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**Grant us
 O merciful God,
 protection in
 our weakness, that we,
 who keep the Memorial
 of the Immaculate Mother
 of God,
 may, through
 her intercession, rise up
 from our iniquities...**

- from the Opening Prayer of
 the memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes

From The Editor's Desk

'LENTEN' DAYS

It seems we have barely had time to put the Christmas decorations away when Lent is nearly here. Sometimes that's how it is in life too.

The question that used to be heard close to Lent was, "What shall we do for Lent?" You don't hear that much anymore. Perhaps there are already 'Lenten' type experiences occurring with regularity in season and out of season. We don't seem to have enough time to prepare for the Lenten season - liturgically or in other aspects of our lives. It was meant to be a season for some personal spiritual 'Spring cleaning', but not anymore, either we think we're already squeaky clean or that there's no use cleaning up our act...because we'll get dirty again.

While discussing this particular situation a priest once said, "You know *parishes* go through Lenten times." I've always remembered that. Not only do parishes go through Lenten times, but so do dioceses, individuals and families, and even the whole church. Look for instance, at the way Pope Francis is constantly asking us to live truly Christian and human lives. Like the Lent we experience liturgically it all feels somber and solemn - and it is, if we take his admonitions seriously.

At any given time, people may be experiencing their own personal Lent. That's at least part of the reason why some people struggle with the holidays. It's very difficult to feel cheerful and in a holiday spirit when you are going through Lent. One of the things I experience as a priest is the fact that sometimes I am privy to what someone is going through and it is hard to watch their suffering; that becomes the sore issue for those who are less sensitive with people 'they can't stand.' Most people have no idea what others are struggling with at any given time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "*We must learn to regard people less in light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.*" That's why the Lenten season looming before us is a blessing. In and through it, we name the fact that we are fellow sufferers following the Cross of Jesus. It is when you view yourself as a 'fellow-sufferer' that you will know how to judge and maybe take someone to task for what you deem unkind, thoughtless, insensitive or even downright crass. That could be quite a challenging 'assignment' for Lent, won't you say?

We are called to walk together this road, side by side, shoulder to shoulder; being less critical of what a person may or may not do and be more compassionate about what they might be suffering. Only through that experience and on this road will we find that Easter morn comes close on the heels of Lent. We must trust in that truth; in every Lenten situation with which we struggle and we have a lot to struggle with I'm sure. I wish you a fruitful and blessed season of Lent!

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

A HEALTHY ATMOSPHERE BREEDS LIFE

by Ian Pinto, s18b

Every planet and many stars and satellites including the sun and moon are surrounded by a layer of gases, commonly known as atmosphere. The atmosphere is basically a combination of gases which have an effect on the body they envelop. The atmosphere of Mars, for example, reacted with the major elements on the surface of the planet, which studies show was iron, causing it to rust and thereby gives Mars its reddish colour. The atmosphere of Venus is so thick that it reflects most of the sunlight that reaches it. Since Earth is its closest neighbour, Venus appears as the brightest object in the sky besides the sun and moon. The atmosphere of earth, on the other hand, protects life by creating pressure allowing for liquid water to exist on the Earth's surface, absorbing ultraviolet solar radiation, warming the surface by trapping the heat from the sunrays and reducing temperature extremes between day and night.

Atmosphere is essential to life. For some decades now, scientists, ecologists and other interested



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parties have been decrying the wanton destruction of the atmosphere through the felling of trees, release of large amounts of CFC's (Chloro-Fluoro Carbons) and other greenhouse gases and extensive pollution. Disturbing the composition of the atmosphere has terrible consequences and we are facing some of them, like hotter climates, paucity of rain, melting ice caps and natural disasters like tsunamis and cyclones. The reason for all this is simply, lack of care for the atmosphere.

The family is like the planet earth. If life should flourish and if the members of the family are to grow into respectable, caring, motivated, positive and successful people then a lot depends on the atmosphere around the family. The home is where the family resides. How does our family home come across to people? Is it a place of love and concern where people are welcomed and looked after or is it a war-zone from which people run away? Is the atmosphere of the home like earth's which fosters life and development or is it like some other planet, toxic and detrimental to life?

Testing the Atmosphere

The environment that children grow up in will directly and significantly influence the person that they become. It is up to the adults in the family to provide a

peaceful coexistence based on love and respect. How can we check the suitability of the atmosphere of our home?

Studies show that the strongest, healthiest families have certain qualities in common. Although there are many qualities that can feature on this list, I have noted only three. These "protective factors" help create a safe and healthy environment for adults to be the best parents they can be—and for the children to learn, grow, and develop to their best potential:

1. Stress Management Strategies. It's a given that parenting is stressful. How we deal with stress can make all the difference in how it impacts our families. Developing creative problem-solving skills, a positive attitude, strategies to bounce back from difficulties, and reaching out for help from trusted sources when needed helps increase parenting resilience—and helps manage whatever life throws our way.

2. Children Who Have Social Skills. While all kids can be challenging sometimes, children who can express and control emotions and know how to get along with other people are more likely to be part of strong families. Strong families have children who feel safe at home and in other settings.

3. Having a Family Network. Strong families have connections to other family members, friends and community. From child rearing help, guidance and information to community and



other resources, a family network offers emotional support and assistance—and opportunities for fun, as well!

Now that we have seen some of the characteristics of a healthy family, let us look at some of the characteristics of an unhealthy or dysfunctional family. There is no typical dysfunctional family. Often, such a family is composed of well-meaning individuals doing their best. Nevertheless, scholars point out certain characteristics which are visible across dysfunctional families.

1. Unpredictability and Fear. These are perhaps the most common signs. Fear usually stems from the unpredictable behaviour of one or more members of the family. This unpredictability may have to do with financial matters, emotional states or reactions to different situations. Family members become fearful of the actions of unpredictable member/s since aggression is often involved.

2. Conflict. While a certain amount of conflict is expected in a normal family, constant heated conflict is not. If a serious argu-

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Don Bosco's Madonna

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Don Bosco's Madonna



ment erupts over a slight misunderstanding on a frequent basis, then something is definitely not going right.

3. Lack of Forgiveness and Communication. Closely connected with conflict are the qualities of forgiveness and communication. Without these there is an erosion of love, respect, trust and peace. Families will gradually drift apart and will lack the motivation to come together and resolve their problems.

Being a healthy or unhealthy family is not something that happens overnight. It is human nature to make mistakes and have areas in our lives that are not perfect, and often times families may go through unhealthy periods due to certain circumstances. What really and ultimately defines a healthy or unhealthy family is how long they persist in mostly positive or mostly negative behavior patterns.

ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT

It does not take any effort at all to drift along from day to busy day without giving any time at all to thinking about whether or not our home atmosphere is healthy and allows members to flourish and enhance our personalities. We can get so in-

involved in budgeting for food, clothing, and health requirements that we tend to leave out the emotional and spiritual needs of the family, which are much greater than the other, material needs.

It is deplorable that we have enough time to work our job, seek a promotion, view our favourite sport or film or soap, shop, party or do whatever else that might remotely enthrall us, but we have little or no time to spend qualitatively as a family.

Healthy families have parents who spend time with their children both inside and outside the home and encourage them to participate in extracurricular activities, including sports and social events. They encourage their children to talk about their

Members must feel free to express their views, opinions, likes and dislikes in an atmosphere of freedom and respect. Parents must make themselves available to their children so that their children can open up and confide in them.

feelings. These types of parents also have a healthy self-esteem and teach their children to value



themselves. Here are a few things that can help us enhance the atmosphere of our homes:

- ♦ **Spending Time Together** – Presence is a prerequisite for family life. You cannot talk of a family if members are constantly away or missing, except for special reasons. Children regard the presence of parents as signs of care and connectedness. Parenthood is a vocation from God and the influence of parents on kids is their greatest legacy. Availability to talk about issues, experiences, plans etc. whether around the food table or elsewhere goes a long way to fostering health in family life.
- ♦ **Express Affirmation and Encouragement** – Showing love and care for one another is an important part of every relationship. Words and gestures have the power to make or break relationships. Often we take for granted our own feelings and those of the other person. How many people suffer silently be-



cause they feel unloved in a family, whether it is parents who feel that their child is not grateful for their hard work and sacrifice or children who feel that their parents do not understand them or have no time for them. Don't hesitate to say "I love you"; "You can do it"; "I am there for you". Families that express affirmation and encourage each other are more likely to be happier and achieve better results.

