

# DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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*May the Holy Spirit,  
who descended  
on the apostles  
gathered around  
the Virgin Mary  
in the cenacle,  
make you witnesses  
in the world  
to the resurrection.*

*(From Solemn Blessing on the  
feast of Mary Help of Christians)*

## From The Editor's Desk

### DON'T WE ALL NEED PRAYER?

Quite some years ago when I was at the Shrine in Matunga and celebrating the 6.30 evening Mass, the congregation consisted of the same fourteen or fifteen people who attended at the end of their work day. There were a sprinkling of grey heads and some who were exhausted with backpacks and drooping shoulders looking relieved that they made it on time, as I entered the sanctuary. They were always in a hurry afterwards, so I seldom had time to meet anyone.

I gradually began to notice one man who nearly every evening came in about fifteen or twenty minutes before Mass. I would see him going to the same place each day to pray. Sometimes he knelt, sometimes, he sat. Some evenings he would finger his rosary beads, or read from a battered prayer book, but mostly he kept his eyes closed in quiet prayer. He always left as soon as Mass was over. I never had the opportunity to meet him.

But one evening, when I came down, I met him as he came out of the church. There was a wry smile on his face (by now we had become familiar, glancing at each other across the expanse of the sanctuary). We exchanged greetings, and he introduced himself as Tom. He told me that he was married with three teenage children. The eldest was going through a particularly rebellious phase at the time, and he was worried about his influence on the others. He had a small business which was struggling to keep going. Sometimes he had to stay working into the late hours, and would arrive home tired and weary.

When I told him that I noticed him at prayer each evening, he smiled awkwardly and said, 'Ah, yes, - prayer is a big help,' 'You're great to do it.' I replied. He looked at me in an embarrassed kind of way, and shook his head. 'I don't see it that way at all. I'm not great. I need prayer.'

Then he told me how he was frequently at a loss to know how to handle his rebellious son. He easily lost his temper with him he said, even though he knew that he wasn't helping him by doing that. Then the tension would spread to the others, and a row would start that left everyone miserable.

At work, too, he told me, he could be too demanding. He sometimes treated his employees unfairly, and showed little understanding of their limitations, or concern for their problems. Some of them had started to avoid him, and he feared that he was growing hard. 'So, now you know why I need that time of prayer before Mass in the evening. I need God to help me during the day to be less tense and more wise. And I think he does. I'm learning slowly.' Then he glanced at his watch, apologized and dashed off.

We pray, not because we are perfect, but because, like Tom, we need God's help in our daily struggles. Prayer is a way of bringing our lives to God and God into the messy heart of our lives. Tom needed prayer; he needed God; don't we all?

*Fr. Ian Doultan, sdb*

## HAS PATRIARCHY COLLAPSED?

by Mons Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

*Everything has a culture and today it is a culture of possessiveness. What is needed is the culture of restraint. That is the meaning of the insurmountable concept of the dignity of the other.*

**S**o many words have been written after the heinous murders of so many women in the context of a loving relationship that came to an end by the will of the woman. One term that has often been used is patriarchy, indicating it as the remote cause, but still rooted in the culture and the minds of many males. We can define patriarchy as that culture that nurtures the idea of a woman's inferiority while exalting the power of the male. This idea is translated into words, symbols and practices that germinate and find traction in the male mind and heart. It is a reaction against women who, according to the

male, are not in their assigned place and role.

Patriarchy, Massimo Recalcati wrote, dominated the West until its rupture in the 1960s. It is no longer dominant today, but its embers have not been entirely extinguished. In the background are our primary bonds, particularly with the mother, when a natural initial functionality persists becoming a will to possess the other. One would go so far as to kill so that the bond that was created may never be severed; so that one may never be abandoned by the other.

Maria Rita Parsi links violence



to the awareness of one's own future death. The anguish of death gives rise to many psychological defences: a spiritual man, for example, defends himself by saying that there is another life, a father by saying that his children will continue his work, and the artist knows that he will live on after death in his work of art. "If you leave me, I'll kill myself," threatens the man who is left behind, like an infant who, deprived of milk or its mother's presence, feels lost. But as he is not an infant but an adult, he cannot bear to die, so he kills.

The history of patriarchy is ancient, and the Bible itself contains traces of it. Biblical scholar Rosanna Virgili recalls the words put into God's mouth after the sin of Adam and Eve: "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16). Words that seem to theorise the story of patriarchy, but, Virgili asserts, all this is the consequence of sin because in the beginning God had wanted to give Adam a "companion," equal in dignity, a strong sign that would limit his almighty loneliness.

The book of Genesis recounts the world as it appears to the eyes of the writer. Despite the rightful search for the salvific message in the texts, a cultural undercurrent often appears problematic to our culture. When Adam wakes up, for example, he is astonished at the creature and immediately claims that it 'comes from him' when, in fact, it comes from God. Adam gives the creature a name just as he done with animals, emphasising a kind of lordship. He should have given her the

word, letting her say who she was and who she wanted to be to him and he to her.

The murder of so many women has been attributed to patriarchy or at least to its residues still alive. However, we must recognise that the alleged importance of the male in the Western world is much downgraded, though it is still present in other cultures. There are different factors behind femicides: emotional immaturity and the personal history of each murderer, the inability to manage conflicts and to accept disappointments and failures. Indeed, there is also a problematic cultural context that is unbalanced on emotional and affective elements to the detriment of ethical ones. □

*"Violence against women represents the tip of an iceberg of a deep crisis involving the universe of human relations and the management of emotions and feelings."*



## MOST BELOVED OF MOTHERS

**M**ary is the world's most beloved mother and should also be known as such by children, as should the fact that May is dedicated to Her. Children, however, know little or nothing about ratings and television analysis. Adults often hear about television numbers, ratings, shares and targets. There needs to be a radio station, newspaper or website that has a space dedicated to what is broadcast on the increasingly numerous TV stations. But not all channels are equal. And among those 'less equal,' there is one channel, channel 28, seen by hundreds of viewers. The live Rosary from Lourdes (from 6 to 6.30 p.m.). It is seen by millions of viewers far exceeding that of the large national and private broadcasters.

This fact alone would be enough to make us feel a caress of fresh air on our faces and remind us that television is not just trash, violence, superficiality, and gossip.

But here, of course, there is more. Because those viewers are not just 'watching' TV. Thanks to the TV, they are praying, connected live with that beloved grotto in the Mid-Pyrenees

region, a stone's throw from the river Gave in Pau, where Our Lady appeared to Bernadette Soubirous. Not to mention the many who pray the Rosary simultaneously in churches, at other Marian shrines or alone, perhaps in their cars. But we know very well that those who pray in front at channel 28 certainly do not do so to count or to count themselves. They and all the other faithful at that hour have a much more important objective: to say thank you to the world's most beloved Mother.

We can say that Christians (and not only them!) deeply love Mary. Jesus Christ, with his mysteries, remains the centre and fulcrum of our faith, of our sanctification, of our instruction and our

prayer. Next to him, Mary, indissolubly united, almost like a link between us and Jesus Christ, transmits his grace to us, to facilitate our imitation of him, to strengthen our prayer. The cult of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ and of the Church, persists and even grows in the Christian people. It is expressed in the intimacy of conscience and heart but is also manifested in personal



**T**he Rosary is the most recited prayer because it is the simplest, the most profound, and of great significance. It is a complete prayer made up of meditation, contemplation and supplication.

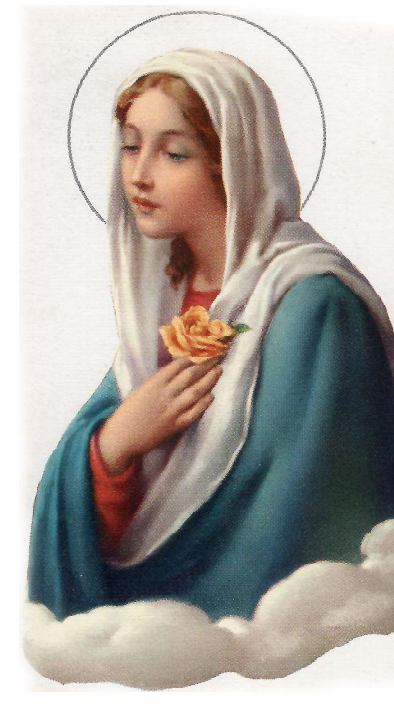
works and attitudes. Mary is venerated in the home: in every Christian family, an image of her stands out as a caring protectress overflowing with maternal care. She is also visible in streets, temples, ancient and recent monuments that adorn our cities, large and small.

