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To Our Lady of Graces

*O Mary of every Grace
 intercede for us,
 that we may receive the outpouring
 of God's love as you did.
 You were chosen by God
 and received his blessing
 in those wondrous words:
 "The Lord is with thee..."
 Share, O Mary that blessing with us
 that we too may know
 the power of those words:
 "The Lord is with thee..."
 Help us realize that
 we have nothing to fear
 for the Lord is with us.
 O Mary of all Graces we greet you
 as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 greeted you:
 "The Lord is with thee..."
 Pray for us O Holy Mother, now
 and at the hour of our death. Amen
 (Fr. Gabriel Harty, OP)*

From The Editor's Desk

ASHES TO GLORY

It is the beginning of February and as I looked at my calendar I realize that February 26th will be Ash Wednesday. I'm sure you will receive this issue well before that. But I thought it best to get a head start. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a day that is named after its primary symbol. Nowadays Christians of every stripe, not just Catholics, crowd the churches for the imposition of ashes. This custom of ashes goes back over a thousand years and has its antecedents in Hebrew Scripture.

It's a very ancient ceremony. Yet in today's world, ashes are hardly irrelevant. The entire world seems covered with ash. It is enveloping us in a mood of uncertainty and threat, like ash blanketing the land; ashes everywhere. Somehow the ashes have silted into our very hearts and souls. In an age of fear and anxiety, of greed and ambition, of aggression and hostility, ashes are an apt and horrible symbol. The colour of modern life must be grey.

With hearts strained under the ashen weight of this world's pain and terror, one might be inclined to say, "No, thank you," and yet we come, drawn by this powerful symbol which speaks volumes. Ash Wednesday challenges us to real honesty.

In the ash of so much destruction, so much life burned up, Ash Wednesday challenges us to admit to our complicity in the world's brokenness. Each day's morning paper places horrible images of rage, greed, selfishness, negligence and death right on our doorstep.

Another word of truth Ash Wednesday declares is that life is fragile. A mere puff of wind will easily blow away the ashes in those little dishes that sit on the altar on Ash Wednesday. Into the richness and pleasure of living comes the chilling reminder, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return:" the shortness and uncertainty of human life.

In these perilous days, Ash Wednesday comes, bringing promise, not threat. Ash Wednesday, that most honest of days, tells us the truth about the worst of human kind and the best of God. We are told the glorious truth that "God loves us," seeks us out, forgives us, restores us and makes us new. We are told the amazing truth that nothing - no disaster, no tragedy, no disappointment, no sin can snatch us out of God's loving arms.

It is fairly obvious that the service that includes the Imposition of Ashes differs in any number of ways from our usual celebration of the Eucharist. One difference is so obvious as not to be noticed. Observe that we approach the altar twice. The first time, for the ashes, sign of our mortality and sin, sign of our deep nothingness without God. The second time we come to receive Christ's Body and Blood, promise of God's loving presence and power in our daily lives. Here is food for the journey as we make our pilgrimage from ashes to glory, from sin to forgiveness, and from Lent to the glory of Easter and beyond.

Fr. Ian Douilton sdb

THE BEST FORM OF FRIENDSHIP

by Gianpaolo Gianin

The other person is the gift of God to me, and love is the experience that allows me to get to know the beauty, the uniqueness and the many hidden features and treasures that only an intimate relationship will be able to open and reveal

Once he defined and described conjugal charity, Pope Francis highlighted a particular aspect of the spousal bond stating that marital love is “the greatest form of friendship” (AL 123) because it contains, sustains and at the same time exceeds all the characteristics of the friendship bond: altruism, reciprocity, intimacy, tenderness, stability and a similarity that is being formed through a shared life. See the intense words with which the philosopher Lewis describes friendship: “Friendship binds two people for a corporeal interest, for one purpose. Hence true friendship is the least jealous of loves [...] indeed it loves to widen the circle of friends. Camaraderie is the matrix of friendship, but it should not be confused with what comes when two companions discover a common idea, an interest that others do not share. If lovers love to be alone, friends open the circle willingly to those who share the same thing. In friendship “do you love me?” means “do you care about the same truth?” There are people hungry for friends, but they can’t find themselves because you can have friends only if you want something besides friends.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*).

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These beautiful statements can also be good for spouses, although their relationship has other characteristics. How beautiful it is that a couple is open to others and yet live in a cozy home! How can we not then think that what unites two spouses is a shared life-plan, a common idea, as Lewis writes and not to presume that “do you love me” also includes the common search for another good that is the ‘truth.’ And it is true that marriages can grow and endure over time if we don’t just stop with the other or with the couple’s relationship but when they open themselves to what is beyond: our children, life and in the end, God himself.

Lewis goes on to speak of friendship in these words: “People find in a friend an ally; friendship is free, the gift of one to the other made freely, without constraints. In a group of friends each one is simply himself and we come to know things incidentally. This is the regal nature of friendship: in it we meet as sovereigns of independent states on neutral ground. A friend recognizes him not because he looks directly into his eyes like a lover does, but because we fight together, discuss

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Don Bosco’s Madonna

with each other and pray together.”

Here too we can recognize that conjugal love contains, integrates and exceeds these characteristics, but without denying them; spouses simply live them differently. How can I forget that both spouses are in league with each other, capable of gift and gratuity? How can we forget that between the two of them there is one true faith that does not need to become an inquisition to stifle the freedom of the beloved? And it is true that the marital bond does not eliminate the singularity of each of them. If it is true that the two spouses look into each other’s eyes and love each other, it is also true that together they fight, argue and pray.

“Friendship,” Lewis continues, “is not the reward of discernment and good taste that we have shown to possess, by finding each other. It is the instrument through which God reveals to everyone the beauty of the other, which is surely, superior to the beauty of a thousand people. Through friendship God opens our eyes to them.”

Here Lewis touches the summit of the friendship relationship and also the spousal relationship. The man and the woman do not deserve a prize for being good hunters who have conquered excellent prey. Certainly there is truth in this because every lover struggles to seduce his beloved and conquer her, but what Lewis says is also true: the other is the gift that God gives me and love is the experience that allows me to know

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the beauty, the uniqueness and the many hidden features and treasures that only that intimate relationship can open up and reveal.

Conjugal love, writes the Pope, is “the best form of friendship,” because it can make all the qualities of this awesome feeling its own and at the same time bind the two in a special way. Conjugal love turns friendship into a unique, but not exclusive relationship; indissoluble, but never a static bond; passionate but always a respectful and creative bond because it adds to the fruitfulness of each friendship, the gift of a third: the child, the fruit of love. But we will talk of that next time. □

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Don Bosco’s Madonna

EVERYDAY, A GIFT TO BE 'UNWRAPPED'

by Maria Chiara Bregolin

What kind of friend am I to my husband? Pope Francis invites us to look at our lives as spouses as the highest form of friendship. He tells us in *Amoris Laetitia* that the two dimensions that characterize the depth of conjugal love are: the tenderness of friendship and erotic passion.

Friendship in the context of marriage seeks consent, mutual love and loyalty. And to these characteristics he adds the passion of physical union and a perspective of the eternal. Very clearly, this particular kind of friendship can celebrate something that other types cannot!

Being 'married' friends means recognizing each other as equals, desiring the good of the other more than anything else and seeing the wonder, uniqueness, and mystery in the being of the other. Being able to count on the friendship of one's spouse means to 'unwrap' every day the gift that God gives us as we live with the person we love the most.



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Being 'married' friends seems anachronistic, let's face it. We live in a society where love is presented to us in a way that is very far from this definition. Isn't it true? Love is proposed to us as attractive, as sensual and possessive. Tenderness and friendship are concepts that probably don't sell when it comes to love. And yet, if marriage can rely on a solid friendship between spouses, it can aspire to last forever and can point to happiness.

Can I count on the support on my spouse, his ability to listen, and for support? Can he count on my collaboration? Do we have common interests? Shared life plans? From the most resilient and enduring relationships of couples around me, I seem to identify some common characteristics: mutual consent, sharing of values and priorities, personal freedom, self-realization, obviously physical attraction despite the passing of years and the constant and continuous commitment to make each other feel heard, accepted and loved.