♦ **Keeping the Communication Lines Open** – Members must feel free to express their views, opinions, likes and dislikes in an atmosphere of freedom and respect. No one must feel suppressed or left out. Developing a habit of listening is crucial. Owning up for mistakes, apologizing and asking for forgiveness are very important. Parents must make themselves available to their children so that their children can open up and confide in them.

♦ **Praying and Working Together** – "A family that prays together stays together." Prayer is the adhesive that keeps the family together. It makes God the center and allows each member to draw from the rich fountain of God's love and grace. Prayer alone cannot sustain us, we need to work as well and in a home work is abundant. Though a lion's share of housework usually falls on the wife or mother, delegation of chores and responsibilities can enormously help improve the atmosphere of the home. When each one plays a significant part in fulfilling household duties, cohesiveness is fostered. □

A FRUITFUL, VISIBLE AND CREDIBLE FAITH

by Giuliano Palizzi

There are moments of everyday life that you remember as 'earth-shattering' or revolutionary. How many youngsters stumble through life, day after day, unable to get anything useful done; they can't concentrate on their studies, they have no dreams for the future ... Then all of a sudden there they are appearing for three tests in a week, getting up early, they're "all pumped up!" What's happened? They've met a girl and everything's different! The power of a person who fills their life with meaning; beautiful and charged! Something similar happens to so many Christians. They seem to be living "lifeless" lives, praying distractedly, simply spectating at Mass without any enthusiasm, making generic confessions (if at all), going to the youth centre to pass the time and they simply drift from day to day. Then one beautiful morning the sun rises on their lives and everything changes. The apostles experienced something similar; they followed Jesus without really believing in him, dreaming of a place in his "kingdom," then they were totally distraught at his death so they vanished out of



fear to live out their frustrated dreams. But then...remember Saint Paul?

CELEBRATE EASTER

Let's look into a mirror: do we seem more like the apostles before the resurrection or better, like them after Easter, at the descent of the Spirit? Alas, How many useless "Easters!" What's missing when I get up in the morning and can't feel the joy of being able to sing that "alleluia" which I typically mumble without any fervour? If I "do Easter" I "take a step" towards whom, to what, to where and when...and how will this happen? What will "my" Easter be, my passing-over? Will I be able to pass from death to life? From mediocrity to excellence? From

sadness to joy? From lethargy to alertness? From being part of the crowd to being a protagonist? From being anonymous to being in control? In short, can I say "I have risen? And can I hear it said of me: "For this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found?" (Lk 15, 24) I would love to make God happy: "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine...?" (Lk 17, 7) There are times when I look around and all I see is sadness and boredom. Do you see that too? While our lips say *alleluia*, our heart feels weighed down and devoid of the freshness and joy of someone who has "come out of the tomb." What kind of faith do I manifest? A faith that must be "visible" and attractive even in the little events of everyday.



PAUSE AT GOOD FRIDAY

What an effort to step back on Good Friday. How we would like to hold and kiss the dead Christ and comfort his grieving Mother! We feel quite at home there. It's so far away from the joy of the

resurrection and that's where we may be at the moment.

Just think of the apostles. "When they saw him they prostrated themselves but they doubted" (Mt 28:17). He rebuked them for their unbelief and their hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who said they had seen him risen" (Mk 16:14). "We hoped that he would deliver Israel..." (Lk 24: 21). "They said: 'We have seen the Lord!' But he (Thomas) said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails...'" (Jn 20:25, 29).

That's not a "credible" faith.

GO OUT TO THE WHOLE WORLD

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in tongues, they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover" (Mk 16:15-18). A "fruitful" faith: "However, many of those who heard him believed and the number of men reached about five thousand" (Acts 4, 4).

A faith that fascinates not a faith that indoctrinates and lectures... a faith that compels. Let's not put on put on mask after mask, let's move out of our sadness. Let's pause and ask ourselves what will Easter want me to do? Because we want to make God happy so let us cease considering ourselves among the 99 Christians who are resigned and sad and be that "one converted" and full of joy; a joy that is visible, credible and fruitful who "calls his friends and neighbours saying: rejoice with me." That day it will finally be Easter, so courage! □



LAURA MEOZZI
1873 - 1951

She was born in Florence on January 5, 1873 into a wealthy family and was baptized three days later. She spent most of her childhood in her hometown. Only in 1877, because of administrative problems the family moved to Rome. In Rome Laura attended the school of The Sisters of St. Dorothy where she received a serious character formation. It was especially through her frequent reception of Holy Communion and the annual retreat that she reignited her love for Jesus which grew into an ardent desire for complete union with Him by dedicating herself to works of mercy. When her spiritual director, a Salesian, told her that God was calling her to join the sisters of Don Bosco, she spent several nights in prayer. The Lord's call to the consecrated life became clear to her in 1896, when Laura began her formation at the Institute of the Daughters of Mary help of Christians. She had to over some family resistance.

After having taken her religious vows, Sister Laura carried out her assignment as a teacher with great commitment and she was greatly appreciated especially for her motherly characteristics among the college students among the young people especially from the poorer classes who flocked to the Oratories,



the workshops and the various centres where they used to gather. She did not reserve her expertise only to the sisters and the teachers. She told them: "Be mothers first, then teachers." She worked in Genoa, Marina, Catania and Nunziata.

In 1922 the General Chapter of the Institute proposed a new missionary expansion. Sister Laura, at the age of 50 with three Polish nuns she was sent to found the first community in Poland at Rózanystok in the North East of the country. They found lodging in a poor wooden shack. As soon as some buildings of a military hospital were abandoned she started the first school for the orphans who had severely suffered after the First World War. She had become the pioneer of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Poland. In 1924,

at the invitation of the Bishop of Wilno, the religious community began to look after girls with particular social and mental problems. In the years that followed, she set up a college for students, various trades such as tailoring and cooking for teenagers and a large oratory for those who helped out in Parish work. The first novitiate was opened in Rózanystok.

Sister Laura was sustained by an unshakable trust in Providence. She was nourished by fervent devotion to the Merciful Heart of Jesus and by her frequent participation at the Eucharist for her daily life. "To love and to seek only Jesus; to live and work only for Him," was her spiritual programme. Through this communion with the Lord she was able to live virtuously and practice the evangelical counsels. She took care of her sisters with prudence and justice. She faced obstacles boldly and yet with mildness. She interacted with those around her with sincerity and charity characterized by purity and kindness.

In 1931 the communities of Poland were organized into a delegation. Then came the Second World War which, among other things, involved the Germans and then the Soviet occupation of her houses in central and southern Poland. Some sisters found refuge in families, others near some Salesian house. The other houses were destroyed in the bombing and many were deported either to Germany or Siberia. Sister Laura refused to return to Italy, deciding to stay

near her Polish daughters and to share their risks and suffering. Alongside the young sisters she experienced the Russian and German occupation; the closure of her houses that had been opened at the cost of great sacrifice, which had been erected at the cost of great pain and love for the education of so many children and Polish girls. Sister Laura had a special talent of being firm and yet very motherly. She knew how to accompany her sisters wisely and gently because she had the gift of discernment of spirits, of listening and of great consolation.

At the end of the war Sister Laura started her work of reconstructing the various communities using makeshift accommodations by recovering what was left of the houses. Once they were opened she gave them new impetus to the moral and material reconstruction of the population.

