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A Blessed Christmas to All

We wish all our friends and benefactors and those who help us in a myriad ways to reach the poor and the marginalized both in our cities and the countryside, the graces of a holy, peace-filled Christmas. You and your families are remembered in our devotions and the Masses celebrated throughout the Christmas Season at the Shrine of Don Bosco's Madonna.

From The Editor's Desk

HOME AT CHRISTMAS

There was a time in the not-too-distant-past when we seniors or super-seniors remembered Perry Como or Sinatra singing: 'I'll be home for Christmas' or something similar...as we headed down the last lap before Christmas...There's something nostalgic about this season that brings 'home' into the centre of our attention.

It becomes beastly cold in the Western hemisphere so our 'dears-in-the-diaspora' strive to head back to our shores in shorts and sneakers...to celebrate Christmas with us. And we all look forward to their homecoming. For those who can't make it, we'll get our tech-savvy kids to set up Skype or some other social media to make contact on Christmas Day. Truly Christmas is a reminder of the mystery, joy and heartache of 'home' in our lives.

Some don't and won't come home...and this brings a tear to some aged eyes. There'll be bittersweet moments too during this season that make us all uncomfortable...but we console ourselves in the hope that maybe they might turn up next Christmas. We hope they will realise that they'll receive nothing less than a huge welcome.

The Christmas homecoming is not just about a house or family. Somehow this homecoming reminds us that 'home' is more a 'state' than a 'place' where memories are cherished, bonds are strengthened, hearts are warmed and ties are reinforced once more. Why is this? Why such an emphasis on *home* and family?

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, begins his poem:

*Thee, God, I come from, to thee go,
All day long, like fountain flow.*

The mystery of the coming of Jesus is that the Son of God and Son of Mary, makes his *home* among us. We say that in different ways: 'he came to his own home and his own did not receive him'; the word was made flesh and lived/dwelt/made his home among us'.

We may, in a busy, more faith-distant world, lose the sense of God being our *home*. But just because we can't get our minds around this idea does not negate our human *homes* for, in the words attributed to Teilhard de Chardin, 'we are spiritual beings on a human journey'; and our deepest belonging, whether we know it or not, is for the Divine.

How do we make this "home" part of our lives? What might this mean? In our ordinary homes, all of us pitch in to spruce the place up for the season which demonstrates our care for it and gives it a sense of being a *home* and giving us a sense of belonging.

Many appeals will come through our mailboxes urging us to help make someone else's *home* a bit more Christmassy. Would we put up the latches, switch off our phones and doorbells and put up huge DND signs so no one will disturb us at home? But who knows? By doing that who might we shut out? Maybe that knock was *His*... and He passed by because and He saw our DND... Could you still have a merry Christmas? I don't think it's possible because we realise *that we truly aren't at home!*

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

GRANDPARENTS

By Jeannette Brimmer

Nobody can do for little children what grandparents do. Grandparents sort of sprinkle stardust over the lives of little children." This quote was said by the writer Alex Haley, but we know that grandparents can also deeply influence their older grand children too.

Since grandparents from all over the world come from various cultures, they have a unique opportunity to teach their grandchildren about their backgrounds and history by sharing their memories, traditions and culture. This can be done using family scrapbooks, photo albums and journals. Through family outings and celebrations God has also given grandparents many opportunities to share their wisdom and their faith with their grandchildren.



Pierre Teilhard de Chardin S.J., a well-known Christian writer assures us that "The future is in the hands of those who can give tomorrow's generation valid reasons to live and hope."

Erica, from Holland, settled in Canada when she was nineteen. She has taught her grandchildren to count and speak a few

Dutch words and has enrolled them in an International school where teachers relay to them Dutch customs and traditions. The children love hearing about St. Nicholas Day on Dec. 6th when "Sinterclaas" gives presents to good children and Black Peter reprimands the naughty ones.

Erica makes attractive, well organized scrapbooks which show family photos, and postcards sent to her from Holland where many of her relatives still reside. She also keeps souvenirs of shared special events so the children can look them over when they come to visit. Because Erica has a strong faith she encourages her grandchildren to rely on God and she prays for them often. Her late husband would be proud of her ability to relate so well with the newer generation and despite being so busy with other concerns, always reserving time for visits with her grandchildren.

When my Grandpa Smith was eight, he came to Canada from Scotland by ship with his large family and his dad cleaned the stables on board to pay for their fare. When Grandpa was in his sixties he travelled with his oldest grandson to places in Canada and the U.S.A. while regaling him with memories of Scotland which my brother passed on to us. He also treated us to the rich shortbread and tasty oat cakes that he had enjoyed in Scotland. His friend, an avid bagpiper, once visited his summer cottage when



my sister and I were small and serenaded the islands while dad and Grandpa took him boating through the lagoons.

An avid reader, Grandpa would tell us about the stories he had read and his photographic memory allowed him to relay all the details. He worked until he was seventy-two in his book binding factory and still rode his bike until a few days before he died at age eighty three. We learned from him that people can be energetic and enjoy life (If they are blessed with good health) well into old age.

Willa came to Canada from Belgium with her family when she was very young. Her parents bought a tiny farm in Southwestern Ontario and were doing quite well until her dad was suddenly killed in a tragic car accident when he was only forty two. His wife was left to run the farm with the help of Willa and her seven sisters, and she taught all of her girls that with God's help they could be strong and endure any hardship. Willa passed on to her family and grandchildren the Belgium attitude of perseverance and hard work as well as an unrelenting faith in God's providence. She has taught her grandchildren about the relatives she left behind in Belgium through scrapbooks and photo albums she

has carefully put together.

When Willa's daughter, Anne, the youngest of five, married, life seemed to be going well and Willa spoiled her three little grandchildren. Then tragedy struck and Anne's husband was in a terrible car crash which left him brain damaged and unable to resume his role as the loving husband and the dad he once was. Willa stepped in and has been helping her daughter and grandchildren cope, besides directing the Church choir and giving attention to her other grandchildren. This happened about a year after Willa's husband was killed in a helicopter crash. "When I feel I can hardly go on I ask Jesus to give me strength and he never fails me," she told me a few days ago. She is a great example to both her daughter and her grandchildren who love her so much!

My great niece and nephew living in Canada's capitol, have learned from their Persian grandparents the value of the extended



family doing things together including going for walks, having frequent family dinners and occasionally doing their weekly grocery shopping together. They enjoy the flavourful Persian feasts that their grandmother prepares which include dishes such as Chicken Kabab, Mirza-Ghasemi and Kashke-Budemjan, and luscious desserts including Persian Ice Cream and Baghlava. During their frequent visits the children are gradually learning to speak in their grandparent's language even though they usually speak English at home.

My oldest son's aboriginal playmate, Jacob, who was a familiar presence at our home during his childhood and adolescent years, learned from his grandparents who cared for him full time. They taught him about their rich past and the value of aboriginal folklore, art work and customs. His grandfather, who fought in the Second World War, and was honoured for his valour. He often spoke at the Memorial service which the grade school held each year. Jacob is very proud of his history and one of my memorable times was when he taught us to make fried bread called bannock which we filled with currants and raisins. Delicious!

My late sister, Helen, was ill with a severe heart condition for many years and was nearly housebound. But she kept in tow with her grandchildren through phone calls and letters. That was before texting became the norm. When she felt well enough she would have one grandchild at a time for an overnight visit. During those precious times she was able to get



to know them individually and they now have those precious memories of her to savour, now that she is no longer with us.

She also picked out her favourite family recipes and gave them to my sister, Doreen, who was looking after her. Doreen compiled a booklet called Grandma's Best Recipes and made copies to send to family members a few months after Helen died. It's a treasured keepsake for her grandchildren who each have their own copy.

When grandchildren are young, grandparents often shower them with love and affection which makes them feel very special for being who they are. The little ones can bond with their grandparents during visits by colouring and doing crafts with them, such as cutting and pasting, and playing simple games with them. These activities help them develop their small motor skills and enhance their innate creativity. Reading stories and poems to them opens a doorway to the spectacular world outside and stimulates their imagination. Taking them for walks and spying on insects, pointing out the pretty flowers or autumn leaves or the way the sunbeams dance on the snow helps them appreciate the delicate and beauty filled world around them. Praying with them and teaching them to thank

God for his many gifts instills in them a sense of wonder and gratitude.

As children become older, especially in their teens, they may begin to distance themselves from their grandparents as other activities take up their time but many still yearn for a listening ear when problems arise. Having grandparents who are not judgemental and refrain from offering advice unless asked for, assures older grandchildren that they can confide in them when social or school difficulties and even disagreements with their parents or guardians crop up.