Finally, let me add one last thing: the role of humour! In these couples, the ability to laugh together and to laugh at themselves, to have fun together always plays a fundamental role and this last comment only reassures me when I hear my husband snort and cite that passage from the Gospel in which Jesus says: "When they rise from the dead, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but will be like the angels in heaven" (Mark 18,25)! ☐

IN THE ARMS OF OLD SIMEON

Don Chino Biscontin

God entrusts his Son to humanity, stripped of his glory, power, totally defenceless. A tremendous risk justified only by an infinite love

It is understandable that quite a few Christian feasts originated because of events narrated in the Gospels. This is also true of the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. According to the book of Numbers, every first-born male belonged to God (Num. 18, 14-18), so the parents had to redeem him, taking him to the Temple forty days after his birth and offering a lamb in exchange or if the family was very poor, a pair of doves. The offering was also meant for the "purification" of the mother.

In Jerusalem, already in the fourth century, forty days after the feast of the Epiphany (in the East this was celebrated as the birth of Jesus), this event was commemorated by a solemn procession at the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. The feast was centered on the recognition of the Messiah by two qualified witnesses, Simeon and Anna, representing the people of the Covenant.

Towards the second half of the seventh century, the feast reached Rome where, having established the birth of Jesus on December 25, forty days later was February 2. Here it became the memory of Mary's purification. And, what surprises us today that it had a penitential tone: the Pope and the deacons wore black vestments. The procession started at the church of St.



Adrian at the Forum and ended at the Basilica of St. Mary Major. The candles used for the procession were brought home by the faithful.

The texts and hymns used for the feasts however, were translations of those used in the East so when the celebration spread

throughout the West towards the 11th Century, it regained its full significance and the newborn Christ Child became its centre, even today it continues to have a Marian connotation.

The touching image full of symbolism continues to be repeated in Christian art; that of old Simeon and the little Child in his arms. A beautiful oriental antiphon exclaims: "You look at the earth and it trembles: how can a tired old man hold you in his arms?" Yet, that is what happened. God entrusts his Son to humanity, stripped of his glory, power and totally defenceless; a tremendous risk justified only by an infinite love. In fact, we cannot forget that some thirty years later, and not far from the Temple Mount, once again, Mary will hold in her arms her Son, but with his hands and feet pierced by nails and his heart pierced with a lance when he is taken down from the cross.

The procession with the blessed candles warrants us to recall the long years of waiting for the coming of the Messiah that Simeon and Anna lived through; the trust of God who gives his Son, is matched by the trust of Simeon

and Anna who firmly believed in the fulfilment of the promises. And while Simeon takes Jesus in his arms, we who celebrate the feast receive the consecrated Bread, Jesus with us, becoming like Mary. The Son of God who asks to be our son, asks us to express ourselves through our humanity, our Christian community, transfigured by his grace to become the Body of Christ.

To me, already an elderly man, that procession makes my journey towards the end of my earthly life, and the encounter with the Lord beyond that threshold: an encounter in which I hope with all my strength, not for my merits, but by virtue of that promise: "Let not your heart be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me. In my Father's house there are many mansions. If it were not so would I have told you 'I'm going to prepare a place for you?' When I have gone and prepared a place for you, I will come again and take you with me, for where I am you will also be" (Jn 14:1-3) The positions are reversed: we no longer welcome Jesus, but it is Jesus who welcomes us. "Lord, let your servant now go in peace..." □

PASSING THROUGH

In the late 19th century, an American tourist went to the city of Cairo in Egypt to visit an old man who was renowned for his wisdom. The tourist was surprised to find that this wise man lived in a very simple room. Apart from his books the only items in the room were a bed, a table and a chair. "Where is your furniture?" asked the tourist. Quickly the old man replied, "And where is yours?" The tourist, obviously taken aback, said "Mine? But I am only a tourist, I am only passing through here." The old man replied, "It is the same with me. I am only passing through life. We are on a journey to God. Material possessions can take over our lives, blind us and tie us down so that we cannot see the way to God nor enjoy the freedom to live and love, which God gave us." The tourist went away a wiser man.

ONE CHANCE TO LIVE LIFE

by Anastasia Dias

February 14th was a cold morning. One could see a crowd of young people in college waiting for the right moment to exchange flowers and gifts. The idea of *Valentine's Day* had always seemed stupid to me - one particular day to declare your love and shower your loved ones with gifts and affection sounded ridiculous and expensive.

Out of the blue, my classmate John walked up to me and asked: 'Anne, do you mind accompanying me to pick out a few flowers to gift someone?' John and I had never really spoken before; he was very quiet and always sat at one end of the classroom - I hesitantly nodded.

So, John and I went together to pick out a huge bouquet of red roses. Thinking my job was done, I was prepared to leave. John surprised me, asking: 'Would you come with me to give these roses to my Valentine?' I was reluctant but John looked at me with pleading eyes.

We drove across town and to my surprise John stopped at the local cemetery. He got out of the car with the bouquet of red roses and a letter that had "Mummy" written on the envelope. I saw him walk up to her grave with tears in his eyes. Standing at her



grave he prayed for a while.

It tore my heart to see John standing there in tears. But in his place, all I could see now was a little boy whispering a prayer for his mum, wishing she would come back and hold him again.

After a while, Johnny came up to me, his eyes moist with tears and said: 'I lost my Mum to cancer when I was 7. She's been my Valentine every year, since then.'

I put an arm around Johnny for a moment and then we drove home in silence. That was the beginning of a very special friendship for both of us. I was beginning to understand Johnny better. The silent guy in class visited cancer patients and worked with survivors after class. He visited hospitals, spent time speaking to victims of all ages, assuring them that they weren't alone in the battle.

One day, I volunteered to go



A GENUINE SEEKER

Nicodemus Meets Jesus

Ian Pinto, sdb

with Johnny after class. I was aghast when I saw little children, young boys and girls, mothers and fathers, people from all walks of life lying on beds with heads bereft of hair. I thought it unfair that anyone should suffer like this. When I started talking to them, I got a completely new perspective on life. Instead of bitter people who had lost so much, I found human beings with hope – hope for the future. People there wanted to live; they had a purpose, a motivation and a drive. They didn't want to give into their disease, they fought it valiantly.

A young mother, who had been diagnosed with Stage-2 breast Cancer told me: 'I was a very angry woman when I was diagnosed. I questioned God, my family, friends, everyone. Then I came to a conclusion – I had two choices: I could be crabby or face the situation with courage. I chose the latter. And today, I can say I'm grateful for all that has happened; for every day and every moment I am alive. I have to live, at least for my kids. They're my reason for living.'

Johnny and I continued our regular visits. Day by day, I began to rediscover the true meaning of life. I had been ungrateful for so many things. I had taken my parents for granted. There were times when I felt like everything was over and all that was left was to give up. And, here, before my eyes were people battling cancer, striving to spend a little more time with their loved ones. I began seeing the world with a completely new perspective.

Six months later, I got the shock of my life when Johnny was diagnosed with Stage-3 leukemia. The months following his diagnosis

were terrifying. He was dying a little each day, yet giving life, hope and joy to everyone around him. One could always see him smiling, talking to everyone who visited him. He advised parents to be patient with their young ones and spend as much time as they could with them, because life was too short to be wasted on spanking or scolding. He understood this better than anyone, having known and felt the loss of his mum each day.

Johnny passed away, three months later. He seemed blissful and at total peace. Little Johnny had been reunited with his mother and he taught me that I had to be grateful for whatever I had and live each day as if it was my last. My life now got a whole new meaning, when I added meaning to the lives of others. Johnny was gone, but his life-lessons are still with me.

On the 14th of February, I visited Johnny's grave, right next to his mother's. I laid down two bouquets of red roses: one for the boy who had become an elder brother and friend to me over the last year and the other for his beloved "Mummy."

I prayed just as Johnny had, exactly a year ago. Standing here, I was grateful for the gift of life and even though I missed Johnny terribly, I know he is at peace. Johnny's voice echoes in my ears: 'Anne, worry less, smile often, make others around you smile, fill the world with sunshine. Remember true happiness is not found in the greatest achievements but in the smallest acts of kindness.'

Valentine's Day last year taught me about life, love, loss and another chance at living and loving. ☐

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a leader of the Jewish people (Jn 3:1). His elevated social standing allowed him to put his education to good use and garner the respect and admiration of the people. Surprisingly, Nicodemus wasn't like other Pharisees. He was humble. He didn't let his knowledge and power go to his head. He was perhaps the only Pharisee in the Bible to have the courage to go to Jesus and clarify his ideas (Jn 3:1 onwards). Even when the Chief Priests wanted to arrest Jesus while he preached in the Temple, Nicodemus took the courage to point out that the Law didn't allow for anyone to be condemned without a proper hearing (Jn 7:50-52). Thus, Nicodemus comes across as a man who was honest, fair, humble and open. The Bible doesn't say much about his personality but it could be deduced that he was probably liked by the people. After all, who doesn't like an honest and humble leader?