The sisters had to abandon the properties that had become part of the Soviet Republic and start all over again. Sister Laura started again. She opened 12 houses. An old castle at Pogrzebien that had served as an extermination centre for women and children was turned into a novitiate and wherever she went she brought vigour, joy and a smile. Her body however, had succumbed to cancer which was aggravated by excessive hard work and exertion and she began to show signs of weakness and exhaustion which caused her immense suffering. In a final act of trust she surrendered herself to the Lord on the night of August 30, 1951. □



CL. XAVIER BANDYA

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

The desire to be someone is everyone's dream. But to fulfill that dream is much more than a desire. To paint my own dream to become a priest and that too a Salesian priest had never come to my mind. I knew and was sure that I was thinking about my life. After my 12th exams, I was stuck in between a career and relaxing at home and going fishing. Fortunately I was admitted into the ITI at Joseph Cardjin Technical Institute, Parel, Bombay. I enjoyed myself, but travelling was difficult for me. At first it was fine but gradually choices surfaced. I started thinking seriously about my life. I was just running from home to college and back. I had no time for myself. I was fed up with this. I wanted to tell my parents. But I had no courage to tell them; I wondered what they would think of me. They had spent so much time and money to educate me. My mind was not clear till I made the decision to become a priest. But I could not tell my parents about it for fear of being rejected. I continued my studies. At that time my cousin was studying in Don Bosco, Lonavla. When he came home I expressed to him my desire to join. He suggested that I complete my studies. After that I joined Bosco Boys, Borivali. I spent three months as a day scholar in motor vehicle section. I used to observe the Salesians who were working there with the boys, their activities, their games and continual presence with the boys. My interest to join



Don Bosco increased slowly. Again I told my cousin that I wanted to join the Salesians, but I did not have the courage to tell my parents. It was my cousin who approached my father and told him about my desire to become a priest. My father was surprised and so was my family. My father approached his uncles who are priests (the brothers of my grandfather) to confirm my decision. They asked me if I really wanted to join and if I had thought about this way of life. After listening to them carefully, I said that I would go ahead. I met my Vocation Promoter Fr. Brian Moras who was part of Bosco Boys. He visited my family and after seeing my desire and my family support he gave me the green signal to go for the Vocation Camp at Lonavla. I do not know what made me make my decision firm. But I believe that it was Jesus who has called me, the guidance of Mother Mary along with the prayers and support of my family in this journey. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



STS. MARIUS, MARTHA, AUDIFAX AND ABACHUM (JANUARY 22)

Mario Scudu

During the Jubilee Year 2000, Pope Saint John Paul II quite rightly defined the twentieth century as "the century of martyrs." More than in any other epoch, including the early centuries of the church, the chorus of persecuting Roman emperors nurtured a deadly hatred for Christianity and Christians whom they vehemently and devastatingly martyred.

The first martyrs of the twentieth century were in China, martyred by the Boxers: 180 missionaries and 40,000 Christian faithful put to death. Then in 1918 approximately 2 million Armenian Christians were massacred by the Turks (Muslims); it was the famous genocide of the Armenians that is still spoken of today and which modern Turkey is reluctant to recognize. Yet, it did take place.

Then there were the persecutions in Mexico and in Spain during the Civil War. At least 7000 priests were killed and thousands of Christians too. The Church recognized them and



remembers them by the collective term: the Spanish Martyrs.

There was a fierce persecution of many Christians by the Nazis but in a particular manner, the utterly cruel manner in which the Jews were persecuted in the famous Holocaust.

But it was particularly and systematically fierce in Soviet Communist Russia. The exter-

mination of all forms of religion and their followers was one of the programmes of the founding fathers of Communism. It was a programme that was implemented (especially during the time of Stalin) during those seventy years during which there were countless martyrs, Catholics, Orthodox and Jews. Lenin himself professed to be “a personal enemy of God” and tried to fight him always and everywhere.

Persecutions also took place in other nations: in Indo-China (Vietnam), in Latin America (the Bishop of San Salvador Oscar Romero, martyred while he was celebrating Mass) and in Africa. From the '60's onwards to this day a persecution has gone on against Christians by Islamic fundamentalists in countries that are predominantly Muslim.

This happens even today in many of these countries where, in defiance of every human right, everyone is required to obey *shari'a* law that is Islamic law.

Of course, those who know a little of Christianity and the Gospels will not be surprised that Jesus himself stated very clearly: “You will be hated by all for my name's sake” (Mt 10:22) and elsewhere, “Remember the word I spoke to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecute me, they will persecute you” (Jn 15:20-21).

Even a saint of the first centuries, the bishop John Chrysostom, who suffered much for the Faith, wrote: “Christian persecutions cannot be substantiated by words of human wisdom but by the power of God.” And this power that has sustained thousands of martyrs down the

ages (and millions in the last century), has also sustained Maris, Martha and their two children; a family united not just in charity towards their brothers and sisters who were already put to death for the faith and in need of a proper burial (a risky business in those times and in those circumstances in Rome) but also by the witness of their own faith in Jesus Christ precisely by their own martyrdom.

But let us get back to our martyrs. The first detail: today it is very important and often stressed that St. Marius died a martyr together with his wife Martha and their two children Abachum and Audifax. That meant it was their entire family. They were Persian nationals of aristocratic extraction. They were all martyrs and all saints. Both husband and wife were not just united by mutual love but also by the same faith that they lived so profoundly and firmly that they could bear witness to it together, to the point of death and even beyond.

Not only were they united and convinced, but motivated by a strong faith which they passed on to their children to the extent of being martyrs. They were all saints in life and martyrs at their death (because it is true that you die as you live with the same convictions and the same strength). They were not just saints but martyrs too.

Even Saint John Bosco researched Saint Marius and his family. They were also an influence on his great friend and benefactor (Count Carlo Cays of Caselle, near Turin). He became a Salesian later. He wrote a little article in the *Catholic Readings*

(1861) entitled “A family of martyrs – the life of Saints Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abachum and their martyrdom.” In the appendix he mentions a Shrine dedicated to them at Caselette where devotion to these martyrs is still vibrant.

Don Bosco did not intend this to be a scientific work as we know it today but a pastoral work for the edification of the faithful. For this he consulted various liturgical and non-liturgical works, breviaries and Martyrologies. He also consulted the Bollandists (genuine scholars on the lives of the saints and martyrs of centuries gone by) who were pleased to report and declare concerning the martyrs: “The matters are worthy of belief and very precise.” I think that historians today would have some reservations about that.

These sources state that this family was Christian of Persian origin and noble: they could afford this expensive and long pilgrimage to Rome. Their intention was to venerate the relics of the Martyrs of Rome, first of all those of Sts. Peter and Paul, the great apostles who had been martyred in the capital of the Empire.

Their pilgrimage was not like our modern ones, a kind of ‘touch-and-go’ (or better, pray a little, and take off), but much more serious and committed, more substantial and spiritual. It was almost an in-depth experience of the Christian life in the places that these great witnesses (martyrs) gave their lives to witness to their faith in Jesus Christ. After having distributed part of their wealth they arrived in

Rome (their arrival set around 275) and they settled down in the Eternal city.

There they naturally endeavoured to visit the places where many Christians were martyred. They even visited the prisons to visit and speak to some of these witnesses who were incarcerated. As far as they could, they practiced charity, giving what they could to the needy. Above all, they mingled with other Christians to help bury their brother-martyrs, decapitated and abandoned. It was a work of mercy that was not encouraged and often opposed by the pagan authorities.

Their charitable efforts could not go unnoticed. And so it was; they were arrested and tried. The trial took place before the prefect Flavian and the governor Marciano. It began with the children who refused to sacrifice to the gods and courageously defended their faith and their work for their brothers and sisters. Their martyrdom dates back to the end of the century, under the emperor Diocletian; he was emperor between 284-305 and he was determined to restore the pagan religion with the worship of Jupiter, the divine will and intelligence and to Hercules who carried out his will. So, there was no room for either Jesus Christ or his followers.

Their bodies were collected by a pious Roman Lady Felicity, who buried it on her farm estate called Buxus (today Bocca). It was there that a shrine to these martyrs was built and it seems throughout the Middle Ages it was a place of pilgrimage, so that their memory was kept alive. □



JESUS: MIRACLE WORKER OR MAGICIAN?

by Ian Pinto, slb

Are miracles real? Is it really possible for the blind to suddenly see, the deaf to suddenly hear, or the lame to suddenly walk? But can we rely on such Bible stories or are they simply the product of fertile imaginations aimed at getting gullible people to believe in someone who the authors claimed to be the Son of God?

Dr. H. Richard Casdorph is an experienced doctor and medical researcher. His CV shows he has published more than eighty research papers in a career that has spanned almost 6 decades, and has earned the respect of his fellow doctors. In the mid 70s he undertook a research project with a difference. He interviewed ten people who claimed to have been miraculously healed of serious conditions. He examined all the case histories – X-rays, medical reports, etc. – and also submitted them to medical specialists for review. In all ten cases, the evidence showed that an unusual healing had taken place after the patient received prayer for healing. The cases were recounted

in a book, *The Miracles*, which includes some of the X-rays.

