian occupation, trolley conductors are required to call out the old as well as the new names to make it easier for visitors to find their way. The other day, the conductor of a car passing through the centre of the city made the required announcement: "Karl Marx Square formerly Augustus Square."

A passenger about to alight shouted back, "Auf weidersehen" (goodbye), formerly "Heil Hitler."

How you cut it

A kindly priest was accustomed to drop in on his good friend Par, for a chat. One Friday, he called on his Irish crony and found him eating sausage. He gave him a terrific dressing down, but Pat countered with the defense that sausage wasn't meat.

"Oh yes, it is" said Father, "and for penance you can draw me a load of wood."

Dutifully Pat went about fulfilling his penance. He hitched up his old box wagon, drove it to the saw mill, loaded it up with sawdust and was dumping it on the priest's wood pile when the priest saw him.

"Pat! Whatever are you doing, dumping that stuff in my yard?" he scolded.

"That's your wood, Father," said Pat. "But that isn't wood at all," said the priest.

"Well, if that isn't wood,"

returned Pat, "them sausages ain't meat."

The Sweetest Part

"Bill used to call his house over there 'the Nutshell.' Wonder why he changed the name?"

"He got tired of having funny people calling to ask whether the kernel was in."

What Providence

"How's times around here?" inquired the tourist."

"Pretty tolerable," responded the old man, sitting idly on the stump of a tree; "I had a pile of brush to burn, and the lightning set fire to it and saved me the trouble of burning it."

"Remarkable! But what are you doing now?"

"Oh, just waiting for an earthquake to come along and shake the potatoes out of the ground."

Stiffnecked Spine

Vicar: "Amid all your troubles Mrs. Abbott, I am pleased to see that your gratitude to Providence does not fail."

"No, sir, rheumatism is bad," she said, "bit I thank Heaven I still have a back to have in in."

Seeing is Believing

"Why don't you go in?" asked one tramp to another, as they stood before the gate. "That dog's all right. Don't you see he's wagging his tail?"

"Sure I do; but he's growling too and I don't know which end to believe." □

THE STARFISH

B.F., Art by Fabrizio Zubani

A terrible storm swept over the sea. Sharp sheets of icy wind pierced the water and lifted it in gigantic waves that crashed onto the beach like hammer blows, or like steel ploughshares they ploughed the seabed, flinging the small bottom-dwelling critters, crustaceans and tiny molluscs, dozens of meters from the edge of the sea.

When the storm passed, as quickly as it had come, the water calmed down and receded. Now the beach was an expanse of sand in which thousands and thousands of starfish were writhing in agony. There were so many that the beach seemed to be coloured pink.

The phenomenon drew many people from all parts of the coast. Television crews also arrived to film the strange phenomenon.

The starfish were almost motionless. They were dying!

Among the people, holding his dad's hand, was a little boy who stared at the little starfish with eyes full of sadness. Everyone was watching and no one was doing anything.

Suddenly, the little boy left his dad's hand, took off his shoes and socks and ran to the beach. He bent down, picked up three small starfish with his tiny hands and, still running, carried them into the water. Then he went back and repeated the operation. From a concrete balcony not too far away, a man called to him. "What are you doing, my young friend?"

"I'm throwing the starfish back into the sea. Otherwise, they will all die on the beach," replied the child without stopping.

"But there are thousands of starfish on this beach; you certainly



can't save them all. There are too many!" cried the man. "And this happens on hundreds of other beaches along the coast! You can't change that!"

The child smiled, bent down to pick up another starfish and throwing it into the water, he replied, "I changed things for this one."

The man was silent for a moment, then he bent down, took off his shoes and socks and went down to the beach. He began collecting starfish and throwing them into the water. A moment later two girls came down and there were four of them throwing starfish into the water.

A few minutes later there were fifty, then a hundred, two hundred, thousands of people throwing starfish into the water. So, they were all saved. □

All it would take to change the world is for someone, even a small guy, to have the courage to begin.

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

We were living in a rented house. We were praying since November 2020 to have our own house. We visit Mount Mary Church every year but last year my mother-in-law suggested we offer a house made of wax while praying for a house. And yes, before we could visit Mount Mary Church again this year we were blest with a house. We were able to arrange funds for a down payment and apply for loan. Before this, my husband and I did not have great jobs to afford a house and apply for loan. Thank you Mother Mary and Jesus for blessing us with a house of our own.

Rosalyn Padayattil, Mumbai

It was in April 2022 that my son who was married in December 2019 gave us the good news that his wife was pregnant. I started praying to St Anne for protection and safe delivery of my daughter-in-law. Alas within two months we heard the disturbing news that the foetus was in fact lifeless for some weeks. A further disappointment was that my daughter-in-law was diagnosed with complications in the uterus so that conception was a bit difficult according to her gynac. I started fervent prayers to St Anne the patron of difficult pregnancies. Everyday my Husband and I made it a point to send our petition to St Anne to ask her to petition Mother Mary. Within two months our daughter-in-law conceived once again. My Husband and I never stopped our daily petition to St Anne to take our case and present it to Mother Mary. On 3rd June 2023 my daughter-in-law was advised to come to the labour room since the baby had grown at an alarming rate. By pre noon that day we were given the happiest news that we had a grandson (a bouncy bundle of joy) that weighed 3.2 kgs. Today our grand son has grown so well that each time we get a chance to see him in person or on the video, it makes our day. We are extremely grateful to Mother Mary and to St. Anne for their gracious intercession in keeping my daughter-in-law and her son safe.

Mrs Trufina Gonsalves, Mumbai

Thank you for miraculously helping me to pass my Std XII examinations when I had a breakdown during my physics paper. I know I have delayed for a long time to acknowledge this grace. I would also thank Our Blessed Mother for granting me admission into one of the best universities and for a scholarship in these difficult times.

Leo Joseph, Nashik

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

NOVEMBER 2023

For the Pope

We pray for the Holy Father; as he fulfils his mission, may he continue to accompany the flock entrusted to him, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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Subs: (one copy Rs. 20/-); **Inland Rs. 200p.a;** **Airmail: Rs 500 p.a.**

MARY WAS THERE

There are so many graces
I am grateful for. Through
the intercession of Our
Lady and St. Dominic
Savio my daugh-ter had a
successful surgery. My son
was also blessed with a
good job through the
intercession of the Infant
Jesus and Our Lady. While
we pray the Three Hail
Marys my son-in-law was
granted employment.
We're so grateful for all the
wonderful graces and
favours Our Lady's inter-
cession has granted us.

Violet D'Sa

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/benefac-
tors.

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.

To help a poor lad to reach the priesthood, is a privilege

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