We who are grandparents can help our grandchildren to be fun loving but caring people who can contribute their talents, and skills to their world, but they can also teach their grandparents a great deal. They hone our patience skills when they spill something on a freshly cleaned floor or keep asking us to take them for a walk when we have many tasks to do. They keep us humble when they say statements such as "You have crinkles in your cheeks grandpa" or ask if the age marks on grandma's arms are freckles. But they renew our sense of wonder and awe as they point out a grasshopper crossing a path, or flower that has gone to seed and is "broken".

Older children may call us relics from the old school who just can't see how the modern world has changed. It certainly has evolved but not always in a good way. In many ways it has become a Godless world where morality allows premarital sex and easy divorce. But they also make us think when they ask questions

such as "Why are we told to be honest when politicians lie to us all the time." Or "How do we really know that God exists?"

Yes, Grandchildren can be fun and cheer us up, especially if we are not their year round caretakers! They can also wear us out with their nervous energy and questions. My grandma used to say to my grandpa "I'm glad to see them come and I'm glad to see them go!" They can bewilder us with their modern ideas and their ability to cope with modern equipment. They test our diplomatic skills when they want us to take their side versus their parents' viewpoint. But grandchildren will always be treasures in our eyes and with our concern, involvement and prayers they will hopefully develop into caring and loving adults.

So as grandparents share their backgrounds, including their childhood adventures, their sorrows, joys and accomplishments, they teach their grandchildren about their roots and are a living history to them. But as well, they receive from their grandchildren a cherished gift...a sense of continuity. Hopefully their history, their faith and gems of wisdom they share, will have a positive and profound effect on the coming generations.□



“VERY CHRISTIAN” CHRISTIANS

by Gianni Palizzi

Like “the twelve” we too feel that we’re better than the One we’re following and so we’re always ready to remind him by our whining prayers, about his duties as God. Unfortunately, we think that our God is often distracted, careless, having a reckless preference for those who don’t deserve so much, I don’t know, maybe distracted with sinners, for example, or those who don’t make it to Sunday Mass! If we don’t do something in time, “this thing here” we will end up behind “the sinners and prostitutes who will get before us into the kingdom of heaven.” Where does all this end? And of us who have been following him for such a long time, we don’t get “even a kid!”

THE RISK OF A CHRISTIAN ATHEIST

When a Christian feels he is better than God by what he says about his beliefs, he is an atheist. This is seen in the case of Peter before he becomes Saint Peter. He knows his religion and gives perfect answers: “You are the Christ,” but soon after that Jesus took him aside to explain to him how he ought to think, because Jesus said some strange things to him which he didn’t know: that he had to suffer, die and rise again... Then at the washing of the feet, was Jesus making a big mis-

take acting like a servant? But Peter didn’t understand. A short time later he would say... “I’ll die with you,” but before the cock crowed... and the other “eleven” were no better.

WHO WAS THE GREATEST?

They followed Jesus but they were thinking of something else. Our thoughts are pretty far from the thoughts of God. They were thinking of great honours, of first places at the final banquet. The two sons of Zebedee even booked their seats on the right and the left of the throne...backed up by their mother, ah mothers! In their goodness they did not even offer their places to God! Christian atheists! Jesus “took a little child and set him in their midst, then placing his arms around him, he said to them: ‘Anyone who receives one of these children in my name receives me.’ You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the powerful oppress them...but whoever wants to be first must make himself your slave.”

SLEEPING IN THE GARDEN

Peter, James and John were his three most attentive disciples and were reportedly always present at

significant events, and yet they were taken “unawares” at Mount Tabor. They were involved at the most tragic moments of Jesus’ life and how did they behave? He sweated blood and they slept! Their eyes were heavy with sleep, they couldn’t keep awake. They had a faith that made them sleepy. Christian atheists... They had a faith that was resigned, routine, repetitive and opportunistic. And Jesus “after he had prayed, got up and went to his disciples and found them asleep with sorrow and he said to them: ‘why are you asleep. Stay awake and pray that you may not enter into temptation.’”

THEY CALLED DOWN FIRE

“Then, as the time approached for him to be taken from this world, Jesus resolutely made his way to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of him who entered a Samaritan village to prepare some accommodation for him. But they did not receive him because he was making his way to Jerusalem. Seeing this, his disciples said: “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” But he turned and scolded them. “Master, we saw someone cast out demons in your name and we forbade him because he was not one of us.”

And Jesus said: “Do not forbid him, for whoever is not against us, is for us.” He had already said: “Do not judge! Do not condemn!”

THE TWO WHO BETRAYED HIM

Peter and Judas, two of the twelve, betray him; a very high percentage! Disastrous! One sells him, the other denies knowing him. Alas, Christian atheists! “While

he was still speaking, behold a crowd arrived and Judas came up to him and kissed Jesus...” “Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”... “Immediately while he was speaking a cock crowed.” And the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word that the Lord had said: “Today, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. At that moment they all ran away and out of fear, either shut themselves in the upper room or went back to their fishing. And at the foot of the cross “they mocked him saying, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ, the Son of God!”

SOME WORDS THAT HELP

Listen

“Which is the most important of all the commandments?” Jesus replied: “The first is: **Listen** Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, you shall love the Lord your God...and you must love your neighbour as yourself.”

Don’t think of yourself

“You are not thinking like God but like man!” “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”

Sell everything, come follow me

Jesus looked at him and loved him and said: “There is one thing you lack! Go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me. But he, on hearing these words, was crestfallen, because he had much wealth.” What a burden! And what a risk atheism is! □



MARIA TRONCATTI 1883 - 1969

Maria Troncatti was born at Corteno Golgi, in the province of Brescia on February 16, 1883 into a numerous family of mountain breeders. She grew up cheerful and active among the meadows and was showered with affection by her little brothers. She flourished in the warm atmosphere of their affection and her exemplary parents. The *Salesian Bulletin* came to Corteno and Mary, sensitive and rich in Christian virtue, contemplated on a religious vocation.

Initially her father was not in favour of her choice but once his daughter turned 21 he consented. Maria asked to be admitted to the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and was admitted to her first profession in 1908 at Nizza Monferrato. During the First World War she took a healthcare course at Varazze and worked as a Red Cross nurse at the Military Hospital. Following a violent storm Maria promised Our Lady that if she was spared she would opt for the missions. Our Lady heard her prayer and so Maria asked Mother General to go to work among the lepers.

Seven years later Mother Catherine Daghero sent her to Ecuador. In 1922 she arrived at Guayaquil bay and reached Chunchi where she was a pharmacist and



a nurse for a short time.

In December 1925 accompanied by the Salesian Bishop Mons Comin and a small expedition, Sister Maria and two other sisters entered the Amazon rain forest. Their mission field was the land of the Shuar Indians in the south eastern part of Ecuador. As soon as she reached Méndez, Sister Maria earned the esteem and admiration of the Shuar tribes when she extracted a bullet from a chieftain's daughter with the help of a penknife.

The little community established itself definitively at Macas in a little hut on a hill. They were surrounded by a village of natives. Just as Don Bosco was 'father' and 'teacher,' Sister Maria became a mother and for forty-four years they called her *Madrecita* (darling mother). The work of evangelization in the beginning was difficult and

involved many risks. She was a nurse, a surgeon, an orthopedist, a dentist and an anesthetist but she was above all a catechist rich in wonderful resources of faith, patience and Salesian loving-kindness. Her work for the promotion of Shuar women blossomed and hundreds of new Christian families were formed. For the first time young couples were free to choose their partners.

With maternal patience she was able to listen, fostering communion among the people, educating the indigenous people to pardon the settlers: "One look at the Crucifix gives me life and the courage to work," this firm faith sustains my life." In every activity, sacrifice or danger, she felt supported by the maternal presence of Mary Help of Christians. Sister Maria's missionary spirit expressed itself in her life given in the cause of evangelization and human and social promotion of the Shuar people in the Amazon rain forest of Ecuador. All her activity was punctuated with the need to be faithful to God's love. In his name Maria made the mercy of God extremely transparent to all those in need of any kind. Her commitment was demonstrated in her strong love and fidelity to the Church and was also expressed in her solicitude for the ministers of God always ready to help them in any difficulties in the mission.

Her remains lie in Sucua, in the Province of Morona (Ecuador). One of the missionaries at that time, Father Giovanni Vigna left us this testimony about Sister

Maria Troncatti: "She was the very incarnation of Gospel detachment and simplicity. With what exquisite maternity she conquered hearts! She found a solution for every problem, keeping in mind what was best at that time. She never forgot that she was dealing with people who were weak and sinners. She was seen dealing with people of all kinds and from all kinds of backgrounds, even the most miserable with immense respect and kindness which came to her naturally and spontaneously. What surprises me most, is that she always remained exquisitely a woman and I would say, as much a virgin as a mother."