The Gospels record numerous miracles performed by Jesus. Mostly, the person who was cured is mentioned but there are also instances where the evangelists have resorted to summarizing the healing ministry of Jesus in words like “Jesus healed many who had various diseases, and drove out many demons” (Mk 1:34). Jesus was renowned as a miracle-worker. Even while he hung on the cross the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law hinted at his wonder-working abilities as they jeered at him saying, “The man who saved others cannot save himself. Let the king of Israel now come down from his cross and we will believe in him” (Mt 27:41).

Many liberal scholars hold that the Gospel portrayal of Jesus as a miracle-worker with divine powers has parallels in other traditions and writings. They make reference to stories of virgin births; stories of people being raised from the dead; stories of resur-

rected deities; stories of healings and exorcisms attributed to magicians and holy men besides stories of fantastic miracles. They firmly conclude that the Bible’s supernatural stories of Jesus are not all that unique or ‘divine’ after all. They can be quite forceful in their presentation of data and may even appear convincing but there is another side to this story.

The observation that there were others in the ancient world who supposedly performed miracles just as Jesus did, can develop into two streams of thought. The first is that which follows the reasoning of skeptical philosopher David Hume who argued that the miracle stories in the ancient world cancel each other out. If we’re not willing to believe other stories of healings, exorcism, and divination found in other ancient literature, then we shouldn’t feel compelled to believe the miraculous stories about Jesus either. All such stories are on the same par. They are legendary.

On the other hand, there are those who find the historical evidence that Jesus actually performed something like healings and exorcisms too strong to be rejected, and thus hold that Jesus must have possessed some extraordinary power. But this extraordinary power was not unique to Jesus. Many have in the past and still continue to manifest extraordinary powers.

The Bible never questions the fact that healings, exorcisms, and other miraculous acts can be done by human beings. It doesn’t record miracles for the sake of glorifying the individual who performed them. In the case of Jesus, the miracles aren’t the focus of the

narrative. That is why only some vital incidents are mentioned. The miracles of Jesus point to a deeper reality. They weren’t simply sickness to health transitions, rather they were reminders that the Kingdom of God had been made present (Lk 11:20). They expressed God’s unconditional love and mercy for His people and were demonstrations of the truth that God had come among His people to redeem them (Jn 3:18).

As scholars dig deeper into history and uncover newer pieces of information with the latest scientific and technological advancements thereby correcting former interpretations, the truth about Jesus becomes clearer and evident. Even though there are unmet claims of people who displayed extraordinary abilities, the scientific evidence for their abilities is often fragile if not negligible. Jesus cannot be reduced to the status of a magician or a sorcerer since in all of his recorded miracles he never once has recourse to chants, spells, magic and the like. He performs his miracles simply by speaking or touching the individual. He never had recourse to anyone or anything else like an amulet to perform a miracle. He did so by his own power. There are no clear parallels to this radically unique ministry of Jesus.

In the last analysis, Jesus is no wonder-working magician. He is the Son of God who performed a feat that is beyond all doubt the greatest miracle ever recorded: He died and rose again! There is scientific evidence to prove that this really happened. Jesus worked miracles during His time on earth and He continues His ministry of healing even today. □

Quiet Spaces

I WILL CURE YOU

Pope Francis at Mass at Domus Sanctae Marthae on February 5, 2015

The Church's true mission is not to develop an efficient aid mechanism, modelled after an NGO. The profile of an apostle — who in simplicity and poverty proclaims the Gospel with the one true power that comes from God — is recognized instead in the plain words that Jesus recommends to the disciples returning with joy from their mission: “We are unworthy servants.” The Pope reaffirmed that the true mission of the Church is “healing the wounds of the heart, opening doors, forgiving all, liberating, and saying that God is good, forgives all, is Father, God is gentle and always waits for us”.

In the passage from the Gospel according to Mark (6:7-13) offered in today's liturgy, the Pontiff began, “We heard that Jesus called his disciples” and sent them “to take the Gospel: it is He who calls”. The Gospel recounts that He called them to Him, sent them and gave them power. In the vocation of the disciples, the Lord gives power: the power to cast out impure spirits, to liberate, to heal. This is the power that Jesus gives”. Indeed, He “does not give the power to manoeuvre or to build large companies”; but “the power, the same power that He had, the power that He received from the Father, he conveys to them”. And He does so with “plain advice: go into the community, but do not take anything for the journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money... in poverty!”.

The Gospel, Francis stated, “is so very rich and so powerful that it does not need to create large firms, big companies, in order to be proclaimed”. For the Gospel “should be proclaimed in poverty, and a real pastor is one who goes like Jesus: poor, to proclaim the Gospel, with that power”. And “when the Gospel is safeguarded with this simplicity, with this poverty, one clearly sees that salvation is not a theology of prosperity” but rather “a gift, the same gift that Jesus had received in order to give”.

Francis again proposed “that most beautiful scene in the Synagogue, when Jesus introduces Himself: ‘I was sent to bring salvation, to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberation to the incarcerated, to the blind the gift of sight. Liberation to all those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of grace, the year of joy’. This”, the Pope said, is precisely “the aim of the Gospel message, without many curious, worldly things”. This is how Jesus conveys it.

And what, the Pope asked, does Jesus “command” the disciples to do, “What is his pastoral plan?”. It is simply to “cure, heal, raise, liberate, cast out demons: this is the simple plan”. It coincides, Francis pointed out, with “the mission of the Church: the Church which heals, which cures”. Such that, he recalled, “a few times I have spoken of the Church as a field hospital: it's true! How many wounded there are, how many wounded! How many

people who need their wounds to be healed!”.

Thus, the Pope continued, “this is the Church's mission: healing the wounds of the heart, opening doors, liberating, and saying that God is good, that God forgives all, that God is Father, that God is gentle, that God always waits for us”.

Referring to the Gospel of Luke (10:17-20), the Pontiff remarked that “the disciples returned with joy” from their mission, because “they didn't believe they would have succeeded”. And “they said to the Lord: ‘Lord, even the demons left!’”. They were “joyful because this power of Jesus, employed with simplicity, with poverty, with love, produced a good result”.

The very phrase that Jesus addressed to the joyful disciples, according to the Gospel, “explains everything”. They recounted: “We did this, and this, and this, and this...”. Thus, after listening to them, Jesus closes his eyes and says: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven”. The words reveal “the struggle of the Church: it's true, we should get help and create aid organizations, for the Lord gives us gifts for this”; but, the Pope warned, “when we forget this mission, forget about poverty, forget apostolic zeal and put our hope in these means, the Church slowly lapses into bureaucracy and becomes a fine organization: powerful but not evangelical, because that spirit is lacking, that poverty, that healing power”.

There is more: on their return, Jesus brings the disciples with Him “to rest a little, to have a day in the country, to have sandwiches and soft drinks”. The Lord wants “to spend a little time together to celebrate”. And together they talk about the mission they have just done. But Jesus doesn't tell them: ‘You're great, eh! Now let's plan things better for the next excursion!’. He limits Himself to recommending: ‘When you have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unworthy servants’” (Lk 17:10).

In these words, Francis remarked, the Lord described the profile of an apostle. Indeed, “what would be the greatest praise for an apostle?”. The answer: “He was a labourer for the Kingdom, he was a worker for the Kingdom”. Indeed, “this is the highest praise, because he goes on Jesus' path of proclamation, he goes to heal, to safeguard, to proclaim these glad tidings and this year of grace. To enable the people to find the Father once again, to make peace in the peoples' hearts”.

The Pope concluded with an invitation to read this Gospel passage, emphasizing “the most important things to Jesus, in proclaiming the Gospel: they are these, these small virtues”. And “then it is He, it is the Holy Spirit who does it all”.

(by L' Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 7, 13 February 2015)

SET THE ANGEL FREE

From Fr. Ian Doullton's collection of stories

This is a parable; the story it tells is as old as human nature but it still holds the power to add a new measure of happiness to your own life.