The cult of Mary has its justification in her divine maternity, in the fact that God chose her to be the Mother of his Son Jesus, whom she begot and carried in her womb, gave birth to, nurtured and guarded beyond the threshold of adolescence. Jesus Christ associated her with his passion, death and glorious resurrection. The Church honours her in her prerogatives as immaculate, queen, virgin and assumed into heaven in body and soul. The cult that Christians pay to Her is, therefore, theologically based. It is not an emotional or sentimental expression. By worshipping Mary, nothing is taken away from Jesus Christ, and everything is regulated in union with and in the function of the glorification of Jesus Christ. Hence the old saying: *Per Mariam ad Iesum*. Mary is not the end, but the way that leads to Jesus. Those who tread it know that they are pro-

tected by her, helped by her, on the path of perfection and holiness to unite themselves ever more deeply with Jesus, humanity's only redeemer and saviour.

As I noted at the beginning, the Rosary is the most recited prayer because it is the simplest, the most profound, and of great significance. However, it must be taken in its entirety, that is, not as a dry repetition of formulas but as a complete prayer made up of meditation, contemplation, and supplication.

Valued in its inner richness, the Rosary cannot fail to point out the face of Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially in the most suffering and poor. When recited well, it fosters an encounter with Jesus Christ. □



## ARE YOU SELFLESS OR SELFISH?

by Anastasia Dias

**T**here was a man who had a huge field. One year, he had a bumper harvest. He had worked hard, of course. But the circumstances had also been conducive.

The man thought to himself, *Goodness, I have such a huge crop. I will tear down my storehouses and build bigger, better ones. Then, I'll sell my crop. And, I'll be a very rich man. After that, I'll buy a new house with all that money. Wow! I won't have to work a single day in my life anymore. And, with all the money I have left I can eat, drink and party. Ah! What a life!*

This is a famous parable that is mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. We know the ending and the message that accompanies it.

Lately, I've been thinking of other messages that Jesus may have wanted me to receive through this very same parable.

Lately, I've been selfish.

Lately, I've been thinking only about myself and my own future.

Dear friends, this is the message I'm getting from this parable: Stop thinking only about yourself and your own future. Live in the moment. And, include other people in your plans right now and those you have for your future.

Including doesn't necessarily

mean you need to have a lot of friends and family and have to spend all your money on making them happy. No, it means thinking about people and their well-being, all the time making our own decisions. It also means going out of your way to help another human being regardless of their religion, nationality, caste or creed.

I would like to share a personal and moving encounter that I'd during the last few months.

I moved to the United States of America in August of 2023. On my second day here, I found myself starving because I ran out of food. I didn't know where to go. I didn't have any friends. There was



no one in the graduate dorm because it was still summer vacation for, people and students hadn't moved in yet. So, I decided to walk, walk till I found a place to eat. I had walked over 2 miles and hadn't found any places. It was raining heavily too. I met a girl, an employee of the University. I asked her: "Hey, do you know any place nearby to eat?" She led me to the dining hall of the University. I don't remember anything. What I do remember is two women saying, 'Get her something to eat, she's starving.' Later, I realised that a single meal at the dining halls cost 14 dollars. And, I had been allowed to eat there, twice a day, for an entire week. Just because I had nowhere else to go.

I remember telling the young girl who had led me there that I was from India. She replied, 'Wow, I'd love to go there sometime. I'm recently married and my husband and I have never gone anywhere else except for Wisconsin.'

I never saw her again for another six months. But I always remembered her fondly. I wondered if she'd known that she had changed my life in a subtle way; given me a new perspective on things. I wondered if the women in the dining halls knew that my impression of people had changed after they had given me free food for an entire week. I had started believing in good people again.

And, then one day, I *did* meet the girl again. I told her that I thought of her with such gratitude every single day because my first impression of America was: a girl who had helped a starving person. And, I have carried that impression to this day. She said, 'There are good people in this world. You just gotta

find them.'

I've met many good people since that day. People who have gone out of their way to help me. People who've considered me while making decisions. People who've genuinely cared for me and been there for me without any hidden agendas. People who have accepted and loved me even though I'm from a different country, even though I speak a different language, even though I look different.

Friends, this is the message I'm getting: Be that person for another human being. A person who loves, cares and includes people in their lives. Every weekend, spend some time with your family. Visit an older family member. Help a friend in need. Reach out to a struggling peer or colleague.

I'm sure I've been extremely selfish and preoccupied like the rich man. I've only made plans for myself without thinking about other people. I've not rested in the moment but have been restlessly planning my own future.

Nonetheless, this is my time: a beautiful, brand-new season, the season where all things come alive and are made new. I am choosing to be a new person, an inclusive friend, family member and colleague.

I am going to love people for who they are, without knowing where they come from or how they look. I am going to include them in my life. I am going to help them in every way that I can and am capable of.

This is a hidden message that I have found from the parable. Dig deeper, you may also find your own meaning of the parable and of this wonderful, beautiful life you've been blessed with.

This is your time. Have a blessed Easter season. □



## THROUGH GOD'S EYES

### Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Fr. Matteo Rupil. I am 37 years old, and I have been a Salesian of Don Bosco since 8 September 2012 and a priest since 5 June 2021. I am happy to be Friulian by birth; I come from Carnia, a land of mountains, where Italy, Austria and Slovenia meet. At the same time, I am grateful to have become a Piedmontese by adoption since 2010, receiving the gift of being able to begin, precisely at Valdocco. This journey has allowed me to follow the Lord as a son of Don Bosco. If Tolmezzo gave me life, the immense love of my family and the surprise of meeting Don Bosco in the courtyard of the oratory and school, Turin gave me the affection and welcome of my brothers and sisters who, from day one, made me feel at home, being able to share the joy of faith and life walking with my hand on the shoulders of so many young people over the years, and the grace of being able to respond to God's faithful love with my little 'yes.' And yes, becoming a Salesian of Don Bosco and a priest. I have experienced all this by looking at life from a



unique perspective. From birth, I had had an eye disease which, in 2000, when I was 14 years old, deprived me entirely of my sight, asking me and giving me the gift of seeing the world through the eyes of others and of walking in the company of so many brothers and sisters who daily, like the Risen One on the road to Emmaus. These young people choose to love me by taking me by the hand and giving me their shoulder, letting me feel that God's Love is faithful and never abandons us. Thanks to these eyes, which are a cross and a blessing at the same time, I have experienced how God's light does want to illuminate precisely our darkest nights if we have the confidence and courage to surrender them to His Love.

### How did your vocation come about?

If I had to sum up the heart of my vocation with one word, I would undoubtedly choose the word "gratitude," like Mary's Magnificat. The desire to say thank you, to be able to give back and give to others the joy of the Love I received and which I receive daily, is undoubtedly the voice with which the Lord called me to follow him as a son of Don Bosco. When I entered the Oratory for the first time, it was the summer of 1994, and I immediately felt at home, called by name and loved simply because it was me, beyond my limitations and qualities. I remember as if it were now that during that summer, I met

such incredible animators who, although I already saw very little, took me by the hand and allowed me to experience a painting workshop with their help, something impossible in my situation! Yet Love is capable of such miracles: Don Bosco stole my heart by making me feel at home. What then fascinated me, particularly during my adolescence, was to touch the Lord with my own hands; the Lord, who could have done everything even without me, and yet he precisely asked and sought my help, my willingness to put myself at his service, to bring His Love and joy to the little ones. However, during my time at university, I clearly recognised His call. As so many roads, all possible, opened up before me for the future, both exciting and fascinating, I felt more and more that my heart was willingly returning, whenever it could, there to the Oratory, among the boys, because only in that place did I indeed find peace, and a home. Helped by the gaze of a precious friend of my soul, I recognised that God was calling me to follow him as a son of Don Bosco precisely through the desire to be there for others, for the little ones, the same welcoming and paternal presence that, like a crystal was reflecting God's light like so many Salesians had been for me. This is the mystery of God, who, every day, when I celebrate the Eucharist, continues to love me by giving himself for me, choosing to need and trust my hands so that I can truly be broken bread "for you and all".

