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**Grant, we pray,
that we may venerate
with integrity of faith
the mystery of
so wondrous an Incarnation
and always celebrate it
with due reverence.**

**Through our Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns
with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.**

Opening Prayer - 19 December

From The Editor's Desk

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Home and Christmas are woven together for many of us. The popular Christmas standard "I'll Be Home for Christmas" expresses with its words and its nostalgic tones our longing to be home. Our desire to belong and to be with the ones we love knows no seasonal bounds. And yet, at Christmas we yearn for home in an especially poignant way.

This can be a simple, sweet yearning. We enjoy a happy family and eagerly anticipate gathering together for our celebration of the Nativity.

For others difficult emotions accompany thoughts of the home fires. Loved ones will not be present this year because they have moved abroad to foreign shores or they have passed beyond the horizon of this life onto the shores of the next. We will miss them even in the midst of our joy.

Still others gather with families who struggle to find the easy belonging we all seek. Old wounds and regrets, things done and left undone, hang in the air of family gatherings like silent, invisible barriers to intimacy, comfort and warmth.

And still, as Christmas dawns, our longing for home grows sharper. That's because Christmas reveals a deep truth and extends an abiding promise. Our longing for home is, in the end, a longing for the presence of the God who made us for himself. At Christmas God himself reminds us of his promise - now fulfilled in Jesus Christ - that he will make his home with us.

God became man in that Bethlehem manger long ago. He entered into a specific time and a specific place, but he also entered into our lives with our joys and sorrows, triumphs and tediums. He entered human life as he found it in order to make it what he meant it to be.

When we celebrate Christmas, we remember that remarkable birth. And yet, we miss the most stirring part of the Christmas promise if we celebrate only things past. God is up to something right now. John Ortberg says it well in his book *God is Closer Than You Think*.

God is still in the business of coming down to earth: to this cubicle, this email, this room, this house, this job, this hospital room, this car, this bed, this vacation. Any place can become Bethel, the house of God, Cleveland, maybe. Or the chair you're sitting in as you read these words.

Our home becomes a home when God comes to dwell there. Old wounds are healed, wrongs are forgiven, sorrow gives way to joy, and fear gives way to confident hope. When God makes his home with us, we can feel at home with one another. God is closer than you think. He has come home to your life, wherever you might be and he yearns to find you there. Where will you be when God comes knocking?

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

SOLEMN THREE DECADES' SECRET

Fr. Erasto Fernandez, sss

Somewhere in West Tennessee, not far from Graceland, nine simple but large-hearted women (or 'The Nine Nanas,' as they choose to be called) congregate in the dead of every single night. At about four the next morning they begin their daily routine: a ritual that no one, not even their husbands, knew about for thirty long years. They are drawn to but one mission and one only: to create happiness wherever they can! And it all begins with baked goods.

"One of us starts sifting the flour and another washing the eggs," explains Nana Mary Ellen, the appointed spokesperson for their secret society. "And someone else makes sure the pans are all washed and ready, arranged in a neat and orderly manner! We switch off, depending on what we feel like doing that day." But we make sure to say that Nana Pearl is the one in charge, because she is the oldest! she adds coyly with a wink and a smile. Over the next three hours, The Nine Nanas (who all consider themselves sisters, despite what some of

their birth certificates might say) will whip up hundreds of pound cakes, as part of a grand scheme to help those in need. And then, before anyone gets as much as a glimpse of them, they will secretly disappear back into their daily lives. The only hint that may remain is the heavenly scent of vanilla, lemon and lime, lingering in the air.



Even the UPS driver, who picks up hundreds of packages at a time, has no clue what these women, who range in age from 54 to 72, are doing. He is just happy to get a hug and a bag filled with special treats. What he does not know, and perhaps never will know, is that he too is part of their master plan. A plan that began thirty-five years ago, when the 'sisters' got together for their weekly card game - something their husbands referred to as "Broads and Bridge."

"Pearl says it was all her idea," Mary Ellen teases, "but as I remember it, we were sitting around reminiscing about MaMaw and PaPaw and all the different ways they would lend a hand in



the community." (MaMaw and PaPaw are affectionate sobriquets for the grandparents who raised four of the women, Mary Ellen included, when their mother passed away; and they took in Pearl as their own, when her parents needed some help).

Their Ingenious Outreach

"MaMaw Ruth would read in the paper that someone had died," Mary Ellen reminisces, "and she would send off one of her special pound cakes. She did not have to know the family. All she just wanted was to put a big broad smile on their faces, and make them feel that someone cared for them! And we started thinking about what we could do to make a difference like that. What if we had a million dollars? How would we spend it? So the ladies began brainstorming."

"One of the sisters suggested that we should all start doing our own laundry and put the money we save in this way to good use. There were a few protests at first. There is just something about laundering that some do not like. But these were miserably out-numbered! So between the nine of us, we managed to put aside a princely sum of about \$400 a month and our husbands never noticed a thing. Their shirts looked just fine."

And then the women started listening. They would eavesdrop - all with good intentions, of course - at the local beauty shop or when they were picking up groceries. And when they heard about a widow or a single mom who needed a little help, they would gladly step in and anonymously pay a utility bill or buy some new clothes for the children.

"We wanted to help as much as we could," Mary Ellen said, "without taking away from our own families, so we became coupon clippers. And we would use green stamps. Remember those? We would use green stamps and make sure to go to Goldsmith's department store on Wednesdays. Every week they would invariably have a big sale and you could spend \$100 and walk away with \$700 worth of merchandise." The Nanas would then find out where the person lived and send a package with a note that simply said, "Somebody loves you" - and they would be sure to include one of MaMaw Ruth's special pound cakes.

Bigger and Bolder Steps

The more people they helped, the bolder they became! "We gave new meaning to the term drive-by," Mary Ellen recalls





with delight. "We would drive through low-income neighbourhoods and look for homes that had fans in the window. That revealed to us that the people who lived there couldn't afford to have air-conditioning. Or we would see that there were no lights on at night, which meant there was a good chance their utilities had been turned off. Then we would return before the sun came up, like cat burglars, and drop off a little care package."

For three decades, the good deeds of these angels of mercy went undetected - that is, until five years ago, when Mary Ellen's husband, whom she lovingly calls "Southern Charmer," started noticing extra mileage on the car and large amounts of cash being withdrawn from their savings account.

"He brought out bank statements and they were highlighted!" Mary Ellen said, recalling the horror she felt. "I tried to explain that I had bought some things, but he had this look on his face that I had rarely seen before - and that is when I realized what he must have been thinking. I called the sisters and said, 'You all need to get over here right away.'"

Broadening Their Horizons

So thirty years into their secret

mission, The Nine Nanas and their husbands gathered in Mary Ellen's living room and the sisters came clean. They told their husbands about the laundry and the eavesdropping - even the drive-bys. And that is where, to the utter surprise and delight of all, their story gets even better - because the husbands now themselves offered to help.

"They were amazed that we were doing this and even more amazed that they never knew. We sure could keep a good secret! All but three of them are retired now, so sometimes they come with us on our drive-bys. In our area, all you need is an address to pay someone's utility bill, so we keep the men busy jotting down numbers."

It wasn't long before the couples decided it was time to broaden their horizons even further afield by telling their grown up children. And that is when happi-



Don Bosco's Madonna



ness began to happen in an even bigger way. The children encouraged their mothers to start selling MaMaw Ruth's pound cakes online, so they could raise money to help even more people. And it was not long before they were receiving more than a hundred orders in a day.

"The first time we saw those orders roll in, we were jumping up and down," Mary Ellen recalled with a loud guffaw. "We were so excited that we did a ring-around-the-rosie! Then we called all the children and said, 'What do we do next?'"

That is when The Nine Nanas moved their covert baking operation out of their homes and into the commercial kitchen of a restaurant owned by one of their sons, where they could sneak in before sunrise and sneak out before the staff came in. They even hired a "happiness coordinator" (whose code name is "Sunny," of course). Her identity needed to be a secret, too, so she could help out with the eaves-dropping. "We swore her to secrecy - her parents think she works in marketing. And, really, if you think about it, she is doing public relations and spends a lot of time looking for people to help at the supermarket!"

Latest Developments

These days, The Nine Nanas are able to take on even bigger

projects, given their online success. Recently they donated more than \$5,000 of pillows and linens and personal care products to a shelter for survivors of domestic violence. And soon, they will be celebrating their second consecutive "Happiness Happens Month" by sending tokens of their appreciation to one person in every state who has made a difference in their own community.