In a certain town there lived a man who had no friends. He was poor and he was ill-humoured; worst of all, he was ugly. Winter and summer, spring and fall, he sat on the steps of his house scowling at the world. In the same town there lived a man known as the kind man. He had friends and all that he needed. Everyday, morning and evening he passed the house of the ugly man and he felt sad. One day the kind man went to see the wise man of the town. "You know that ugly man who lives in the first house on the street of the elm trees?"

"I know the man who lives there." I pass his house every day in the morning and the evening and it disturbs me to see the ugly man scowling. He asked the wise man for some advice and this is what the wise man told him: "There's an angel hidden in him."

This surprised the kind man. He couldn't believe it. The wise man went on: "This angel is buried deep, held fast as in a prison, but you may be the one who will set this angel free."

On hearing this, the kind man was determined to help but he didn't know how: "But how, how shall I set the angel free?"

The wise man pondered a moment and then told kind man that he should give him what he was most in need of. But what was that? He didn't know so he asked

the wise man: "And what is that?"

"The only way to find it is to search your own heart. Look there for what this man needs most."

The kind man's eyes sparkled and he smiled and said: "If he were not ill-humoured he would have friends. If he had friends they would give him work so that he would no longer be poor. If he were not poor he would not scowl at all the world. I'll tell him this. Perhaps no one has ever given him good advice. He'll begin to smile and to be happy. Then the angel in him will be set free."

The wise man didn't say much more, he just added: "You will know if advice is what he needs most."

It took a lot of courage but the kind man went to the house of the ugly man. The ugly man was sitting on the steps of his house scowling at the world. When he saw the kind man he only scowled the harder. The kind man said to the ugly man:

"I pass your house night and morning. It grieves me to see you friendless and alone because everyone is afraid of your ill-humour. Listen now, because I'm going to give you good advice: Speak softly to all men, smile, give everyone a greeting then you'll have friends and when you have friends they'll give you work and you'll no longer be poor." He had hardly finished saying this when the ugly man barked: "Out! Get out."

The kind man was upset. He had just told him to speak softly but the ugly man simply shouted: "The devil take you and your advice.

Get out before I throw you over the fence!" And he went into his house and slammed the door.

The kind man went away angry and after that he travelled by another road, morning and night so that he did not pass the house of the ugly man. But everyday he thought about the angel in the prison and he felt sad. When it came near to Christmas, the kind man went again to see the wise man. This time he said: "This is the time of peace and joy. It grieves me to think that the ugly man will have no peace or joy; also that the angel in him will not be free to join the other blessed spirits in praising God."

The wise man thought it was good advice but once more he told the kind man to look into his heart once more.

As he meditated he thought that the ugly man was ill-humoured because he was poor and now that it was Christmas time he would be grateful for the gifts the kind man would bring him and he would be thanked...then he looked up at the wise man and concluded: "He will be grateful to me and his thanks will set the angel in him free."

"Go and try. That is the only way you can discover what he needs most" was all the wise man said as he saw the kind man off.

The kind man went back to his house. He took clothes that were hardly worn and a portion of his holiday feast. These he brought to the house of the ugly man. The ugly man touched them with one finger. He said nothing. The kind man pointed to all the gifts he had brought saying: "These are all for you. This food would only go to

waste in my house and these clothes will never be worn again because I've bought new ones. You might as well have these." The ugly man simply touched the gifts with the tip of his finger and said: "I said I'll take them..."

"I couldn't think of anyone who needed them more than you" said the kind man. The ugly man simply looked over the gifts. He said nothing. The kind man went away very angry because he had received not one word of thanks for his pains. He resolved that he would give no more thought to this ugly man but try as he might, he could not help thinking of the angel and grieve that he might not set him free.

When it was near to Spring and the time of Lent, a fever broke out in the town to the north and many people died. So the town council in which the kind man and the ugly man lived made a law that forbade anyone to go north. The ugly man was away from the town when the law was made. After his return he was not seen on the steps of his house for seven days. It was whispered about that he had gone north in secret and so was taken with the fever. The people were in such dread of the fever that many of them gathered before the house of the ugly man. He was not sitting on the front steps. The butcher of the town called for him to come out after a time he stood in the doorway. He was weak and he looked pale as a church candle. The butcher called out to him: "Stop there, you've been off?"

The ugly man was upset and simply said that he had gone south for a week to cut some wood. But

the butcher was certain that he had the fever. He looked so pale. "I have no fever but an ache in my bones that will not let me eat or sleep" the ugly man shouted back. Everyone standing with the butcher thought he was lying. The ugly man was willing to swear on the Bible and the Cross...but the butcher shouted to the villagers: "Is there anyone here who will speak for this man?" Then he went on: "Has he a friend among you?" No one answered. So it was decided to drive him out of the village to avert the fever. They decided to burn his house down and that was what they did.

They drove him into the forest nearby. The kind man couldn't bear it. He turned to the butcher and pleaded: "But to turn him out in this chill and rainy weather would be hard..." But they wouldn't listen. The kind man pleaded once more: "Wouldn't you wait a day and night perhaps to see whether he shows signs of the fever?" The kind man pleaded. But they were determined. They drove him into the woods.

The kind man went back to his own house. For a day and a night he stayed there thinking...then...he went a third time to see the wise man.

It was evening and getting dark and as he sat in the wise man's house. He said: "This thing they've done to the ugly man is neither right nor just. This is the time of the Saviour's death and they've done this for one for whom the Saviour died."

The wise man looked out of the window...ruminating and said softly: "Then you must do something for him or your hands will

be stained with their guilt."

The kind man seemed helpless. Wringing his hands he said: "What can I do? I could not save him from being driven into the woods; I cannot bring him back."

His good advice didn't work and the gifts he gave didn't help. But he didn't want to give up. He decided to go himself to the woods and stay with the ugly man. He stood up to leave and the wise man smiled and said: "Go then, and God be with you."

The kind man went out into the woods. He found the ugly man sitting under an elm tree. The ugly man did not rise nor did he say anything. He scowled harder than ever because he was afraid. The kind man came up to the ugly man and said: "I've come to stay with you. I say...I've come to stay with you."

The ugly man was upset and simply told him to go away: "Get away...why do you mock me? First you mock me with advice and then with gifts, now with friendship."

"I didn't mean to mock you."

The kind man said. The ugly man thought the kind man was like the rest of the village. But the kind man was saddened at the thought of leaving the ugly man alone. The ugly man simply growled back: "I've lived alone, I can die alone."

This time the kind man was determined to stay and he came alongside the ugly man and sat down firmly.

After some time he looked around and found that the ugly man had not eaten in some time, so he went out and hunted for rabbit and brought it back and prepared

some broth which the two of them shared. Then the kind man carried water from the spring; he also built a hut of branches. He and the ugly man sat knee to knee by the fire. The ugly man only said words that were short and grumbling. The kind man said nothing.

When it was Holy Week, a preacher of both simplicity and power came to speak in the church of the town. The people begged the preacher to speak to the ugly man and command him to mend his ways. The preacher went out to the woods to see for himself how matters ran. On Good Friday all the people gathered in the church to keep watch for the three hours of the Saviour's suffering on the cross. But the preacher mounted the pulpit and said to them: "Why are you here? You think of keeping watch with Christ's suffering? You believe he will look down and be pleased that you hold his Passion in memory. But where is Christ? He is in the woods; he suffers there now. I saw him there. He suffers in the man whom you have driven out, for, the Saviour himself has said: *'Whatever you do to the least of these my brethren, you do to me.'* People who call yourselves Christians what have you done to Christ?"

The people went away to their houses – the rest of that day and the next they prepared for the feast of Christ's rising; but their feet dragged and their hands fumbled. Very early on the feast, even before the bells rang for the church all the men and the women of this town had set out for the woods. The butcher asked the wise man, speak to the ugly man. "I will... In the name of Christ,

risen and glorious, come out to us." Then noticing some movement in the forest he said: "There, look there, someone is coming. But who is this? His face is clear and shining. His face is like an angel's. Where is the ugly man?"

The ugly man spoke: "This is the man who was called ugly. From his childhood, you and all in this town mocked him because he was poor; he was dull and he was clumsy. It was grief at your contempt and despair at your cruelty that lined and furred his face. He locked up goodness in the depths of his soul like an angel in prison. Now love has set the angel in him free." But the butcher who was looking on wondered who had loved him. Then suddenly there was another rustling of leaves in the forest and another figure emerged. It was someone else and he too had the face of an angel.