If there is one thing leaders today lack, it's humility. Their power makes them arrogant. Despite being chosen by the people, after a while, they begin to think it was Divine Will or their own merit that put them in office. Therefore, they see themselves as being entitled to privileges and the respect and admiration of the people! Pope Francis in his recent apostolic exhortation, *Gaudium et*

Exsultate makes reference to such an attitude. He points out that such an attitude is a modern form of an ancient heresy called Pelagianism. Pelagianism gives emphasis to the human will over and above the grace and mercy of God. People who fall prey to this heresy forget that everything "depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy" (Rom 9:16) and that "he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19).



The first characteristic the Pope makes regarding Pelagianism is that it is "A Will Lacking Humility." The Pope talks of Pelagianism within the Catholic context and says that we could be very effective preachers of the Word of God, we might even comfort and counsel people in the name of God but all the while we could subtly be pushing our own agenda (*GE* 49). "The lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgment of our limitations prevents grace from working more effectively within us, for no room is left for bringing about the potential good that is

part of a sincere and genuine journey of growth. Grace, precisely because it builds on nature, does not make us superhuman all at once. That kind of thinking would show too much confidence in our own abilities... Unless we acknowledged our concrete and limited situation, we will not be able to see the real and possible steps that the Lord demands of us at every moment, once we are attracted and empowered by his gift" (GE 50).

What is applicable to leaders is also very relevant to priests and Church heads. Priests, who are called to be pastors, and other Christian leaders, who are supposed to be servant leaders, often turn into hard nuts! They appear, at times, unwilling to listen to others while pushing their own agenda and even resorting to throwing tantrums when things don't go their way. If the first case is sad, this is sadder still. Not only have such people soured the Church and made it off-putting for those who frequently attend, they have also succeeded in ruining the desire of others who would like to have come to Church! This kind of behaviour is typical of another serious malady that Pope Francis alludes to, and that is Gnosticism. Taking a clue from its name, Gnosticism can be defined as the heresy of the head. An individual who attributes undue importance to knowledge over and above experience and revelation, can be called a Gnostic (cf. GE 39-42). Priests and other religious leaders are more susceptible to fall into this trap because of the long years they

spend studying about faith and religion. At the end of it all, they could come out of it with an 'I-know-it-all' attitude. Such an attitude is not only detrimental to themselves and their relationships with others but negatively influences the Church too!

Nicodemus is presented in the Gospel (Jn 3) as a sincere seeker of truth. Notwithstanding his elevated social and religious position, he is humble enough to recognize the veracity and power of Jesus' message and make attempts to understand it. His dialogue with Jesus elicits from the Lord some of the most profound truths of our faith. For instance, Nicodemus spurs Jesus to utter the words that are regarded as the summary of the Bible and the Christian faith: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Nicodemus teaches us the value of humility especially when it comes to the spiritual life. We might be CEO's, officers, entrepreneurs, accountants, teachers, clerks or any other position of authority in our workplace but in the Church and before God, we are all children. For God there is no high or low, smart or dumb, rich or poor; it doesn't matter much who we are in the outside world, we aren't going to take all that wealth and glory anywhere, what matters is who we are on the inside and that is a child of God. The sooner we realize this, the better. It is childlike love and faith that God desires (Mt 18:3-4) and only a genuine seeker will be able to offer it to Him. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times

**ST. PETER DAMIAN
BISHOP, DOCTOR (AD 1072)
(FEBRUARY 21)**



St. Peter Damian was born at Ravenna and was the youngest of many children, and, losing his father and mother very young, he was left in the hands of a brother who was married, in whose house he was treated more like a slave, or rather like a beast, than one so nearly related; and when he grew up, he was sent to keep swine. One day he came to receive a sum of money which, instead of using for himself he chose to bestow in alms on a priest, desiring him to offer up his prayers for his father's soul. Another brother, who was archpriest of Ravenna, took pity on the neglected lad and undertook to have him educated. Having found a father in this brother, Peter appears to have adopted his name Damian for his surname, though he often styled himself the Sinner out of humility. Damian sent Peter to school, first at Faenza, afterwards at Parma, where he had Ivo for his master. By the means of good natural talents and close application, it was not long before he found himself able to teach others, which he did with great com-



petence, and was paid well for his professorship. He had early begun to take to fasting, vigils and prayer, and wore a hair shirt under his clothes to arm himself against the allurements of pleasure and the artifices of the devil. At night, if any temptation of concupiscence arose, he got out of bed and plunged himself into the cold river. After this he visited churches, reciting the psalter

which he performed till the church office began. He not only gave much away in alms, but was seldom without some poor person at his table, and he took pleasure in serving such, or rather Jesus Christ in their persons, with his own hands. But thinking all this to be removing himself from the deadly poison of sin only by halves, he resolved entirely to leave the world and embrace a monastic life and distance himself from his own country, for the sake of meeting with the fewer obstacles to his design.

While his mind was full of these thoughts, two religious of the order of St. Benedict, belonging to Font-Avellano, a community at the foot of the Apennines in Umbria, happened to call at his place and being much edified at their disinterestedness, he took a resolution to embrace their institute soon after. This hermitage had been founded by blessed Ludolf, about twenty years before Peter came there, and was then in the most famous. The hermits here lived in pairs together in separate cells, occupied chiefly in prayer and reading. They lived on bread and water four days a week: on Tuesdays and Thursdays they ate pulse and herbs, which every one prepared in his own cell. On their fast days all their bread was given them by weight. They never used any wine, (the common drink of the country) except for Mass or in sickness; they went barefoot, used disciplines, made many genuflections, struck their breasts, stood with their arms stretched out in prayer, each according to his strength and de-

votion.

He now devoted considerable time to sacred studies and became as well versed in the Holy Scriptures as he formerly had been in profane literature.

His superior ordered him to give frequent conferences to the religious and as he had acquired a very great character for virtue and learning, Guy, the abbot of Pomposia begged his superior to send him to instruct his monastery, which consisted of a hundred monks. Peter stayed there two years, preaching with great fruit, and was then called back by his abbot, and sent to perform the same function in the flourishing abbey of St. Vincent near the mountain called *Pietra Pertusa*, or the Hollow Rock. His love for poverty made him abhor and be ashamed to put on a new habit, or any clothes which were not threadbare and most mean. His obedience was so perfect, that the least word of any superior, or signal given, according to the rule of the house, for the performance of any duty, made him run that moment to discharge, with the utmost exactness, whatever was enjoined. Being recalled home sometime after, and commanded by his abbot with the unanimous consent of the hermitage, to take upon himself the government of the community after his death, Peter's extreme reluctance only obliged his superior to make greater use of his authority till he acquiesced. Wherefore, at his death in 1041, Peter took upon him the direction of that holy community which he governed with the greatest reputation for wisdom and sanctity.

He also founded five other hermitages in which he placed priors under his own general direction. His chief care was to foster in his disciples the spirit of solitude, charity and humility.

He was for twelve years much employed in the service of the Church by many zealous bishops and by four popes successively, namely Gregory VI, Clement II, Leo IX, and Victor II. Their successor, Stephen IX, in 1057, prevailed with him to quit his community and made him cardinal bishop of Ostia. But such was his reluctance to the dignity that nothing less than the pope's threatening him with excommunication, and his commands, in virtue of obedience, could induce Peter to submit. His successor, Alexander II, out of affection for the holy man was prevailed upon with difficulty to consent, but reserved the power to employ him in church matters of importance, as he might hereafter have need of his help. The saint from that time considered himself dispensed not only from the responsibility of governing his see, but from the supervision of the various religious settlements he had controlled and reduced himself to the condition of a simple monk. In this retirement he edified the church by his penance and compunction and laboured by his writings to enforce the observance of discipline and morality. His style was copious and vehement and the strictness of his maxims appears in all his works, especially where he treats of the duties of clergymen and monks. He severely rebuked the bishop of Florence for playing a game of chess. That

prelate acknowledged his amusement to be a faulty sloth in a man of his character, and received the saint's remonstrance with great mildness and submitted to his injunction by way of penance, namely to recite three times the psalter, to wash the feet of twelve poor men, and to give to each a piece of money.

Whatever austerities he prescribed for others, he practised himself, remitting none of them even in his old age. He used to make wooden spoons and other little useful things that his hands might not be idle during the time he was not at work or at prayer. When Henry, Archbishop of Ravenna, had been excommunicated for grievous enormities, Peter was sent by Alexander II as legate to settle the troubles. Upon his arrival at Ravenna he found that the prelate had just died, but he brought the accomplices of his crimes to a sense of their guilt and imposed on them suitable penance. This was Damian's last undertaking for the Church. As he was returning towards Rome he was attacked by an acute fever in a monastery outside Faenza, and died on the eighth day of this illness, whilst the monks were reciting Matins round about him, on February 22, 1072.

