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***Almighty  
ever-living God,  
just as your  
Only Begotten Son  
was presented  
on this day  
in the Temple by the  
Blessed Virgin Mary,  
so, by your grace,  
we may be presented  
to you  
with minds  
and hearts  
made pure.***

**From The Editor's Desk**

*SPACE AND TIME*

This time is a special time – and we’ve been enduring this time for that past ten months or so. Soon it will be coming up to a year that we’ve been experiencing the “new normal.” We might have mistakenly thought that we would have gotten used to it but we haven’t and we’re constantly ‘pushing against’ the goad with our own brand of rumbles and grumbles. Whatever you might think of this time, one thing is for sure: it has given us a lot of time to reflect, to think, to grieve...even to pray.

I have learned a long time ago, not to confuse God with life. This truth was brought home to me more poignantly as we entered the COVID era. I’m not a stoic. I can be as upset as anyone can about what is happening. But this ‘time’ has been teaching me that God feels the same way as I do about what’s happening. (If you don’t believe me, just look at the Cross) I’ve learned to look beyond the physical reality of this world. And when I look at the dark confusion of this present time, I am convinced more and more that God is more, infinitely more than the worst of life and he can and does bring out the best in us like never before.

If we develop a relationship with God, that includes the harsher realities of life, then we are able to deal with life’s unfairness, without falling apart, when physical reality breaks down. Then I realize that God does not owe me any special favours because I try to be his disciple. [I remember the parking ticket I received years ago when I was wont to fret and fume at God for driving such a hard bargain with me, his disciple. It took me time to accept that it was my doing, even though I got it while visiting a dying man in the hospital.] In hindsight, I realize (rather soberly) that he brings light out of darkness, health out of sickness, joy out of sorrow or health out of pain. I had just to begin to look at reality a bit more closely.

This came to me when I compelled myself to sit quietly and reflect in order to sustain and centre myself. It does not mean indulging in my form of ‘navel gazing.’ It means attending to God, and realizing with a growing conviction that God is to be found in everyone and everything.

And so, I’ve begun to seriously take time out of my cares and anxieties of everyday life. I’ve started realizing that I really need to do that more often. A few deep breaths and a soothing sacred word brings me to ‘that secret place’ where the Father attends to me and brings me the inspiration (not the insight) to see ‘God writing straight in the crooked lines’ of situations and catastrophes, calamities and tragedies, to listen for that ‘still small voice’ saying: ‘Fear not, it is I.’

*Fr. Ian Doulton sdb*

## YOU'RE ALWAYS WITH ME

Giampaolo Dianin

When someone is important to me, when I am in love with him, it is normal that he inhabits my thoughts even when we are apart; my eyes glisten with joy at the experience of feeling loved and of loving. The physical distance between two lovers is not a problem, because the one loved is always with me, indeed, inside me. Even when two spouses experience a difficult moment the same thing happens; even when they are far apart. What I am experiencing lives within me and doesn't abandon me. In religious life, the consecrated person lives a similar experience: he has made a choice to love and his day is constantly spent in the presence of the beloved. It is not a question of remembering at every moment who you love or to do loving things for her, but to feel and live as a married or a consecrated person.

The idea of "presence" after that of communion which we have just spoken of, sums up well the aspect that characterizes family spirituality and of which Pope Francis speaks of in *Amoris Laetitia* (317-318). For married couples as for consecrated persons, there are unalterable concepts of the spiritual life such as good food that nourishes the journey of faith and the relationship with God. Francis recalls prayer, the Eucharist, the many forms of popular piety and union in the paschal mystery of death and resurrection. The Pope does not claim to be exhaustive or to

write a treatise on family spirituality, but only to recall some aspects that all lead to what we have termed the spirituality of presence: "If a family is centred on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life." (AL 317).

First of all, prayer: "A few minutes can be found each day to come together before the living God, to tell him our worries, to ask for the needs of our family, to pray for someone experiencing difficulty, to ask for help in showing love, to give thanks for life and for its blessings" (AL 318). The Pope suggests something that is possible for everyone, without requiring intensive courses on prayer, and this suggestion seems to take away any excuse of justification because this can be done very simply. Prayer thus described, is being in the presence of God, it is the surrender of our life to God, it is intercession, praise, gratitude, request and supplication. Above all, it is "being united before the Lord." Prayer not only makes our relationship with God grow, but also makes us feel more united as spouses and a family.

Then the Pope mentions popular piety, a theme dear to Latin Americans and much loved by the Pontiff who feels close to the little ones and the simple. I would define popular piety as a set of nuances that personalize my relationship with God, which also needs signs, places and actions, words, visibility and concreteness. Devotion to some saint

and above all a bond with Mary who has a particular place.

Finally, the Pope speaks of the Eucharist, linking it to the Sunday rest: "Jesus knocks on the door of families, to share with them the Eucharistic Supper (cf. Rev. 3:20). There, spouses can always seal anew the paschal covenant which united them and which ought to reflect the covenant which God sealed with mankind on the Cross" (AL 318). It is so provocative that Jesus "knocks on the door," a knock that resounds throughout the family's life every Sunday; a gentle knock; but precise, aware that food is necessary for the Christian family. Every Sunday spouses not only listen to the Word, they nourish themselves with bread, strengthening their bonds with the larger community, while also renewing their pact of love.

I have kept for the last what I have called the spirituality of presence which however opens these two issues of *Amoris Laetitia*. The Pope states: "If a family is centred on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord's cross [...] In the darkest hours of

a family's life, union with Jesus in his abandonment can help avoid a break up [...] Moments of joy, relaxation, celebration and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection" (AL 317). I believe this is the heart of spirituality in general and also of the family: to live in his presence and to feel his presence in our life. Living in communion with the Lord, just as we said at the beginning: when one is in love, the other lives within me even when we're far apart. Sometimes this presence is also felt emotionally, at other times, the feeling gives way to believing and trusting that God exists.