The wise man smiled and said: "This is the man who was called kind. Now he is truly kind because he loves his brother for the love of God. It is only for the love you show them that the foolish will bear your advice and the poor be grateful for the gifts you bring. This the kind man has learned and so he has set free the angel in his own soul."

The people of the town went quietly to the church. They never forgot the lesson they had learned at the edge of the woods. They told their children and word of it passed from generation to generation. To this very day, that town is a reminder to all the world that kindness is the soul of happiness. □

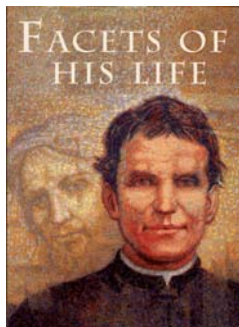
PIEDMONTESE WEIGHTS AND MEASURES IN DON BOSCO'S TIME

by Natale Cerrato

In 1816 the Savoy government finally adopted the decimal system for its coinage but this only came into force two years later. Till then there were only minor adjustments made to the old measures and weights. It was only in 1845 that King Charles Albert ordered the introduction of the decimal metric system to be introduced in all the states on the mainland starting on January 1, 1850.

That was why Don Bosco's book on *The Metric-Decimal System* was published in 1849 to meet "the needs of the times," because, as he stated in the introduction: "Everyone is aware of the many ways whereby one may be mistaken, prone to error, fraud and sometimes causing suffering and no small damage to almost everything concerning weights and measures" (OE 4,3).

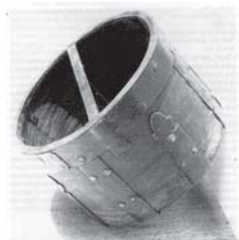
To achieve his purpose, Don Bosco was not content with simply writing his precious little manual, he sourced experts to teach this new system to his day scholars and the students of the evening classes. So it may be interesting for the reader to recall some of the details of the saint's life that relate to the old system of weights and measures that were prevalent in his day and so enhance our knowledge of his personality and his educative



method.

Units of measure for grain: Emin and coppa

The local chronicles of the terrible famine of 1816-1817 assures us that there was neither a drop of rain nor a snowflake from November to May the following year 1817. The crops were almost completely lost and the price of food grain simply sky-



an emin

rocketed. In his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco claims that in that year he had to pay 25 lire per *emin* of wheat, a price that was three times the official one prevalent in the markets of Turin. Were these prices simply fictitious or were they hiked for fear of the famine? It was hard to say. The famine of 1817 however, was not a joke and when Mamma Margaret managed to buy four *emin* of wheat from the Chaplain Vittorio Amedei at 37.50 she was already in danger of averting another disaster in July thanks again to the good priest.

The *emin* (in Pied: *min-a*) was a measure for cereals in Piedmont which was a little less than 23 litres. Then there was the half-*emin* and its sub multiples corresponding respectively to 1/8 and 1/16 of an *emin*. Interesting examples of the *emin*, the *coppa* and the half-*coppa* are on display at the museum of "Peasant Life" at Colle Don Bosco near Don Bosco's house, thanks to the Salesian Teresio Chiesa.

Units of measure for wine: Brent and pint

Of the eight dialogues composed by Don Bosco to teach his youngsters the value of decimals, this was one on: "The Litre, the decalitre and the hectolitre compared to the pint, the *brent*, etc." The dialogue took place regarding wine between the waiter Battista and a military officer who was supposed to represent authority to explain to the uninformed waiter the new measures. Here's part of it:

"Battista: Oh, oh! We're not meek mules! How can we carry two

loads?

Officer: I believe that to carry wine a half a hectolitre means carrying 50 litres.

Battista: Is fifty litres or half a hectolitre larger or smaller than a *brenta*?

Officer: Fifty litres or half a hectolitre is the same as the *brenta* you are already using.

Battista: Oh! Well, well, thank you. I won't waste money making another *brenta*. Instead of a pint I'll use a litre and instead of a *brenta* I'll use half a hectolitre, that's the same as a *brenta*" (MB 3,642).

As you can see, in his dialogue Don Bosco takes into account not only the difficulties of calculation but also the economic predicament of the poor who have to work are always short of money. This is well represented by the waiter (*brindar*) who we find at Piazza Carlina in his blue overalls and a cask of wine on his shoulders. Poor Battista is one of these who feels that a hectolitre is worth two kegs and so he is worried about his poor back and the fact that he will have to shop around for kegs adapted to the new measures. But when he fails to understand that there will be no need for him to change his bottles and that he can still use his *brenta* to carry half a hectoliter of wine, he cheers.

More than once Don Bosco used pints in other ways. One April evening in 1847 on the grounds of the Castello of Turin he came upon a group of youngsters who were openly making fun of him behind his back. He didn't break up the group, he simply greeted them:

"Good evening, my friends, how are you?"

"Not so good, Father," replied the ringleader. "We're thirsty and we're broke. Would you buy us a bottle of wine?" Another added. "Yes, how about it, Father?" shouted the others at the top of their voices.

"Gladly!" replied Don Bosco. "In fact, since you're so many I'll get two bottles, but I want to join you in a drink."

It must have been quite a sight! A priest with a retinue of young toughs in a tavern! Later he invited them to the Oratory: And a dozen or so ruffians followed Don Bosco to Valdocco. The saint had a bright idea. Beneath the attic in the Pinardi shed was a loft with some straw. He made them comfortable there and gave them a few blankets. His guests made off with his blankets but he was not discouraged. That same year he started a real boarding. The first Oratory began with a Hail Mary in the sacristy of St. Francis. The idea of a real boarding came from a cafe while paying for two pints of wine for his unusual guests (cf EBM 3,140-141). Oh, the humour of Providence!

Units of Weight: *rubbe* and *libbre*

John Bosco, in year 5 at middle school in Chieri, was about 19 or 20 years old. One day he was stopped by four of his classmates who jumped on him. He carried them back to school to the fear and admiration of his companions. His biographer commented: "at that age John could easily carry twenty *rubbi*" (The *rubbo* was a Piedmontese weight measure equivalent to about 20 pounds) (EBM 1,100).

As he grew old, despite his ailments, Don Bosco possessed exceptional strength and there are more than a few witnesses to attest to this. In his younger days his strength was sometimes described as "vigorous" and even "brutal" (MO 60-61). There is no doubt however that carrying twenty *rubbi* was no small feat for a twenty-year-old farmer. The *Rubbo* corresponded to 25 Piedmontese *libbre* that is around 9.22 kg. Twenty *Rubbi* then amounted to 184.44 kg. Now carrying a 100 kg sack of wheat or rice on one's back was not impossible but going up to 184 was something else!

Even physically, Don Bosco wasn't a delicate-darling. In the manual on the metric-decimal system he taught his boys how to reduce the *rubbi* into milligrams multiplying by a factor of "9222" separating four digits from the product. But he also taught them to endure hardships.

Surface measures: *tables* and *days*

The inventory of Don Bosco's father's inheritance included eight tiny plots of vineyards, fields or meadows totalling 272 *tables* (tavole).

A hundred tables made a day (*una giornata*) a Piedmontese farm measure which was about 3800 square metres which corresponded to the area plowed by a pair of oxen in one day.

Don Bosco would later have to concern himself with *Tables* (tavole) when he would start to buy or sell pieces of land at Valdocco. In 1848 he would acquire the *Casa Moretta* and the adjacent plots which amounted to a total of 58 tables, 2 feet, 10 oun-

ces which amounted to 0.22,19 acres (cf MB 3, 456). In the years 1850-51 he would set about constructing the extension to the chapel in the Pinardi house on a plot, approximately 100 tables (cf MB 4, 40).

Units to measure length: feet, yards and miles

And what about linear measures; the principle measures were the *running foot* (*piele liprando*), *the tribot* and *the mile*. This was about 800 trebuchets or 6 running feet. The name *running foot* (*liprando*) was used all over Italy since the middle ages and was probably named after King Liutprando who died in the year 744. In Piedmont this corresponded to 51.55 cm. A trabucco then was about three metres and a Piedmontese mile was about two and a half km (m 2469.13) well above that of other countries.