### Why specifically Salesian?

God met me and loved me with

the smiling and paternal face of Don Bosco, together with the patient and caring face of my family members. If I had to compare the Gospel to a beautiful musical score, I would say that ever since I was a child, I have always heard this melody given voice by Don Bosco's orchestra; it is as if the Gospel for me has always resonated with the tone and timbre of the Salesian charism. I have never had any doubts or second thoughts about this: gifts should not be explained but recognised, welcomed, and lived. I like to think back to Don Bosco, now an old man, who, looking at the first Salesians, loved to say: 'I sketch, you paint'. I think that in these words is enshrined the mystery of my life and every Salesian life, to be able to bring to light, making it shine, a trait of Don Bosco's heart, life and fatherhood, or that God entrusts to me, uniquely, to make a gift of to others.

### Being a priest is your starting point for what?

I have been a priest for almost three years, and I am increasingly discovering that becoming a priest is not an achievement or a point of arrival but a grace and a starting point. Understanding and finding the beauty and greatness of Salesian life will undoubtedly take a lifetime. But I hope that day after day, the Lord will give me two particular graces. The first is never to doubt His Love, but to recognise, step by step, that God has loved us and loves us 'to the end', as John says, always and in any case, before everything and regardless of everything. This is the heart of

the Gospel, the cornerstone of every Christian life, and the sound and accurate news that the world and young people mainly wait for, from us. By not seeing, I have discovered very well that, albeit with some difficulty, without noticing, one can live. What extinguishes life is not being seen by anyone. What instead saves us and makes us rise is being looked at with a gaze of Love, like the one Jesus gives the rich young man in Mark's Gospel. And it is only if this gaze meets and concretely loves my life today can I tell it and witness it to the young people I meet. And the second grace is that of becoming, step by step, simply a good father, as Don Bosco was to his boys. The word father is, in fact, the most beautiful definition of what a Salesian is and should be. Father means to love that knows how to be a faithful presence that remains and does not leave you alone, a

sacrifice that makes you grow by giving life day after day, tenderness that knows how to become a closeness that accompanies you and freedom that never takes possession of lives and paths.

#### How do you see your future?

In these years, I have touched upon a truth I am deeply convinced of. Indeed, it is good to dream and have plans and projects for the future. But much more beautiful is to discover that our life, present and future are guarded by the dreams God has for us. To dream is exciting, to find that we are dreamed, to find out that God, as one who truly loves us, dreams of us, is infinitely more beautiful and extraordinary. Our dreams, however big they may be, can never have the breadth and beauty of God's dreams, of a God who is faithful not so much to our questions as to his promises. Thinking of my future, I

hope always to know how to say yes, without ifs and buts, to God's dreams for my life, trusting in Him and continuing to walk beneath His gaze with my hand on the shoulder of Don Bosco, of the confreres and of the young people He will allow me to meet: over these years I have seen with my own eyes and touched with my own hands that nothing is impossible for God because God is truly all-powerful in Love, we are only asked to trust Him, as a child trusts its mother. □



Fr. Matteo in Africa

## Witnesses in & for Our Times



### ST. PETER NOLASCO (May 6)

#### Liberator of Captives

The 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the final leg of the infamous Crusades. The Islamic Moors had gone far beyond the Holy Land and had brought large parts of Europe under their dominion. The Iberian countries of France, Portugal and Spain, particularly the latter, became Moor strongholds. Christian rulers were fighting back and the price of war was increasing with every passing day. Amid all the violence and bloodshed, thousands of people were taken captive; this does not only include prisoners of war but also those who were taken as slaves. Slavery had been around for centuries at this point and zealous Christians even sought to defend slavery as part of the way God willed the world to be. While one can find Scriptural references to back up such an idea, there are also clear passages that speak of liberation from slavery.

The Old Testament urges Jews to treat slaves as part of an extended family. They were to be given their dignity and treated with respect (See Exodus 21:1-11). Every seventh year was considered a Jubilee year and so every slave was to be set free (Deut 15:12). Tho-



ugh these laws were only applicable to Jews within Jewish society, non-Jewish slaves, while remaining bound indefinitely and considered as family property were largely treated with dignity. In the New Testament times, Christians considered slaves to be spiritually free beings even though they were temporally bound in slavery. Submission to their masters was taught to be the way they could fulfill God's will for them (Eph



6:5).

The Jews believed that the Messiah would come to redeem all those who were bowed down and in bondage (Is 61:1; Lk 4:16-21). Jesus endeavored to do this in his lifetime. Even though he never openly denounced the practice of slavery, Jesus went about setting people free from the various forms of bondage that held them captive, particularly spiritual bonds.

During the time of the Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula, Peter Nolasco felt called by God to take up the liberation of captives. He was so moved by the pitiful condition of slaves and was concerned about the threat posed to their faith on account of living and serving in non-Christian houses that he decided he would make it his life's mission to set Christian slaves free from their Moorish lords. Thankfully, he had the financial means to do this but it was only a matter of time before he had spent all his patrimony. Therefore, he founded a Congregation (Mercedarians) that was solely dedicated to the liberation of Christian captives.

#### **Family Background**

The birthplace of Peter Nolasco is uncertain. Some sources say he was born in Languedoc, France while others say he came from Barcelona, Spain. The official website of the Mercedarians offers no clear answer and says he could have been born in either of these places. However, 15<sup>th</sup> century Mercedarian historians record that Peter was the son of a merchant who hailed from the French village of Mas-Saintes-Puelles, near the town of Castelnaudary, and was born in the year 1189. His family

was well-to-do, and already as a young man, Peter became known for his deep piety and generous heart.

While some of these details are debated, this much is certain, he came from a rather wealthy family and he did his growing up in Barcelona. As mentioned earlier, Spain was a Moor stronghold. Peter was appalled by the treatment of Christian slaves under Moorish masters. He resolved to do something to remedy the situation and alleviate their plight. Even though he was occasionally aided by the contributions of generous benefactors, his ability to pay the ransom for slaves became increasingly difficult.

In 1218, St. Raymond of Penyafort began a lay confraternity that was directed to ransoming slaves from the Moors. At this time, Raymond was Peter's confessor. The latter became an active member and was even put in charge of procuring funds. However, he felt that a simple confraternity would not do and there was a need for something more structured and committed. Hence, he dreamed of starting a religious order. Our Lady nurtured his desire when she appeared to him in a vision and told him: "Find me men like yourself, an army of brave, generous, unselfish men, and send them into these lands where the children of the faithful are suffering."

#### **The Mercedarians**

With the recommendation of St. Raymond and the support of King James I of Aragon, Peter succeeded in founding the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy. On August 10, 1218, Peter and two companions were insti-

tuted as the first members of the Order. St. Raymond drew up the rules for the Order based on the rule of St. Augustine. Besides the customary three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience that are integral to all religious orders and congregations, the Mercedarians take a fourth vow: to use all the means at their disposal to redeem slaves and if need be offer themselves as hostages for Christian prisoners in danger of losing their faith.

The Mercedarians wore a white habit so that they could easily blend in with the Moors. They also wear around their waist a wide leather belt with a chain instead of the sword that the early Mercedarians carried. Initially, the Order was founded as a Military Order, hence the sword as part of the religious habit. Pope Gregory IX approved the Order in 1230. The initial Mercedarians were all laymen and thus, they were ready to take up arms and engage in battle to redeem slaves, if the situation demanded it.

Once Pope John XXII decreed in 1318 that the Superior of the Order should always be a priest, clerics were introduced into the Order and with that, the sword was put away for good. This decree created unrest within the Order and sparked an exodus of laymen who joined another military order. Peter Nolasco was never ordained a priest, neither were the first seven Superior Generals of the Order. Once the Order was forced to turn hybrid, the monks were obliged to take up liturgical duties including the praying of the hours of the Divine Office while the knights were tasked with sentry. However,

they were also obliged to pray the Office when they were not on duty. The Mercedarians eventually turned into a mendicant Order and set up monasteries in Africa, France, Italy and Ireland. They were also among the crew of Columbus when he voyaged to America.