And that million dollars they once wished for? They are almost there. In the last thirty-five years, The Nine Nanas have contributed nearly \$900,000 of happiness to their local community. But that does not mean that they are too busy to continue doing the little things that make life a bit happier. Sometimes they just pull out the phone book and send off pound cakes to complete strangers. And if the Nanas spot someone at the grocery store who appears to need a little help, it is not unusual for them to start filling a stranger's cart.

"Not everyone is as lucky as we were to have MaMaw and PaPaw to take care of them, to fix all those things that are wrong. 'So this is our way of giving back,'" Mary Ellen said. "We want people to know that someone out there cares enough to do something. We want to make sure that happiness happens."

"Jesus gives himself to me totally through the Eucharist. So I too want to give myself totally to him through the Eucharist!" ☐

WHERE'S THE GOOD IN GOODBYE?

by Melanie D'Souza

And here we are again. It's almost the end of the year.

How do you feel? Excited? Tired? Complacent? Well, either way I really hope you don't feel complacent. You've gotten to see yet another year, end and begin, and that's pretty awesome. Especially when God gave and took a lot away this year. He is the God of the past and future anyway!

Even resolutions are getting old. It's not like we don't make a hundred resolutions throughout the year itself. Take better care of my appearance, hit the fitness centre more often, work harder in school, put away my phone more, visit my family more, eat out less, save up for more. To top it all, we even have Scrooge warnings from the Ghost of Christmas Future!

These desires are on the surface though. The year-end or the year-start (depends on how much of a half-full or half-empty glass person you are) has got you thinking deep about your own growth. Growth in maturity, spirituality and self-actualisation. The transition has also got you thinking about *change* itself. Not just how you've evolved as a person, but all of the people and things that changed in your life;

some unexpected.



Well? The egg *has* to hatch. Earlier this year, when I expressed how intimidated I was with the fact that I was going to be making four moves this year, after never having lived alone before, the pastor at the Catholic centre of my University told me just this. There is a time for all youth to strike that growth chord, and when I thought I was least prepared, my time had come. Hey, even our dear Jesus was taken aback at the wedding He attended in Cana (John 2: 3-5 NASB) when His mother directed the servers to take orders from Him as per His miracle plan- at a time He was least ready to start ministry. The more an adventurous person like myself

flit past the calendar towards my first move, the more apprehensive I was getting about leaving everything behind; college, friends, parish, familiarity.

Now I laugh. My concerns were valid. But goodbyes can be good; very, *very* good.

We already know this, but we have to keep reminding ourselves that it's all about the *journey*. Resolutions can be made in effect on the 1st, but life is too much fun to not experience the challenges around it. Staying unafraid and undeterred is great, but change is even better when we learn to respect the change in others. Get ready to lose friends that are dear to you now, and get ready to get close to those you didn't think much of, before. This life is too blessed and unpredictable to remember all its shortcomings, and yet time is a great maturing agent.

Walk into that mystery.

The best thing about the New Year is that it is such a big unknown, and yet another chance. *Because everyone deserves a fresh start.* If you're a student, you might long for a better semester or a new internship in a different city. If you're a young professional, you may be thinking of changing jobs, or seeing developments in the romantic department.

Think about what you need a fresh start with. A stale job? Grades to improve? Revive a relationship? Right now, I think my biggest challenge is that I need to change how I think about myself. Again! I might be a self-assured twenty-something, but

this year has taught me to want to grow more comfortable with being alone and independent, although those concepts are not new to me. Each year is a chance for a renewal for confidence...and a *renewal of faith*.

What was unique about this year in the Catholic calendar? Sure enough it was the *Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy*, but that was only our *trial round*. The Year of Mercy is something we can still propagate because of the grace that is available for us to share. The New Year isn't about fulfilling our own resolutions, but helping others reach their goals as well. So let's take those *mercy steps* forward with us: learning to forgive quicker, absorbing more patience, being slow to anger- all while reflecting on God's mercy towards ourselves these past years.



Go forth with your *messenger attitudes* into the New Year, aspire to become like the unrelenting Blessed Handmaid when future goals seem too lofty, the unabashed St John the Baptist in desert-like adversity, and adopt the open-mindedness of the prophets towards the Word. Count your blessings later. Keep trusting the Lord as you walk along for now.

Happy New Year!



SALESIAN SAINTS

ALBERTO MARVELLI 1918 - 1946

Born in Ferrara on March 21, 1918, Alberto was the second of six boys. They grew up in a family steeped in the Faith and who combined catechetical activity, social commitments with piety and works of charity.

The family moved to Rimini in 1930 where the young Alberto frequented the Salesian Oratory and immersed himself in the Catholic Action after the example of Dominic Savio. As he matured in the Faith he made a decisive choice: "My programme consists of one word: 'saint.'" He prayed fervently, taught Catechism with conviction and his deportment manifested zeal, charity and serenity. He was athletic and loved all kinds of sports: tennis, volleyball, athletics, football, swimming and hiking in the mountains. But his one great passion was cycling. It even became his favourite means of carrying out his apostolic activities.

He pursued his cultural formation at the university and his spiritual formation at FUCI. He took as his model Piergiorgio Frassati. After graduating in Mechanical Engineering on June 30, 1941 he should have joined the military. Italy was at war; a war that Alberto vehemently condemned: "May peace be restored immediately with justice for all peoples,



and war disappear from this world forever." He was turned down because three of his brothers were at the front. He worked briefly at FIAT in Turin.

After the tragic events of July 25 1943, and the consequent German occupation of Italy, Alberto returned to Rimini. He knew what his task was: he would become a volunteer. After each bombardment he was the first to rush to the aid of the injured; he encouraged them, assisted the dying, and sought and rescued those who had been buried beneath the rubble. He assisted those who had lost everything; he even fed the hungry. To the poor he distributed all that he could collect: mattresses, blankets and cooking utensils. He then went around to farmers and shopkeepers and bought all kinds of food and after loading them on his bike he went to where he knew there was hunger and disease.

Sometimes he came home without his shoes, or even his bicycle which he had given to someone who needed it more than he did. During the German occupation he rescued men and women by courageously opening the railway wagons at Santarcangelo station that were already sealed and ready for departure and destined for the concentration camps.

After the liberation of the city, September 23 1945 he entrusted him with the most difficult commission, that of housing which often caused inevitable resentment. After this he was entrusted with the task of reconstruction, as a collaborator in the department of Civil Engineers.

On a little notepad Alberto wrote: "It is better to serve than to be served. Jesus served." This lay Christian grew up at the Salesian Oratory of Rimini, expressing his Christian faith particularly through his political and social commitments as understood in serving the common good: "With the Lord's help I desire and propose to always be an example to my companions and to defend my faith on every occasion without fearing human respect but turning my mind always to the greater glory of God." It was with this spirit of service that Alberto approached his civic commitments.

In Rimini he enlisted himself in the Christian Democratic Party. He felt and lived his political commitment as an organized community: political activity could and should become the highest expression of one's lived faith.

At that time, the bishop asked him to lead the Catholic Graduates. His commitment could be

summed up in two words: culture and charity. "We must bring culture not only to the intellectuals but to all the people." Thus he gave birth to a popular university. He opened a soup kitchen for the poor. He invited them to Mass and prayed with them; after that there was a refreshing bowl of soup and he listened to their needs. He tirelessly worked for anyone in need and was one of the founders of ACLI, a cooperative of construction workers, "the first 'white' cooperative in 'red' Romagna."

His intimacy with the Eucharistic Lord never became an occasion for turning in on himself, alienating himself from his commitments and his life. Instead, when he sensed that the world around him was steeped in injustice and sin, the Eucharist became for him a power to strengthen him to undertake a redemptive and liberating role capable of renewing the face of the earth.

On the evening of October 5 1946 he was on his way by cycle to an election rally. He was also one of the candidates at the first municipal council. At 8.30 a military truck hit him. He died at the young age of 28. For a few hours he regained consciousness. Mother Mary was near him in his pain. News of his death spread throughout Italy. Alberto Marvelli stands out as one of the authentic forerunners of the Second Vatican Council with regard to the Christian commitment of the laity in the Christian animation of society. He was, as Don Bosco willed, a good Christian and an honest citizen committed to the Church and the society with a Salesian heart. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. MARAVILLAS OF JESUS (DECEMBER 11)

With contributions from Abbye Saint-Joseph de Clairval

On May 10, 1998, Pope Saint John Paul II beatified Mother Maravillas of Jesus, a Carmelite who died in 1974 and who "lived motivated by a heroic faith, in response to an austere vocation, placing God in the centre of her existence..." (*Homily of the beatification*).