Especially when he was a young man, Don Bosco travelled hundreds of Piedmontese miles on foot. When speaking of the time he was a seminarian in Chieri, he told his oratory boys: "I can still remember that I once travelled with Don Giacomelli over twenty Piedmontese miles (around 50 km) in one day. We left from San Genesio on some errands in Turin and returned to Avigliana. There were other times when I left Turin and went to Becchi in six hours and we did those twelve miles (about 30 km) on foot without stopping." And he concluded:

"I believe that inactivity is a significant cause of the present day's sagging health. Readily available coaches, buses, and trains have eliminated the need

to walk even short distances, while just fifty years ago people thought nothing about taking a walking jaunt from Turin to Lanzo. I don't think that a jolting coach or railway carriage offers us enough exercise to keep healthy" (EBM 12,244).

What would Don Bosco say about those who won't even go round the corner to shop for groceries or won't go a hundred feet away without a car? And these are not miles, but simple trebuchets or even *liprandi*.

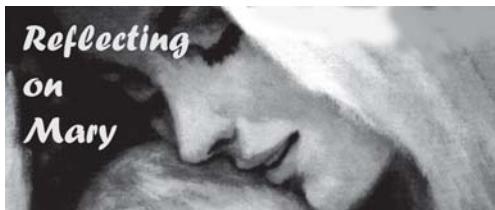
Units to measure volume: *bale* of hay or *bundle* of wood

We cannot ignore some units to measure volume. We recall here at least bales of hay or bundles of wood used in Don Bosco's skits.

The *tesa* (in Pied. *Téisa*) was an equivalent measurement of volume in Piedmont determined by the number of "manual feet" (!) cube, depending on whether it was stretched over a bale of hay or a bundle of wood. That of hay corresponded to 125 cubic manual feet equivalent to 5.02 cubic metres; that of wood corresponded to 100 cubic manual feet equivalent to 4.01 cubic metres. Don Bosco always directed his dialogues to improve the lot of the poor so they could better their station in life.

The elders used to say: "*Dal savèj a-i ven l'avèj*," "To know is to possess."

And Don Bosco encouraged the education of the peasants in the rural areas which contributed greatly to the economic amelioration of his countrymen. This was also true in the area of evangelization and catechesis. □



HAIL MARY: QUEEN OF THE HOLY ROSARY

by Angelo di Maria

Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you (Lk 1, 28). That was how the angel addressed Mary and that was how Elizabeth recognized her as the mother of the Lord (Lk 1, 43) and proclaimed her blessed among women. We sinners invoke her as Mother and always implore her to be by our side at the hour of our death. The *Ave* has been a prayer that always rises from the hearts of the humble and the simple. Everyone, children and adults, those wise or ignorant by worldly standards have found in her the strength that Christ gives to those who pray with faith. It is a prayer of a child to God, in Christ through Mary.

MARY IS THE MOTHER WE LOVE

Mary: in the cave of Bethlehem, Jesus, who was born, the centre of everything! Let's try to imagine: How did you welcome the Lord? How did you wait before the Annunciation and after that, in those marvelously nine long months? How did you live with him and for him throughout those thirty years in Nazareth and then wandering

around Palestine; not always loved, not even always sought after, indeed right up to the cross? How did you anticipate and worship the Risen One? With Mary, praying the Holy Rosary we re-live every moment of the salvific experience of Jesus' life. We meditate on the mystery of his birth; joyful, humble and obedient as a child, busily going about his day with Mary and Joseph. We are thrilled when, during his public life, he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom, enlightening everyone, because He is "the light of the world" (Jn 8, 12). Humbly and gratefully we meditate on his redemptive suffering and we worship him risen and in glory. With Christ we honour Mary who with faith and love is Mother, helper, faithful disciple and co-redemptrix.

THE ROSARY: A MEDITATION ON THE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST

The Rosary means living every experience of our life confident that in heaven there is a mother who listens and welcomes our words, our problems and takes

them to God. To love the Rosary is the simplest and the easiest way to honour Mary and to reach Jesus. It is so beautiful to repeat so many times with trust: "Hail Mary." We're unable to say these words without wanting to become better, because we say them to Mary, the all holy one, asking her help: "pray for us sinners." Just like a child is safe and serene when it places its hand in that of its mother (Ps 130:2) we know we can never be lost. Unfortunately today, the Rosary is a prayer that is underappreciated, and even derided; it seems too simple and too puerile a prayer meant only for elderly people. Instead it actually reveals the depth of love we bear for God and for Mary. The insistent repetition of the *Hail Mary* reveals the need we have to go to God through His mother. The Rosary is a school of sanctity, because Mary invites us to reflect on our lives, urging us to change,

to be courageous and to ask for forgiveness and to forgive, in short to live like Jesus. It is a chain of roses leading to heaven; a "weapon" that Mary herself has given us. Don Bosco made the Rosary an indispensable instrument for evangelization. Praying the Rosary means meditating on the mystery of the greatness of the Holy Virgin; she is in close union with God, she trusts Him and is totally abandoned to His will. We often feel discouraged in the face of sufferings and problems but we should think of the problems that Mary faced. Of course, Jesus was nearby, but we too possess him in our hearts through the Eucharist and we must therefore also live this surrender which sometimes requires courage but which seems beyond our possibilities when such huge problems weigh down on us like boulders. Thinking of Mary, the problems she had and her faith, we, recite the Rosary



The Annunciation by Jean-Marie Pirot (ARCABAS)

and understand that if we rely on her, these problems do not disappear but they become easier to bear because we find in our hearts more courage and love and the will to move forward.

THE ROSARY ENHANCES LIFE

Cherishing the Holy Rosary we cherish our own life. Every *Hail Mary* ought to become a *yes* to God, a *yes* to listen to the will of the Father. Meditating on the life of Christ and his mission we begin to realise our own greatness. We turn to God who is our Father. We are children called to collaborate with Christ, following the example of Mary, we bring peace to our world and love among our brethren by extending our hand to help them recognize the true face of God, the face of a father. We are invited

to take up our cross, as Jesus did and with Mary, because she fulfilled the will of God. Mary help us! We turn to her in simplicity and trust, with filial gratitude, working with love and out of love everyday, in whatever we do, always happy, always joyful and hopeful and optimistic. On his deathbed, Don Bosco felt such joy, peace and contentment at the thought of being a devotee and an apostle of Mary: the mother who never lets us down.

AND SO WE PRAY:

O Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary, give our prayer a firm faith so that through our meditation on Christ's love for us and trusting in your motherly assistance we and our brethren may nurture in our hearts the desire to be saints. □



Mary, Why do I love you

*I feel like singing because I love you.
 Mary, your sweet name fills me with joy.
 As I meditate on your life in the gospel
 I'm not afraid of approaching you,
 O Virgin, full of grace.
 You lived the life of the poor in Nazareth
 You are the mother
 of the poor and the little ones.
 They don't have to be afraid
 Of raising their eyes to you,
 Incomparable mother
 Who travels with them along life's path
 Leading to heaven.
 O Mary, I want to live with you,
 I want to follow you every day.
 I want to immerse myself in your
 contemplation
 And discover the depths of love in your heart.
 Then all my fears vanish
 And your maternal gaze
 teaches me to weep and to rejoice.*

(Teresa di Lisieux)

NEWSBITS

ROME

Lanzhou is one of the world's most polluted cities. And Joseph Han Zhi-hai has been its Catholic bishop for 14 years: ordained in 2003 with papal nomination but without governmental recognition. Yet, for some days now, his status as successor to the apostles has also been certified by the government. In the exclusive interview with Vatican Insider, he explains the reasons for him asking for government recognition of his episcopate. The official inauguration ceremony took place on November 10, 2017 in the cathedral of Lanzhou, dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

The bishops who took part in the rite were all in full and declared communion with the Pope. And the same happened in the official inauguration ceremony of the bishop of Handan, Joseph Sun Jigen, ordained in 2011 with the apostolic mandate received from the Holy See and who has also been recognized by the Beijing government.

Joseph Han was born in 1966, in the heart of the Cultural Revolution. He said that in those years, his family members were kept in faith by simply praying at home, in the depths of their heart. And he recalled that his vocation blossomed when he looked at Father Philip, the priest - later bishop of Lanzhou - who in 1978, when he was freed after thirty years of imprisonment and isolation, the minute he tasted



freedom, without even a complaint, immediately began to announce the Gospel, in small villages and countryside.