Pope Francis' final words are very strong: "Married couples shape with different daily gestures a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord" (AL 317). What is mysticism if not an intense communion with God and living in his presence? The communion of two spouses has moments of strong intimacy and community and many other daily moments where this communion does not fail, despite them becoming less intense. And even when

fatigue puts a strain on the relationship, both of us cherish the warm memory of the stronger moments lived together. So it is also with our relationship with God: in fatigue, trial and dryness we keep the memory of those beautiful and intense moments lived in the presence of the Lord. □



## HAPPY, BECAUSE YOU'RE FREE

by Chino Biscontin

*The austere sign of the ashes, with its severe symbolism and flavour of authenticity, is actually "good news." You are not be a slave, you are a noble and free child of God!*

Jesus warns us that thirsting and yearning for more can really possess us and replace God in our lives. Only God exists and He protects and guides our lives completely because He loves us. "Mammon," instead (as Jesus refers to him) comes to exploit us and bleed our souls dry. This idol has acquired enormous power in our world today.

In the globalized world in which we live, communications shrink vast distances, for instance, what happens in China may have consequences even in the smallest country on the other side of the planet. The problem is not globalization per se, but the fact that there are no structures that can manage and control it. Governments of individual countries have the potential to, but they do not do what they can. Besides they are not interested in guiding the economic processes for the welfare of the common good even of their own people. This is not only the case in individual nations but also at the global level. Even structures like the UN which seem to have the responsibility to bring their authority to bear seem to be inadequate in this regard.

In such a situation where absolute economic liberalism

holds sway, it is large capitalists that move products and services from one part of the world to the other without a care for the less fortunate in their own regions nor in the regions from where they extract undue profits, doing everything they can to constantly maximize them. Among the many strategies they use, they continually bombard us with propaganda stimuli and since they control the media in many ways, they impose on us, lifestyles that engender unnecessary artificial needs.

If we do not resist this, it conditions and even modifies us. In particular, among other things the media negatively influences our mind in two ways: causes a crisis on family relationships and dramatically erodes our faith. All we do then, is look upon this state of affairs with anguish and a sense of helplessness. It is above all a superficiality determined by the excessive stimulation of our drives, emotions, needs and desires; and all this at the expense of a gradual shrinking of our deepest emotions. In the second place we gradually develop an individualistic way of feeling, thinking and acting which affects our relationships with others, so that an "I" becomes more

important and aggressive crushing the "we," choking out any semblance of a relationship.

But, because we are meant to be beautiful and our lives to be genuine and good, we need our emotions without which there can be only satisfactions but no genuine joy and much less happiness. What we need is a positive openness to others without which we will end up being obstacles and threats to one another since happiness depends on good human relationships.

Lent comes around proposing a more sober life, one that is more austere. Because it is in contrast to features mentioned above, it may seem unpleasant and unpopular. Actually, this season is meant to liberate us from those influences that cause others to control our lives for the sake of their own enrichment at the price of impoverishing our souls and depleting human values present in our lives.

Lent invites us to regain control of ourselves with the practice of abstinence and renunciations that counteract the addictions we suffer, which unmask the falsehood of the promises they proclaim. This is how we learn to be happy when we have just what we need and not crave for a thousand other useless titilla-

tions. We gradually learn not to be unhappy if we refrain from buying this or that unnecessary commodity and feel proud to have been able to take back our lives into our hands directing ourselves towards the teachings of Jesus, following his words and example. This strategy has only one identity: love.

The austere sign of the ashes (17 February) with its severe symbolism and its flavour of authenticity, is really the "good news," the Gospel. You need not be a slave to anything or anyone here and now; you are a royal and free child of God! The God who loves you says this; and guides us all towards Easter the fulness of life and joy in the risen Lord. □



## DREAM YOURSELF INTO REALITY

Anastasia Dias

**W**e're born with dreams. We may dream of achieving our goals, making new friends or travelling the world. Our dreams could comprise of going to college, getting a job, finding a partner or serving people. Whatever they're made of, the first step in fulfilling our dreams is *believing* in our dreams.

Now, there are obstacles that we encounter on our way. Sometimes, we don't realize our potential and give up. Most of the time, our past experiences keep us from turning our dreams into reality. We hold ourselves back by thinking and over-thinking about the past.

I have a true story for people who can't seem to let go of the past, a story that gave me the courage to dream and pursue my dreams. Many years ago, there lived a young boy. He was bright-eyed, talented and immensely gifted. Among his many talents, he was also blessed with the power to dream. Every time he dreamt of something he was overjoyed as if the dream had come true. In his heart, he knew one day, all his dreams would.

In every dream, he saw himself as a leader. Excitedly, he shared those dreams with his family. His

brothers had always been jealous of him and started hating him more because of this. They hatched a plot to get rid of him. And, they did, by selling him to foreigners.

Because of his honesty and charm, he was liked by everyone he met in this foreign land. There were times he missed his family. There were other times when he was punished for things he hadn't done. Suddenly, the situation turned around and he was promoted from the status of a foreigner to that of a leader over the entire country. His name was Joseph, sounds familiar? How did Joseph get to his position? He wasn't looking for power or fame, neither was he seeking vengeance over his brothers, but his dreams came true. How? Only because he realized his true potential. He dreamed; he believed in his dreams and pursued them with all his heart. He could've thought, 'I've had a bad past. My brothers hated me. I could've died at their hands. I can never do anything great.' But he didn't. He reclaimed his calling in a foreign land. What propelled him to dream was his faith in his ability to dream.

A few months ago, I met



someone who told me that he was discouraged. He had lost his passion for life. Every single day, he hated getting out of bed and doing the things he once dreamt of doing. When I asked him the reason why he felt that way, he replied: 'It's the past. I can't forget all that I've been through.'

I wasn't entirely surprised when I heard this. I've also been in situations, where I felt like I couldn't go any further. There have been times when I haven't done what I needed to do because they evoked unpleasant memories. I also have friends who have felt the same way at some point in their lives.

There are studies that demonstrate how people remember negative events from the past more vividly than positive ones. And every time they feel that they are in a similar situation, they start recalling the negative events from their past with greater poignancy.

The sad part, I feel, is that most of us give up on our dreams because of our past. We allow ourselves to be held back by

memories of people and situations. Although these people are no longer in our lives, they still control our minds. Even though, we're no longer in those situations, we relive them in our minds. Our past keeps us from living our best life. Why? Because we give it the power it doesn't deserve.

At an event I attended last year, a young girl earnestly asked the speaker, 'How can I forget painful memories?' He gave a one-line reply and later elaborated on it. His reply blew my mind away. He said, 'The past is memory, the present is reality and the future is imagination.'

I've come to this realization ever since: Whatever has happened in my life, whether good or bad, is just an irrevocable memory. There is nothing, absolutely nothing I can do to change it. The question I posed to myself was, 'Will you allow the past to rule the present and determine the future? Or will you give your own self that power?'