Maravillas was born in Madrid on November 4, 1891. Her mother, remarkable for her charity, prudence and lively intelligence, had a great devotion to Our Lady "de las Maravillas" (of Marvels), Patroness of Cehegin (in the south of Spain), from which the family originated. Her father, the Marquis of Pidal, was the Spanish ambassador of the Holy See. A fervent Christian and profoundly humble, he placed in the service of religion and the homeland the great moral and intellectual qualities which God had given him.

Maravillas heard with pleasure the lives of the saints that her maternal grandmother would tell

her. Nevertheless, the child was not perfect, and she received compliments with pleasure. "One day," she said, "I found myself with several individuals whose judgment I greatly esteemed, and whom I knew to be in my favour in every way; in leaving them, I delighted in these thoughts when I distinctly heard within myself, 'And as for me, I am considered a fool.' These words (of Jesus) made such an impression on me that from then on, all these vain desires changed very quickly into the ones I have had since then: to be despised."

On December 19, 1913, the Marquis de Pidal left this world



for eternity, followed soon thereafter by Maravillas' grandmother. Maravillas was her mother's sole remaining moral support. But the young woman burned with the desire to enter Carmel. When would this be possible? One day in 1918, during a walk, her mother suddenly asked her, "Listen, Maravillas, are you still thinking about the same thing?" After a pause, she insisted, "If you don't answer me now, don't count on my having the courage to talk about it again!" It was thus that, on October 12, 1919, Maravillas entered the Carmel of the Escorial, close to Madrid.

From enthusiasm to surrender

Also in the year 1919, on the Hill of Angels, in the geographic centre of Spain, fourteen miles from Madrid, King Alphonsus XIII unveiled a monumental statue of the Sacred Heart, King and Divine Protector of the Spanish people. The crowds and the people's piety were impressive but it was soon abandoned becoming overrun by weeds.

Shortly after her novitiate, Sister Maravillas heard the appeals of the Lord who urged her to found a Carmel on the Hill of Angels. "In this place, I want you and the other souls chosen by my Heart to build a house in which I will take my delight. My Heart needs to be consoled. I want this Carmel to be the balm that dresses the wounds opened in me by sinners. Spain will be saved by prayer." Sister Maravillas confided in Mother Josefa, the foundress of the Carmel of the Escorial. The project was approved, which the Bishop of Madrid likewise welcomed with great interest. On May 19, 1924, the first

four Sisters destined for the foundation moved into a small house in Getafe, very close to the Hill, while waiting for the new monastery to be built. She was named Superior. She who desired to be the last would remain Superior for 48 years; additionally received the duty of novice mistress.

A strange question

On October 26, 1926, she moved with her Sisters into the convent on the Hill, near the Monument of the Sacred Heart. In 1931 began the social agitation which would end in civil war – convents and churches in Madrid were burned. Despite the dangers, the community serenely proceeded with its life, intensifying its prayer and increasing its sacrifices. "When they ask me if we are concerned, if we are afraid, it seems to me terribly strange!" wrote Mother Maravillas. "I think that anything that can happen to us is of so little importance and that only the Glory of God is important... Seeing so many offenses against God penetrates me to the deepest part of my soul; then lights up in the depths of myself like a silent love, in the darkness, but so strong that it sometimes seems irresistible."

On May 1, 1936, an armed band tried to attack the monastery by climbing the walls. Mother suggested to her daughters return to the shelter of their families. All of them, however, remained without hesitation at me monastery, thereby risking martyrdom.

Coaxed by gentleness

Soon it was necessary to evacuate Madrid. Mother arranged, not without trouble, for the

Carmelites not to be separated. They crossed into France and arrived in Lourdes on September 16, 1937. Exhausted but burning with love for Jesus and Mary, they remained there twenty-four hours before returning to Spain. The Sisters were, however, astonished by the attitude of Father Florencio, the community's confessor. Full of gentleness and condescending towards everyone, he was severe towards Mother, and sometimes even openly disagreeable. The reason for this conduct would be made apparent after Mother's death, by letters and examinations of conscience which Father Florencio had kept like a treasure. Thirsting to suffer for Jesus, to participate in His Passion and in the painful humiliations that He endured for our salvation, Mother wrote to her confessor: *"I am writing to you to-day to ask you with all my soul, for the love of God, to make use of the greatest possible severity towards me, that you never give me what I would like, that you despise me in front of the Sisters and that in their absence, you give me what is bitterest... I have a burning thirst for this!"*

In 1939, the civil war having ended, the Sisters returned to the Hill of Angels. From 1961 on Mother Maravillas of Jesus regularly lived hidden in the convent in La Aldehuela. Her many works had worn her down and, on November 7, 1962, she suffered a first heart attack. She recovered from it, but her body remained weakened. Paradoxically, in the degree that her physical strength diminished, her activity in the service of her neighbour seemed to become more intense. Seated at her work

table, or in the parlour, to everyone she gave freely of herself. She helped many Carmels for men and women, encouraged seminarians' vocations, brought about the building of high schools, and supported efforts to assist a poor neighbourhood; shortly before her death, she offered what was needed to build a clinic to receive sick contemplative religious, and grouped her monasteries into an association to offer each other mutual spiritual and material assistance.

Overflowing life

It is as if the works of Mother Maravillas were the outpouring of her interior life; they burst forth from her intimacy with God, from her abandonment to His will. In her usual recollectedness, she dealt with God in private, and love from her pure heart interceded efficaciously before Him. On October 27, 1972, another heart attack overcame Mother Maravillas. Thanks to the care of her daughters and devoted physicians, she lived until 1974, retaining the mental clarity to guide, advise and maintain herself in prayer. As in her entire life, as in her words, in her gentle yet penetrating manner of action, her final moments on earth were of extreme simplicity, and she peacefully fell asleep in the Lord on December 11, 1974.

Blessed Mother Maravillas loved to say, "The only thing we must do is allow ourselves to be led by the most loving Providence of God... You will see how everything works out; have great confidence in the Lord. "This is the grace we ask of Saint Joseph for you all. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

No escaping payment

A tall, gaunt-looking person recently entered a hotel in a town where several fires had occurred and applied for a room at a price which entitled him to lodging on the top floor of the house. Among his belongings the proprietor noticed a coil of rope, and asked what it was for.

"That's a fire escape," said the man. "I carry one with me so I can let myself down from the window without troubling anyone."

"Good plan," said the landlord, "but guests with fire escapes pay in advance at this hotel."

A foreign tongue

The British Ambassador walked briskly into the foyer of a magnificent Washington Hotel, and stopped for a moment to speak with one of the hotel attendants in the lobby. After he walked on, an assistant manager who had noted the incident, went over to the attendant and said, "What did the Ambassador want?" "I don't know," answered the attendant. "He couldn't speak English."

Never refused

"At last," said the novelist, "I have written something that will be accepted by any magazine." "What is it?" asked a friend. "A cheque for a year's subscription."

Everybody knows

A struggling author called on a publisher to inquire about a manuscript he had submitted. "This is quite well written,"

admitted the publisher, "but my firm only publishes work by writers with well-known names." "Splendid!" shouted the caller in great excitement. "My name's Smith!"

Not enough space

Soprano: "Did you notice how my voice filled the hall last night?"

Contralto: "Yes, dear; in fact, I noticed several people leaving the room for it."

Couldn't bear it

"Madam, I'm the piano tuner."

"But I didn't send for a piano tuner."

"I know it, lady; the neighbours did."

Due for a raise

"And what," asked the chief of the Cannibal Islands, in his kind tones, "was your business before you were captured by my men?"

"I was a newspaper man," answered the captive.

"An editor?"

"No, merely a sub-editor."

"Cheer up young man! Promotion awaits you. After dinner you shall be editor-in-chief."

All in the job

Editor: "You wish a position as a proof reader."

Applicant: "Yes, sir."

Editor: "Do you understand the requirements of that responsible position?"

Applicant: "Perfectly, sir. Whenever you make any mistakes in the paper, just blame 'em on me, and I'll never say a word." □



DYNAMICS OF RELATIONSHIPS

Ian Pinto, *sdb*

The concept of living together dates back to the earliest times when man was just beginning to evolve from his primitive and instinct-driven life. Gradually over time rituals and customs were attached and it became institutionalized as marriage. The difference between the new institution, marriage, and the previous kind of relationship was that the former involves commitment from the partners to each other besides other socially constructed rules and customs.

Joseph's Dilemma

Joseph and Mary were betrothed to one another. In Jewish culture, betrothal was almost like marriage. The man and woman were considered husband and wife although they didn't live with one another and were not officially declared married by ritual. However, betrothal was the first stage of marriage. Breaking it off implied that something was drastically wrong and it cast a slur on the couple, particularly the woman. A false accusation could destroy a woman's life and hope of

being married. Jewish women, because of socio-cultural reasons, found their identity only in relation to a man. Thus, when they were young their identity came from their relationship with their father. After marriage, it came from relations with their husband. Spinsters were rare and were obviously looked down upon because of their lack of identity! Widows shared a similar plight. A disgraced woman has lost her identity even if she shares a filial relationship with her father or a spousal relationship with her husband. She is ostracized and is perhaps, depending on the gravity of the sin, even stoned to death.