In 1602, Juan Bautista Gonzalez led a reform movement within the Order and created the Discalced Mercedarians. They were accepted as a separate Order by Pope Paul V in 1606. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Mercedarians were facing an existential crisis. Their mission was in jeopardy as slavery became outlawed almost universally. Fortunately for them, a certain Pedro Armengol Valenzuela became Superior General around 1880 and he oversaw a radical revision of the Constitution of the Order. The mission turned toward educational, charitable and social upliftment activities. Thanks to this renewal the Mercedarians continue to remain in existence.

Peter Nolasco died in Barcelona in 1256. During his lifetime, the Order is believed to have rescued over 2,700 slaves. As per their records, the Order has succeeded in freeing over 70,000 slaves. Peter's dedication to the mission stands out. He even went as far as Africa to redeem slaves. His passion for the temporal liberation of Christians so as to facilitate the exercise of their spiritual freedom is truly commendable. His feast was originally fixed on January 31 but was shifted to January 28 once Don Bosco was canonized. Later it was moved again to May 6 which is recorded as the day of his death. □



## THE DAY OF PENTECOST

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

**1. Reading:** Take a few moments to read the Gospel passage slowly and attentively. Pay attention to the story's details and imagine yourself in the scene. Try to understand the emotions and actions of the Spirit and Jesus' disciples during this encounter.

**2. Meditation:** Ponder on the message of the passage. Consider the significance of Jesus appearing to His disciples on Pentecost. Reflect on the fear and confusion the disciples may have felt after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Focus on Jesus' words, "Peace be with you," and His gift of the Holy Spirit. What does this story reveal to you about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church? Here is a short reflection that will help us explore our reflection.

*Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'*

The phrases I picked from the gospel reading present two difficulties as we move forward in Christ's name. The words Jesus



spoke to them urge us to react to Jesus' message without doubt or questioning. And the words, "So I send you," encourage us to put self-interest and self-assurance aside as we walk out to promote Christ's mission.

We live in trouble where we witness wars, discrimination, loneliness, depression, etc. Economics, social welfare problems, and foreign affairs dominate the news in media. Even if we can distance ourselves from these global challenges, their influence on our daily lives can be felt deeply. This harsh reality often makes hearing Jesus' words of peace difficult. However, Jesus stands in our midst and offers his peace. The issue emerges when we, like his earliest followers, refuse to embrace the incredible gift he provides us. In this world, Jesus is everywhere. Even in the darkest of circumstances, Jesus is present. And, while Jesus stands amid humanity's calamity and sorrow, his peace is ever-present. We are challenged to embrace the gift he provides us and to utilise that gift for the welfare of the people with whom we live and, maybe, for the greater good of the world.

The following thinking leads to the second difficulty. Today is Pentecost, the day we remember and celebrate the advent of the Holy Spirit into the world. The promised Advocate will be with us throughout the time. The Holy Spirit enables us, in dramatic ways, as we learn in the Acts of the Apostles, to take and share Christ's love and peace with people we are called to love and serve in his name. Jesus' words are clear: he was brought into the world to provide the reconciliation and peace that we so urgently need - and Jesus, in turn, is sending us to do the same. As we receive strength from his peace, we are challenged to use that peace in his name.

Today, we are challenged to stop questioning Jesus and to accept the peace and forgiveness he

provides us in trust. Then, in his name, we are expected to go forth and share that peace and forgiveness with others by the compassion, patience, and love of our words and actions. <https://corby-glenchurches.uk/reflection-on-john-20-19-23-pentecost-year-a/>

**3. Prayer:** Engage in a conversation with God. Share your thoughts, feelings, and questions that arise from the passage. Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and His presence in your life. Ask for the grace to be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance and to experience the peace that Jesus offers. Pray for a deeper understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and your spiritual journey.

**4. Contemplation:** Enter into a moment of silence and stillness. Allow the words and images of the Gospel passage to settle in your heart. Imagine yourself in the room with the disciples, witnessing Jesus' appearance and His breathing the Holy Spirit upon them. Reflect on being more open to the Holy Spirit's work. Rest in God's presence, allowing Him to speak to you beyond words.

**5. Action:** Consider how you can apply the message of this passage to your own life. Reflect on how you can cultivate a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit. How can you be more attentive to His promptings and guidance? Reflect on how you can share the peace of Christ with others and be a witness to the power of the Holy Spirit. Commit to take action based on the insights you have gained. □



# Quiet Spaces

## THE HOLY SPIRIT REMINDS US HOW TO ACCESS THE FATHER

*Pope Francis' homily on Sunday, May 17, 2020*

### Introduction

Today our prayer is for the many persons who clean hospitals, streets, empty trash from the dumpsters, who go to each house to remove trash: work that no one sees, but it is a job that is necessary to survive. May the Lord bless them and help them.

### Homily

As He says farewell to His disciples (see Jn 14:15-21), Jesus gives them tranquility, He gives peace, with a promise: "I will not leave you orphans" (v. 18). He defends them from that pain, from that painful feeling of being orphans. In today's world, there is a great sense of being orphaned: many people have many things, but they lack the Father. And in the history of humanity, this has repeated itself: when the Father is missing, something is lacking and there is always the desire to meet, to rediscover the Father, even in the ancient myths. We can think of the myth of Oedipus, or Telemachus, and many others: always in search of the Father who is missing. Today we can say that we live in a society where the Father is missing, a sense of being orphaned that specifically affects belonging and fraternity.

And so Jesus promises: "I will ask the Father and He will give you another Paraclete" (v. 16). Jesus says, "I am going away, but someone else will come who will teach you how to access the Father. He will remind you how to access the Father". The Holy Spirit does not come to "make us His clients"; He comes to point out how to access the Father, to remind us how to access the Father. That is what Jesus opened, what Jesus showed us. A spirituality of the Son alone or the Holy Spirit alone does not exist: the center is the Father. The Son is sent by the Father and returns to the Father. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father to remind us and to teach us how to access the Father.

Only with this awareness of being children, that we are not orphans, can we live in peace among ourselves. Wars, either small ones or large ones, always have a dimension of being orphans: the Father who makes peace is missing. And so when Peter and the first community respond to the people regarding why they are Christians (see 1 Pt 3:15-18), it says: "do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear" (v. 16), that is, the gentleness that the Holy Spirit gives. The Holy Spirit teaches us this gentleness, this tenderness of the Father's children. The Holy

Spirit does not teach us to insult. And one of the consequences of this feeling like orphans is insulting, wars, because if there is no Father, there are no brothers, fraternity is lost. They are – this tenderness, reverence, gentleness – they are attitudes of belonging, of belonging to a family that is certain of having a Father.

"I will pray to the Father and He will send you another Paraclete" (Jn 14:16) who will remind you how to access the Father, He will remind you that we have a Father who is the center of everything, the origin of everything, the one who unites everyone, the salvation of everyone because He sent His Son to save everyone. And now He sends the Holy Spirit to remind us how to access Him, of the Father, of this paternity, of this fraternal attitude of gentleness, tenderness, and peace.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to remind us always, always about this access to the Father, that He might remind us that we have a Father. And to this civilization, with this great feeling of being orphaned, may He grant the grace of rediscovering the Father, the Father who gives meaning to all of life, and that He might unite humanity into one family. □



# RED GERANIUMS ON THE WINDOWSILL

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

**I**t was dawn and the bells of the little village church joyfully sent their chimes from the olive-clad hillside over the freshly-painted countryside, to the white roads of the valley and the distant hills.

The village women, prayer books in hand and veils under their arms, went in small groups, scattered along the slope, towards the church for the first Mass on Easter Day while talking among themselves. They whispered that that morning he was to arrive at the village and that she would go to meet him at the 'Madonna del Sasso,' or who knows, she would no longer have to wait for him at home.... After so many years, though, it took some courage for her to go to see him again.... They parted when they were, one might say, still young; then what happened, and since that evening; something that no one had forgotten, they would see each other again in a few hours. Mario's innocence had finally been recognised. By now he was free.