St. Peter Damian was one of the chief forerunners of the Hildebrandine reform in the Church. His preaching was most eloquent and his writing voluminous, and he was declared a doctor of the Church in 1828. □

(Edited and adapted from: Butler's Lives of Saints, ed. Michael Walsh.)



FREE TO CHOOSE THE GOOD

Don Carlo Broccardo

This passage of Sirach (15:16-21) tells us of this binary that helps us to live better lives: First: our wellbeing and that of the others is in our hands; Second: faith is a proposal

We read this way back in 2017 when we were reading the Old Testament and we have not yet paused to go deeper into a single page of the book of Sirach! I would say that the time has come for us to attempt this. If you **hear (or have heard) this passage from chapter 15** on February 16, as the first reading; let us study it together.

First of all get this: it's not our fault! I mean it's not our fault that we haven't read Sirach yet; it's not an easy book to read and we've always struggled to read it. It was written in Hebrew around 180 BC by a man named "Jesus ben Sirach, the son of Eleazar of Jerusalem (we find this quote - which is his signature - in Sirach 40:27; the name Joshua/Jesus was widespread at the time). Some years later it was translated into Greek by one of his nephews. He immediately exerted a certain fascination among some readers but the Jew-

ish communities never considered his writings "sacred," or "inspired." In other words, the book never entered into the official canon of biblical books. It was preserved because we Christians continued to read the Greek translation but the Hebrew original was lost. In 1886 some archaeological discoveries found some pieces but not the whole book.

The book of Sirach belongs to that group of Old Testament books, called "sapiential" books which contain reflections and teachings on many aspects of life, from the most practical things (advice about not being too naïve when making a contract) to deep truths of the faith (such as reflections on the meaning of life and death, God and evil).

The sapiential books - citing a beautiful definition by the biblicist Luis Alonso Schockel (1920-1998) - is "an offer of sig-

nificance"; in our case, this wise man of the 2nd century BC thought of putting into a book - Sirach - all the reflections that he had throughout his life from where those who want to can draw on its wisdom to live better lives. It is not obligatory, it is just a proposal.

We can also understand the style of today's reading: "If you want to, you can keep the Lord's commands," he does not say 'you must keep the Lord's commands, they are obligatory!' There are no threats: if you don't, who knows what will happen to you! No one will do anything to you if you don't observe them but know this, if you learn them and put them into practice they will protect you; that is, live with faith and you will live better lives. "He has placed fire and water before you; reach out and take whichever you want," if you stretch out your hand over the fire you will burn yourself; if you stretch out your hand towards the water, you may draw it up and drink and so quench your thirst, it is a free choice. No one is forced to do good but if we choose it, it will, first of all, be good for us.

The rationale is simple and straightforward: since God sees everything, he knows the work of men and knows just what we need. Trusting his word is like listening to the suggestions of an expert guide: surely they will take us to our destination by the best way. Because, just like the last words of our passage state, not every path is good, and not every behaviour is like water to quench your thirst. "God has never commanded anyone to be

wicked or given anyone permission to commit sin," the fact that God leaves you free to choose does not mean that everything is equally good, as if he has given you permission to sin without batting an eyelid - so *you* have to decide. You have to decide what you want to do, not what is good.

It might seem a bit too simplistic as an argument, and indeed it is. In fact, very often in life it is not very clear whether the word we'd like to say or that action we'd like to do is good or bad, is it water or fire? Sometimes we have to try and if we realize that we've been mistaken we should fix it. At other times, maybe we understand what is good, but we cannot do it because maybe we are conditioned or we are weak and give in to the temptation.

It is true: this passage from Sirach does not give us all the nuances of reality but it shows us two tracks we may follow, two clear directions that will lead us to a better life. The first is that our good and that of others are also in our hands; of course, there are many things in life that do not depend on us, but there are also several things that do depend on the choices we make day after day. We can make this world a better place by making the right choices!

The second line of thought is that faith is a proposal, no one forces us to believe; it makes no sense to force (or to threaten) someone to announce the gospel. But if everyone sees that we freely chose to listen and live the gospel, we'd be better people...surely that would be quite something. □

DO NOT DELAY CONVERSION

Pope Francis at Mass at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Thursday, February 23, 2017

Pope Francis' reflection at Santa Marta on Thursday morning focused on the "sin" of those who profess to be Christians and then show their true colours by living a life that is not at all Christian, and the counter-testimony of those who "exploit" and "destroy" the lives of others while pretending to be good Catholics. Commenting on the harsh words used by Jesus in the Gospel, he called on those living a "double life" to convert.

The Pontiff's homily was inspired by Psalm 1, which reads: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, (...) and on his law he meditates day and night." The Bible, Pope Francis explained, was referring to men who find their "strength" in the Lord, and "who feel little, who know that without the Lord they can do nothing". This man is "blessed by the Lord," the Pope said.

Further on, Pope Francis continued, the Psalm also suggests the "contrast between those who follow the Lord's law and those who are arrogant, evil." This same contrast can be found in the day's Gospel (Mark 9:41-50), he explained. In that passage too, "there are good people and bad people." One can perceive behind Jesus' words "the image of these just people who feel they are little but whose trust is in the Lord," Francis said. He pointed out that the word "sin" comes up four times in the passage and that the Lord is "very harsh" in using it. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea," Jesus says. In fact, the Pontiff explained, for the Lord, sin is the same as destruction, thus Jesus advises that it is better to destroy yourself than to destroy others. "Cut off your hand, cut off your feet, pluck out your eye, throw yourself into the sea," Francis said, but do not cause the "little ones, that is, the just ones, those who trust in the Lord, who simply believe in the Lord," to sin.

At this point, the Holy Father asked: "what is sin?" The answer, he continued, affects every person's actual life: "sin is saying one thing and doing another; it is a double life." He then offered an example, "I am very Catholic, I always go to Mass, I belong to this association and another; but my life is not Christian, I do not pay my employees fairly, I take advantage of people, I play dirty in business, I launder money." This is a "double life", he stressed, adding that unfortunately there are "many Catholics who are like this and they cause sin."

These are clear words which bring each of us to reflect back on our daily lives. "How many times have we heard, in our neighbourhood or elsewhere: 'better to be an atheist than to be a Catholic like him'; this is sin" which "destroys", which "wears us down," Pope Francis

said. "This happens every day: just watch the television news or read the newspapers. There are many scandals in newspapers, and there is also great publicity of scandals. And scandals destroy."

Continuing his explanation, the Pontiff spoke about a recent fact regarding "an important company" that was "on the verge of bankruptcy." Since the authorities "wanted to avoid a strike which was justified but which would have resolved nothing," they tried to get in touch with the company's director. But where was this person while the "company was failing" and people "were not receiving wages for their work?" This manager, who said he was "a very Catholic man," was "on a beach in the Middle East having a "winter holiday." This fact "never made it to the papers", but "people found out," he explained. These "are the sins, the double lives" and Jesus asks those who behave like this not to destroy the little ones who believe in him, with their double lives, he said.

Paraphrasing another passage of the Gospel, the Pontiff imagined the moment in which the sinner knocks on Heaven's door: "It is I, Lord!" — "Don't you remember? I used to go to Church, I was close to you, I belonged to this and that association, I did this ... do you not recall all my offerings? Yes I remember. The offerings I remember: all of them dirty. You steal them all from the poor. I do not know you."

The Holy Father explained that the problem begins from an attitude which is well described in today's first reading (Sirach 5:1-8): "Do not set your heart on your wealth, nor say 'I have enough.' Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart." Thus, he continued, a double life "comes from following your heart's desires, the capital sins which are the wounds of the original sin." Those who create scandal follow these desires even if they conceal them. Scripture admonishes those who, even while recognizing their errors, nevertheless rely on the fact that "the Lord is patient, he will forget..." Indeed, Scripture cautions us: "do not delay" conversion.

The Pontiff echoed this invitation to every Christian. "It will be good for each one of us to think about whether there is a double life within us: to appear just, to appear as good believers, good Catholics, but to really be doing something else," he said. It is a case of trying to understand if our behaviour is that of someone who says, the "Lord will forgive me everything, but I will continue..." and despite being aware of his mistakes, repeats: "Yes, this is no good. I will convert, but not today. No: tomorrow." Pope Francis ended by calling for self examination in order to experience conversion in our hearts, beginning by acknowledging that "sin destroys." □

THE KING'S CROWN

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doullton silb

As soon as the guards realized that Colin O'Donnell had escaped from prison, the prosecutor ordered that the house of the judge who had sentenced him be patrolled night and day by the police.