Against this background, it becomes evident why Joseph, who was an upright man, sought to quietly divorce Mary, who was found pregnant before they came to live together. Adultery was condemned by Jewish law. Yahweh had decreed on Mt. Sinai, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14). The penalty for adultery was death by stoning (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22) Joseph's conse-

quence didn't allow him to expose Mary's disgrace. He was no doubt a respecter of life. But he was caught in a difficult and delicate situation.

Divine Intervention

Joseph's predicament was understandable. Mary had committed herself to him and yet she was found pregnant. The evidence shows that she has been unfaithful to that commitment. Joseph's decision to divorce her quietly was justifiable under the circumstances and in fact, it was a gracious thing to do. By doing so, he could have freed himself from the burden of an unfaithful wife, care of an illegitimate child and the disgrace, should news of this affair come out in public.

As he ponders over his future plan, the angel of the Lord gives him a double surprise. The first surprise is the extraordinary visitation and the second is the revelation of God's Will and command to accept Mary as his wife. This divine intervention is a turning point in the life of Joseph and in the larger saga of Jesus. Prior to the intervention, his focus was *himself* and how *he* could solve *his* dilemma. But thereafter, his perspective and behaviour changed: From thinking of getting rid of Mary to embracing her; from breaking the betrothal for the sake of honour to renewing the commitment despite the difficulties and ambiguities.

A Reversed Dynamic

Joseph and Mary's relationship can become a lesson for us. We face numerous difficulties and dilemmas with regard to a number of things: family, work, relationships and so on. How do we res-

pond or deal with them? Do we look only for our own comfort, pleasure and security, or do we also take the other person/s into consideration? Joseph was a righteous man and sought a solution that would protect his dignity and, at least for a while, save Mary from a critical situation. Divorcing her would result in his not being a part of the impending condemnation and punishment of Mary, for her ignoble condition.

It was divine intervention that gave a twist to things. God's plan of salvation was in effect but He needed human cooperation to see it through. Whenever we are faced with dilemmas, let us first ask ourselves whether God is trying to tell us something. We must try and find out his plan for us through prayer and the guidance of a spiritual director. We will not always find God's will revealed to us clearly but in faith, we must take the step that He inspires us to.

In every relationship, we are sooner or later going to encounter dilemmas and problems. Packing our bags and fleeing may seem a good option but the story of Joseph and Mary shows us another way. Not every difficult relationship must end in separation. If God is brought into the picture, things are more likely to change. □



A GRANDMOTHER'S LESSON

On the morning of December 14, 2015, the Holy Father celebrated Mass in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae. The following is the edited English text of the Pope's homily which was delivered in Italian.

God forgives everything; otherwise the world would not exist." these words, spoken by an elderly Portuguese woman to Jorge Bergoglio in 1992, provide a real "lesson" at the beginning of the Holy Year of Mercy. Warning against falling into "clerical rigidity", the Pope suggested instead choosing without hesitation the road of hope and mercy that makes us "free." At Mass on Monday morning in the Chapel of Santa Marta, Pope Francis again recommended letting your "eyes be opened", so as to go beyond in order to see and to speak the truth.

"In the First Reading", the Pope noted immediately, "we heard a passage from the Book of Numbers" (24:2-7, 15-17) about the "story of Balaam: he was a prophet, but he was also a man, who had defects. He too sinned." Francis remarked that "we all have sins, everyone, we are all sinners." But "do not be afraid," he reassured, "God is greater than our sins." The Pope explained that Balaam "is 'hired out' to a certain Balak, a general and king, who wants to destroy the people of God," and who sends Balaam "to prophesy against the people of God." However, "on the journey, Balaam meets the angel of the Lord and his heart is changed, he sees the truth". Nevertheless, "he does not change parties: today I belong to this political party and then go over to this other one. He changes from error to truth and tells what he sees."

"It is beautiful," Pope Francis added, "the way the Book of Numbers tells this story: The oracle of Balaam, the oracle of the man whose eyes are opened." In fact, the Pope explained, "when his heart is changed he converts, his eyes are opened and he sees afar, he sees the truth, with an open heart, with the heart — with good will you always see the truth — and he speaks the truth."

"It is a truth that gives hope, because he has the desert before him, the desert is right in front of him, and he sees the tribes of Israel: 'How fair are your tents, your encampments, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the Lord has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters.'" Thus, "beyond the desert he sees fruitfulness, beauty and victory."

But "what has happened in Balaam's heart?" The fact, Pope Francis said, is that "he opened his heart and the Lord gave him the virtue of hope." And "hope is that Christian virtue that we have as a great gift from God that lets us see far beyond, beyond the problems, beyond the pain and difficulties, beyond our sins." It shows us "the beauty of God."

"Hope", therefore, is the key word, he said. And "when I am with a person who has the virtue of hope and is in a difficult moment in his life — be it a disease, concern for a son or daughter or someone in the family, or anything. But he has this virtue, in the midst of pain his eyes

have been opened. He has the freedom to see beyond, always beyond." This is precisely "the hope, the prophecy that the Church gives us today: she needs men and women of hope, even in the midst of problems." Because "hope opens horizons, hope is freeing, it does not enslave and it always finds a way to set a situation straight".

In the passage from the Gospel of Matthew (21:23-27) from the day's Liturgy, the Pope continued, "we see instead men who do not have this freedom, who have no horizons, men who are closed in their calculations." Such that the chief priests and elders of the people ask the Lord: "By what authority are you doing these things?" When Jesus poses his next question, they make their calculations. "If I say this I have this danger, and if I say that...". Then they answer "we do not know." However, the Pope remarked, "human calculations close the heart, they block freedom". It is "hope" that "lightens" our load. Therefore, it is "this hypocrisy of the doctors of the law that we see in the Gospel, which closes the heart: it enslaves us. These men were slaves."

"In this Year of Mercy," the Pope said, "there are these two paths." On one side there are "those who have hope in the mercy of God and know that God is Father," that "God always forgives," and that he forgives "everything." That "beyond the desert there is the embrace of the Father, forgiveness." However, on the other hand "there are also those who take refuge in slavery, in its very rigidity, and they know nothing of God's mercy." The doctors mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew "had studied, but their knowledge did not save them".

"I would like to conclude," the Pope said, "with a story that happened to me in 1992. An image of Our Lady of Fatima had arrived in the diocese. In a large mass for the sick — it was immense, held in a big field, with so many people — I went to confess there. I heard confessions from noon until almost six, when Mass had ended. There were many confessors." Right "when I got up to go to celebrate a confirmation elsewhere", Pope Francis said, "I was approached by an elderly woman; she was 80 years old, with eyes that saw beyond, eyes full of hope". And "I said to her: 'Grandma, have you come to confess? But you have no sins!'". The woman responded: "Father, we all have sins!". Fr Bergoglio continued the conversation: "Will the Lord, perhaps, not forgive them?". The woman, strong in her hope, said: "God forgives everything, because if God did not forgive everything, the world would not exist".

In considering "these two types of people" — those who are "free" in their "hope, that which brings you the mercy of God"; and those who are "closed, the legalistic, the truly selfish, slaves to their rigidity" — Pope Francis recommended we take the lesson he received from the elderly Portuguese woman: "God forgives everything, he is only waiting for you to draw close to him." □

BAA BAA BLACK SHEEP

From Fr. Ian Doultan's collection of stories

This is the story of Ensign Robert Baker...who found more than his voice when he talked to a statue! This is how he narrates it.

One foggy morning I walked into this Navy hospital which could have been one of the most attractive beach resorts on the West Coast. After three months of clinics, throat doctors, electro-therapy, massage, I'm giving the medics a last chance... it's not much of a chance because I can't talk and I know I never will. I'll never be able to speak a word or be a lawyer. I'll go back to Scarsdale and marry Anne Marie. Looking out of the parking lot I can see a lot of deep blue Pacific where a man can lose himself after he's lost everything else.