Those who now passed Luisa's house would look up to see if she would look out of the window while putting out the usual pots of flowers on the windowsill early in the morning; but by that time the red geraniums were already waiting for the dawn, fresh and beautiful as they were from that distant memory...

Yes, because it was a bouquet just like those large, velvety and fragrant ones that she threw to

him in the street when, one May evening, as beautiful as ever, her love had come to sing, under her window accompanying himself on his guitar. He picked her up and kissed her. She saw him, in the lunar whiteness that lined the street with silver lustre; a wide smile on his face; and later, turning upwards, he would keep up his ditty.

She remembered it and would have given who knows what to hear it again; and only those flowers she had kept in her window for so many years reminded her of him with a hope in her heart. But for whom? The poor little girl in love with his deep, black, black-eyed, blackberry-haired eyes, but what hope was there? He would never return...

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Mario was a conscript. When one evening his mother mentioned to him that there was a note from the Military District in a cupboard, the young man said nothing. He ate dinner, took off his work clothes, and headed for his fiancée's house.

The next day was a holiday. In the morning, they went to church together, and at sunset they went for a walk along the bank of the stream, which was already beginning to bloom with daffodils.

They were both pensive. She looked into his eyes and did not know what to say to him; and, every now and then, watching the clear water gurgling, brushing against the grasses at the

bottom, she did not want to think about all that time when he would be stationed in a distant regiment... who knows where... and she here alone...

"Do you love me, Luisa?"

"Me, yes, very much. And you me?"

"Me too."

The water continued to pass, some violets that had sprung up, by chance, in the last bushes of the bank, felt all the quivering of the current very close and let themselves be cradled; a willow leaning forward with its stem bent a little; and the song of the stream was always like that: sweet, equal, eternal. It almost made her heart ache to think that it would never change; never, never....

When they returned to the village, dusk was falling; they still stood in the doorway.

On Monday morning Mario was supposed to leave for the regiment: but his friends held him back, they told him that if he arrived in town in the evening it would be the same; he allowed himself to be dragged along and when they went to eat at Gigi's inn, the twelve o'clock train had already passed.

They ate a lot and the good wine had immediately put them in a cheerful mood. Someone then began to play the guitar, while the others sang at the top of their voices until it was dark.

Luisa, who would have held him with her eyes, felt herself dying. She would have gone there



to call him, to tell him not to be long before he left: but she was shy... there were all those men in there...

The poor girl said, "Holy Mother of God, if he doesn't leave tonight when he gets there, he'll be in big trouble... don't mess with the military", and she was still listening at the house window to hear when he would stop singing.

The marshal of the Carabinieri was passing by, had recognised him by his voice and after having him called out, had told him in a fatherly tone: "Mario, that's enough with the singing. You should have left by now because the travel card I gave you was for today."

The young man tried to justify himself, blamed his friends; they said that nothing was true: a rather heated argument ensued and at the moment it seemed that everything had ended for the better and they all went back to drinking. But when they went



out, the argument flared up again: so much so that one of them fell to the ground fatally wounded with a knife.

The heinous accusation was heaped on Mario. He found himself in handcuffs without even knowing who had put them on him. They sent him to Peschiera; and the incident passed like a bad dream over that little village, which, even today, to look at it, is a love story, especially when it laughs in the sun in fine weather.

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Luisa was then little more than eighteen years old. She also ceased singing. She just whispered when she was preparing yarn at the spinning wheel for her grandfather, who was a weaver. Extremely sad, she shut herself up in the house and did not go out except on Sunday mornings to church.

Now, with that little pallor in her face, she was even more beautiful; her sadness gave her an extra sweetness.

"But yes, there were those who said, 'Now she's playing the goody-goody; but when some time has passed, she'll be making love again with someone else... anyway Mario won't see her again... and even if he does come back, which he never will, her hair will have turned white.'

A year after that incident, there



was a guy from the neighbourhood, who had land and money and who had expressed his feelings to her. Serious things, mind you; but she said "no!" at once; he became as harsh as fire and brimstone, and resorted to third persons; but the young maiden remained firm in her reply, making it clear that she was not to be disturbed any longer, and continued to carry her sadness.

After a while, an employee of the municipality, a serious, polite, rather distinguished young man from a good family, also came to the post; but even then, it was the same response as before. After this, others persisted...

As the years went by, now distanced from the age of early youth, her face took on that inci-

pient maturity of a new, clear beauty that is like the blossoming of a fresh season, this simple girl above all, grew more and more beautiful.

Her grandparents died; she remained alone. Time passed for her too, and when she saw the first strands of white in her hair, she did not regret it; on the contrary, she thanked the Lord for having given her the first sign of physical decline. And she continued to cultivate the red geraniums on the window sill, to water them, to remove their dry leaves and to remember...the old days

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The wind carried a whistle from afar that was lost in the midst of the green countryside among the hills that gazed enchantedly, under the reedy mantle of the hillocks, at the turquoise-laden sky.

The train entered the village almost at a walking pace because the station platform, although it was Easter Sunday, was more crowded than usual. People wanted to see Mario when he got off... maybe she should have been there to see him arrive... and who knows what they would have to say to each other. The locomotive puffed three or four more times, the brakes screeched on the shiny rails and the dusty, smoke-black convoy, its curtains fluttering from the carriage windows, stopped in front of the pharmacy. First some soldiers got off, other men, two nuns, some boys, and then a man, with greyish hair, decently dressed, was seen getting off on the platform.

"There he is! And she heard herself say, "That's him! He has

aged, though..."

Mario, who hardly recognised anyone looked and looked, seemed to want to guess among the people who might smile at him; but someone told him: "She's there, waiting for you."

So he went in that direction; she came towards him dressed for the occasion; she had put on the bright coral earrings that she had received as a gift from her fiancé when they had got together... they were close... they shook hands, looking each other immediately in the eye... they both tried to regain their youthful appearance...

"How are you, Luisa?"

"Good. And you?"

"Thank God, I can see you again."

The neighbourhood had gathered around the pair. A few women were even moved to tears. Mario gave those he recognised his hand, occasionally speaking that dialect they understood so well, occasionally touching his forehead as if to recall a face or something far away; then, looking at his watch, he said to her:

"Let us go, it's time for Mass."

Side by side, they took to the road, rejoicing all the way to the church, which was all aglow with sunshine through the stained-glass windows.

In the full light of the morning, which descended like a blessing of glory upon the earth, the somewhat slow, hunched figures emerged among the hawthorn hedges behind the church, while from the top of the hill, the bells had resumed their festive ringing. □

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 52

by Michele Molineris

### 234. Don Bosco in a top hat (1877)

And here we are on 13 November set to embark on the largest part of the third missionary expedition, headed by the ardent Fr Costamagna, says Fr Vespignani. Don Bosco wanted me to accompany him in the little boat that took him aboard the French steamer Savoie, anchored in the bay, some distance from the dock.

As we were rowing towards the steamer, a strong gust of wind threw Don Bosco's hat over-board; and while it was being picked up and dried, a good Co-operator put his top hat on his head, and Don Bosco let it be, thanking him. Then with admirable severity and sweetness he looked at me, who was standing in front of him, and said to me: "You are thinking of mummy now, but I'll take care of mummy."

I answered immediately: "No, Don Bosco, I'm not too worried about that thought. My mother soon resigns herself, when it's a question of God's will."

We arrived at the steamer. Don Bosco had recovered his biretta. He was met by all his sons, who, accompanying him to the Savoie salon, surrounded him to savour his last words and receive his precious souvenirs. For the third time already, the saint was boarding that ship and bidding farewell to his sons being sent to the missions. To each one he addressed a word of encouragement, a joke, a memento that

remained deeply impressed.

He repeated the recollections already given to the first missionaries encapsulating the whole programme of his missions: to seek souls and not money; to be charitable and respectful to all; to care for the poor and abandoned youth; to trust in Mary Help of Christians and to enkindle in everyone the love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, promoting religious instruction and attendance at the Holy Sacraments.