"Good evening, judge!"

Despite the prosecutor's promptness, Colin had reached there before anyone. It was really by a whisker in spite of the police arriving on two speeding bikes. Now he faced the judge, gun in hand.

"Say your prayers, your time has come!"

Outside, the police had mounted guard and they could see only a light coming from the judge's large study. But what

they did not know was that inside a terrible dialogue had begun:

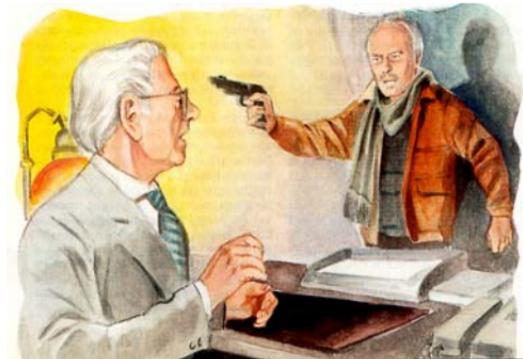
"Judge, I told him that you would pay for my sentence with your life."

"Colin O'Donnell, I passed sentence according to my conscience!"

"That's not true I was and am innocent... She knew it. I never killed anyone, your honour. I am Colin, called the "King" of the port: I stole, I cheated, sure...but when that policeman was found dead on the pier, I was in bed with a fever!" Then with a smirk he went on: "Colin, the 'King' would never have done something so stupid."

"Colin, death is not something stupid!"

Colin didn't even understand



the judge's last sentence. His mind was far, far away...

"I have saved up quite a fortune...I promised myself that I would buy a peerage...I would have really been a "king"! Everyone would have turned their heads and pointed at me saying: "That's Colin, the "king" who has the title of count or baron or marquis... But instead your sentence judge, has destroyed my dreams...my life."

Colin had finished. His tension snapped, it seemed to vanish and he was suddenly confused: in a flash, he slipped off the safety catch and fired.

The police outside heard the shot and rushed in. They saw a shadow jump out of the window; they dashed there and fired desperately.

Then all was quiet again: there was a death in that house.

"Go and see who it is, Brother Lucian," said the Prior, the sound of the bell still echoed in the air. Brother Lucian left his hoe in the centre of the flowerbed and moved as fast as his 110 kilos could carry him.

When he reached the door he looked through the peephole but saw no one. That must have been the usual joke played by the rascals in the neighbourhood but then on second thought, he carefully opened the door and saw a man lying on the ground.

Brother Lucian shook him gently by the shoulder, turned him over and then decided to hoist him on his broad shoulders and take him into the priory.

As he reached the Prior who was waiting for him, he said: "He was just outside the door, on the ground...seems to be dead."

"Don't jump to conclusions, Lucian...he must just hurt...but he's still alive."

"Follow me quickly."

He placed him on the little cot hoping he would regain consciousness eventually. The Prior washed his wounds and carefully disinfected them, but he still continued to bleed.

"Call the doctor, Brother Lucian. Go quickly..."

Colin had been hit. He had wandered around all night along the narrow streets by the harbour and then he made his way up the hills behind the village in a desperate attempt to get away. Before the town could wake up at dawn he came to the little priory and knocked on the door: now he was confined to this bed...delirious with fever that danced inside his head, tormenting him.

"I'll kill you, judge, I'll get you!" He muttered in his delirium.

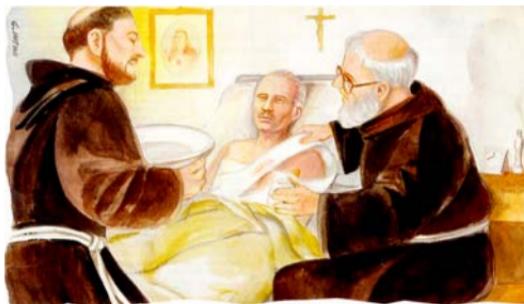
The Prior was startled. Colin had spoken and only words of death.

"Shh! Don't upset yourself...!" he murmured, lost.

"I'm the "king" I want the crown!"

Brother Lucian was on his way back and he stopped on the threshold, struggling with a feeling of surprise. What kingdom was he talking about, that poor unfortunate man?

"I'll kill all the others, judge



after I'm done with you!"

"Father Prior..." Brother Lucian's eyes grew large, and this time he was even afraid.

"Yes, Brother Lucian: have you called the doctor?"

"Certainly, but wouldn't this be a case for the police?"

"Our Lord prayed for sinners."

"But he is more than a sinner!"

"Our Lord died even for him, Brother Lucian!"

The Prior resumed cleaning Colin who was moaning on the bed; attending to his wounds, disinfecting them and trying to stop the bleeding. More than that what could the poor friar do? At other times death came to the priory placidly almost very serenely. This time instead, it came violently and almost shrouded in hatred and the blood kept oozing out red and hot...

"Let me handle this Father Prior," said Brother Lucian. And he started cleaning the wounds with fresh gauze and water...then as if he had done

nothing else all his life, he bandaged the flesh quite skillfully and the bleeding finally stopped.

Colin had not yet regained consciousness. The blood that he had lost during his escape had thrown him into a state of violent delirium. But memories of the past, his escape, the murder of the judge were all a muddle in his mind with the force of a nightmare. Colin was now afraid.

"Enough!" he shouted with his eyes shut and his large hands trying desperately to grasp the spectre that was haunting him and tearing it to pieces. His face was twisted in a painful grimace. Looking at him, Brother Lucian could only make the sign of the cross.

"Brother Lucian, pray for him", said the Prior.

Brother Lucian crouched in a corner and began to pray the Rosary, taking the olive-wood beads from deep within his habit pocket. Never did prayer rise to Heaven with more fervent accents than his and all the while

Colin only grew worse.

Colin dreamed of being a king. He dreamed of greatness and glory and honour: he dreamed like a simple hungry soul dreams, the soul of a poor humble man who peeps through an open door at a great banquet. Delirium can do such strange things; so much so that Colin lived in this kind of dream world that had been the greatest illusion of his life.

That was what made Colin smile.

"Thank you Lord, that he's no longer swearing," muttered the Prior as he looked at the young monk with eyes glistening with emotion. The childlike devotion of the monk was so tender!

"Behold the King!" interrupted Colin. The delirium returned for the last time.

"Make way for Colin, the 'King!' Give him the chest of diamonds and gems, the red velvet cloak and the crown, the gold crown, a crown fit and grand enough for Colin..."

"Brother... and where did I keep my crown?" Brother Lucian was upset once more and didn't know what to do.

Then as if an afterthought the fugitive said feebly: "There will be no need, Brother... This poor king still has need of your prayers more than the crown..."

Thus the prayers of the humble friar and the yearnings of Colin O'Donnell rose from that poor cell to heaven; perhaps both were very gladly accepted by the Lord.

"Lord, have mercy on us..."

"Oh, my golden crown! Where is my golden crown?"

Brother Lucian tried to comfort Colin: "Forgive us O Lord for our shortcomings... Father Prior says that most of the time we commit them without knowing what we do..."

Just then the doctor arrived: in time to grab Colin under his armpits and holding up his head. Then he laid him gently on the cot and closed his eyelids.

"I've reached here very late...he's dead."

It was 3 pm on Good Friday: the same day and the same hour when the "King of Heaven and Earth" Our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross.

At the door the doctor met the police hot on the trail of the fugitive.

"Go in."

And they entered.

"We're looking for a fugitive, an assassin..." they said to the Prior.

"He rests in peace."

The police didn't hear the last words; they dashed forward with their pistols drawn. In the cell Brother Lucian was disturbed by this commotion. He looked up at the officers.

"Put those arms away!"

"That man is dangerous!"

"That man is dead!"

They entered the cell with heads bowed and their weapons in their holsters.

Colin O'Donnell was waiting for them. He had a crown alright but not on his head but woven between his fingers: it was the olive-wood Rosary of Brother Lucian. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 13

by Michele Molineris

42. Lottery Numbers (1850)

(Continued)

A pastor from Turin, Father Dominic Muriana, of the Church of Saint Teresa and former pupil of the Oratory, also went to seek advice from Don Bosco. He had found himself in great financial trouble because of the debts left him by his predecessor. He had gone to see the saint immediately upon being assigned to the parish, to ask him what he ought to do in order to conduct his ministry properly. He had been given the threefold advice the Saint usually gave in similar instances: take care of the children, the sick, and the older people. At this time the saint asked him whether he had done as he had advised. Father Muriana said yes, and added that he was very pleased, for he saw how fond the population was of him.