I entered the facility and at the desk I take out my pad of paper and my pen. I wrote: "*Ensign Robert Baker - I lost my voice in a plane accident.*" I handed the slip to the duty-orderly. He blinked at it: "Oh, dummy eh? What did they send you here for? The only space we've got is a room with a lieutenant who's batty, but he's harmless. Would you mind bunkin' with him till we get you a room?" "*PUT ME ANY-PLACE.*"

The orderly was pleased that I was resigned to any place so he took me to the room. On the way he warned me: "Only thing is, this guy's a holy Joe." When we reached there he told me I had the bed by the window and then he pointed out to a little statue of a nun. "It belongs to the holy

Joe. He calls it his little sister...the Little Flower...I think it is... Take my advice, don't kid him about it."

We were going to be fine pair of room-mates: a dummy and a nut! And the nut's a padre! I looked at that statue again and I felt kind of... embarrassed. I felt I was buttin' in where I didn't belong. While I was unpacking this 'Joe' came in. When I saw him I got a real shock. He was bigger than me. I'm six feet one... he must weigh close to two hundred. He was not handsome, but he was friendly anyway. He came over to me smiling: "Hello, what're you doing here?" I wrote him a note. He read what I wrote: "*Ensign Robert Baker, I'm your roommate, lost my voice in a plane accident.*" He seemed kind, almost apologetic: "Ensign, I'm really glad to meet you. My name is Joe, it isn't really Joe, it's Father Tom, but everyone here calls me Joe. I'll introduce you to my little sister..." Then he turned to the little statue by his bed: "Sister Teresa, this is Ensign Robert Baker. I'm going to call him Bob. He lost his voice in a plane accident...Then he bowed his head and after a while he looked up and smiled: "Bob, it's alright, she says, it's alright. I'll pray that she'll drop a rose petal from heaven for your voice. If she sends you a rose petal, you'll be cured no matter what's wrong with you."

Suddenly there was the sound of the bell. I felt rescued, 'saved by the bell,' as they say. It was the

mess call. I can't say anything to anybody and that's lucky for me because I catch on fast. I realize that the fellows don't let anybody crack wise about Joe. The first Sunday I was there, a Navy bus pulled up at the front door and a shipload jumped overboard. They grabbed Joe, he hauled me along. We wound up taking over half the beach, while Joe refereed boxing matches, pitched soft ball and generally ran the show, one of the enlisted men set me straight about him: "Joe was chaplain on our cruiser, the time when we headed one of the first Guadalcanal attacks. We took a couple of direct hits; Joe worked on the deck all day and straight through the night, sorting out bodies, helping fellows die, carting our wounded below....then a hit exploded right above him and threw him fifty feet. He's been like this ever since. NP the medics call it: Neuro-psychosis, something there's no medicine to cure. All I know is that every time our cruiser hits San Francisco, the boys charter a bus and beat it down here to see Joe. He may be NP with the medics, but he's OK with us."

When the bus finally rolled away, Joe was dragged out. When he got back to the room he didn't talk to the statue, he just knelt in front of it. I guessed he knew he didn't have all his buttons but I felt sorry for him. Yeah, but I've got troubles of my own; I can't even talk to a statue!

The next morning I had further troubles. Joe finished a long low conversation with his "little

sister" and then he jumped at me! "Bob, she says I should teach you to talk... she says I should teach you...you're going to learn for sure. That's great isn't it?" He was so excited but I had to convince him that I couldn't talk and never would but Joe was adamant. "Bob that isn't right; my sister told me to teach you. Let's start now!" I was not going to let him push me around. I got up and left the room in a huff. I had to get away from him. How barmy can you get? I spent three months making funny noises in the best clinics in the country and a batty padre was going to teach me to talk in one easy lesson!"

The next morning it was my turn to go on guard duty which meant following the padre all round all day to see that he didn't get hurt if he strayed off the property. He got up at six and dressed up in his civvies. I trailed out of the hospital after him, into the fog. He headed straight down the avenue to a church; it was one of those old California missions. He rang the front door bell, and a big padre with a red face opened the door.

Joe greeted the priest respectfully: "Good morning monsignor..." He seemed to plead for something. The priest shook his round red face: "No, son! I told you that the day almighty God allowed you to say Mass again, I'll be shouting it from the housetop. Come on in lad, I've a pot of coffee on the stove waiting..." Then looking over Joe's shoulder he saw me and called to me too: "Oh, you come in too boy..." Joe introduced me to the monsignor: "This

is Bob, he can't talk, but my little sister and I are going to teach him." Joe headed to the kitchen as the monsignor whispered to me: "Bob it's a shame, a fine lad like you." Then speaking about Joe he added: "He comes here every morning at the same time, at seven, hoping to say Mass. And every morning I have to tell him the same thing."

Well, I remember how my grandmother used to say that the best cure for your misery is to try and help someone else out of theirs. So the next morning, Joe and I start our lessons. I know it won't work, but I do it to please Joe. I like the guy. I sprawl on the easy chair; he sits on the floor..." He was all eager and rearing to go. "Bob... we'll learn the way babies do. A baby couldn't say Massachusetts. So we'll start with baby words. I'll say them first and then you try. Mamma, Mamma..." and there we got started. He seemed pleased with my progress. "You can say mamma and dada just fine Bob and we've only been working three weeks. Now let's take a hard one...baa, baa black sheep..." and so on we went. I got stuck so long on that one that when I finally get it we use it as a kind of a password. Baa... baa...black sheep, it meant good morning, good night... anything you wanted it to mean. The next word we tackle is please...

One morning I was in my easy chair, Joe is on the floor... his long legs stretched out. "Take it again Bob... P-lease.... p... lease..." and I tried to repeat: "...lease...lease..."

"As we were at it, there was a

sound at the door and it opened: "Lieutenant Martin and Ensign Baker...this is Captain Stewart from Washington. He is inspecting hospital facilities. Lieutenant Joe, stand up please." Captain Stewart realised that this was the NP case. Commander Wilson added: "But he's absolutely harmless and he does something for the morale here." Captain Stewart was not pleased. He said it was entirely contrary to regulations. As if he hadn't heard anything Joe turned to the Captain and said: "Have you ever met my little sister? Sister Teresa, these are Navy men. We must pray for them. We must ask a rose petal for them..."

Captain Stewart went on: "Commander...we have mental institutions where this man can receive treatment." Commander Wilson pleaded that if Joe were taken from this facility it would cause him tremendous harm. And not only him, but everyone else. He makes the boys forget their own troubles. Then he added: "Won't you let him stay here doing his job, saying his prayers?" Captain Stewart was determined: "I don't think that's possible commander."

I tried to butt in: "P-lease..." I muttered. Commander Wilson introduced me and told the Captain that that was one of the half dozen words that Joe had taught me. He added: "The padre spends four to five hours a day teaching him to talk. What the ensign wants to say is that he'll take care of Joe...watch him like a hawk." Captain Stewart turned to go and simply mentioned that he would let them have his

decision the following day.

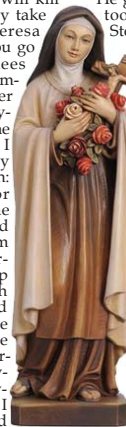
I knew what that word's going to be. That night I couldn't sleep. I lay there listening to Joe's deep breathing. I looked over at the statue and all of a sudden I got up. I went over and plunked down on my knees in front of Joe's little sister. I tried to pray but all I could think of was: *now I lay me down to sleep...* Then my knees began to hurt so I got up and sat in the easy chair. I kept staring at the statue and then Joe's little sister seemed to get bigger and bigger or maybe I was getting smaller and smaller. She talked to me. Her voice was sweet and soothing:

"Good evening, ensign? You can speak without your voice and I can hear you very well." I pleaded with her: "It will kill him, little sister, if they take him away." Sister Teresa went on: "Why did you go down on your knees tonight?" I was a bit embarrassed and told her that I had seen Joe praying for everyone in the hospital and so I thought I should pray for him. But she went on: "He has prayed for you." I knew that. She went on: "And I listened to both prayers. From our Father I have permission to give his help to one of you. Which one should it be?" I told her that it was easy she should help Joe. She reminded me: "You forget, ensign, he has prayed for you. Is your prayer better than his?" I was a bit embarrassed

and con-fused. Then with a sweet smile she added: "I'm sorry, I will cure you my friend and you will help my brother." Then she gradually faded away as I struggled to keep her talking with me. Sitting straight up in an easy chair, I was talking to a little statue! 'I'm talking...mamma, mamma... baa... baa ...black sheep... now I lay me... Roger!'

I rushed out the door as quietly as I could and ran to Commander Wilson's office. He was still there and I burst in: "Commander Wilson...?" I shouted. He stood up: "Ensign, you're talking!" He shook his head vigorously as if he understood: "Joe and his little sister?" and I added, thrilled at hearing my own voice: "Yes sir, Joe and his little sister."

He grabbed me by the arm and took me straight to Captain Stewart.