As he parted from his children, as signs of departure were given, a very tender scene took place, which moved the onlookers to tears; everyone kissed his hand, asked for his blessing, recommended themselves to his prayers with words cut short by sobs. Don Bosco was taken away from them by Fr Cagliari and Fr Albera, the then Rector of Sampierdarena, and they returned with the little boat to the quay, while the departing people waved their hats and white handkerchiefs until they disappeared from our sight (Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola di Don Bosco*, 138).

### 235. Easy on telegrams! (1877)

On the train, bidding farewell to our homeland, it was always Don Vespignani who spoke. We made our calculations as to where he would rest on the second night of the journey. And there we were at the first adventure. We consulted the timetable and saw that around ten o'clock at night we would arrive in Marseilles.

"Where are we going to sleep?" we asked each other. I said to Monsignor Ceccarelli:

"Among the great French Co-

operators, there is an excellent parish priest of St Joseph's Church. Let's try to notify him by telegram of the arrival of the four of us tonight.

No sooner said than done: we all set out to combine the telegram. We knew very little French; the most talented was the cleric Panaro, who as a young man had worked in Cannes and practised a certain dialect that few understood; here was a sample: *Arrivrons quat salesien dis ors*.

The telegram was done; but who would sign it? Monsignor Ceccarelli said: "I am not known; neither are you... So let us put Don Bosco's signature; they'll understand."

Unfortunately, they understood! As soon as the train was stopped in Marseille station, 'Don Bosco! Don Bosco!' was heard repeated at various points.

"Oh, you see," I said to Monsignor, "there's a priest going by the name of Don Bosco."

At that moment the priest came in and asked breathlessly: "Where is Don Bosco?"

We looked at each other in the face without answering; but the priest took out a sheet of paper from his pocket and said: "Here is the telegram from Don Bosco, advising me of his arrival with three Salesians."

We were stunned. Fortunately, Monsignor Ceccarelli took heart and said frankly: "Don Bosco had some mishap that forced him to stay, and he remained in Nice (we had sent the unfortunate telegram from there). He sends many greetings and begs to be excused."

In the meantime, a committee of distinguished gentlemen, who had come to receive Don Bosco,

were approaching the windows, preparing to celebrate and honour Don Bosco. How confused we were! We stood there with our suitcases in hand without daring to descend. Where were we to hide? Who knows where! Fortunately, Monsignor Ceccarelli had a straight face and answered for us. We descended at last; and here were those good gentlemen surrounding us and pestering us with questions, to know what had happened to Don Bosco who had not arrived. We expressed ourselves with a few gestures, leaving it to Monsignor to put things right.

Outside the station were many splendid carriages with liveried servants. Everyone was waiting, watching, sharing the discouraging news. The parish priest made us get into two beautiful carriages and, still regretting the disappointment, he repeated: "Don Bosco has done it to me! Patience!"

At the parish house a new surprise and much more serious business. Another commission of honour, made up of the city's aristocratic ladies, had gathered there. One can well imagine the throng of questions, and what had happened on the journey, and where Don Bosco was and why he had not arrived, and how he had sent that telegram a few hours earlier. We, full of confusion, were like so many chicks in the tow.

A sumptuous dinner was prepared in a magnificent hall. Stunned at the sight of such pomp, so many flowers, so much luxurious tableware, we seemed to be dreaming... ah, that wretched telegram... But at least we understood what Don Bosco's name



meant in France even then.

Our curate eventually calmed down; the representatives of high society had withdrawn; perhaps, without our sincerely confessing our grave error, the worthy cooperator guessed it and sought no further explanation. We dined amidst plenty, but without appetite; then we were led to the rooms, which were truly princely.

That evening, examining our consciences, we found that we had started our first missionary journey badly, very badly. And we were stung by the remorse of the disgust our carelessness would have caused Don Bosco. But *errando discitur* (learning from errors). We really did learn to be careful with telegrams, especially in French! (Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola di Don Bosco*, 141).

### 236. Nothing new under the sun (1878)

In Turin in 1878, an epidemic of conjunctivitis had broken out, an epidemic disease that affects the eye and can be transmitted to cohabitants. For this reason, the authorities had arranged an inspection of the public schools, which were immediately closed, and then they set about ascertaining the situation in public schools and boarding schools in general.

The last to be visited was the Oratory. "The commission," wrote Don Ceria (M.B., XIII, 564), "made a minute visit, which lasted several days. The overzealous fervour of the commissioners put the superiors under suspicion and suggested to the catechist Fr Veronesi a sneaky trick. On the second day of the inspection, he brought back with

the others some young men whose condition the doctors had judged very serious. Well, those gentlemen, suspecting nothing, declared them healthy; then, having known the game, one can well imagine how they remained."

However, the epidemic was there and the report was disastrous: this amounted to the closure of the Oratory. The prefect did not take the report literally and thought to postpone a decision until a second visit. In the meantime, steps were taken to contain and combat the malady, leaving everything to Don Bosco's prudence.

But while the inspection was still awaited, the order came for the Oratory to be closed, due to non-compliance with the prescriptions and carelessness in the application of the prescriptions suggested by the commission.

We became increasingly convinced that conjunctivitis was a pretext and that anything was to be expected from an ill-disposed and prejudiced government. In fact, barely a month later, came the announcement of a new commission, which this time would be tasked with establishing whether the general hygienic conditions were capable of ensuring the physical safety of the inmates. The commission that announced in June only came in September, chaired by Dr Polto, who was very well-intentioned and well-disposed towards Don Bosco and his institution.

I read again from Ceda (p. 568): "In fact, while visiting the dormitories, the doctors who accompanied him kept saying that there was not enough air and he, almost annoyed, said: "Go and see

the attics where father, mother and three or four children stay all day and cook, sleep, wash, and cannot raise their heads without banging them on the ceiling..." He then confided to Joseph Rossi that his colleagues wanted him to sign a report that was contrary to the truth and that he would have preferred to resign from the office rather than play such parts.

The commission declared that the institute was in adequate condition to hold 275 pupils. So, the closure was avoided; but Don Bosco, obliged to limit the number of inmates, when mothers came to the Oratory to recommend their children, answered them: "I cannot accept them. Go to the prefect and ask his permission."

Now it is said that the prefect, at that interminable procession of mothers, lost his patience and sent word to Don Bosco: "Accept as many youngsters as you like, but don't let anyone come and pick my pocket."

The false information of the second visit that never took place, confirmed the doubt of underwater manoeuvres to achieve the closure of the Oratory." (M.B., XIII, 564).

### 237. Foreseeing the election of Leo XIII (1878)

Don Bosco was in Rome in the winter of 1878 and one day when he returned to the Vatican, he was anxious to speak to the Cardinal Secretary of State, and not knowing where to find him, he wandered around the stairs and corridors, which on the occasion of the conclave became the cells of the clergy. Hundreds of work-

ers worked tirelessly day and night under the orders of Card. Pecci, Chamberlain of Holy Church, whom Don Bosco had met

"Here is the cardinal chamberlain, Most Eminent Pecci" he was told.

Don Bosco looked at the angelic face of the cardinal and, approaching him, said with filial affection: "Your Eminence will you allow me to kiss your hand?"

"Who are you, that you approach with such authority?"

"I am a poor priest, who now kisses the hand of His Excellency praying in the firm hope that in a few days he may kiss his sacred foot."

"Mind what you do! I forbid you to pray for it."

"You cannot forbid me to ask God for what pleases Him."

"If you pray in this manner, I threaten you with censure. And the saint retorted: "You have no authority so far to inflict censure; when you have it, I will respect you."

"But who are you who speak to me so authoritatively?"

"I am Don Bosco."

"Please be silent about this. This is a time for work and not for joking."

But, as the saint had predicted, on 20 February, just 14 days after the death of Pius IX, Card. Gioachino Pecci, archbishop-bishop of Perugia, was elected Pope and took the name Leo XIII. And on 21 February, Don Bosco hastened to pay his respects and those of his children to the new pontiff (*Vita*, II, 146). □



## MARY, OF THE SUPERIOR PLANE

Mons. Tonino Bello

**I**con. This term refers to sacred images painted on wood, which our brethren of the Eastern Churches venerate with particular devotion. Enveloped in light, they imprison a spark of divine mystery, which is why some have rightly called them windows of time open to the eternal.