Just like Joseph, I had a choice. I could allow whatever had happened to me to affect the way I thought or felt. Or I could learn the lesson and move on.

Each one of us has this power. We're blessed with it. We're born to dream, like Joseph did and turn our dreams into reality. Now, we need to make a choice: we've got to choose between living in the past or following our dreams. This choice will ultimately create our future. □



## DON BOSCO IN INDIA

Love at first sight beautifully  
and splendidly reciprocated

*Interview with Fr. Chakanattu Raju, a Salesian  
Secretary of the Commission for Vocations  
of the Episcopal Conference of Kerala*

*by O. Pori Mecoi*

### Fr. Raju, please introduce yourself

I am an Indian Salesian, I come from Kerala. I came in contact with the Salesians when I was 12. I became a student of the Cultural Centre in Kochi where I studied over seven musical instruments including the violin, the piano, the guitar and a couple of Indian percussion instruments such as the tabla, mridangam and drums. I studied classical Indian singing and Indian classical dance called Bharatanatyam. I did all this while I was attending regular school. After finishing school, I decided to become a priest.

I did my early training in Italy and then my baccalaureate in Social Communication and Theology at the Salesian University in Rome. I returned to my province of Bangalore and was ordained a priest in Vaikom, my home city.

I continued to pursue my studies in social communication, English literature and theology. I have already published sixteen books in English and in Malayalam, my mother tongue. I have directed films and television programmes. For the last seven years I have been the Secretary of the Vocation Commission of the



Episcopal Conference of Kerala and the Director of the Conference of Vocation Directors in Kerala. As a Salesian I am the treasurer and Vice-Principal of Don Bosco College affiliated to the University of Calicut in Mannuthy, Thrissur Kerala.

### What do you have to say about your family?

I come from a traditionally Catholic family. I am the youngest of five children and I am the only one who has chosen the religious life. My father expired; my mother is at home. She was a middle school teacher. We had land which was cultivated. My dad took care of that. My brothers and sister are married. One brother is in New Zealand, the other is in Australia. My sister is a teacher, married and in our

country. A brother of mine and his family lives with my mother.

### Why did you choose to become a Salesian?

Being a Salesian allows me to communicate the Gospel to young people through music, dance and theatre. I want to use these means for the proclamation of the Kingdom. To be holy for me is to be happy, as Don Bosco says, and to do as much good as I can for people.

### Yours is a very large province: what some of its most beautiful realities?

We have many kinds of works. First of all, we have schools and colleges and University centres. Then, there are parishes, oratories and many centres for suburban and street youth. We have technical schools, formation houses, houses for the elderly and sick Salesians, media production centres and cultural centres where music, dance, cinema and theatre are taught.

### What does it mean to be a Catholic priest in India?

Being a priest today is beautiful and also very demanding. The road is long and distractions along the way abound, trying to draw us away from our vocation. Being a Catholic priest means living with joy the call we have received from the Lord and offering the Sacraments to the people of God. We attempt to be genuine champions of the Kingdom. Being a priest today means living like Christ, accepted by few, looked upon by many and helping everyone. It is the witness of a life conformed to Jesus,

beyond every weakness and insignificance. Today, in India there are people systematically trying to eliminate Catholics. And so, living here in India as a priest means a lot. Furthermore, being a Salesian priest in India means giving oneself to the people, everywhere and always, as Fr. Tom Uzunnalil did.

### What are the future prospects of the Church and the Congregation in your state?

In Kerala, there is a fairly peaceful environment with regard to multi-religious coexistence. All religions experience moments of revitalization. As long as there are young people, as a congregation, we will have work to do. Youth work is no longer a Salesian thing: there are other congregations and lay people who perhaps work more in this field. I believe that more creativity and innovation are needed in youth work. I believe that the Congregation and the Church in Kerala must see the signs of the times and work harder on the peripheries, just as the Holy Father asks us to. Even theological and philosophical reflection must be given more visibility.

### What are some of your happiest experiences?

There are several. I keep them in my memory to reload them from time to time. One of the most beautiful was when I made my perpetual profession on the football field of the oratory in Florence, during a very special Holy Mass. Even though I didn't have any of my relatives around, my boys and the animators were

around to make me feel how wonderful it was to give my entire life to the Lord. I remember that when I was part of the Press Office of the CEI in Tor Vergata (Rome), for the World Youth Day, it was wonderful working with young people from various parts of the world. Another was when I saw for the first time one of my books come out. That was the beginning of a series of volumes on the Spiritual Life and Vocation Animation. And then at the inauguration of the Academy of Music and Dance in Kochi. Also, the experience I am living right now; that of being the Secretary of the Vocation Commission of the Episcopal Conference of Kerala which includes 31 dioceses.

**Who are your daily “clients”?**

My “clients” are of two types. First of all, college boys and girls I work with. I’m a bursar and Vice-Principal. And then there are religious who belong to various congregations who



have to amend or maintain the forms that register vocation candidates; an organization we have set up to deter false vocation promoters who try to induct young people for other reasons.

**Are there any difficulties?**

Sometimes it is difficult to convince bishops and religious about their duty to work together for a common project. As for the college...everyday throws up new challenges to “overcome.”

**What is your dream for the future?**

My dream? Thanks to my fantastic imagination, I have several dreams. The most prominent one is to look forward to the day when I will be able to teach children of various countries to work together beyond political, religious and cultural differences. I have been enriched by my experiences in Italy and elsewhere. My dream is to always be open to the novelty that the Lord sends me and to let it bloom well wherever life takes me. □

**Witnesses  
in & for  
Our Times**



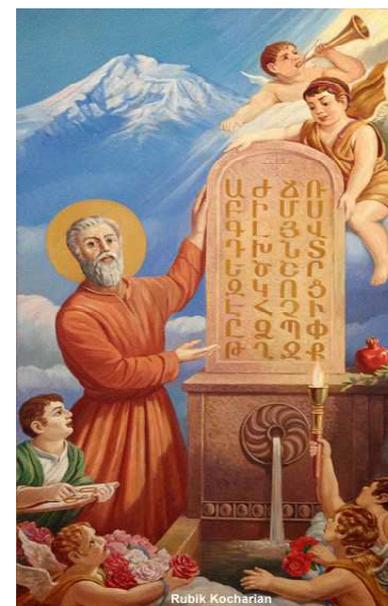
**ST. MESROP MASHTOTS**

(17 February)

Ian Pinto, sdb

It is interesting how over a period of time people completely forget who is responsible for the good things they are enjoying. Take something as common as a computer or a mobile phone. How many of us could state who were the people responsible for their invention? At the time, I’m certain Charles Babbage who is credited with designing and building the first mechanical computer and Martin Cooper who created the first ever mobile were quite popular. As the years progressed, people began to forget who invented it and perhaps focused more on how they could come in possession of the best and latest version.