A week later, I was given thirty days leave before I returned to active duty. It was not much leave, but it would do. I could get up to Scarsdale and to Anne Marie. The last morning at the hospital before I left to catch the six thirty bus, I took a final look out of the window. I saw Joe walking down the avenue in the fog. He would remain attached to the hospital as long as he wanted to stay. A sleepy ensign was trailing after him. Joe was on his way to the church to ask monsignor... something got in my eyes...and it wasn't fog. □

DON BOSCO'S MIRACLES

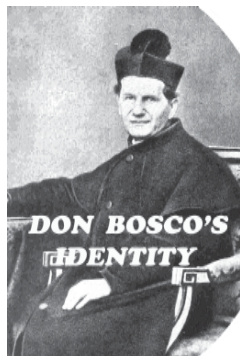
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by Fr. Elias Dias

In the lives of saints and sages we can see the power of wonders and miracles. Don Bosco was not an exception in this regard. In his life we see the gift of miracles in order to fulfil his mission. Some of these miracles were recorded by his followers and they are mentioned only to consider their effects on his mission for the poor and the downtrodden.

On 16 August, 2011, the birth anniversary of Don Bosco, Larisuk Khongsit was baptized as Larisa Mary Khongsit. The baptism ceremony took place at the Shrine of St. John Bosco, Cherrapunjee, India, where during the visit of the relic of Don Bosco, this bedridden girl had a miraculous healing after praying to Don Bosco. Twenty-three young people and children from families that have been drawn to the faith through the healing of the 11-year-old child also received baptism, at a ceremony presided over by Archbishop Dominic Jala SDB, of the Archdiocese of Shillong.

It was on 19 June, when the relic of Don Bosco was in Sohra that she persuaded her mother to take her to the prayer session for healing being held on the grounds of the Parish. She said a simple prayer: "Don Bosco please give me healing; I want to go to school again." Two days later alone in her hut, she suddenly felt the urge to get up and walk



and went to fetch her mother who was washing clothes at a nearby stream. Since then the foul smelling puss stopped coming out of the wounds and the rotting flesh slowly came off leaving place for new flesh. On 17 July, a piece of bone just dropped out of the little opening that was a large wound on her leg. Larisa keeps in mind all these important dates. She, and the entire community, really has reason to rejoice.

Don Bosco's entire life may be considered as one great miracle. Bishop Cagliero who daily witnessed so many extraordinary happenings says, "As for me, the greatest miracle of Don Bosco was his successful struggle of some fifty years to steer his course through a stormy sea amid endless shoals and...which threatened to submerge the fes-

sive oratories and the Congregation of St Francis de Sales.

The miracle of the multiplication of Hosts recorded by Joseph Buzzetti is one of the first miracles in the Valdocco oratory.

About six hundred boys had gone for confession and wanted to receive Holy Communion. Don Bosco started the Mass convinced that the *ciborium* inside the tabernacle was full of consecrated Hosts. Actually, however, it was almost empty. Joseph Buzzetti the sacristan had forgotten to put a full *ciborium* on the altar before the Consecration. He realized his oversight only after the elevation. As Don Bosco began giving Holy Communion, he was distressed by the small number of the Hosts for such a large crowd. Saddened at the thought that many boys would be unable to receive Our Lord into their hearts, he raised his eyes into heaven and then went on distributing Holy Communion. Without breaking the hosts Don Bosco gave Communion to all the boys. Joseph Buzzetti often spoke of this happening to his friends.

Don Bosco himself confirmed this fact on October 18, 1863. As he was talking with a few clerics, he was asked about Buzzetti's story; whereupon a grave expression came over his face. After a long pause he answered "Yes there were very few Hosts in the *ciborium*, yet I was able to give communion to all who came and they were by no means few." Upon being asked how he felt this happened, he said: "I was deeply moved, but undisturbed; I was thinking to myself

that the miracle of Consecration is even greater than that of multiplication. May the Lord be praised for everything." And then he changed the subject.

It was on Sunday after All Saints Day in 1849 at the close of the Exercise of Happy Death, Don Bosco took his boys to the cemetery to pray for the departed souls. He promised them chestnuts on their return to Valdocco. Mamma Margaret had bought three bags, but she cooked only a small amount, thinking it would be enough. Joseph Buzzetti came home ahead of the other boys. When he went into kitchen and saw the small pot, he immediately told Mamma Margaret that one would never be enough for all the boys, but it was too late to do anything about it. The other boys were already milling around the chapel door. Don Bosco set himself there and began to dole out the chestnuts, filling every boy's cap quite generously. Buzzetti became worried and told Don Bosco not to give so much for the boys. Don Bosco did not pay heed to his words and went on distributing. The nearest boys noticed that the basket was almost empty. An anxious silence followed. Thinking that his mother had economically put aside the rest of cooked chestnuts, Don Bosco ran upstairs to fetch them, only to find to his surprise that they had not been cooked.

For an instant Don Bosco was at a loss. Then, undismayed, he said "I promised the boys chestnuts and I have to keep my word!" When finally Buzzetti brought the basket back into the

kitchen he noticed that there was still a portion left.

When the last boy had received his share, a loud shout broke out in unison "Don Bosco is a saint!"

Don Bosco often cured boys of small ailments who flocked to him and asked them to do a special act of piety in honour of Our Blessed Virgin Mary. The Oratory boys also received such blessed relief. Charles Gastini told us the following story several times. One Sunday he was suffering from a severe toothache and flung himself into bed, Don Bosco said to him: "What's ailing you Gastini?" Then he placed his hands on the lad's head and drew it close to his chest. The pain disappeared as if by magic. This was not the only incident of this kind during this period.

A very extraordinary event took place in 1849. A fifteen-year-old boy named Charles who attended the Festive Oratory of Don Bosco, fell seriously ill and in a short time was at death's door. Don Bosco was not at home. The boy was dead, but repeatedly he had been asking for Don Bosco.

As soon as Don Bosco returned, he drew near the bed, thinking "Who knows whether his last confession was a good one?" Don Bosco recited a short prayer, blessed the dead boy and called to him twice in a tone of command "Charles, Charles, get up!" Charles opened his eyes as though awakening from a deep slumber, looked bewilderedly about him then set up and asked "Where am I?" Finally his gaze fell on Don Bosco. "Oh! Don Bosco, he exclaimed "If only you

knew I wanted so much to see you! I sent for you so many times... I need you very badly. I am glad you woke me up! "So am I Charles" replied Don Bosco "Now tell me everything you want to say I came just for that"

This incident may have not caused a stir in the city nevertheless, the word got around among the boys' companions and for many years this event was accepted in the oratory as an undisputed fact.

Generous souls never tired of coming to Don Bosco for assistance. On December 16, 1866, Don Bosco had to meet a payroll of four thousand lire. In the afternoon Don Bosco himself went out to beg. To his surprise, a liveried servant came up to him and told him that a benefactor could help him to build the new Church. Don Bosco went with him and met a lady who in tears told him that they were waiting for him. She wanted a grace from our Lady for the cure of her husband who was suffering from serious dropsy and there was no hope of cure. Don Bosco told him of his great need of 3000 lire. He did not have so much money. He told him he could go to the bank but it was not possible. Don Bosco assured them that everything would be alright. He then ordered them to give him his clothes and the man went and got the needed money for Don Bosco. He said "I am perfectly cured!" In turn, Don Bosco thanked him and exhorted him to be grateful to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christian who alone gave him this extraordinary cure.

Whenever a person was healed with Don Bosco's blessing, he generally gave a generous donation. Don Bosco's reputation for holiness, the people's trust in his influence over the heart of God and their wish to draw God's blessings by works of charity brought him funds he needed to carry out his works.

In 1860, a fifteen-year-old secondary student Francis Dalmazzo of Cavour was studying in the secondary school at Pinerolo. One morning before his departure however, he decided to go to confession once more to Don Bosco. Don Bosco was hearing confessions in the church behind the main altar. The mass was about to end and he was in the line to go for confession. The two kitchen helpers came to Don Bosco and whispered that there was no bread for the boys. Don Bosco advised them to go to the baker; they said he would not give any bread since they had not paid his bills. After some time they returned again to tell him that the mass was about to get over and that there was no bread for the boys. Don Bosco went on hearing confessions.

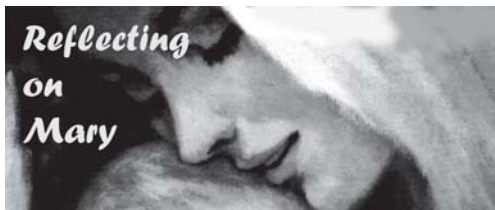
Finally, they came back again and Don Bosco told them to collect everything from the house and put it in a basket and he would soon come to distribute them to the boys. Young Francis Dalmazzo was listening to the whole conversation. He saw about fifteen buns in the basket. The boys kept on filing past and getting their buns from him and kissed his hand as he smiled and said a kind word to each one...