Her activity developed mainly in the fields of education and healthcare at the Pius XII hospital in Sucúa and in numerous other dispensaries. She was the Mother of the missions of the Vicariate of Méndez: Macas, Méndez, Sevilla Don Bosco and Sucúa were all administered in shifts.

On August 25, 1969, in Sucúa (Ecuador) a small plane carrying Sister Maria Troncatti on her way to a retreat, crashed just a few minutes after takeoff on the edge of the forest that, for almost half a century, was "the homeland of her heart" the place where she had given herself selflessly among the "Shuar" people.

Sister Maria's final takeoff led to Paradise! She was 86 and spent every one of those years as a gift of love. She wrote: "I'm happier each day in my religious missionary vocation." □



VOCATION PROMOTION

CL. CHRISTOVAN CARDOZO

A Salesian Student of Theology at Don Bosco, Koregaon Park, Pune

It is said that God has his own way of calling. I don't remember God calling me directly but I am sure that the prayerful and spiritual atmosphere at home was the reason for my vocation. As a regular altar server all I wanted one day was to be on the other side of the altar. Whenever anyone asked me about my future I would quickly reply, 'I want to be a priest.'

I remember celebrating my own small Mass with a Marie Biscuit and tea cup. My neighbours would laugh and poke fun at me, but my mother said nothing. As I reached the fifth standard I had priests inviting me for vocation camps, and I attended all of them be they SVDs, Pallotines, Pilar, Diocesan but mostly those of the Jesuits. And why not? I was studying in a Jesuit school right from my first standard. I liked going for camps, I got to see what different people did, but I attended them more to have fun.

Never did I once attend a Salesian vocation camp. But from the eighth standard I had attended the summer camps held at Don Bosco Animation Centre and what fun and joy there was! That was where I first encountered the jovial, young Salesian



priests and brothers. I immediately developed a liking for them.

After my tenth standard results, a Jesuit priest whom I knew very well, wanted me to join them. Somehow, I don't know why, I rushed with my mom to Don Bosco, Benaulim and said I wanted to join them.

And from then on I have stayed with the Salesians. I am happy to meet Salesians and more especially to meet so many young people and become part of their daily life.

Has it been all smooth sailing? Ha! ha! Where there is mischief the question of smooth sailing doesn't arise at all.

I constantly trust in God and surely the prayers of many to keep me strong. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



BL. URBAN V (DECEMBER 19)

With contributions from Abbye Saint-Joseph de Clairval

Guillaume de Grimoard, who would become Pope Urban V and be beatified in 1870, was born around 1310 in the Grizac family chateau in the Gévaudan region (today part of the Lozère department). His family was known for its Christian virtue. His father, a gentle and humble man and a brave knight, showed compassion towards the poor. His mother had a reputation for great charity. Both would rejoice at their son's vocation. At the age of twelve, Guillaume left to study in Montpellier; he later went to Toulouse to study civil law for four years. His teachers, dazzled by his intelligence and abilities, led him to hope for a chair-in-law. But suddenly, without a word to anyone, he embraced the monastic life in a Benedictine monastery of twelve monks in Chirac, where one of his uncles was Prior. The monastery was in his mother's home region of Lozère.

Guillaume was soon sent to Saint Victor Abbey in Marseille to complete his monastic formation. There he made his vows and demonstrated many good qualities: humility, obedience, and love of



prayer and mortification. When he returned to his original monastery, he was ordained a priest, and before long, he left again, on the advice of his superiors, to teach as a university professor in Toulouse, Montpellier, Paris, and Avignon. He was twenty-five years old. On All Saints' Day 1342, he received the title of Doctor of Canon Law, in Montpellier. Many came to seek his advice—the rich sought him out to arbitrate their disputes, and the poor asked his advice on their small family matters. After his classes, he never failed to go to the churches to make pious exhortations to the

faithful. He also served as Prior of a monastery in the diocese of Auxerre, and in 1352, Pope Clement VI made him head of Saint Germain Abbey in Auxerre.

Since 1309, the papacy had relocated to Avignon to escape the revolutions that had been occurring one after another in Rome. Clement VI had made this situation official in 1348 when he purchased Avignon from Johanna I, Countess of Provence and Queen of Sicily. In 1352, the Pope entrusted Guillaume de Grimoard with a difficult mission to the archbishop of Milan, who was disposed to encroach on the Holy See's temporal power in Italy. In September 1362, the Pope died. At the conclusion of a difficult conclave, Guillaume de Grimoard was elected to succeed him. It was extraordinary that a simple monk, an abbot, not even a bishop, was elected Pope. He was 52 years old.

The new Pontiff's coronation took place in Avignon on November 6, 1362. Guillaume chose the name "Urban" because, as he explained, "the other four Urbans were all holy men." His sole ambition was, in fact, to become a saint. From the day of his coronation, he led his pontificate on the path of austerity. He himself wrote to the Catholic rulers of Europe. The king of France, John II (John the Good) who had just arrived at Villeneuve-lez-Avignon, was allowed only to kneel before the Pope, without ceremony. Having come for the procession that would not take place, he wanted Urban to name four cardinals of his choice, but the Pope refused.

In these circumstances, Urban V presented, from the outset, an

example of a life of prayer and simplicity. A monk through and through, he continued to lead a monk's life. He reformed a number of monasteries, which sometimes caused turmoil.

Throughout his pontificate, Urban V promoted intellectual life, wishing thus to improve social conditions. He wanted to make education accessible to all. So, for the Polish who were unable to go to France or Italy, he founded a university in Krakow in 1364, sending the best professors there. He did the same in Pecz, Hungary; Vienna, Austria; and Geneva, Switzerland. He founded the universities in Orange and Angers, France and in numerous locations instituted colleges of civil and ecclesiastical law, theology, and humanities. He was, in fact, convinced that everyone, according to his state—father of a family, cleric, or artisan—would better assume his responsibilities if he had been educated to the extent of his abilities. He furthermore thought that knowledge aided the practice of virtue.

A man of peace, Urban worked for the reconciliation of the Eastern and Western Churches. In his profession of faith he affirmed all the articles of the Catholic Creed, notably that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, as well as the primacy of the Roman Church and the authority of the Pope over bishops and even patriarchs. The emperor and empress returned to Constantinople well pleased with the treatment they had received. Many Greeks, moved by the Pontiff's goodness, reunited themselves with the Church of Rome. This reconciliation was one of Urban V's greatest

joys.

Urban V's apostolic zeal also manifested itself in the missions he sent throughout the world—to Bulgaria, Lithuania, Georgia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Serbia, and as far as Mongolia and China, where the first diocese was created in Peking in 1370.

Concerned by the wars and violence of his century, Urban V applied himself to laying the foundations of a lasting peace and spreading civilization throughout Europe. His primary objective was to return to Rome and install himself there. Thanks to the political, military, and juridical work done by Cardinal Albornoz, this return became possible in 1367. Arriving in the City in October, the Pope sought to improve the lot of the disoriented citizens of Rome. He created great parks on Vatican Hill to provide jobs for unemployed workers. He had numerous monuments restored, and undertook excavations to find the skulls of the Apostles, Saint Peter and Saint Paul, which were discovered under the altar of the Lateran basilica.

To maintain the integrity of the Papal States, and ensure the freedom of both the Sovereign Pontiffs and that of Italy, which were inseparable, the Pope conceived the plan of gathering all the Italian States around him into a sort of league, which he would head. The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV of Bohemia, and the King of Hungary were the first to agree to this plan. The Italian States followed, with the exception of Florence.

On the other hand, if the Hundred Years' War experienced something of a respite after the

Franco-English Treaty of Brétigny in 1360, the unemployed mercenaries flooding the roads ravaged everything. Urban V, joining diplomacy with firmness, excommunicated these bands, and urged them to leave on crusade, as much to get them away from Europe as to try to stop the Muslim push threatening the Eastern Empire. But, a few years after the Peace of Brétigny, violence flared up again between France and England, convincing the Pope to leave Rome for Avignon in order to arrange a meeting between the two kings and force them to come to terms. In his eyes, the vacuum left by the weakening of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire could only be filled by the mutual recognition of the nations that emerged from this empire (France and the German and Italian states), forming a peaceful and united Europe, rooted in the Christian faith.