Icon. By this term, perhaps because of the sharp strokes with which they are sketched, we nowadays also call those biblical scenes that contain, with the swift force of celebratory mega glasses, an essential message of salvation.

Well, of these icons, the first chapter of Acts records one of extraordinary splendour when it says that the apostles, after the ascension, while waiting for the Holy Spirit, "went to an upper floor, where they lived". And with them was also Mary, the mother of Jesus.

It is the last biblical sequence in which Our Lady appears. She definitively shuns the limelight like this: from the top of this post, from above, as if to show us the spiritual levels on which every Christian's existence must stand.

In truth, the whole of Mary's life has developed significantly.

Not that she disdained the homes of the poor. Far from it. Shepherds' wives would barter wool and cheese with her for a piece of cloth woven by her hands. The neighbours never noticed the mystery hidden in that seemingly earthly life. Nor did the peasant women of Nazareth experience in her those distances with which those who make a career often mortify their former companions. She went with them to the market. She bargained like them on prices. She would go out with the others on the road after summer downpours to stem the torrents of rain. And on May evenings, her voice would echo in the courtyard, accompanying the choruses of ancient oriental chants, but without overpowering anyone.

In short, although aware of her superhuman destiny, Mary never wanted to live in high places. She never built herself pedestals of glory. She always rejected niches that could prevent her from enjoying the joy of living on the

ground floor with ordinary people.

She did, however, reserve for herself a very high special place from which to contemplate not only the ultimate meaning of her human vicissitude but also the long trajectories of God's tenderness.

Two strategic points in Mary's life confirm that she was a habitual tenant of the higher plane that the Holy Spirit had called her to inhabit: the Magnificat's height and Golgotha's altar.

From that height, she extends her gaze to the ends of time. Capturing the unfolding of God's mercy from generation to generation, she offers the most coherent reading in the history of salvation.

From that altar, she thrusts her gaze to the ends of space. And, holding the world in a single embrace, she offers us the surest guarantee that the corners touched by her motherly eyes will also be reached by the Spirit, which gushed forth from the side of Christ.

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Holy Mary, woman of the upper floor, splendid icon of the Church, you already experienced your personal Pentecost at the



*Inside a closed palace, one sees, on the upper floor, the Virgin, the apostles and some women praying in the Upper Room. Outside the palace some people representing all the people to whom salvation will be announced.*

angel's annunciation when the Holy Spirit descended upon you, and the power of the Most High spread its shadow upon you. If you stopped in the cenacle, it was only to implore upon those around you the same gift that had enriched your soul one day in Nazareth, as the Church must do. Which, already possessed by the Spirit, has the task of imploring, until the end of time, the irruption of God on all the fibres of the world.

Give her, therefore, the intoxication of the heights, the measure of extended time and the logic of overall judgements. Lend her (the Church) your foresight.



Do not allow her to suffocate in the courtyards of the chronicle. Preserve her from the sadness of getting bogged down, with no way out, in the narrow perimeters of the everyday. Make her look at history from the perspective of the Kingdom. Because only if she knows how to put her eye in the highest slits of the tower, from where the views widen, will she be able to become an accomplice of the Spirit and thus renew the face of the earth.

Blessed Mary, a woman of the upper plane, help the pastors of the Church to make themselves tenants of those high regions of the spirit from which it is easier to forgive human weaknesses, more lenient to judge the whims of the heart, more instinctive to credit the hopes of resurrection. Lift them from the ground floor of codes, for only from certain heights can one grasp the yearning for liberation that permeates the articles of law. Let them not remain inflexible guardians of the rubrics, which are always sad when one cannot see the red ink of love with which they were written.

Enlighten their minds that they may know how to overcome the coldness of a right without charity, of a syllogism without imagination, of a project without passion, of a ritual without inspiration, of a procedure without genius, of a *logos* without *Sophia*. Invite them to ascend with you, for only from certain positions will your gaze indeed be able to widen to the ends of the earth and measure the vastness of the waters over which the Holy Spirit is hovering again today.



Holy Mary, woman of the higher plane, let us contemplate from your windowsills the joyful, sorrowful, glorious and luminous mysteries of life: joy, victory, health, sickness, pain, and death. It seems strange, but success will not make one dizzy from that height, and only at that level will defeat prevent one from allowing oneself to plummet into the void.

Looking up at your window, we will be more easily caught by the fresh wind of the Spirit with the rejoicing of its seven gifts. The days will be imbued with wisdom, and we shall perceive where the paths of life lead, and we shall take counsel on the most practicable paths. We shall face them with fortitude, be aware of the pitfalls that the road hides, become mindful of God's nearness to those who travel in holiness and be disposed to walk joyfully in his holy fear. And we shall thus hasten, as thou didst, the Pentecost upon the world. □



## I'M DON BOSCO IN KHMER COUNTRY

Conversation with Fr Roberto Panetto SDB

O. Pori Mecoi

### What is your identity card?

One of the many faults that we Salesians' have is that we are in love with Don Bosco. When someone asks us who we are, the quick answer is 'Salesians of Don Bosco.' We feel we are sons of Don Bosco before we are sons of the good Lord, but the Lord is pleased with our weakness because anything that leads a human being to be good is pleasing to the Source of all Good.

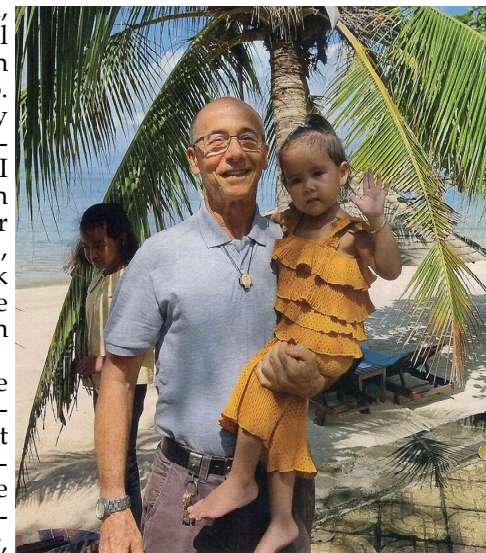
I confess how proud I am to be a native of Turin, where Don Bosco carried out his adventurous mission. In December 1951, after a few days in the maternity ward, I was taken to the village of Ceresole d'Alba, which makes an equilateral triangle of 40 km with Turin and Colle Don Bosco.

However, I did not stay in the village for long because, after five months, I was diagnosed with spleen tuberculosis, a disease for which, if one survived, there was a significant risk of severe impairment due to the vital medicines in use at the time.

Thus began the little ordeal for my family because my mother, to assist me at the children's hospital in Turin, had to leave or somewhat forcibly detach my 2-year-old sister,

who rightly cried, clinging to her mother as she went home, leaving her alone with my father. The period spent in the hospital was almost two years. My mother recounts the severe treatment, with antibiotic injections three times a day, to which I invariably reacted with the only means babies have to make themselves heard and express their disappointment...

In these situations, it is natural to have recourse to all the saints, and my mother had recourse to the right one because she wrote a letter begging for help from Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. Padre Pio replied with simple writing





One of the many ingenious accomplishments due to the resourcefulness of Fr Panetto

on paper torn from a notebook: 'Pray, and the Lord will grant you what you ask for'.

The serious obstacle to healing was the fact that I regularly refused milk. Without nourishment, there is no way of healing! So it was that, following Padre Pio's advice, after a brief visit and prayer in the hospital chapel, my mother put the bottle on my lips while I was sleeping. It was a miracle! My mum tells me how she felt the plastic bottle flatten in her hand from sucking so hard... and from then on, I regained my strength and health. I can imagine what my mum must have felt at that moment!

### How did your vocation come about?

Thanks to a 'good night'! Not precisely like Samuel, but for all those called to follow Christ in religious life, there is something mysterious about a vocation: something between a call and an order... leave everything, come and follow me! This happened for both vocations, the Salesian and the missionary.