There were over four hundred boys who received the buns. When the distribution was over his mother said to him: "Let's go Frankie." He was wonderstruck and said to his mother "Mom, I have changed my mind I am staying here!" He exclaimed "It is blessed by God, Don Bosco is such a holy man."

With the decree on the heroicity of Don Bosco's virtues the work of the man towards the attainment of Don Bosco's beatification had ended and the work of God just begun. Naturally these miracles had to have been attained after his death and solely through his intercession. The process of the miracles of the beatification took place in Turin from 1924 to 1926.

Although Don Bosco worked many miracles he said, "God has been abundantly generous to me with His goodness. I have never claimed to know or do supernatural things. All I ever did was pray and urged pious souls to ask for graces from our Lord."

Pope Pius XI said "In the Bull of Canonization for St Thomas Aquinas a felicitous expression says that, had there been no other miracle, every article of his remarkable *Summa Theologica* would have constituted a genuine miracle by itself." We too, can say that every year of Don Bosco's life, every undertaking of his mortal life and every moment of his posthumous life, the perpetuation of his undertakings in his sons, the Salesians and his religious family are all part of God's marvellous miracles worked through the intercession of Don Bosco. □



MARY: WOMAN OF CHARITY/2

by Mario Scudù

In those days Mary rose and travelled...

That was how Luke described Mary's visit to Elizabeth. It was a visit between relatives who needed each other, not only for material help but also for spiritual comfort and physical reassurance. The visit, in biblical language *par excellence* is one that God makes to save his people. Zechariah himself in his Canticle praises God "because he has visited his people" (Lk 1, 68). The contemplation of Mary's visit should be viewed in this broader mystery of a God who comes close to his people, walking with them, even visiting them through his prophets and through other signs and portents.

What does the expression "in those days" mean? Those words certainly refer to the days of the Annunciation, to the words of the Angel Gabriel who had said that the Incarnation 'of the Most High' in her womb also had reference to her cousin "Elizabeth who has also conceived" and was now in "her sixth month," and she "who was called barren, because nothing is impossible with God." Pope Saint John Paul II writes in *Redemptoris Mater*

(n. 12): "The reason for her visit is also to be found in the fact that at the Annunciation, Gabriel had made special mention of Elizabeth, who in her old age had conceived a son by her husband Zechariah, through the power of God." Mary remembered that the angel's suggestion made about Elizabeth was uttered when she had "objected" saying "How is this possible? I am a virgin." Then, urged and guided by the Holy Spirit Mary sets out, carrying her child in her womb but sustained by Him, certainly on an impulse of charity and solidarity for Elizabeth, but also to "see," for herself the wonders wrought by the power of God in her cousin who lived far from Nazareth. The visit was not only but also to communicate to her, her own experience; that of a young 15-16 year-old girl, already pregnant, sharing her secret and finding understanding, approval and support. Mary was not moved by anxiety or uncertainty, not by superficial curiosity or the urge to touch before she believed. She went with haste because she believed what the angel had told her. The journey was meant to read the sign

that she was given and so on seeing Elizabeth she understood the "impossible gift" that she was given.

Mary co-operates with the grace of God

Pope Saint John Paul II writes in *Redemptoris Mater* (n. 13): "At the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the "full submission of intellect and will," manifesting "the obedience of faith" to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine "I," and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with "the grace of God that

precedes and assists" and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who "constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts."

Mary possessed within herself an ineffable secret, humanly overwhelming and awesome and she wanted to share it with another woman, not just a relative but someone in a similar predicament. Again Cardinal Martini: "It happens even to us, when we carry oppressive burdens that we're unable to share: problems, the unbearable sufferings that others have told of or that we have seen. So, it should not be so difficult to understand in some way Mary's predicament as she carried this awesome yet overwhelming secret: her virginity, her relationship with Joseph, the new trajectory her life was taking, the mystery that was beginning to unfold and which would be fully revealed only at the cross and the resurrection of her Son. So you see? Now you feel understood, by another person who needs no explanations, who knows her secret and accepts her, assuring her that she did well to trust, as if to say: "Come on, I can understand, don't be afraid, you're on the right track and I myself am going to have a son" (in *Sui sentieri della visitazione*, pg 28).

We're not trying to diminish Mary's human and supernatural greatness or doubting the genuineness of her trust in God's plan, if we assume in her a very human desire to want the reassurance of others concerning her intentions and existential decisions in order to receive some encouragement. This confirmation and support from Elizabeth lets Mary explode in pure praise to God: the Magnificat. ☐



Mary is the "handmaid of the Lord" - that is why she is called Blessed



walking with the Church

Counseling the Stubborn, Scandals & the Media, Icons

From St Martin's Messenger, Ireland

Q. *My Uncle is a bachelor in his late sixties living alone. He is in bad health although he is not housebound. However, he has not attended Mass, gone to Confession or received Holy Communion for over twenty years. He can be very contrary and rude at times so I am reluctant to ask a priest to visit him. I am concerned that if he were to die suddenly without him having a chance to repent for his turning away from God - would he still be considered a Catholic? Could you also give me some advice and tips on how he could be encouraged to return to God - bearing in mind that he is not a very co-operative person.*

A. Thank you for your question. Like your uncle there are many baptised Catholics who, for reasons known only to themselves and God - perhaps a row with a priest or in recent times the scandals in the Church or whatever - do not go to Mass or Communion. It does not mean that they have turned away from God or disowned God. I would venture to say that most, if not all of them, still have faith in God.

Faith is nourished and deepened by our participation in the Mass and the reception of the Sacraments. So the faith of those

who for their own reasons do not go to Mass or receive the Sacraments may be weak and their relationship with Christ (whom we meet in all the Sacraments) not very strong, but that does not mean they have rejected Christ. They have not turned into non-believers, and our hope in a loving God tells us that in His great love for all of us He will find a way to nourish and keep alive their faith and to lead them safely to final union with Him.

It is not always easy to speak to people like your uncle but, should he become housebound, you might ask him if he would like to see a priest. Sometimes it is better to say nothing but rather continue to do our best to live a good Christian life ourselves - giving witness in that way to our own strong belief. Very often silent sincere witness to our faith can influence people far more than hours of conversation. Our sincere prayers are always answered, so keep praying for your uncle entrusting him to God's merciful love.

Q. *Frequently we hear about scandals within the Church. The media is quick to publish the sins and failures of the Church authorities or any of its members*

...When Christ founded the Church, do you think he foresaw the weakness and sinfulness that would almost inevitably be a part of it?

A. Thanks for writing. I feel sure that Christ, being human as well as Divine, understood the frailty and fickleness of his followers. He told Peter he would deny him three times and also foretold that Judas would betray him. So Christ would have foreseen that his followers over the centuries would also deny him through their sins and failures. Indeed it would be extraordinary if there were no scandals and failures within the Church because it is made up of human beings who are weak and prone to sin. Stories of human weakness and failures and resultant scandals run through the whole history of the church. So betrayal and disloyalty was there from the very beginning and it has continued right up to the present day. The people of God who make up the Church are imperfect human beings. It is a Church of saints and sinners.

How does the Church deal with these scandals? In the past the Church authorities tried to hide scandals. We now know that this was wrong. The Church authorities and the Catholics who make up the Church must be honest and admit failures. Admitting failures does not mean that we say that our beliefs are wrong. We believe that Christ founded the Church, a community of believers, and left us a way of living that is the only true way of living for mankind. A way of life based on love of God, who is our maker, and our neighbour

who, like us, is a child of God. Yes we are weak, yes it is a struggle, but we are never alone. Help is always at hand. Christ, who called us to follow him, is at our side as we continue on our return journey to the Father who awaits us.

Q. *What are icons? What exactly is it that sets icons apart from other kinds of Christian art, in terms of artistic style and spiritual meaning?*

A. The Catholic Dictionary describes an icon as being a representation of Our Lord, Our Lady, or a saint painted on a wall, a partition or a wooden panel. The icons of the Eastern churches take the place of statues in the Western Church. An icon is much more than just a painting. An icon aims to teach the faith. The artist who creates the icon spends many hours in prayer and meditation before and during the actual painting of the icon. So it is said that the icon 'is more an image for the eyes of faith than for the eyes of the flesh.' Icons seek to emphasize the holiness of the figures portrayed, rather than their humanity. Indeed, icons seek to exclude anything that does not portray the holiness of the subject.