Urban V's return to Avignon was probably also motivated by the desire to assure the calm and independence of the cardinals when they met in the conclave that would take place upon his death, which he felt was near. For Italy was once again the scene of dangerous unrest. As it happened, after several weeks of terrible suffering, Urban V died on December 19, 1370, just two months after his return to Avignon.

Blessed Urban V's strength came from his union with God. A chronicler who was a very close witness of this Pope, wrote, "In God alone he poured out his heart, in God alone he set his thoughts and he consecrated himself totally to His service." □



HERALDING THE GOOD NEWS

Ian Pinto, *sdb*

The people of Israel hadn't had much good news lately. In fact ever since the death of the great and wise King Solomon, there had been little good news. Towards the end of King Solomon's life he turned away from God and began to worship false gods and idols. God was angry with him and foretold through the prophet Ahijah that he would not take the kingdom away during the lifetime of Solomon on account of his father, David's faithfulness. Instead, after his death, when it is time for his son to take over, he will be given charge of only a small portion of the Kingdom. This came true and twelve tribes of Israel were split into ten on one hand and two on the other. Jeroboam, one of Solomon's officials took over as ruler over the former while Rehoboam, Solomon's heir, was left with the other two. Thus the Kingdom of Israel was divided from within. The two kingdoms grew weak over time and were overcome by the Assyrians (612 B.C.E.) and the Babylonians (587 B.C.E.). This marked the beginning of a long

dark period in Jewish history. This was the beginning of their subjugation by foreign powers.

The Babylonians gave way to the Persians (531-339 B.C.E.) and then to the Greeks (331-143 B.C.E.). It was during this time that the Maccabees, a Jewish family, rose up and overthrew the oppressive regime. This was a welcome relief to the Jews even though it was only short-lived. Soon the Romans arrived on the scene and took over the reins of Government, wresting it out of the hands of the local Jewish rulers. In more ways than one Israel was a divided nation. Besides, their history wasn't very impressive. In fact, for most of their history they were oppressed and subjugated (as you can see above). One can imagine the anger and frustration that these people had pent up inside them. Through it all, they had the voice of God through the prophets, to guide, encourage, teach and even admonish them. But Biblical scholars are of the opinion that God ceased to speak to the Isra-

elites through prophets after Malachi. Therefore the location of the book of Malachi in the Bible (the last book of the Old Testament) takes on a very strategic and significant meaning. The Prophet Amos had predicted the end of prophecy over 200 years before Malachi. "A time is coming—declares my Lord God—when I will send a famine upon the land: not a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the Lord. Men shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it" (Amos 8:11-12).

This above passage poignantly describes the situation of the Israelites. They began to feel the absence of God's voice. For over 500 years there was complete radio-silence from God's side. This period is called the Intertestamental period as it marks the transition between the Old and New Testaments. Prophet Malachi prophesied of the one who is to come before the Messiah, "Now I am sending my messenger ahead of me to clear the way; then suddenly the Lord for whom you long will enter the sanctuary" (Malachi 3:1); and again, "I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the day of Yahweh comes, for it will be a great and terrible day" (3:23).

The Jews believed that the Messiah would descend from the line of King David and would accomplish the unification of the twelve tribes of Israel, thereby establishing them as a nation. In keeping with Malachi's prophecy they were looking forward to the arrival

of Elijah since he would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus acknowledged John the Baptist as the messenger promised by the prophet (Mt 11:10). He also lauded him as the greatest person to ever live (11:11). John brought the Good News that the people of Israel so eagerly desired. He brought them news of the coming of the Messiah. God had ended His radio-silence and not by issuing a mere prophecy from the mouth of a prophet but by bringing Himself, in all His divinity to His people.

The greatness of John doesn't lie in his message but in his personality. John is highly revered because he was a genuine seeker of God. He left everything to discover God's Will in the trying wilderness. Despite his increasing fan following, he was honest enough to admit that he was not the Messiah they craved for. He openly proclaimed, "Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals" (Mk 1:7).

We can pick up a thing or two from John. First, humility is a mark of a seeker. Everyone who claims to be a follower of God ought to be humble. Second, God is greater than my ego. If I am going to strut around with an arrogant "I am" attitude, very little is going to happen in the spiritual field. Even God can't get past a big ego. Finally, John points us to Jesus. The Jews were unwilling to accept Jesus as the Messiah and hence He could accomplish little with them. However, He has and He will accomplish great things with all those who are willing to trust in Him. □

Quiet Spaces

A FATHER'S CARESS

On the morning of Thursday, December 10, 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.

A father or a mother says to their child: "Do not be afraid, I am here" and pampers the child with caresses. This is the privileged condition of humanity: small, weak, but reassured, supported and forgiven by a God who loves them. At the beginning of the Jubilee, Pope Francis took the opportunity to return to the theme of the Father's mercy while reflecting on the daily Liturgy in the Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning. The Cardinal Advisors also participated in the Mass.

The reflection was inspired by the Responsorial Psalm, which repeated: "The Lord is merciful and great in love". The Pope called it "a confession of faith" in which the Christian recognizes that God "is mercy, and he is great, but great in love". This statement is simple only in appearance, because "understanding the mercy of God is a mystery, it is a journey that must be made throughout life".

In order to help to better enter into this mystery, the Pope referred to the Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (41:13-20), which is God's monologue to his people. It tells of how God "told his people that he had chosen them not because they were great or powerful", but "because they were the smallest of all, the poorest of all". Pope Francis explained that God is truly "in love with this poverty", with this "littleness".

It is a text from which this love clearly emerges: "a tender love, a love like that of a father or mother" speaking to their child "who wakes up during the night frightened by a dream". God speaks with the same concern to his people and says: "I will hold your right hand, rest assured, fear not". Using imagery to describe the condition of littleness, he continues: "You worm of Jacob, you men of Israel, I will help you, your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, fear not".

Do not be afraid. With regard to these words, the Pope returned to the example of family life: "We all know the caresses of a mother and father, when children are restless with fear". Parents too say: "Don't be afraid, I am here". The Lord reminds each one of us, tenderly: "I am in love with your littleness, with your nothingness", and he tells us: "Do not be afraid of your sins, I love you so much, I am here

to forgive you". This, in essence, the Pope explained, "is God's mercy".

Continuing his reflection, Pope Francis gave the example of a saint ("I think it was St. Jerome, but I am not sure", he confided), recalling how the saint was said to have been very penitent in his life, offering sacrifices and prayers, and that God always asked more of him. The saint continued to ask: "Lord what can I give you?", until he said, "But Lord, I have nothing more to give you, I have given you everything". And the answer he received was: "No, one thing is missing" – "What is missing Lord?" – "Give me your sins". With this story, the Pope sought to emphasize that "the Lord wants to take our weaknesses, our sins and our weariness, upon himself". It is an approach that we also find in the Gospels, in Jesus, who said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and tired and I will give you rest". Francis said that God repeats it over and over again: "I am the Lord your God who will hold your right hand, fear not little one, do not be afraid. I will give you strength. Give me everything and I will forgive you, I will give you peace". These, the Pope added, are "God's caresses", the caresses "of our Father, when he expresses himself with his mercy".

We men, the Pontiff continued, "are so nervous" and "when something does not go well, we shout and we are impatient". While God instead comforts us: "Do not worry, you've made a big mistake, yes, but do not worry; don't be afraid, I forgive you". In this way he welcomes us entirely, even with our mistakes and our sins. This is precisely what is repeated in the Psalm: "The Lord is merciful and great in love". Thus, the Pope said in conclusion, "we are small. He has given us everything. He asks us only for our miseries, our littleness and our sins, to embrace and caress us".

Recalling the prayer recited at the beginning of the Mass, "Lord, awaken the faith of your people", Francis concluded by inviting everyone to ask the Lord "to awaken in all of us, and in all the people, faith in His fatherhood, in His mercy, in His heart", and to ask that "this faith in his fatherhood and mercy" makes us "a bit more merciful toward others".

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 51, 18 December 2015)



JOHNNY THE DERBY

From Fr. Ian Doullton's collection of stories

Do you like mysteries? Do you follow the best radio and television thrillers; if you do, you'll like Johnny the Derby!

Johnny the Derby was a character straight out of *Rocky V* movie. I saw him for the first time when I went in to check a story in a hotel just off Skid Row. I was a reporter for the Daily News, then. A killer had holed up in a room in the hotel. The police tracked him down. He elected to shoot it out...the police won.

The hotel was just one cut above a flop house but it had an elevator with an operator. He stood about five feet two. He had the battered lips, the bashed in nose and the cauliflower ears of an ex-prize fighter and he wore an old-fashioned black derby turning green with age. He took me up to the sixth floor where the excitement had been.