The Catholic Church welcomes people from all walks of life. This is evidently seen in the characters of those persons who are recognized as having lived extraordinary lives of goodness and piety. While the vast majority of saints appear to be monks, priests, nuns or martyrs there are among them royals and people of noble status, youth, slaves, converts, parents and even geniuses. Yes, geniuses and inventors! This saint was an



inventor. He did not create a gadget or a system but developed a language and was thus able to give an entire population a cultural identity and a vital tool for communication. This great personality was named Mesrop Mashtots.

**EARLY LIFE**

Mesrop was born in modern day



*Statue of St. Mesrop, Kapan*

Armenia around the year 361. His family was quite wealthy and therefore could afford to give him a good education. He had keen linguistic skills and was able to pick up and become fluent in as many as 4 languages! His student, Koryun recounts that he was fluent in Greek, Persian, Asorian and Georgian. Very little is known about the childhood and early development of Mesrop. Considering that he lived so long ago, there is hardly any information about him except for the biography written by Koryun.

Koryun informs us that Mesrop's education earned him a place at the Royal court. He served in the royal secretariat as an executor of royal commands which in today's terms is a prime minister. His knowledge of law rendered his service all the more effective and vital. He was held in high esteem by both courtiers and subjects for his diligence and his mastery of military tactics.

Interestingly, Mesrop found time to nurture his spiritual life and develop a relationship with God. Despite his political work, he would set aside time to read and meditate on the Scriptures. We must remember that the Bible at

the time was fully translated only in Greek and Latin. So thanks to his education, Mesrop was able to read and understand the Bible in Greek. The Bible enlightened him and helped him to gain insight into the truth behind God's commands. This knowledge in turn helped him carry out his responsibilities and duties in a better and more effective manner. He was now not merely a keeper of the law but an agent for God. The spirituality that evolved from his study of and prayer with the Bible, flowed into his work such that it became noticeable in the royal court and even to the royals that Mesrop was inspired by God.

#### **CALLED TO FOLLOW**

Gradually, Mesrop became restless with his pattern of life and felt called by God to a closer relationship. He took time to discern this call, all the while praying about it even though he continued to carry out his usual work. At last, he realized that he could not go on any longer serving the servant while the master was waiting. Hence, he decided to give up his life of luxury and power and become a monk in the same way that Jesus "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied himself and took the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8).

Looking at the lifestyle of Mesrop and how he conducted his affairs as a monk, one would find it hard to believe that he was at one

time the prime minister of the country. He practiced great austerities and disciplined his body through harsh sacrifices. It was not as if his entry into monastic life was not painful. He found it quite difficult to adjust at first, to the rigor of monastic life. He faced hardships from internal and external forces but kept his eyes fixed on Jesus. He wore a hair shirt under his habit which was a popular practice at the time and spent time in solitude in the mountains enduring hunger, thirst and the elements, and sustaining himself on herbs. His habit was nothing like the ones we see today; it was coarse sackcloth. He often spent whole nights in prayer and committed himself to a sincere study of the Holy Bible.

#### **LEGACY**

Armenia was the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as its state religion. We might be aware that one of the key reasons for Christianity to have thrived and spread across the globe was thanks to its adoption as state religion of the Roman empire under Constantine the Great. Armenian tradition holds that the apostles Jude and Bartholomew preached the gospel there and set up the Church. A few centuries later, Christians began to be persecuted; some miraculous events took place thereafter that ultimately led to the conversion of the King and consequently the declaration of Christianity as the state religion in 301 much before Rome would do so.

Unfortunately, the majority of the population could not really understand their faith well since

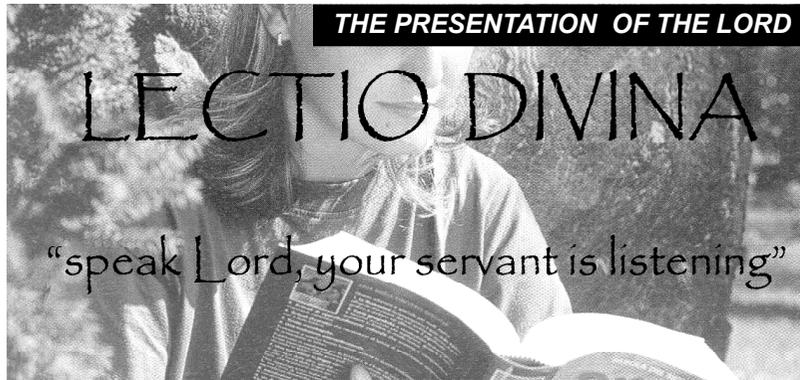


*Church of St. Mesrop, Yaravan Armenia*

the Bible was in a foreign language. The Armenian language did not exist except in speech; it had no alphabet. The highly educated and rich who could afford to have a copy in Greek could read and enjoy the inspiration of the Divine Word but the rest had to depend entirely on the priests and religious leaders for their instruction.

Mesrop Mashtots was inspired to invent the alphabet in Armenian. With this invention, he was able to not only translate the Holy Bible and other Christian source materials into Armenian, but was also able to give the people a cultural identity and preserve Armenian ethnicity from disappearing due to political turmoil.

He was hailed from the time of his death as a saint. His immortal contribution to the Armenian population and culture has been recognized by the State by naming several of its institutions after him. Perhaps for the rest of the world, Mesrop Mashtots is an unknown but for the people of Armenia he was and is a national hero and saint. □



## FROM THE ARMS OF MARY TO THOSE OF THE FATHER

*Simone Marini*

**T**he canonical Gospels are austere and adhering to historical realism, and have documented only a few episodes from those first years of Jesus' life. They tell us the episode of the presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple (Lk 2, 22-38). The scene shows us Mary carrying the Son of God in her arms as one of great simplicity and rich symbolic significance. We contemplate Mary and Joseph who punctually fulfil one of the laws of the religious tradition of the people of Israel.