"As to the debts, there is a very easy solution," Don Bosco said. "And what can that be?" "Play the lottery." "But shall I win?" "Most certainly you will win." "If that is so, complete your advice and tell me what numbers to...play."

"Look, I will give you three numbers, but listen to me and understand Faith, Hope and Charity. But do not act the way someone does who, after getting these three words out of me, goes to a fortune teller to find out the relative numbers."

"Did the numbers come up?" "Not even one! You play these

three virtues properly and you will pay off all your debts."

A Salesian remembers having heard several times from Father Giuseppe Bruschi (who died in La Spezia on June 2, 1901) another version of the previous episode. Father Bruschi claimed that he did not invent anything and heard it directly from the lips of Don Bosco.

One day a distraught and hungry cobbler came to Don Bosco, begging him, in his charity, to give him three good numbers to play the lottery. At first Don Bosco became defensive and gave him some alms; then, attempting to put in a good word said to him: "Well, play these three numbers: *faith, hope, charity.*

Very happy, the cobbler ran to the nearest lottery booth and consulted the lists for the three corresponding numbers. But the night before he had had a dream which created such a deep impression on him that he seemed to be more convinced about what Don Bosco had said. "How should I do this?" he thought. "I'll play the first number that I saw in the dream, because that must be flawless then the last two of the three that Don Bosco gave me." And so he did.

At the following draw: it was and it was not; the numbers that were suggested to him by Don Bosco came out first...and none of the others. Desperately the poor cobbler came back to Don Bosco and told him what had happened and begged him to give him three more numbers to give him a little luck, promising that he would never change them.

Don Bosco couldn't help laughing and with his usual good humour and before he sent him on his way said: "My friend, hold on to the faith, otherwise you will lose everything else forever. (B.S., Nov. 1918, 219).

The Chevalier Gorla, a Salesian alumnus, one day some time ago, while reading the newspaper learned that the priest Father Bartholomew Fascie, the Councilor General of Studies of the Salesian Society, on January 31, 1937 after preaching of the glories of Don Bosco with great unction and profundity, on his feast day in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, descended from the pulpit showing signs of unusual discomfort. It was 11 o'clock. He died around 2 pm.

It was such sad news concerning the affectionate alumnus, reflecting on the peculiarity of his death. The idea materialized, although strange, that he had complied with the playing of three numbers provided by that painful circumstance: 11 - 14 - 31.

The following Sunday Chevalier Gorla, while listening to the radio distractedly, heard the announcement of the lottery draw: one after the other, the three numbers mentioned above. His throat went dry!

To the pleasant surprise of the Chevalier, (concerning this singular and significant incident), the alumnus seemed to feel very close to the beautiful soul of Father Fascie, for whom he had a Mass celebrated. At the same time he had two Salesian niches constructed in his garden: one with the statue of Mary Help of Chris-

tians and the other that of Don Bosco.

We wanted to recall the curious origin of these two niches due to the fact that they now have become a place of pious pilgrimage for the people around on their respective feast days. Of particular significance is the feast of Mary Help of Christians. On that day, a Salesian celebrates Mass before the niche of the Virgin Mary before crowds of devotees who participate in the celebration invading and overrunning the whole garden. But for the heavenly Madonna that is alright! And throughout that day the house of the Chevalier becomes everyone's home because the goings and the comings of people lasts until late in the evening as they come and go after praying to the Madonna of Don Bosco who was placed in the niche and who had obtained from the Lord some special graces for them.

Thus devotion to Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco came to Cassano Magnago through the intervention of an alumnus (*St John Bosco in the memory of the Past Pupils*, 298) who won the lottery, we might add.

43. Like mountain pipes (1852)

In 1852 all Turin began to flock to Piazza Castello to watch the shows conducted by a well-known and elegantly dressed charlatan. Through his revelations and predictions he had acquired a great following. One day, after several demonstrations he had received tremendous applause, he had a clairvoyant take sealed letters and read them aloud. At this point Don Bosco pushed his way through the crowd.

"There's a priest who wants to talk to you," someone yelled to the man. "Please come forward Father," he replied. Don Bosco stepped forward into the open space in front of the clairvoyant who was seated and blindfolded. Don Bosco took out a sealed letter received that very day from Archbishop Fransoni. "What may I do for you, Father?" asked the charlatan. "I would like the clairvoyant to read this sealed letter," Don Bosco replied. "That's easy," the man remarked. Then he turned to the woman and imperiously told her: "Read it!"

The woman hesitated as if things were not going according to plan. The inflection of the voice commanding her had not given her any clue as to what she should answer. Forced to say something, she exclaimed: "I see it! I see it all!" "What do you see?" the man asked. "I cannot say." "Why not?" "Because the contents cannot be revealed." "Why not?" "The letter is sealed." "That explains it," said the man to the crowd. Then, turning to Don Bosco he added: "She is right; sealed letters are inviolable!" "If that's the case, there's an easy solution," replied Don Bosco. So saying, he broke the seal.

"Excellent; now the letter may be read," the charlatan said to the woman. "I still can't read it," she replied. "Why not?" The clairvoyant, now obviously annoyed, answered: "Because...because as I've already told you, I can't operate with priests around." Then she uttered a terrible blasphemy. On observing this fiasco, the crowd broke into derisive laughter and quickly dispersed, making caustic comments. (*EBM IV*,

p. 504-505)

44. A sorcerer unmasked (1852)

Another swindler named Dr. Giurio opened a studio in Via Santa Teresa that featured a clairvoyant called Brancini. The doctor claimed that by simply examining these objects in consultation with his clairvoyant, he could diagnose the patient's sickness. The lamentable moral and spiritual consequences that had resulted from similar setups in other places clearly indicated that these consultations smacked of diabolical intervention.

Don Bosco after watching several demonstrations asked the doctor to put him in communication with the clairvoyant. The doctor agreed to do so with great self-assurance.

Don Bosco began to ask questions and then took out a lock of hair he had been given and asked the woman to diagnose the illness of the person to whom it belonged. "Poor boy! How greatly he must be suffering," the woman murmured. Don Bosco interrupted her, saying: "This hair doesn't belong to a boy. Can you tell me where this person lives?" "Yes, yes. I see that person in Via della Zecca." "Wrong," commented Don Bosco. "That person is not there," exclaimed Don Bosco. "Now, tell me what this person's illness is." "Epilepsy." "Wrong!"

At this point the woman became angry and uttered such an obscene and insulting word that everyone present was shocked and immediately left. Obviously, it was either a fraud, or else the devil was afraid of good priests. (*EBM IV*, p. 506) □

SALESIAN SAINTS

EUSEBIA PALOMINO YEÑES

1899 - 1935

Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Blessed

Eusebia Palomino Yeñes was born on December 15, 1899, literally the twilight of the nineteenth century in Cantalpino, a small town in the province of Salamanca (Spain) into a family as rich in faith as it was scarce in means. Papà Augustin, a hugely kind and gentle man worked as a seasonal labourer in the service of the landowners in the area while Eusebia's mother Juana Yeñes took care of the house with her four children.

At the age of twelve she went to Salamanca with her elder sister and was employed at the homes some families as a nanny and a house-help. On Sunday afternoons she frequented the festive oratory of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. They decided to employ her in the community. Eusebia more than willingly (and immediately) accepted and set to work: helping in the kitchen, carrying wood, cleaning the house, doing the laundry in the large courtyard. She accompanied the students to the state school and ran other errands in the city.

Eusebia's secret desire was to



consecrate herself entirely to the Lord. The visiting superior, to whom she confided her desire, welcomed her with motherly kindness and reassured her: "Don't worry about anything," and willingly, on behalf of Mother General, she decided to admit her.

On August 5, 1922 she began her novitiate in preparation for her profession and in 1924 she pronounced her religious vows. She was assigned to the house of Valverde del Camino, a town of around 9000 inhabitants in the extreme south-west of Spain, in the mining district of Andalusia close to the border with Portugal. The young girls at the school and the oratory, when they first met her, did not hide their disappointment: the newcomer looked rather insignificant, small and pale, not in the least bit beautiful, with large hands and an unseemly name. The following

morning the little nun was at her workplace: a multi-faceted job engaged her in the kitchen, at the porter's desk, in the laundry, tending the small vegetable garden and assisting the small girls in the festive oratory. The little ones were soon captivated by her ability to tell missionary stories, narrate the lives of saints or Marian episodes or anecdotes from the life of Don Bosco.