My friend Detective Ross was already there. Everything was over except taking the body away. This character in the derby kept staring at the corpse with a kind of wide-eyed hungry fascination. Ross seemed to know him. "Well, Johnny here's another one for you." Johnny seemed to know him. He said that he was suspected of two other murders; but he was not sure. DCI Ross turned to Johnny: "What's the matter? Does a fellow have to commit more than one murder to belong to your club?"

Johnny was more concerned about the last moments...how did it all end...Was it quick?

Ross simply said: "What's the

difference, so long as none of my men got hurt. He saved the state all the trouble and expense of a trial."

Johnny shook his head...and looked rather pensive. Ross had finished the report and asked Johnny to see if the wagon had arrived. So off Johnny went.

I was quite satisfied with the story I got. But I was puzzled with Johnny's expression. He looked disappointed that our man didn't live to get the chair. Ross turned to me and gave me a wry smile: "Oh, Johnny the Derby's always like that. Killings and executions are his meat. He's an odd ball for sure."

A lot of people follow murder trials as if they were the World Series but they lose interest when the trial's done. Johnny follows the condemned into Death Row and practically sits in the chair with him. That's what Ross told me.

I found that weird. I know some people collect sea shells or old coins, old stamps. Johnny the derby collects murderers. Ross looked at me and I asked him: "Why would a guy collect murderers?"

He smiled, packing up his briefcase: "You're a reporter. This is in your line. Why don't you run down the answer? I think he gets a second-hand thrill out of it."

I found it all very ghoulish. The man collects murderers; that was a new one. But it got me thinking. It might make a good story.

It's not pretty but it surely sells papers. Whenever I was down in Johnny the Derby's territory I would stop in to see him. He was

always ready to talk. It was obvious he hadn't had much education but did have a sharp mind.

Sitting in the hotel lobby Johnny would recall for me some of his favourites. He took great delight in filling me in on cases I thought I knew everything about while he peppered them with details that no paper reported. Where did he get all his information from? Johnny admitted that he wasn't rich. He knew he wouldn't make a lot of money during his lifetime. Then with a chuckle he would add: "So I learn to live without what I don't have, and you know, I never miss it."

Oh yes, Johnny was up on a lot of things but his pet topic was murder and murderers. When he spoke about the last night of the killer on death row, he seemed to live every moment of it with the condemned. It gave me the creeps. But still there was something about Johnny that kept me from writing it off as a morbid obsession.

One cold rainy night when I dropped in to see him, he was through for the evening and he invited me up to his room for a cup of coffee. The place was typical fourth rate hotel: dresser, bed, table, chair, all of them chipped and cigarette scarred. But there were books all over the place even on the bed. On the table there was a thick scrap book lying open with pictures and newspaper clippings scattered around. While Johnny was fussing with coffee on the burner, I flipped the pages. He caught me looking. He suddenly came up behind me and gently shut the album: "I forgot I left that out."

"It's quite a collection you have here." I said.

He said he hadn't missed one in the last ten years. I told him that it was quite an odd hobby. He looked at me: "What do you mean?"

I told him it was queer having a whole collection of pictures and write-ups of killers as if they were his heroes. And he admitted: "Well, they're like friends..." Then I pressed further, a little gently: "I don't want to get personal Johnny, but aren't they funny company for you to be keeping?" And he said something strange: "I guess, I'm all they have."

I reopened the album as we talked and I pointed to a picture with RIP written under a picture and I said: "And this, you've got written here...RIP...Rest in Peace... that's the limit. If there is a hell, do you think these fellows are going to have any peace?"

Johnny became serious and told me that he hoped they were at peace and he made sure that each of them got 'his' Mass. I found that funny: "His Mass?" Johnny knew the priest at St. Stephen's who agreed to offer a Mass every time one of the guys went to the chair.

To me it was getting more puzzling. Johnny didn't know these people but one thing Johnny was sure of and that was, that these men needed praying for. With a serious and dignified look, he said: "If I were a good and younger guy, you know what I'd do? I'd like to start an Order of Brothers." Johnny went on to explain that he wanted to found a congregation of brothers just to pray for these condemned souls.

This conversation was getting

me worked up: "I still don't get it, Johnny. What's poor about somebody like this Carlson guy? You've got his picture right here: a nice old man took him in and Carlson killed him for seven fifty. Or this Dave Webster here he shot his father and his brother over a little family argument. They're mad dogs or beasts..."

Johnny shook his head: "No, no, they're still humans."

I was convinced that they were the lowest specimens of humanity.

But not for Johnny: "They've got souls, and a soul is a soul. To save one, is to save a little bit of God himself."

I told Johnny that to me, it sounded like a waste of prayer. Johnny gave me a tired smile as if he'd had this conversation before: "That's what most people say. They say it's a waste of time to pray for souls like these. You know what that kind of talk is?" Then raising his voice he added: "You don't know what it is, that's all. That kind of talk is blasphemy. Think of putting a freeze on a soul, any soul. Only fools set themselves up to measure the mercy of God." Then he was quiet for some time and he put his head down and added: "I'm sorry, I got worked up. I have no right." I smiled and patted him on the shoulder and told him he was entitled to his opinion. He smiled and stood up: "Let's skip it...I'll say, I almost forgot your coffee. It's all ready."

Now I knew the reason for the scrapbook. It wasn't a rogues' gallery for Johnny to gloat over. It was an album of his beloved dead. I found out also that he knelt down every night and said a Rosary for the list of his poor souls. But it still

didn't add up. How did a character like Johnny ever get started on this mixture of murder and religion? I wasn't going to give up till I found it out. But Johnny must have felt that he had lifted the curtain too far. He crawled into a shell and he wouldn't let me needle him. Shortly after that I was assigned to cover an execution at the state penitentiary. I got a byline of the story in the paper. Johnny the Derby came after me like a hound dog. He caught me outside the penitentiary gate. He was sure that I left something out. I hadn't put it all in. I agreed and I told him that I put in sensational stuff that people would read. He needed me to find out what I had left out. That was my chance and I was going to take it: "Johnny, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make a deal with you. If I tell you what I left out. You've got to give me the lowdown on your murder album. I want the straight-down on it. Will you trade?"

Reluctantly Johnny agreed. I told him: "What I left out was the last thing he said, just a few words he called out when they were strapping him to the chair. He said: 'I'm sorry.'" Johnny's face brightened: "Didn't he say: 'God, I'm sorry.' Isn't that what he said?" I nodded and Johnny was satisfied. He was sure that Gleeson would repent at the last minute. But I told him that he should have thought about it before killing his wife. It was no spur-of-the-moment crime with him. He trailed her for three days. That was a cold blooded job if I ever heard of one. Johnny went to Gleeson's defence: "No, it wasn't. He was burning inside. He loved her and he saw her with another man. It burned his eyes and when he shut

them it burned inside his brain and all he knew to put out the fire was to see her dead at his feet."

I looked at Johnny: "Johnny, you sound like you know him."

Johnny said he was married but he realized that something wasn't right from the outset. So we sat on the bench outside...in the bright sunshine and he began to tell me his story: "She who was pretty, me with a mug like mine. She was too pretty, that was the trouble. There was way too much straining and fighting. The first time I caught her. I almost died inside. She swore she'd never do it again. I figured she was young and she'd get over it. I tired picking fights near to home. I got one out of town; the first in nearly a year. When we got there and we heard that this kid Foley had the flu bug and we had to call off the fight. I came home that night, unexpectedly thinking I'd surprise her. In front of the house I see this big shiny car. I go round at the back and look in the window. I see her and him for so long and I can't move. Then I creep away. I'm bending over like I've been stabbed in the heart. That's how I feel. I can't think, I just hurt; I was blocks away when it hits me: that's my wife with some guy. I see a red hot curtain drop in front of my eyes. I stagger along till I come to a shop that has guns in the window; their handles were pointing towards me. It's late, the place is still open. So I go in and buy a gun. Instead of going straight back to the house I start walking aimless. I come to the bridge over the river. It's blowing and the water is slapping like it's mad. I look down in the water and I think I see the two of them there

lying dead. It hits me, what I'm going to do: I'm going to kill, commit murder. Part of me wants to and part me doesn't. Then I'm praying: 'God, don't let me do it.' The next moment I see red. I hang on to the bridge rail so I can't go. All the time I'm trying to pull my hands loose. She's got it coming, she's double-crossed me. I took her back once and this is the thanks I get. I loved her but she's nothing but a tramp. Him too, the dirty rat...he's got it coming. I go back to praying... 'God don't let me commit murder. Keep my hands clean.' And I sweat and I pray. All of a sudden it's over. I'm quiet and calm. The wind's died, the water's still. I look down and I see nothing but the moon. There's no blood on my hands...I'm so grateful to God for that. I threw the gun in the river and I never go home again."