The Gospel is lavish in its detail because it intends to show us the fidelity with which the Holy Family lived the rites required by the Mosaic law, because as we recall, Joseph was a just man, though he was not the father of Jesus.

Certainly, Mary knew that Joseph was not the father of her Son and Joseph knew that Mary was his mother. Of this Joseph had not the slightest doubt. It was therefore up to Mary to offer her Son to the Lord, and it was up to

Joseph to pay the ransom with the two turtle doves: he could not afford a lamb. It was Mary who was carrying the "Lamb" in her arms.

This would have been the first time that Mary went out of the house with her Son and it was to the temple; from the arms of Mary to those of the Father.

When Mary arrived at the temple that day, she was not only prepared to offer her Son to God, but she also confirmed her consecration to the Lord.

For the first time, the temple in Jerusalem was God's true abode among men. On that day, the prophecy of Leviticus was completely fulfilled: "I will make my dwelling among you" (Lev 26:11). This was the real consecration of the temple upon which the glory of the Lord had descended. This was the moment when it was no longer the ark that sanctified the temple, but the incarnate presence of God.

The temple had never been filled with such glory. It was no

longer only the heavens that sang the glory of God nor was it only the firmament that proclaimed the work of God's hands: now it was the earth and the temple that sang the presence of God among men.

The first authentic temple of God was therefore, Mary and her arms: the first altar. It was no longer celestial spaces, not even the angels in the highest heavens that would celebrate the divine majesty; it is Mary who sings and magnifies the Lord, because the Almighty had accomplished great things in her and what God had done and promised to his people. Faced with this scene, even the prophets fall silent.

It was a historic day: God takes possession of the temple of his ancient and new people who are symbolically reunited in Simeon and the prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel and the Holy Family.

It is the passage from the Old to the New Testament. The glory of the old temple ceases and the new is illuminated by the True Light. It is the temple not only of the Father but also of Mary who, carrying her Son in her arms, becomes the mother of the new temple, the new church.

Simeon's words indicate that salvation was not limited to the people of Israel, but it embraced all nations: "a light to enlighten all people and the glory of your people Israel."

Commenting on Simeon's prophecy, Saint John Paul II affirmed: "Mary unites her life in an intense and mysterious way to the painful mission of Christ: she will become the faithful co-worker of the Son for the

salvation of humankind" (General Audience, December 18, 1996). Her participation will always be maternal. She presented her Son in the temple and as a mother, accepted and offered the Father, Christ's death.

The feast of the Presentation of Jesus also invites us to contemplate the maternal closeness of Mary to us especially in life's moments of great difficulty. Our Lady is an expert in pain: "a sword will pierce your soul"; and therefore, she herself is at the head of all those who suffer.

Pius X splendidly comments: "And what would the life of the miserable children of Eve be without you (Mary)? Each of them has a pain that consumes them, a wound that torments them and an anguish that oppresses them. And all turn to you as the harbour of salvation and the source of all succour. The poor who find themselves deprived of daily bread, beg of you; and no one who turns to you remains without aid and consolation" (June 2, 1905).

Yes, Mary loves us with the heart of a mother, but she also loves us with the heart of her Son. Nicolas Cabasilas, an Eastern Bishop says it so well: "If anyone could contemplate the Church of Christ as truly united to Christ and who shares in his flesh, he will only see it as the body of the Lord; but if he contemplates the most pure and holy Virgin Mary who seems like an understatement, one cannot but contemplate her except as the heart of Christ, because she is the centre of creaturely life and the meeting point of heaven and earth." □

# Quiet Spaces

## WORLDLY TEMPTATIONS

*This was a morning homily that Pope Francis gave on Tuesday February 21, 2017  
at the chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae.*

**T**he focus of Pope Francis' homily on Tuesday, was the daily struggle of all Christians trying to overcome "worldly temptations," such as thinking they are "better than others".

The temptation is inevitable, the Pontiff explained, inspired by the day's liturgy of the Word, taken from the Book of Sirach (2:1-13), which reads: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation, set your heart right and be steadfast" (cf. vv. 1-2). The Pope explained that "Christian life is a life with temptation" and, therefore, "we must be prepared for temptation," because "we will all be tempted."

This is confirmed in the Gospel of Mark (9:30-37), which, the Pope said, indicates that Jesus "went with his disciples decisively, resolutely, toward Jerusalem, in order to fulfil his mission," that of "doing the Father's will." Jesus informed the disciples in advance what would happen in Jerusalem: "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise". Not even the disciples understood "these words, and they were afraid to ask him." Thus, they said: "Let's stop here. It's better." In other words, they gave in to "the temptation not to fulfil the mission," a temptation, the Pontiff emphasized, to which Jesus was also subjected "at least twice." The first time was in the desert, with the devil's three propositions "do redemption but for another, easier life," a life "more down-to-earth." Another time, "it was Peter who tempted him," when, as Jesus spoke of His fate, Peter said: "No, this will never happen, Lord!" To him too, Jesus replied, "begone Satan!" Indeed, "Peter was doing the same thing that the devil, Satan, had done in the desert."

Something "interesting" in the Gospel narrative, Francis pointed out, is that the disciples "did not want to hear these words of Jesus." Rather, "they did not understand these words and were afraid to ask him." The disciples' difficulty is further clarified later in the reading. "When they arrived in Capernaum, Jesus asked them: 'What were you discussing on the way?'" Here too, the Pope underscored, they "were silent." But this time they were silent "out of shame." Indeed, whereas the first time they were "afraid" and repeated, "no, let's not ask anything more: it's better to keep quiet," this time they felt ashamed because along the way "they had discussed with one another who was the greatest." They were ashamed of this discussion. It was a two-fold attitude: that of fear and that of shame, the Pope explained. "They were good people who wanted to follow the Lord, to serve the Lord. But they did not know that the way of serving the Lord was not very easy; it was not like enlisting in a charitable association." Thus, he said, "they were afraid of this." On

the other hand, they had "the temptation of worldliness."

But, Francis advised, the temptation was not theirs alone: "From the moment that the Church became Church up until today, this has happened, it happens and will happen." For example, it happens "in parishes" where there are always "struggles," and one might hear someone say: "I want to be president of this association, I will try to climb a little;" or "who is the greatest one in this parish? No, I am more important than he is ..." The temptation of worldliness is where "the chain of sins" begins, such as "speaking ill of others" and gossiping, which are all things that serve one who seeks to "climb."