Sometimes icons are spoken of as "windows into heaven." They are intended to be an invitation and an aid to worship. For that reason, among Eastern Christians icons are venerated, not simply admired or appreciated. They have been spoken of as sermons in colour, as hymns, as prayers. □

NEWSBITS

TURIN

More than thirteen thousand young people to date have been formed through the technical training programme TechPro2 by Chrysler Fiat Automobiles and CNH Industrial with CNOS-FAP - the National Centre for Salesian Works that promotes training and professional development using the educative method of Don Bosco. The young people from the deprived areas of 11 countries spent over 380,000 hours in training and have started more than 5,000 internships and placements through the FCA and CNH Industrial networks. In some countries like India, 100% of the youngsters who complete the training programme immediately enter the working world. In general, the percentage of immediate entry is 40%, others enter during the first three years while 30% continue their studies.

TechPro2 aims to provide young people with more than 50 schools - from Poland to Ethiopia, from Argentina to Italy, from India to Brazil - the knowledge and commercial skills needed to prepare them for future work in the automotive and industrial industry. The project leader is Mopar - the brand of services, Customer



Care, original spare parts and accessories of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles - which in 2008 developed TechPro2 in collaboration with CNOS-FAP. CNH Industrial in 2011 became part of the initiative, introducing a specific programme related to commercial vehicles. CNH Industrial has recently launched a new initiative dedicated to the agricultural sector, which will follow soon with a specialization in FPT Industrial engines. FCA has expanded the offer and in 2016, has set - to collaborate with Abarth - a pilot course that train Racing Team Technicians and in September will start a new course on logistics.

Fr Francesco Cereda, the Vicar of the Rector Major of the Salesians said: "TechPro2 is a programme that gives young people a life project: offering future generations standard growth opportunities and structure, allowing youngsters to live a present and design a future of work, family and dignity." At the Sangalli hall at Valdocco, the Salesian Mother House, during the first International TechPro2 Event, outside the financial statements on the objectives and achievements of TechPro2, eight youngsters from different parts of the world were given awards; among them a South African girl, one of the first youngsters involved in the programme: Olivia Masedi, 25, as a child had expressed a desire to become a mechanic. Now she has a dream to open her own workshop in Johannesburg. (La Stampa)

THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



The devotion of the THREE HAIL MARYS is a very simple yet most efficacious devotion. Everyday, recite Three Hail Marys, adding the invocation: "O Mary, My Mother, keep me from mortal sin." Many people recite the Three Hail Marys as part of their morning and night prayers. To practise this devotion in time of danger, stress, special need or temptation, is a sure means to obtain Our Lady's help.

It was December 2015 that I was faced with a difficult situation to handle alone. I began to pray the 3 Hail Marys and through the intercession of Mary I received help. Thank you dear Mother for your constant help. Keep me and my family under your protection always.

Mrs Imelda Fernandes, Mumbai
Our grateful thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary and all the saints for blessing our son with a good job and for many other favours received. Please continue to bless and protect us always.

F. C. G. Mumbai
Thank you, Lord Jesus and Mama Mary for all the blessings granted to us and our family and for all the prayers you have heard and answered. Thank you for making me pass my Std XII exams with good marks and a good percentage and thank you for all the favours.

A devotee
Thank you Mother Mary Help of Christians for the normal report of my mummy.

Sabrina Coutinho
My most sincere and grateful thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Mother Mary for a very special favour and many other favours received through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys. Mother Mary bless our family and intercede for us always.

L. Lobo, Mumbai
Here is my testimony on the efficacy of the 3 Hail Marys in my life. My dad has always told me that if I find myself in trouble or in stressful situations, to always pray the 3 Hail Marys and everything will be taken care of by our dear Mother (He is a loyal devotee of our Mother). My family, along with brother's family and my parents travelled to Our Lady of Health Shrine in Velankanni on February 11, 2016. My father (a heart patient) wasn't keeping too well during the journey. On the night February 12, his condition worsened and we had to rush him to the hospital. I prayed the 3 Hail Marys to our dear Mother to grant him good health. Thanks to our Mother's intercession, he didn't need to be hospitalised and his condition got better during the night. We were able to pray, make our offerings and travel back home uneventfully. I would also place on record that our dear Mother has been extremely kind and compassionate to me and my family in every step of our lives.

Sheeba Eustachius

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Thank you Holy Spirit and Mother Mary for numerous favours received.

H.W.V. Mumbai
Belated thanks dear Mother Mary for saving me from a serious stroke. I didn't know what was happening to me. I only went on praying almost for 15 to 20 minutes: Jesus help me...Mother Mary help me. Something was moving in my head. It stopped suddenly. I was crying very bitterly. I smiled and said *thank you Jesus*, thank you Mother Mary. I was all alone. I called up my daughter and my friend. They took me to the doctor. I was admitted to the hospital for 10 days. I had lost my balance, because of which I couldn't walk but Jesus and Mother Mary helped me and it was a miracle. Now I can do all my work and say my prayers too.

Angela Pinto, Thane
I am grateful to Our Lady for healing me of the pain of Rheumatoid Arthritis and also the swelling caused by a twisted nerve in my knee and ankle. My son too was suffering from an eye infection. I began a novena to Our Lady of Vailankanni and on the 6th day of the second novena the pain in my leg disappeared and the infection in my son's eye too disappeared. I am cured and I am grateful to Our Lady for her powerful intercession. Thank you mamma Mary for your protection.

Mrs Ellerena Peters, Chennai

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Most Blessed Mother Mary and Don Bosco, I thank you sincerely from the bottom of my heart, for being present with the doctor, on 18th Jan 2016, besides my bed at the hospital, during my heart surgery and making it a success. With this testimony, of seeing you during my hour of need, I feel blessed and cleansed with the precious blood of Jesus for the new life given to me. Your child in Lord Jesus Christ.

Anthony James Dsouza, Dubai
Our heartfelt thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco for granting our son Gavin success in his career. *Mrs Henrietta Lewis, Secunderabad*
We give thanks to Mother Mary Help of Christians, St John Bosco and St Dominic Savio for granting our daughter Maryann success in her Std XII Science examinations. *Mrs Maria F De Souza, Goa*
My grateful thanks the Most Holy Trinity, to our dear Mother Mary Help of Christians, St John Bosco and St Dominic Savio for helping us in all the dangerous situations we encountered down the years. We are most grateful.

Jessie Fernandes, Mumbai
Our sincere and heartfelt thanks to dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby girl in a normal and safe delivery and for many other favours received.

Alison Miranda & Fly, Raikar
Dear Mother Mary thank you for healing me and for granting all normal reports to my mother.

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Our sincere and heartfelt thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio in a special way for the safe and normal delivery of our daughter and for being blessed with a healthy baby boy. May the Lord bless and protect her family abundantly. The scapular of Dominic Savio is a very powerful weapon. She wore it everyday during her delivery too. Thanks to St Dominic Savio for the gift of this beautiful scapular.

Filipe, Flory and Aiken Dias, Goa
I am grateful to St Dominic Savio for a safe delivery and for the gift of a sweet second baby girl after 13 years. I was reciting the daily prayers to St Dominic Savio and wearing the scapular throughout the pregnancy. Thank you Jesus, Mother Mary and St Dominic Savio.

Sharlet Barnes, Mumbai
I am grateful to Mary Help of Christians and Dominic Savio for many favours received and also for helping our granddaughter to pass her Std IX examination.

Joan and Eric Peters, Pune
I am grateful for the gift of our child, Justin. He was born on 20th October 2014. Special thanks to Mother Mary for keeping us safe and healthy. Thank you Jesus, Dominic Savio Please keep showering your blessings on our family.

A Devotee
I thank you Jesus of Nazareth, Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for the gift of a baby boy to my daughter and a cute baby girl to my niece. Also for the many favours received. Do protect us always.

Remy Nazareth, Goa
Belated and grateful thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for your blessings and graces bestowed on us, especially for good health. Please continue to bless, help and protect us. Sorry Mother for our long delay.

M. D'Souza, Mumbai

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER DECEMBER 2016

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MARY WAS THERE

I am 86 years old and I was crossing the road in Mapusa, Goa, when I was knocked down by a car. I was picked up and brought home by a couple. I was grateful to them and even thanked them. I was simply happy that I was alive. From home I was taken to the doctor and subsequently admitted to hospital for the setting of my left arm which was dislocated. As I waited I prayed to Jesus and his Blessed Mother. On my way to the operation theatre I realised that my arm had stopped paining. My arm had miraculously set. I am sincerely grateful to almighty God and his Blessed for their intervention in my life. The above incident took place on May 3, 2016.

Ignatius Dias, Mumbai

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay.

The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail)). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

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