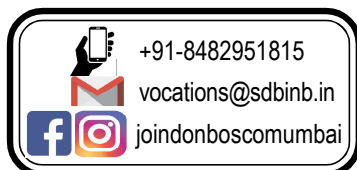
In the last months of the three years, here was the good night that changed my life.

The Salesian, Fr Bianco, then catechist at the school, spoke of the two paths facing young people as a fork in the road; the road of marriage is the most travelled and leads to a small circle of people who

make up the fam-ily. The other path is to follow a possible vocation to consecrated life, such as the Salesian one: this path leads to a family so large that it includes the whole world. New people are discovered daily, all part of our large family.

### What is your current task?

I am currently the bursar of the Cambodia delegation, which is part of the trio of countries of the Thai province comprising Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. As part of the bursar's job, I am also in charge of the planning and projects office for our mission in Cambodia. I reside in the seaside town of Sihanoukville, 230 km south of the capital, Phnom Penh. Thus, I can also help out in the technical departments of the Don Bosco Technical and Hotel School. □



## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### Unenviable Solution

On a ferry I boarded in the Sudan, scores of people stumbled over the squatting form of a boy, who persisted in sitting in the bottom, despite oaths and kicks. I asked the captain to move teh boy somewhere to keep him from being hurt. "Very good, your excellency," he replied, "but it is only fair to warn you that if the boy gets up, the boat will sink."

### In Hindsight

In a contest in Surrey for road safety slogans, one youngster came up with this suggestion: He looked; she didn't. He is, she isn't.

### Feverish Pitch

An aspiring vocalit had just completed a lesson. "Professor," she asked, "do you think I shall ever be able to do anything with my voice?" "Well," replied her instructor, "it might come in handy in case of fire."

### Advance Notice

A kindergarten teacher smiled pleasantly at the gentleman opposite in the bus. He did not respond. Realizing her error, she said aloud, "Oh, please excuse me. I mistook you for the father of my children." She got out at the next corner.

### Corresponding Love

A young lad we know is still trying to decipher the following letter from his current girl friend: "Dear John, I hope you are not still angry. I want to explain that I was really joking when I told you I didn't mean what I said about reconsi-

dering my decision not to change my mind. Please believe me I really mean this. Love, Grace."

### Manual Dexterity

Wife to husband about to hang picture: "You'll find the hammer in the drawer, the nails in the cupboard and the bandage in the medicine cabinet."

### Keeping the Beat

Basil Rathbone was visiting Victor Borge in his hotel room, and the Dane was telling the actor of the versatility of the piano. He told Rathbone that he could even tell time by the piano. The actor was sceptical; so Borge sat down and crashed out a few bars from a Sousa March.

Immediately there was a pounding on teh wall and a sleepy voice rumbled angrily: "Stop that noise, you idiot! Don't you know it's one thirty in the morning?"

### Swift Thrift

One man to another: "Its not that I spend more than I earn, it's just that I spend it quicker than I earn it."

### To be on Top

A little boy, taken to the ballet for the first time, watched curiously as teh dancers cavorted about on their toes. "Mummy," he whispered loudly, "Why don't they just get taller girls?"

### Political Figures

Accountant to his fellow worker: "For aminute this deficit really had me worried... I forgot I was working for the government." □



# THE FABLE OF THE BREAD

Bruno Ferrero

In a distant village, a poor widow supported herself by serving a rich and mysterious lady who lived alone in a gloomy-looking mansion half-hidden in the heart of a forest. The kindly widow performed her work with generosity and dedication, and one day, unexpectedly, the lady gave her a gift: an extraordinary ring.

"By turning this ring twice around your finger, you can transform yourself into anything you want," the strange lady explained to her.

The widow did not take much notice, but she remembered the ring when a terrible famine struck the region.

She circled it twice around her finger, and it turned into a magnificent hawk with strong wings. She had decided to fly until she found land to provide sustenance for her son and his neighbours.

She flew until she exhausted her strength, then sadly returned to her home. Famine had struck all the lands of the kingdom, and there was no escape for anyone.

But the woman was not resigned to her fate. She turned the ring twice, and she became a huge, fragrant loaf of bread.

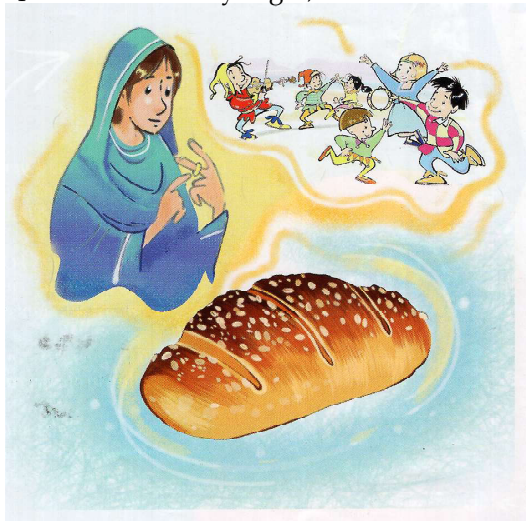
When her son came home and saw that

huge loaf, he began to eat with gusto. It was only bread, but it satiated admirably. As he chewed with relish, the widow's son saw a neighbour passing by with whom he had had many disagreements and who engendered in him an extreme dislike.

He was determined to ignore the passerby, but a tremor in his heart compelled him to invite him to share that miraculous bread. The word spread and people flocked from all over the village: young and old, poor, sick and healthy, desperate and restless.

That bread seemed never-ending. Moreover, it did not just take away hunger but instilled serenity and a desire for peace, a sense of goodness and health for the body. Those who were enemies reconciled, and those who had previously ignored each other smiled warmly at each other.

Every night, the last crumb of



bread was transformed into the generous widow. Every morning, the woman became again a giant loaf of fragrant, delicious bread, nourishing the body and spirit of the villagers.

So it was, until the new harvest.

A big feast was organised that day. Naturally, the widow also attended. Everyone who approached her felt a strange sensation. The woman exuded an intense scent of freshly baked bread. □

## SNIPPETS

### With Mum every evening

In his book entitled *"I quattro del Gesù"* (The Four of Jesus), Senator Giulio Andreotti recalls the case of the priest Ernesto Bonaiuti, who was censured for accusations of modernism and reduced to the lay state, calling for a post-humous re-examination of his position as a professor at the *Sapienza* University in Rome. Still, around the 1960s, he had the little altar permanently at home ready if he could celebrate Mass, and he recited the Rosary every day with his mother who was distressed by her son's situation. Close to being reconciled with the Church, which he had always loved, Fr Bonaiuti could not use his little altar again, but the rosary consoled him until the last evening of his life.

### Telefilm

A 1983 film, *'In the Name of the Father'*, directed by J. Sheridan, starring D. Day Lewis and E. Thompson, about the case of Joe, a very religious Irishman, falsely

accused of a crime and imprisoned in Belfast with his own son, a pro-terrorist who, however, never practised violence. Both innocent, they spent 15 years in the same prison amidst abuse of all kinds. One of the most evocative scenes is when Joe, scolded by his son who rebels against the resignation, forgiveness and pacifism of the Catholics, takes refuge in the rosary, which he recites aloud: his son mocks him. He coarsely underlines the very words of the *Pater* and *Ave Maria* (in the cell, an image of Our Lady of the Rosary by Sassoferrato is seen attached to the wall). The exhortation and the example of trusting devotion end up converting the young man, who, after his father's death, promotes a rehabilitation campaign, obtaining from the English courts that his innocence be recognised. Freed, in turn, will dedicate his life to promoting peace, faith and coexistence 'in the name of the Father who is in heaven.'

Reginaldo Frascisco

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### MARY WAS THERE

I thank Mother Mary and her Son Jesus a million times for restoring peace in my home before Christmas 2023. My brother would get annoyed and irritated for petty things. In my distress I would turn constantly to Mother Mary, pleading for peace to come to my house before Christmas. As I pleaded with Jesus and Our Lady my prayers were granted before on the eve of Christmas.

I was overwhelmed with joy that till date, he has been a changed man. My prayers have been answered and the joy still lingers in my heart and in my home. *A Devotee*

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

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

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