It is a temptation, the Pope cautioned, from which the clergy are not exempt: "At times we priests say, shamefully, in the presbyterate: 'I would like that parish...' — 'But the Lord is here...' — 'But I would like that one...'" In other words, we follow "not the path of the Lord," but that "of vanity, of worldliness." And, he continued, "even among us bishops, the same happens: worldliness comes as a temptation." And so it happens that a bishop says: "I am in this diocese but I would like that one which is more important," and he tries to push "in order to get there." In short, the Pontiff clarified, "the mission is to serve the Lord, but, often, our real desire pushes us toward the path of worldliness in order to be more important." Then there may be disappointment, as it was for Jesus' disciples, who "first kept quiet out of fear, then remained silent out of shame." The Pope called this "holy shame!" and suggested we always ask the Lord for "the grace to be ashamed, when we find ourselves in these situations."

The criterion for choosing our actions, in the face of certain temptations, is explained by Jesus in the same Gospel passage: "He sat down and said to them, 'If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all'" and, taking a child in his arms, he said: "Become as this child." Christ, explained the Pope, "overturned everything. Glory and the Cross, greatness and the child."

This, the Pontiff concluded, is a Gospel passage that "leads us to pray for the Church, to pray for all of us that the Lord may protect us from ambition, from the worldliness of feeling that we are greater than others." May the Lord "grant us the grace of shame, that holy shame, when we find ourselves in that situation". May he grant us the grace to say: "Am I capable of thinking this way? When I see my Lord on the cross, do I want to use the Lord in order to climb?" But also, he added, may the Lord "give us the grace of childlike simplicity", of understanding the importance of the "path of service" and, at the end of a life of service, to be able to say: "I am an unworthy servant." □

## A FLOWER IN THE WIND

Adapted and translated by Ian Doulton  
from stories by Pierluigi Menato

"We're being offered a fantastic holiday, you and I," Lenny told me with a caress in his voice, like a fan of feathers, "We'll go to a dream spot for a few days far away from time and reality. I really need to relax. I've worked too hard. Think of it, distant horizons and hummingbird blue skies..." he said, as he concluded, hugging me.

God, how I loved him...the "hummingbird blue," that was me, Jennifer of course. On other occasions he compared me to a flower or a stray kitten in need of so much tenderness.

So, when I got home, I prepared my suitcase; a kind of electrifying ritual, while Monique, the friend with whom I share the studio apartment and with whom I prepared for my exams at the University - the biological sciences faculty - stared at me as if I were some comet and she a puddle in a grey courtyard.

"You'll see," I try to comfort her, "sometime soon, it will happen to you too. You've just got to find the right type, sooner or later..."

But Monique, sceptical and pessimistic as she was...had no faith in men. Too bad for her.

I'm hauling hundred little packages, chosen eagerly, together with him: a fabulous black glittering jumpsuit, in satin with a cascade of white pearls that will make me look like Madonna, the singer, a tiny scarf that could fit in my fist; a pair of silver

sandals and a blonde wig for when I want to be different and maybe, fatal.

I ring my mom in town, to prevent any possible investigation. "I'm leaving for the hills with some friends," I fib casually. "I've just had a bad attack of flu, but I didn't tell you, so as not to worry you, but it'll do me good; this change of air."

"Be careful, Jenny," whispers my mother. She's grown so apprehensive ever since my father went away to sleep beneath the cypresses on the hill, "Don't be reckless..." "Why?" I ask as my heart beats faster. But she alludes to 'physical' recklessness and the possible dangers of going to the hills, *that I won't even see on a postcard.*

"I'll come back as soon as possible, and get back to you. Don't worry," I conclude quickly hanging up so I don't have to hear that little voice warning me. But I can't tell her the truth.

I go to bed early that night and try very hard to sleep but the fantasy runs away like winged horses in my imagination: where will I be tomorrow at this time? I ask myself anxiously and I'm filled with euphoria. Then I fall asleep. Suddenly...

The telephone rings loudly like a distressing voice. Who knows what time it is? There's a dull light on the dresser like a dull sword: I realize that I was having a dream; a hallucinating dream: I was walking among eternal boundless

clouds. Alone. Opening my sleepy eyes, I realize, staring at Monique's brown head on the next bed, the alarm screams at five in the morning. I shiver severely in dismay as I grab the receiver; maybe it's my mother.

But I hear Lenny's voice, unrecognizable. Perhaps it's the dream that's going on; instead of being in a beautiful country, I'm still among the frozen peaks. Alone. His voice is quivering like a thread. "I'm not coming," I heard him say, "Why?" I shiver in my candy pink pyjamas. An eternity passes; I hear the slow dripping of a badly turned off tap in the kitchen.

Absurd thoughts. Then Lenny's voice again: "Because Gianna tried to kill herself last night! She noticed the two of us, despite my desperate attempt to be careful. I

feel terribly guilty, Jenny. After all, she's a good woman, off and on though, as I've told you and the mother of our two children, you understand, don't you? We've lived together for ten long years now. Good or bad. Now, she's in the clinic, out of danger. I've just got home. Sometimes she feels so "different," you know? No! You don't, you're too young, you still won't understand! I was afraid that Gianna would die because of me, so I promised someone that if she pulled through, I would never see 'precious you' again. Forgive me. Don't worry, you'll forget me..."

"You've made up your mind then?" I laughed sarcastically and imagined those ten years of his married life "good or bad" spent with the unknown Gianna, his wife, a faithful mother of two



children I didn't know.

"Are you mad at me?" He asks.

I laugh again trying to stifle the sobs.

"No! Maybe I'll just go alone," I added lightly.

"And where will you go?" *To hell*, I silently in my head.

"Yeah, where will I go?" I hang up quickly.

Lenny's voice, my great Love with a capital L. The one who compares me to a blue hummingbird, or a flower. Who knows, I think, maybe why not an Anemone, called "a flower of the breeze," and also "the abandoned flower" as the legend of Anemone that gave it its name. It was a beautiful nymph, Anemone, loved by Zephyr, king of the winds of the East; but Flora, goddess of the gardens, very jealous of her, transformed her into a flower and Zephyr too had abandoned her to the vengeful gusts of Borea, king of the North winds who, as soon as she bloomed, condemned her to wither almost immediately, because she refused to respond to his love. Poor faithful Anemone!