Everything in Sister Eusebia reflected the love of God and her strong desire to make him loved: her busy days were always flavoured with her favourite themes and her conversations confirm this: first of all the love of Jesus for everyone demonstrated through his passion which has saved us all.

The other 'pole' of Sister Eusebia's devotion consisted of the "True Devotion to Mary" taught by the famous Frenchman Louis M. Grignon de Montfort. This would be the soul and the weapon of Sister Eusebia's ministry throughout her brief life. The beneficiaries were girls, youngsters, mothers of families, seminarians and priests.

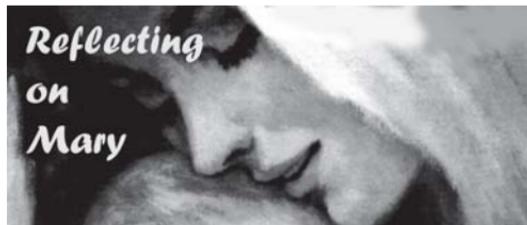
In the early 1930's when Spain felt the convulsions of the revolution caused by the rage of the destruction of religion, Sister Eusebia did not hesitate to bring to bear the extreme consequences of that principle of her "availability," literally being ready to be stripped of everything. She offered herself to the Lord as a victim for the salvation of Spain, for the freedom of religion. Her sacrifice was accepted by God. In August 1932 she showed the first signs of a sudden illness. Then the asthma,

which at various times had disturbed her, now began to torment her to levels of intolerance and these were aggravated by various other insidious substitutes.

At this time visions of blood grieved Sister Eusebia even more than her inexplicable sicknesses. On October 4, 1934 while some sisters were praying with her in her room of sacrifice she stopped and said: "Pray a lot for Catalonia." It was the beginning of the workers' uprising in Asturia and Catalonia and Barcelona (October 4-15, 1934) which were in their early stages. The vision of blood was concerning her beloved superior Sister Carmen Moreno Berutez who would be shot with another sister on September 6, 1936. Her martyrdom would be recognized and she would be declared blessed in 2001.

Meanwhile Sister Eusebia was getting worse: her doctor admitted that he did not know how to define her disease; asthma together with a shrinking of her limbs. Those who visited her were morally strengthened by the radiance of the sanctity that emanated from those aching limbs and the tenderness of her emotions which were absolutely exemplary. To those sisters who assisted her she promised: "I'll be back to stroll with you."

In the night between 9 and 10 February 1935 Sister Eusebia seemed to sleep peacefully. The following day her frail remains was draped with flowers and visited by the whole population of Valverde. All who came out of her room had the same comment to make: "A saint has died." □



MARY AT CANA: "THEY HAVE NO WINE"

by Don Giorgio Chatrian

During the wedding celebration at Cana, Mary noticed that the wine was running out and she said to Jesus: "They have no more wine" (Jn 2, 3). She went on to tell the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2, 5).

How many miss out on the feast of life...without the reassuring wine, without the Eucharist... that strengthens them for their daily struggles...

Without realizing it we simply "do what (he) tells us" but we're not listening to Jesus. Our subtle but very effective teachers have become the TV, singers and anchors, trendsetters, popular opinion or advertising.

"Be it done to me according to your will!"

I remember that day when I was invited to the wedding and I went to the celebrations with Jesus and his disciples, I was so happy. They were dear friends and the celebrations were going really well. At a certain point I noticed some commotion among the servants. It is indeed a great gift that you, O Father, gave us women: a glance is enough and we immediately

grasp the core of the problem. We know how to read non-verbal gestures or simple silences and almost always, we have a solution readily on hand.

What happened at Cana? The wine ran out! A wedding celebration without wine, unthinkable!

And so, having approached my Son I immediately warned him of the scenario that was unfolding and almost ordered him to use his power. Jesus' reply didn't hurt me, as a woman and a mother my eyes opened and I thank you, O Father for that. With that request, I realized that I wanted to be at the helm of affairs to feel like the protagonist.

But this is earthly reasoning: using a miracle in our favour; wanting to bend Jesus' will which is basically yours, to ours... Jesus made me understand the importance He placed the things of your Kingdom and doing your will, Father or it would benefit no one.

In short, I had forgotten what Jesus had told Joseph and me when, after a long and anguished search, we found our twelve-year-old Jesus in discussion with the doctors in the Temple: he was sent

to take care of your affairs Father, and so he behaved accordingly.

Perhaps those long years of daily life made up of work, family, prayer and friends in Nazareth gave me the impression that I had Jesus at my disposal.

At Cana I realized that this was not the case. Jesus is your Son, ready to follow your will, to be a sign of your Fatherly love which, thanks to him, floods the world with the coming and the building up of your Kingdom.

Amazingly I realized that even though I suggested that the servants do what He would tell them - from my point of view I wanted it to be His will not mine. So the miracle took place and the feast was even more grand much to the surprise of the guests who did not expect the best wine at the end of the banquet! It had to be that way.

That strong and sparkling wine was Christ, your Son, who reinvigorated the water of the Old Covenant with the freshness and richness of the New Covenant. Or, as he would say later, he replaced the old wine with new wine, much more appreciated because it gave new life to the people.

Then let's throw away the old bottles and barrels! In short, only Christ can satisfy the thirst that burns the throats of those, especially young people, seeking meaning in life and he always pours wine on the wounds of those who bruise themselves in this quest. It is he who transforms projects watered down by conformism or illusion trying to do it their way with their own insipid wine of hope.

O Father, only in the last dramatic week of His life did I fully understand what had happened

in Cana; when Jesus, on that evening opened his heart to the twelve before that final drama, taking some wine and saying that that was his Blood, my heart sank. His hour was near, the hour when he would offer himself by your will for all the victims to save the world. And within a few hours I too was crucified with him at the foot of the cross on which he was nailed... And while He shed his blood giving His life out of love, I joined in that sacrifice to become John's mother and in him, Mother of all believers.

On Calvary seriously and without any hesitation or calculation I did your will O Father, with your Son and I also shouted with him on the Cross when he experienced that heartbreaking sensation of being abandoned by you. And here (at Cana) his glory was manifested which would then reach its fullness in the resurrection.

O Father, I pray that everyone may themselves find - in the words of the centurion - at the end of that crude but never desperate spectacle of the crucifixion - that indeed He was just and truly the Son of God!

One of the first manifestations of that final and definitive glory was already seen at Cana and true faith in Him was consolidated in me and also in the disciples. Together we experienced "the power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12) and me, actually, to be the Mother of Jesus, your Son.

Accept, O Father, my sincere thanks: it is the thanks of all the poor who say: "Let your will be done" and then... they do it!

With your help they will never be discouraged because the music of hope will accompany them all their days. □

NEWSBITS

ITALY

O.R.I. the non-profit association, Ospitalità Religiosa Italiana is an association that provides overnight accommodations in convents, monasteries, sanctuaries, parish houses, hotels, campgrounds, and hostels (among others) made available by Religious Institutes in Italy, and every year, 5.6 million tourists (of which 3.3 million are foreigners) make the unlikely choice to stay in one of these religious structures "for a holiday characterized by a spiritual experience".

There are 3,500 accommodations available for guests to choose from, including convents, hermitages, monasteries, alpine houses, bed and breakfasts, apartments, hotels, and hostels. Across the country, that's a total of 232,000 beds in locations that vary from the high mountain ranges of the Alps to the most sought-after rivieras; from art-filled cities to breathtaking landscapes immersed in nature. Each of these locations are managed by parishes, dioceses and congregations, or some religious figure of the community, and "entrusted to the laity".

These spiritual hotels emphasize "family hospitality" and that "they're places where one can isolate themselves in a 'spiritual desert' and relax". "There is no obligation to participate in community life," assures Rocchi, but only "the invitation to discover an environment that is not limited to handing over the keys".

Elsewhere, in Cogoleto (Genoa) in a typical Ligurian village be-



tween Arenzano and Varazze, we arrive at Villa Divin Redentore, which is located on a hillside in the Beigua Park, near the sea, with an extraordinary view and a "relaxing atmosphere". Immersed in a lush garden of olive trees, palms, and roses, it is "an ideal place for families, especially grandparents with grandchildren, and couples of all ages," stresses Sister Sara. She adds that the guests enjoy attending Mass in the morning, and the presence of priests with whom they can talk to on vacation. "The priests that stay here often hold their own sermons during the day, usually before dinner," she says.