Was it you who asked the government to recognize you as a bishop?

Yes, I was the one who asked to be recognized as bishop by the government. Already in 2003 I had begun to hope that the government would officially recognize the role I play by virtue of episcopal ordination.

Why?

The reasons are obvious: without the Government's recognition, it is more complicated to carry forward the diocese and help the emerging local Church. This official recognition makes us freer to devote our energies with less restraints to proclaiming the Gospel. There are so many priests and nuns who want to carry out their mission, and in China, if you don't have the recognition of government, everything, even the simplest things become more complicated. (*La Stampa*, Gianni Valente, ROME) □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Pre-emptive Action

"You look all-in today, Bill. What's the trouble?"

"Well, I didn't get home until after daylight, and I was just undressing when my wife woke up and said: "Aren't you getting up pretty early, Bill?" In order to save an argument I put on my clothes and came down to the office.

Discreet Disclosure

"I'm not wealthy and I don't have a yacht and a convertible like Jerome Green," apologized the suitor. "But darling, I love you." "And I love you too," replied the girl. "But tell me more more about Jerome."

Age of Employment

The employment clerk checking over the applicant's papers, was amazed to note the figures 107 and 111 in the spaces reserved for "Age of Father, if living," and "Age of Mother, if living." "Are your parents that old?" asked the surprised clerk. "Nope," was the answer, "but they would be, if living."

Managerial Stuff

"I say, Waiter, call the manager, I can't eat this stuff." "It's no use, sir, he wouldn't either."

A Worthy Cause

A church worker approached the town skinflint soliciting funds for the foreign missions. "Huh, I never give a dime to them!" said the miser. The worker held out the bag in which she was collecting money and said: "Well, in that case, help yourself to some of this money! It's for the heathen, you

know!"

Divine Influence

Tommy had finished saying his prayers as his mother walked into the room.

"Did you ask God to make you a better boy?" His mother asked. "Yes," said little Tommy, "and I put in a good word for you too."

Manpower - Scots Style

Englishman: (Employed by a Scotsman): "I have been here ten years, sir, doing three men's work for one man's money, and now I want a raise."

Employer: "I cannot give you that, but if you'll tell me the names of the other two men, I'll sack them."

Literally Literate

"Tomorrow, children, I want you to write an essay on the subject: "Our dog." Next day, Johnny was asked to read before the class his essay. He read: "Our dog, we have none."

On Health Grounds

"Why did you leave your last job?" asked the employer, "Illness, sir." "What was the trouble?" "They said they were sick of me."

Courting Sympathy

He had been brought before the judge on charges of vagrancy and panhandling and was pouring out his sad tale. "Your honour," he whined, "I was foodless, friendless and homeless." I am moved to tears," the magistrate interrupted. "Food, shelter and companionship shall be yours for the next ninety days. □

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.

Holy Mother Mary, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for hearing my prayer and helping my family in our time of urgent need. Dear Blessed Mother of Jesus, I thank you for always being with me and answering all of my prayers Mother dearest. I once again extend to you a big THANK YOU. With a grateful heart, I want to express my eternal gratitude to You for always being available for me. Each time, I feel nervous and unsure, I recite the 3 Hail Marys and You are there always by my side showering me with love and confidence. Throughout the years, Your assuring presence and support has provided me hope and has strengthened my faith in You. I have always prayed to You for our good health and guidance and You have always been with us providing health and strength for us to carry on. Thank You very much for helping me out when I needed help. Thank You for listening to my prayers.

Mrs. Ramona D'Costa, Mumbai Central
Our sincere and heartfelt thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary and all the saints for all the graces and blessings received by me and my family through the faithful recitation of the three Hail Marys.
Mabel D' Cunha

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

A million thanks to Jesus and Mamma Mary for blessings received; for giving me the best position in the whole world. Every second is a blessing from them.

Hermione Bangera, Mumbai
My heartfelt thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for favours received.

Violet Pereira, Mumbai
My sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary. My brother and his wife were almost separated for many years. I prayed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Today they are together on talking terms. Continue to bless my brother. I'm grateful to Mary Help of Christians for her intercession.

L. D'Souza, Vengurla
My grateful thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary and all the saints for granting us many favours and for the Pilgrimage to Fatima and Lourdes in May 2017, which was safe and successful.

Mrs. R. Mascarenhas, Mumbai

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

Our grateful thanks to the Blessed Trinity, Mary Help of Christians and all the saints. Through their intercession our daughter is alive today and is improving in health. And we continue to trust in your protection.

Mr. & Mrs. Anthony D'Silva, Pune
Our sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother and all the Saints for all the favours granted through their intercession. May they continue to shower their blessings on us and our family always.

P. Bhatt, Mumbai

**THANKS TO DEAR
ST. DOMINIC SAVIO**



After their marriage my daughter did not have a child. With our Lady's blessing and the intercession of Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio they now have a baby who is nearly two years old. A Devotee, Goa My most sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Divine Mercy and Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary, Dominic Savio, Don Bosco, St. Joseph, and all the Saints for the countless Blessings and Graces received. In particular, for the very fulfilling and soul searching pilgrimages to Europe in September last year and to the Holy Land/

Egypt in March/April this year. For a delightful apartment, in an equally delightful neighbourhood, into which I relocated on August 31st. My new home is a few minutes walking distance to Church, where I am able to attend Holy Mass and visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament on a regular basis - something I have dreamed of for decades. I turned 80 in February this year! How truly awesome is God's Mercy and Amazing Grace! Indeed, with faith and trust in God, all things are possible. Alleluia!

Illa Maria Coutinho, Nairobi, Kenya
Our heartfelt thanks to the Divine Mercy, Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for all the favours received. Please continue to bestow your blessings on our family.

Patricia B., Mumbai

**APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER
FEBRUARY 2018**

Say "No" to Corruption

That those who have material, political or spiritual power may resist any lure of corruption.

VISITED BY AN ANGEL

Anne Marie Lee

"Come in," I called over my shoulder to a very loud knock on my office door. As my back was to the door at the time, I turned from my task to see who had entered. My eyes dropped down to fix on the pale round face of a serious looking little boy. Two blue eyes looked back at me in silence. Continuing to stand still, he turned his head while his eyes swept the room taking stock of its contents.

"And who are you, Mr. Man?" I asked. Without a word he approached me with arms stretched wide and before I could react, wrapped himself around me in an affectionate embrace.



The little boy was about four years old. He was built solidly and wore a 'bee bob' hair cut. This and the grey V necked jumper he wore made him look like a child of the nineteen fifties.

"Where's your Mammy?" I asked. He turned to the door and pointed vaguely to the right. "Ok! Lets go and find her." I said. "Maybe she's looking for you?" At this suggestion he ran out the door and I followed. Two other offices and a children's playschool share the corridor outside my office.

Once out the door he ran to the left and started to climb the stairs. I called him back. He came readily and took my hand. He was perfectly comfortable with me although I was a complete stranger to him. Within minutes we met a staff member who recognised him and knew that he had escaped from the playschool. She offered to take him back there and without a word he went with her, but not before turning to smile and wave at me.

One of God's little angels

I was left with a pleasant, warmfuzzy feeling after this encounter and kept reflecting back on the incident over the next few days. I'm one of these people who believe that God reaches out to us, through others, in the ordinary events of our daily lives. Something very precious was communicated to me in the encounter with that little boy. Something about the abundance of God's love for him spilling over to me, through his actions. No words were exchanged as the boy had no words to share. While he looked a perfectly normal healthy four-year-old he was intellectually delayed, one of 'God's little angels', a special child. □

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MARY WAS THERE

I had gone to St. Pius X Seminary, Goregaon. After lunch I was returning. I came to the main gate of the seminary to catch a rickshaw to Goregaon station and there was a traffic jam on the road. BEST buses, taxis, autos and cars, and I didn't know how to move to the other side. The traffic stopped for a while and I began crossing the road to the opposite side. I was just at front of the bus, near the driver. Suddenly from the Western side of the road a motorcycle, which I did not notice, came at full speed with a pillion. The motorcycle was about to come on to me. By the grace of God, in a split second he braked and the motorcycle only touched me but caused no injury. The bus driver simply said: "*bach gaya*". But I knew it was Jesus and Mary who saved me.

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

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