The next morning Monique woke up amazed to see me still there, my nose pressed against the pillow. "So, you haven't gone?"

She was a kind of mutt, she didn't hear the phone, she hadn't noticed anything at all. I shrugged my shoulders.

"No comments!" I say; she comes over and hugs me.

"Great! He's married with two kids, and you threw yourself at

him, you know? I wanted to tell you, but how? You seemed too infatuated, so happy, Jenny! But you seemed prudent and judicious. After a fabulous holiday what would have happened? He certainly wouldn't have left his family for you; you were just a suitcase he wanted to carry around; strolling around the world."

*But no, my dear Monique, I said in my head, I was like a flower, a flower in the breeze.*

The next day, I took a stroll along the pier to stop and look at the boats slowly lulling themselves in the slight gusts of the sirocco. It really was summer I told myself so half-heartedly. Maybe I'd like to die. I feel so lonely, with a spasm of desperation. Who knows how could I have fallen in love with Lenny; making Gianna suffer; having no respect for myself or others?

Suddenly I become aware that a blond sailor is following me and I instinctively quicken my pace. Then I think about it. "I don't like being followed," I murmur to myself. "If you like, let's walk together," and I smile at him. He blushes, astonished. He has the same expression on his face as Mario my brother has when he's talking to some girl on the phone and tries to show he's arrogant.

So, the blond sailor joins me and I realize that his eyes are as blue as the sea he comes from. I don't know why but I would suddenly like to know everything about him and tell him everything about me: birth, existence, illnesses suffered including scarlet fever,

my joys and sorrows; to talk to him about my mistakes, to confess to him the emptiness I feel inside me, the remorse and the anguish too.

He asks: "Would you like to have an ice-cream with me?" Who knows if it's Ok for a girl like me to go to a café with a sailor like him!

The bar's called the "Golden Sail," and it's full of smoke and old sea wolves who are drinking and playing cards. "It's so great to be young!" Shouts one of those old dogs who looks like a former pirate, winking. *That's not true you know, sea dog?* I reply under my breath, *at times we look down in the dumps but not angry at life that has bruised us.*

"What's your name" asks the sailor.

"Jenny, and you?"

His name is Marino, did he think I already knew?

It suited him like magic, like his

blue eyes, like cornflowers in a field. So, I'll really talk to him about me. He rolls up his sleeve and shows me a tattoo on his arm: it represents a cat with a sly face. "Why did you get a cat tattoo instead of a mermaid?" I ask him.

He's silent. His face changes suddenly. We walk by the pier together. His ship will soon leave but he has promised to write to me and come back soon to see me. Even sailors sometimes keep their promises, I console myself.

"Will you wait for me, Jenny?" he asks with a strange anxiety in his voice, looking right into my eyes. "I'll wait for you, sailor," I assure him.

So, he tells me about the "tattooed cat." He recalls a certain Anna, the girl he was madly in love with and who had let him down; he suffered much after that. We both know of flowers in the breeze, but perhaps we'll pick up cheerful sunflowers together. □

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### THE BOX OF KISSES

**T**he story opens a long time ago, when a man punishes his 5-year-old daughter for losing a valuable object and money was low at that time and it was Christmas. The next morning the little girl brought in a present and said: "Dad, this is for you."

The father was visibly embarrassed, but his anger increased when, on opening the box he saw there was nothing inside. He said brusquely: "Don't you know that when you give a gift to someone, you assume there is something inside?"

The child looked up at him from where she was, her eyes filled with tears and said:

"Dad... It's not empty. I put inside so many kisses until it was full."

The father felt devastated. He knelt down and put his arms around his baby's neck and asked her to forgive him.

Years went by and a misfortune took his child from him. For the rest of his life, the father always kept the box near his bed and whenever he felt discouraged or distressed, he would open the box and take out an imaginary kiss, remembering the love his little girl had put in it.

*Bruno Ferrero*

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 25

by Michele Molineris

### 78. Don Bosco drank up... to the dregs! (1858)

Even in drink, Don Bosco was a model of temperance. Although he came from a country where excellent wines were made, he drank very little of it, and only during meals, and this too, always watered down. Until 1858 and beyond, the cellar of the Oratory was partly supplied by the town hall, which sent, almost every week, a mixture of not too popular, samples and assays of wines and cask bottoms that remained on the marked which he also used in the mixtures.

He often forgot to drink, and it was up to those who sat beside him to pour him some; if the wine was good, he immediately sought water to make it better, repeating: "I've renounced the world and the devil, but not the pumps (*pomps*)!"

Between meals, he never took anything at home: in people's homes, out of politeness, he sometimes accepted a few drops of wine, with water (*Vita*, II, 201).

### 79. You didn't have to come from Turin to tell me this (1858)

Fr. Francesca recounts: We arrived at the Odescalchi residence around half past four. The building you entered was and is one of the most sumptuous in Rome. That lady was not Italian, but very religious and devoted to Rome and to the Pope.

Her exterior, even if it were ensconced with a large cloak that

she had thrown over her shoulders, and with no ornamentation on her person, did not prevent her from appearing to me as a woman of great presence and truly Roman majesty. She was waiting for Don Bosco in the hope that the Lord would want to console her mother's heart through this servant of hers. She welcomed Don Bosco with such a melancholic aspect that Manzoni's words would come to my lips: "Oh Lord! Listen to the desire of that most sad mother!"

I remained in a large hall, while Don Bosco, with the lady and whoever had come to receive us went into the building to visit her sick children. She didn't say a word to me and with a rather proud air, she almost pretended that she hadn't seen me. I stood by and spent my time praying a few Rosaries. As time went by, I was beginning to fear that they had forgotten about me. Finally, they reappeared.

How the princess had changed! She no longer knew how to detach herself from Don Bosco... This time, she also acknowledged me, she wanted to know my name, and begged me not to forget her and that she would let me get closer to Don Bosco. In short, I saw a total change. She wanted to receive his blessing and so she knelt on the ground, that is, on a large rich carpet in that room, kneeling in a posture that reminded me of those very fervent people I had seen at other times.

She accompanied Don Bosco out of the hall, along the wide corridor, up to the staircase perfectly composed up to now.

The servants appeared here and there, peeping and then withdrawing. They too seemed amazed at Don Bosco, but perhaps it was because of the way they saw their mistress standing with him. They seemed to be saying: "Who is he? He must be some bishop or cardinal who could disturb our mistress so."