"Whoa! Johnny, that was close." Johnny nodded: "Close enough...so I know how a man gets murder in his heart. I've got a lot of pity for a chap who can't get rid of it. I say to myself: 'There but for the grace of God, goes Johnny the Derby.'"

Johnny the Derby had preached a great sermon, one of the best I've ever heard. Most people are like me, they see killers as just the couple of murderers they are, for just a couple of minutes out of their life. Johnny sees them as poor souls who've fallen under the onslaught of temptation. He pities them for those moments of madness and he prays that the grace of God will reach them and Johnny is right. Pity is needed most where the sin is greatest. Pray for dying sinners. Pray hardest for the dying, whose sin is murder. □

LIGHT AND HEAT IN THE CENTURY OF GREAT INVENTIONS

by *Natale Cerrato*

LIGHT AND HEAT IN THE CENTURY OF INVENTIONS

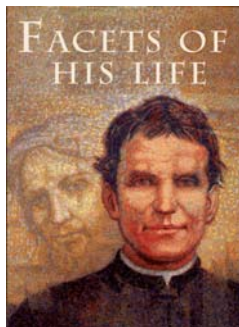
Among the typically material elements that distinguish life in the nineteenth century and what follows are the lighting and heating systems. These help us to better understand how life was lived in those days when the economic and social scene was changing.

Passing through winter we ought to try to recall the ways and means generally used in Turin and Valdocco in particular during the time of Don Bosco and we will highlight him too in this regard.

Illumination in Turin

In the eighteenth century, "the century of light," illumination was still sought through wax candles, oil and animal fat. In the nineteenth century, "the century of great inventions," oil lamps, gas lights subsequently gave way to the electric bulb.

In Turin, town lighting in the early 1800s was provided by about 500 oil lanterns, a remnant of the first 40 lanterns that hung up on long perches at the crossroads in the 17th century. Private homes used petroleum lights which were gradually replaced by candles, not without some apprehension. They had a dazzling effect, better than the light of oil lamps with wicks. This encouraged not a few heads of households to dare to light the lamp. Imagine what happened when they began



using gas lighting...they were truly excited.

In 1837 King Charles Albert ordered the construction of a factory to produce gas from coal. This was inaugurated in the following year not far from Porta Nuova. The Gas-works had their critics because of their black and nauseating smoke. This divided the populace of Turin into the "pro-gas" and the "anti-gas" lobbies and the latter was alarmed at what might happen if there was an explosion, to say nothing of the stench and the costs! But by 1851 gas lamps were lighting up the streets, the squares and the city centre.

Illumination at Valdocco

Throughout this period of the introduction of illumination, Valdocco used the usual means employed in private homes at that time: candles, and oil lamps and finally gas. Lanterns and tapers were placed at key points in the buildings, corridors, dormitories and classrooms. Don Bosco him-

self oversaw their use warning of any waste. He was often seen wandering around the house late in the night, lowering the wicks where he judged it unnecessary. He himself wrote one day to the Bursar Fr Lazzerio: "You should study and implement how to find means to use gas in moderation, perhaps a third of the expenditure could be saved." (E 1883) At the same time he was particular that there should be sufficient and well-regulated lighting. In 1876, on a visit to the study hall Don Bosco noticed that the gas flames were not well distributed where they were actually needed. He explained that it was necessary that they be adjusted so that the light reached all parts of the study hall. Economy and solicitude for the health of everyone was always uppermost in Don Bosco's mind.

Don Bosco forgot about economy when it concerned the Madonna. On June 9, 1868, the day of the consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, after the evening service, the faithful came out of the church to witness an unexpected spectacle when they saw the entire dome lit by hundreds of gas flames. The stars on the Virgin's crown, the pedestal of the statue, the cornices and railings were all illuminated. On the feast of Mary Help of Christians in 1881 the lighting was extended to the entire Basilica.

However, as long as Don Bosco was alive, electricity had not reached Valdocco. In fact, electricity had not reached the popular neighbourhoods either. One could only admire the lighting in the richer areas of the city. However, Valdocco must have had some kind of rudimentary electric bell.

The "Biographical Memoirs" inform us that one day in 1886, an old friend of Don Bosco, hearing that he was in poor health arrived at Valdocco. It was true, Don Bosco wasn't well and the porter did not want to permit anyone to visit him. But "at the vociferous insistence of Blanchard, the porter had recourse to the electric bell to inform Don Bosco that there was a stranger to see him" (MB 1.300). It all ended in a very cordial conversation between the two old friends. Then Don Bosco wanted his friend Blanchard to have lunch with the Salesians and occupy his place at the table since he was unable to go down to the refectory. He requested it using the "electric wires" and it was settled. But how exactly that wire system of communication worked we are unable to tell. We would hope someone will enlighten us someday. It had to be through the use of electricity!

Turinese Winters

The lighting at Valdocco, good or bad was never lacking but heating in the cold winter months in Turin was another discourse. In Piedmont, minimum temperatures sank very low. The usual extremes traditionally being called the "days of merla," i.e. were 29, 30 or 31 January when temperatures in Turin in particular could reach 15 degrees below freezing on some days, if not lower.

Don Bosco remembers particularly the winter of 1844-45 when it went down to 16 below zero on December 17, 1844. It got so cold in the winter of 1854 that the wine froze into wafers in the church. It was so also in the winter of 1868 when, on January 12, Don Bosco

wrote to Cav. Federico Oreglia:
"Here, the intense cold goes on; today we went down to minus 18 degrees. Despite the fire in the stove, the ice in my room didn't melt. We have delayed the rising for the boys and since most of them have only summer wear, they put on two shirts, a jacket and another coat, two pairs of trousers and military coats. Others draped themselves in blankets throughout the day. They seemed to be dressed for some kind of carnival."

A little later he added:
"Today, the 13th it is down to 21 degrees with 60 centimeters of snow (E 634).
On the 26th of the same month he wrote once more:
"The cold is back this morning and it has touched 14 degrees below zero. The doctors say that this cold purifies the air and is very healthy but in the meantime, the mortality has tripled in Turin" (E 639).

The winter of 1871 was also extremely harsh when it was 11 below zero on December 9. The winter of 1877 must have been a memorable winter, when a bitter snow storm struck the city for two consecutive days in February and that was certainly not the last winter storm!

Heating

As a young boy Don Bosco was habituated to the cold. Walking from Becchi to Castelnuovo every day in the winter of 1830 he trudged along icy roads in the snow and fog till he was numb. As a young student in Chieri, life was not much easier.

Beneath the staircase at the *Café Pianta* he was able to benefit from the heat of the oven nearby but at

the Marchisio household and also at the tailor Cumino, where he was a tenant, it was very cold. Firewood was very expensive for poor students like him. Perhaps that was the reason that Don Bosco was never heard complaining about the cold. Giovanni Bisio testified about him: "It was beyond me how he managed to hold a pen in his hand and write in an ice-cold room. But I never heard him complain either of the cold or of the heat, nor for that matter about anything else" (EBM 4,131).

In winter, Don Bosco suffered intensely from cold feet, but never once did he use the "footstool heater." This was a copper or brass stool filled with ash and embers with a perforated lid to warm the feet when rested on it while seated. It could be 40-40 cm high, but Don Bosco thought it was a luxury.

In Valdocco there were no stoves either in church or dormitories or in the classrooms. There were stoves in the rooms for distinguished guests and then in Don Bosco's room and in the rooms of the senior confreres to give as much warmth as possible.

The stoves were usually of terra-cotta, metal or even stone, fired by firewood or charcoal. There were also sheet metal stoves that burned on sawdust.

Winter clothing

In Valdocco therefore, the community was only kept warm by animal heat, firstly by closing doors, windows and plugging cracks, because "the chill could be the death of you." The only other mode of keeping out the cold, other than food – which was nei-

ther rich nor plentiful – was to cover well. It was not always easy, especially when the boys were in hospital without any winter wear, hence Don Bosco's many requests to the Ministry of War for winter wear and military blankets for his orphans. One of these requests dates back to the winter of 1860 and the minister's response deserves to be reported:

"Ministry of War, Turin, this day of December 5, 1860, the Directorate General of Military Administration n 7818

This ministry, in acceding to your request is able to supply clothing for your poor boarders provided proper arrangements are made to store the goods, that they may be put to their designated use.