And for those who can't afford it, ORI offers free stays: The initiative is called "Merciful Hospitality". The idea was born three years ago on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy and was much appreciated by Pope Francis. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Horticultural Charity

A rather stupid young fellow saw a sign which read: "Ring the bell for the gardener." He walked up and pulled the cord. A red faced man soon appeared and inquired what he wanted. "Are you the gardener?" asked the young man. "Yes, what do you want?" "I saw the sign there, so I rang the bell and now I'd like to know why you can't ring the bell yourself?"

Hair-raising Guarantee

Client: "Do you give a guarantee with this hair-restorer?" Barber: "Guarantee, sir? Why, we give a comb free with every bottle."

Tools of the Trade

The family and their guest had just stented themselves at table. "Susie?" said the mother, "Why didn't you put a knife and fork at Mr. McClunk's place?" "He didn't need any, mother," replied Susie. "You said he eats like a horse."

Air of Confidence

Pilot: (after landing in a tree) "Sorry, but I was trying to make a new air record." Farmhand: "Well, you certainly did; you're the first person to climb down that tree without climbing up it."

Celestial Therapy

A pianist who was undergoing an operation asked the doctor if he would be able to play the piano when he recovered. Doctor: I won't guarantee that.

Pianist: Why?

Doctor: Because the last fellow that underwent this operation was playing the harp twenty-four hours later.

Verbal Communication

First Student: "Our Economics professor talks to himself. Does yours?"

Second Student: "Yes, but he doesn't know it. He thinks we're listening."

Fatal Cuisine

A tourist entered a restaurant in China, and ordered a dinner. He was served a large plate of stew, which he enjoyed immensely. When paying the bill, he jokingly referred to the stew.

"I hope you didn't kill a dog to make it," he said laughingly. The Chinaman looked horrified. "Oh! No sir, we no killee dog," he said. "We find him dead!"

Cold Facts

Teacher: "Name a liquid that does not freeze."

Jack: "Hot water, sir!"

The Spirit of Life

Two soldiers were carrying a stretcher with a wounded man on it.

Bill: "I say, Joe, how did you manage to keep him alive?"

Joe: "Brandy!"

Bill: "What! Don't you know that the doctor said you were not to give brandy to any of the wounded?"

Joe: "I didn't! I promised him some."

CHRISTIAN HOPE

Vivian Boland OP

Hope springs eternal in the human breast', wrote the poet Alexander Pope. Where there's life, there's hope, we are told. Human beings survive enormous difficulties still 'nursing the unconquerable hope'. Hope seems to be natural to the human being. Perhaps that is why we find suicide so shocking that a human being should take his or her own life.

Its capacity for hope is the quality that makes the human species so adaptable and so successful at surviving, dreaming, planning, anticipating and coping with failure if this is necessary.

Psychologists and philosophers point out that this is something that marks the human being off from the rest of the natural world.

Hope is strong in both the Old Testament history of God's dealings with Israel, and in the New Testament revelation of God in the teaching and example of Jesus. It has a special relationship to the future but hope means how we relate to the past and also to the present.

Take the example of Moses' experience of the presence of God that is recounted in Exodus 3. The God who appears to him in the burning bush identifies himself as the God of his ancestors, the God who was present with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who promised great things in the past and fulfilled those promises.

'I am well aware of your sufferings', God says to Moses, reassuring him that God has not abandoned his people, that He is aware of their difficulties and that He is



preparing to do something to help.

And so, God promises Moses, 'I will deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them to a land where milk and honey flow'. Because of what God has done for his people in the past Moses places his confidence in God's promise for the future.

God is faithful to his promises

The basis for this hope is that our God is who he is. He is a God who is faithful to his promises. This is the meaning of the personal name by which he identifies himself to Moses. *'I am who I am'*: I am the one who is present, with his people.

God is patient, realising that for human beings things take time. Love takes time, forgiveness takes time, but God is patient with us. We must be patient with ourselves and with others, giving the 'fig-tree' another chance, another year, more time.

Hope is a quality of how I live now. Because a person's trust and confidence in God is strong, he is free to involve himself totally in the tasks of this world, in building a kingdom of justice, love and peace here on earth. God is with us. He will be with us in the future. This is the basis for my hope for the future and for my hope in the present. □

St. Martin's Messenger - Jan. 2014

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Our heartfelt and grateful thanks to dear Mother Mary, Help of Christians, St. Dominic Savio and St. John Bosco for the much awaited gift of a granddaughter to us and daughter to our son Adrian & daughter-in-law Soumya on 17 July 2019. *Peter & Jennifer Lopes*
Thank St. Dominic Savio for the miraculous healing of a tumour on the thigh which was first diagnosed as malignant but on a second biopsy resulted miraculously in being declared benign and did not need to be treated.

F. DeSouza, London

Thank you, dear Lord, Mother Mary, St. Dominic Savio and St. Mother Teresa for blessing my daughter with a precious and healthy baby girl and for her safe delivery. Please continue to bless my family. *R. Vaz, Mumbai*

I had a fall two or three years ago and hurt myself but none of my bones were broken. I was in terrible pain. I prayed to my dearest Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio and the pain disappeared. I also prayed that my nephew get a job and my prayer was heard but I neglected to publish it.

Josephine David, Pune

Our sincere thanks to the Infant Jesus, St. John Bosco, St. Clare, St. Gallini, St. Chavara, St. Anthony, St. Jose Vaz, St. Damien and Mother Teresa for all the graces and favours received through the powerful intercession of these saints whenever I invoked their intercession during the span of our four decades of our happy married life in the midst of our beloved children and grandchildren. We implore their continued blessings on our family.

Mr. and Mrs. DAG, Mumbai

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Thank you Mary Help of Christians for all the favours granted to me. *Sherwina J Soares*

I had this itching problem all over my body since the last 35 years. Medicines and creams were of no use as I found no relief in them. On July 14, 2019, I attended a prayer service in Mumbai and found that I was healed on the first day itself. Till today, there has been no itching on my body. The Lord has healed me completely. Praise the Lord. *Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai*

My sincere thanks to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin Mary for having helped me do very well in my graduation examinations and thank you to all the angels and saints of God for your guidance and protection. *A Devotee*

My grateful thanks to Almighty God and our Blessed Mother for being blessed with the gift of a baby girl after four and a half years. *Mrs. Bapsy D'Souza, Utan, Bhyandar*

Thank you Jesus and Mother Mary for all the favours received through your intercession, especially for the success in getting a student visa for Canada for my daughter. *S. Braganza, Goa*

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.

I had a severe back ache for many years and feared it could be very serious. I did not take any kind of treatment but 'doctored' myself to no avail. Since my own medication did not work, I took to prayer earnestly and spent quality time before the Blessed Sacrament, recited the Rosary and the 3 Hail Mary's and also sought the intervention of St. Pio for a very special healing touch of my God. One day in the most mysterious circumstances and quite unexpectedly, I heard the tangible voice of the Lord instructing me to apply a balm that I had in my possession on the affected and painful area and I felt relief in a few days and as I continued with the balm, my pain left me completely. Thank you, My Lord.

Maureen de Zilwa - Sri Lanka

Due to sinful habits I fell prey to a sexual weakness and inability to have a normal sexual life. I prayed to Mother Mary to be healed of this on Saturday night with devotion. After attending the Sunday Mass I realised that I was totally healed. I want the world to know about the miraculous healing through this prayer. *Elvis Terrance Pink*

My heartfelt thanks to our dear Mother Mary for the gift of a beautiful baby girl Angelina Karkera and for my safe and normal delivery. Also thank you Mother Mary for granting me many favours through the recitation of the Three Hail Mary's. Mother Mary, continue to bless us. *T. Karkera, Mumbai*
I am grateful to the Blessed Virgin Mary for the success granted me through her intercession. *Mrs. R. Fernandes*

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Thank you Jesus, Mother Mary, Don Bosco and all the saints for all the favours received. *Flavia, Mumbai*

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER FEBRUARY 2020

*Listen to the Migrants' Cries
We pray that the cries of our migrant brothers and sisters, victims of criminal trafficking, may be heard and considered.*

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MARY WAS THERE

It was a Tuesday afternoon, when I received a message from my son in US that his wife was in a critical condition and that a caesarean was inevitable to save the lives of mother and the child. After his consent, the doctors successfully removed the baby but due to persistent flow of blood, doctors lost hope. Her situation became very complicated. We called our Divine Mother; along with my friends and neighbours we continued to storm heaven. At the time of our prayer, I received a message from my son stating that the blood flow was abruptly stopped and she was out of danger. We praised God and Mother Mary for her timely intervention. Our grateful thanks to Almighty Father, for giving us a wonderful Mother who is always ready to help her children.

*Francis Xavier
and Philomena Francis, Pune*

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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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