Request for the same may be made at the director of the warehouse.

The following items are issued:

- Used linen trousers 304
- Woolen vests 100
- Cotton shirts 107
- Pairs of woolen socks 1000
- Pairs of shoes 150
- Capes for external use 140
- Used blankets 40,

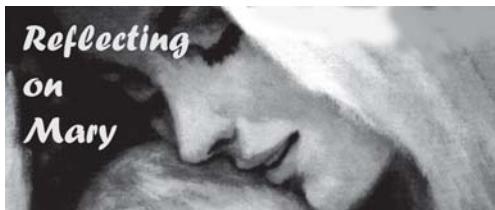
A similar receipt was signed by the bursar of Valdocco, Fr Alasonatti. It only remains for us to point out that the vests were nothing more than vests made of heavy fabric of cotton, soft and wooly that the military wore over their shirts in winter. Valdocco found a use for everything to supplement for the lack of heating. On the other hand, everything was used sparingly because that was the only way to get by. Not for nothing was Don Bosco very demanding. One

day when Fr G. Barberis suggested that a heater be put in the library of the priests and teachers, he replied: "Do whatever is necessary, but let us forget about stoves. In the seminary we had no stoves anywhere, and no one ever complained. Everything worked out fine. Now we practically have a mania for heating everywhere. I find it hard to remain silent when it's a question of avoiding waste of money. If a room is kept tightly closed and there are several people in it, why do we need heating?" (EBM 13,698)

Other occasions

The growing demand and facilities today coupled with our present physical frailty, redoubles our admiration for our elders, even if we no longer wish to imitate them. It is clear however, that if in Don Bosco's time at Valdocco, they suffered the cold. This was not due to any kind of penny pinching but due to the state of poverty that the common people in the city experienced. That's not how it is today.

Don Bosco, having always given an example of mortification in enduring the cold despite his infirmities, he never ceased to do all that was in his power to alleviate the hardships for his boys during the winter. Right up to his last illness in December '87-88, he would ask all the Salesians who visited him about their health, "if they were well protected from the cold, and if they needed anything." (MB 18, 489) The cold that he suffered throughout his life was not what he wanted for his boys. □



Reflecting on Mary

PREDESTINED

by Gianni Sangalli

When there's a birthday at home, more specially mother's birthday her children come from near and far to wish her, to bring her gifts as tokens of their affection. On that day mother finds the time to talk to each of them, giving them advice and offering them her recommendations.

It is with such love and with a fervent desire to listen to her advice that we want to celebrate the feast of the Immaculate. It is the feast day of the Mother that Jesus gave us and who we "have taken to our homes." It is her feast day because the angel, sent by God addressed her: "full of grace," meaning, without sin, Immaculate.

A Very Dear Feast

Years ago, in 1974, there was a move (in Italy) to reduce the number of religious and civic holidays in the calendar because they thought that by increasing the number of working days they could help the Italian economy recover.

In that context, one of the feasts that were listed to be suppressed was that of the 'Immaculate

Conception,' but a quick survey through various sections of the Christian community immediately revealed apparent opposition to this idea and the feast was retained.

What is it that makes this feast so dear and compelling? Perhaps the Psalm that is read on this feast could suggest the reason: "We ponder O God the marvels of your love." Mary is definitely a unique marvel of God's love and so we feel obliged to continue to contemplate her and to thank God for this gift to humanity.

Blessed Paul VI in his discourse at the closing of the Second Vatican Council expressed it thus: "Immaculate, therefore innocent, stupendous and perfect. She is the woman, the true woman who is both ideal and real, the creature in whom the image of God is reflected with absolute clarity, without any disturbance as happens in every other human creature."

What does it mean?

Immaculate, that's how the word sounds, precisely means spotless, that is, without sin: The Immaculate Conception. You can

say that Mary, from the first moment of her life, from her very conception was under the sign of God, never under the sign of sin, not even original sin.

It was appropriate that it be so. The opening prayer of the Mass confirms for us the reason: "O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant we pray, that as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son."

As the moon shines with the light of the sun, so Mary must shine with the Divine Sun that she bore in her womb. This is what the Church always believed, when Pope Pius IX on 8th December 1854 solemnly affirmed: "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God." This did nothing but express the faith of the whole Church throughout the ages.

Four years later on March 25th 1858, appearing in Lourdes at the grotto of Massabielle, the Lady dressed in white revealed her name to Bernadette saying: "I am the Immaculate Conception." It was beautiful that the Madonna should have confirmed that she was pleased with the name that her children had given her: Immaculate.

Therefore Mary is fully blessed but those blessings that St. Paul speaks of in the letter to the



The Lord chose her, the first since the creation of the world to be holy and immaculate, and predestined her to be the mother of the Redeemer.

Ephesians are prepared for us too: "Blessed be God who has chosen us before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ."

This happened for us at baptism which was our "Immaculate Conception." From that point we began our journey to achieve it.

And it is precisely that on this journey that we find the Immaculate as a model we must strive to become. Because - we should remember well - the privilege that God bestowed on Mary, her Immaculate Conception, became in her a way of life. She was obedient to the will of God which she freely embraced.

So we have to sign up at the school of Mary to become like her.

This is not some utopia. It is

possible for us to imitate our sister; being also able to say every day, at every moment our 'yes' to God, so that our entire life becomes an act of generously responding to him. This is exactly what it means to commit ourselves to live an immaculate life "in holiness and purity of spirit" ... It means "to live Christ" in our daily attitudes, just as Mary did, when she encountered concrete situations, easy or difficult, grasping the truth, the significance of things and the mysterious and very sweet relationship of children who turn to their Father.

In "the divine plan of salvation" all this is described as "becoming holy and blameless in his sight."

Mary is ever ready to help: she is the "woman clothed with the sun," as the liturgy calls her, "the face that most resembles Christ." As Dante says: "you are most beautiful, the sacred reflection of in-

finite beauty."

Dostoevsky wrote that: "beauty will save the world." Mary is that beauty that makes God known to us without the use of concepts.

Mary is eternal youth. Have you ever reflected that in all her apparitions Mary is always presented as a very young lady? Mary is young because she is without sin.

Within 17 days it will be Christmas. The Lord wants to find in us a worthy dwelling place: Mary helps us to prepare that. We renew our commitment not to be overwhelmed by evil, even when the snares are spread all around us.

We have this assurance: that Mary was there for the apostles, for the first Christians, for her people in the past and she continues to be for us a guide, a help, a sister and a mother.

We greet her with trust: "Hail, Immaculate Mary, full of grace, pray for us sinners." Amen ☐



walking with the Church

A Candle In the Window at Christmas

From St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland

Q. Was there a custom of putting a lighted candle in the window as a sign of welcome to the Baby Jesus?

A. Yes, the custom of a lighted candle in the window on Christmas Eve was observed in many Christian countries and it is still maintained in some homes. The faithful in many countries

used to set up a candle in their homes on Christmas Eve and kept it burning during the night as a sign of welcome to the new born baby. Since the early days of Christianity, Christ the Lord is represented by a burning candle and having a lighted candle in the window was a symbol of welcome to the Child Jesus. ☐

NEWSBITS

GENOA

"Let yourself be bothered by Jesus, without dividing who you meet in good or bad people, approaching everyone and seeing in everyone the face of Christ. It is the Pope's legacy to the young Genoese. He responded to four questions after praying in silence for a few minutes. The youngster asked the Pope how to be missionaries to their peers, "especially those who live in difficult situations, who are victims of drugs, alcohol, violence, the deception of the wicked." They have also asked for advice for daily spiritual life.

"You do not want prefabricated answers, but concrete and personal. Hearing the invitation of Jesus is always joyful, and no one can take this joyfulness away from you. Joy is not the same as having fun. Becoming missionaries means letting yourself be transformed by the Lord. The Mission, by being a missionary we learn how to look."

"Listen - said Francis, "learn to look with new eyes, let the mission renew your eyes. Look at the city, our lives, and our family. This experience opens our eyes and hearts, as we learn to look with our heart as well. Being more sensitive, more careful, look carefully at so many people who share life with us everyday but that we end up ignoring because we don't know how to look. We do not know what they are thinking or feeling or why their heart has approached them."

"The mission," said Bergoglio,

"approaches us to the heart of so many people and this is a beautiful thing. It destroys hypocrisy. Finding hypocritical adults is ugly but... Finding a young person who begins life with a hypocritical attitude is suicidal!"

The Pope therefore called on us not to divide whom we meet in good and bad people. "The mission also helps us to look at each other as 'brothers and sisters. The first thing is to love your peers. We can do nothing without love, a gesture of love,



a look of love. You can make plans to help them, but without love - that is to give life as Jesus did - unless your heart is willing to love, you cannot do a good mission." "To love," said the Pontiff again, "is the ability to touch a dirty hand, look in the eyes of those who live in degraded conditions" and say: You are Jesus. I had occasion once in Argentina to greet a detainee who had murdered more than 50 people and I thought that you are Jesus, he said that if you come to visit me in jail, I'm there, in that man. This madness of the cross is what it takes." ☐ (*La Stampa*)

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Right Timing

A burglar's wife was badgering him for money.

"Okay, okay, stop nagging," grumbled the man.

"I'll get some as soon as the bank closes."

Courage to Face...

"Just once, I'd like to see a waiter with enough courage to lay a bill on the table face up."

Inevitable Consequences

Father: "So you want to become my son-in-law, do you?"

Suitor: "No sir, I really don't. But I want to marry your daughter and I don't see how I can avoid it."

Personality Problem

"How do you do, my dear?" said the old lady to the little girl.

"Quite well, thank you," was the polite reply.

There was a pause and then the old lady asked, "Why don't you ask how I am?"

"Because," said the child calmly, "I'm not interested."

Agony and Ecstasy

"For twenty years," mused the man at the bar, "my wife and I were ecstatically happy."

"Then what happened?" asked the bartender.

"We met."

Expecting Business

A local busybody, unable to control her curiosity any longer, asked an expectant mother point blank whether she was going to have a baby.

"Oh goodness, no," the young

woman said pleasantly. "I'm carrying this for a friend."

Time Efficiency

"Why don't you get a good brush?" inquired an employer of his decorator. "You can do twice as much work."

"Mister," replied the painter, shifting his gum, "I just ain't got twice as much work to do."

Brave Assessment

"Don't be so nervous," whispered the fight manager, cheerfully. "Remember, if he was any good he wouldn't be fighting you."

Top Level Intelligence

"Well, I have quite a day at the office," announced the business tycoon to his wife. "I took an aptitude test."

"Oh, good grief!" breathed his wife. "It's certainly lucky you own the company."

Utter Compatibility

"Henry, dear, we've been going together for fifteen years. Don't you think it's time we were married?"

"Yep, but who on earth would have either of us?"

Presence of Mind

A vain young man, honouring a girl with his presence, wanted to make sure that she appreciated her blessings. "I suppose," he remarked, "You've been out with worse looking fellow?" She didn't answer, so he repeated the question.

"Just wait a minute," she said impatiently. "I'm trying to remember." □

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.

Belated thanks and gratitude to Mother Mary Help of Christians for many favours received through her intercession: my son's and daughter's jobs; the success of my daughter Chrisan's studies and exams. Thanks Mother Mary, protect my children and me under your mantle and bless Chrisan with a good job also.

Filomena Fernandes e Rebello

My most sincere thanks to the Blessed Mother Mary for the success of my uncle's heart operation and all the blessings received. Keep us under your love and care and bless us always.

Lovelyn Pinto, Mangalore

A sincere thanks to our dear Mother Mary for all the graces bestowed on our five children, their spouses and our eleven precious grandchildren through the faithful recitation of the Three Hail Marys. Mama Mary keep us safe under your mantle blue.

Mrs. Avis & Mr. B.A. Wright, Trichy

My belated but heartfelt thanks to Our Lady for answering my prayers and for all the favours received through my faithful devotion to the Three Hail Marys. Dear Mother, keep us safe under your loving care.

Isabel Fernandes

My daughter had a fall and her hand was troubling her very much. I daily recited the Three Hail Marys for this favour and for all the favours granted me. Mother Mary please keep my children under your care.

M. D'Silva, Mumbai

My heartfelt thanks to Mother Mary and Jesus. I prayed the Three Hail Marys for my brother and he was well enough to travel to the United States. I had a fall and fractured my left ankle. There wasn't any ice to soothe the pain so I used a hot salt water fomentation. The following day I developed boils all over my ankle. I fervently prayed the Three Hail Marys and the doctor put a cast on my ankle and all the boils disappeared. I also thank Mother Mary for all the other graces I received.

Maria Sanchas, Mumbai

"When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, I used everything you gave me." *Erma Bombeck*

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

It was on August 19, this year. My daughter was always bringing in her birthday at the Cross in Malad and from there go to the Mount in Bandra. On the way to Bandra, on the Western Express Highway, the driver fell asleep at the wheel. He nearly rammed into a rickshaw. We yelled and the car alongside us also drew our attention to the fact that the driver had fallen asleep. As usual we were praying the rosary. This I know for sure that Our Lady saved us that day. My special thanks to Our Mother and her Son. To one and all I say: *Please pray the Rosary.* *B.E.D.S. Mumbai*

**THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO
OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO**

I am very grateful to the Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and the saints for a very important favour received. *Marietta Coutinho, Australia*
I would like to thank Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Teresa of Kolkata and Don Bosco for speeding up the process of getting a visa for my daughter to come to India. It does take much longer, however, with faith and prayers, we received it in record time. *J. Alvares, Canada*

**THANKS TO DEAR
ST. DOMINIC SAVIO**



Thanks to St. Dominic Savio, who is my patron saint, as I am named Savia. As my mom told me, I was the answer to her prayer. I could not conceive. After two years of marriage I was operated but before the surgery I was kept in a room which had a picture of Dominic Savio and Mother Mary (the Perpetual Succour). I could feel their presence in my life (a moral and spiritual support). After three years of marriage I conceived and through the intercession of St. Dominic Savio, I was gifted with a son in March 2004 and a daughter in July 2008.

I wish to thank Our Lady and St. Dominic Savio for the graces I received through their powerful intercession.

Mrs. Savia Furtado, Salcete, Goa

I am sincerely grateful to the Lord Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for helping my son get a job after a long period of more than two years. We fervently pray the Three Hail Marys and the Lord grants our petitions. *Xavier Jayaseelan*

Thank you, dear Mother Mary, Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio. I bought two scapulars of St. Dominic Savio - one I gave my brother and the other to my daughter-in-law. My brother suddenly fell ill. He was to return to the USA. He was in hospital in the States and died a peaceful death in a nursing home. My daughter-in-law used the scapular and delivered a healthy baby boy via a C-section.

Maria Sanches, Mumbai

*A Story about God and how He
might answer our prayers*



A small village in rural Russia was beset by drought one year and all the crops failed. The village rabbi prayed to the heavens, "Why don't you do something about this dreadful drought?" But the heavens remained silent. So the rabbi organized a charity food drive with the neighbouring villages to feed his people. When the rains came, they came in heavy and the local river flooded, killing all the livestock. The rabbi again prayed, "Heavenly Father, my people are suffering so much, save us from this flood!" But, again, no help from God seemed forthcoming. So the rabbi lobbied the government authorities to provide financial assistance to replenish the herds lost in the deluge. Finally, in the wake of the flood, infection and disease ran through the inhabitants of the village. The rabbi prayed once more, "Now surely God you will help us!" But the diseases ran their course. So the rabbi marshalled and organized the able bodied in the village to care for the sick.

Months later reflecting on the tragedies of the past year, the rabbi turned to God and accused Him, "Why did you not answer the prayers of my poor villagers? Why did you not send help to them when we were beset by drought, floods and pestilence?" After many hours of anguished entreaty, a quiet voice answered the rabbi in the depths of his heart, "Of course I sent help; I sent you!"

Yes, God definitely answers our prayers and sends help with or without our knowledge. He knows what is best for us under the circumstances we are in.

Very often he does not give us what we ask for and this may even lead us to despair. But be assured many years later we will realise what he did was indeed right and for our good. He does not perform miracles and magic to solve our problems. If we are waiting for such acts, we will be sadly mistaken and disappointed. Like the rabbi in the above story, we are his "miracle" workers among men. He has given us our intelligence, talents and skills to perform his "miracles" to help others. □

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

DECEMBER 2017

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MARY WAS THERE

It was April 28th 2017, and I was heading to the railway station. I was riding my bike and suddenly a truck from the opposite direction broke the road divider and collided into me. I was thrown down from my bike and skid towards the end of the road near a tree. My cellphone also fell out of my pocket. It was Our Lady's protection that none of the vehicles travelling behind me collided into me. Even the truck that collided into me didn't bruise me. My cellphone too wasn't damaged. The accident took place just near a statue of Our Lady and I had a little statue of Our Lady on my bike. Thank you Mother Mary for your protection.

Clyde Rodrigues, Vasai

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