When we were alone in the carriage and I was able to speak, I asked Don Bosco what extraordinary thing had transpired that changed the princess's demeanour so much.

"It was nothing. She wanted me to heal her two children. But as soon as I saw them, I turned to her and said: "Madam Princess, you must accept what God judges best." She put her hands on her hips and, pretending to be angry, she stared at me with a wild aspect that almost frightened me. Then she said, "You did not have to come from Turin to tell me this." She retorted excitedly and somewhat haughtily. "Do you know what I told her? Madam Princess: *"Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam!"* "God resists the proud and gives his grace to the humble, and then I made as if to leave."

"The lady, who at heart was really virtuous, realized that God's favours could be had only through humility, and from that time she put on no airs whenever she spoke with him. She corrected herself and almost weeping said to me: "Forgive a poor mother! Who knows it's not my immense love for them that makes them die? Pray for me and bless them! I went back to the sumptuous rooms where they were lying and blessed them. The Princess was all

distraught and in tears and couldn't stop asking for forgiveness.

"So," I added, "That was why she came back here and that was why there was a change in the way she dealt with me! May the Lord comfort you, dear lady!"

"She needs it, I assure you. Perhaps next week her ordeal will begin.

And in fact, like autumn leaves, one after the other the two children passed away leaving an immense void in the soul of that mother.

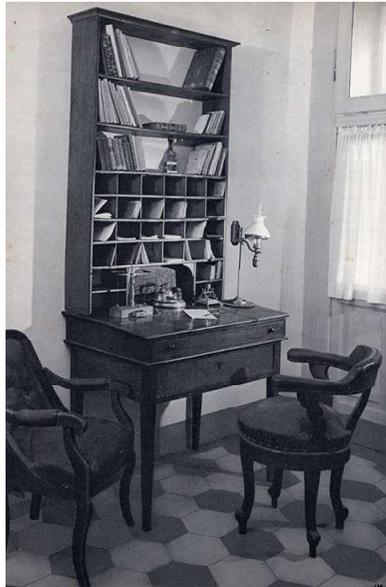
"Were they good?" I asked Don Bosco, "Were they ready for the great leap?"

It seems to me that they were, and that if they left a principality here on earth, they would do so in order to possess another that would never be lost. I told them precisely of this change, and they looked at me with a grateful air, as if they wanted to express the idea that until now no one dared to say it to them so boldly.

Then again, I had seen the good mother at least twenty times, that is, as soon as her children left this earth for heaven; but always resigned and always full of reverence for Don Bosco and for his poor secretary (Francesia, *Due mesi con Don Bosco a Roma*, 118).

### 80. Priest? Better dead! (1858)

Accompanied by her youngest son, a lady, of a noble Turinese family who passed for being very religious, went one day to visit Don Bosco; and not without reason, since her father, finding himself in the Piedmontese diplomatic corps in 1870, had retired after the breach of Porta Pia.



*Desk, letter balance, inkwell, pen rack and oil lamp used by Don Bosco. These articles are still kept in Don Bosco's room. Don Bosco spent many a long night at this desk.*

Don Bosco, in his goodness, who asked the lady for news of the health of her children ended up asking: "and what does he want to do with his firstborn?"

"He will become a diplomat like his father."

"Well, and the second?"

"He is in military school, struggling to become a general; he would be the first in the family not to reach that rank.

"Marvellous," said Don Bosco; and then referring to the child who was present: "And him?" He said: "Shall we make him a priest, don't you think?"

At the word priest, his noble visitor, almost frightened remained dumbfounded for an instant, then furiously screamed:

"No, priest? He's better dead!"

Don Bosco was deeply saddened by this response and he tried to bring the lady back to a sense of calm and pointed out that the word he said was not a verdict but it was all in vain. The woman repeated the horrible curse and withdrew in shock.

Eight days later, Don Bosco saw her reappear all trembling this time; her eyes swollen and pleading with him in these terms: "Come, come quickly, out of love for my son, the one who was with me the other day: he's dying."

Don Bosco when to the boy's bedside and the child takes his hand and kisses it respectfully. At that time, the doctors after much consultation candidly declared that they were completely ignorant of the nature of the boy's disease.

The boy, who had understood everything, made his mother come to his side and in a weak voice whispered: 'Mamma,' he said, 'They don't know, but I know why I'm dying. It was your words that killed me. Do you remember that day, there at Don Bosco's? Poor mamma! You preferred to see me dead rather than give me to God; and the Lord is taking me to himself.'

Then Don Bosco, completely terrified by the sad scene at which Divine Justice made him a spectator, could do nothing but prepare the family for this difficult moment, exhorting them to resign themselves to the will of God and promising to pray for this intention. But he had just come out of there when they brought him news of the death of the child (D'Espiney, *Don Bosco*, 259). □

## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### Points of View

Three matrons sat down at a restaurant table next to mine.

After each had moved her menu closer to and farther from her nose, all three produced spectacles from their handbags.

"I only wear mine for reading," explained the first.

"I really need mine just for driving," the second said, putting hers on.

"I rarely wear mine," said the third, "except when I want to see."

### Apparent Heir

People who use sarcasm, we have always felt, deserve to get a retort, so we liked the story of the father who was wheeling his new son's pram. He was asked by a passerby.

"That your baby?"

"No," said the father facetiously, "I borrowed it from a neighbour."

"Hmmm," replied the other, taking a closer look, "ugly little beast, isn't he?"

### Apology Letter

Lisa, my co-worker at the travel agency, needed to send a letter of apology to a customer whose trip was a complete fiasco from start to finish. I reminded her of a similar situation a year earlier and dug out the letter I'd written then.

"All you have to do," I told her, "is to change the details, the date and the name."

She looked it over and smiled wryly. "We won't even need to change the name." □

### Parting Words

A pastor was leaving his area and was saying farewell to his congregation at the Church doors for the last time. He shook the hand of an elderly lady as she walked out. She said "Your successor won't be as good as you."

"Nonsense," said the pastor, in a flattered tone.

"No, really," said the old lady, "I've been here under five different ministers and each new one has been worse than the last."

### Captain Comeback

I worked in the biology department at a local State College. The Maritime Institute also stationed at the college, employed a licensed boat captain to man its research vessel. It was common knowledge that the captain couldn't swim. When newcomers learned of this, they would approach him about it. "Is it true?" one of them asked incredulously. "You, a boat captain, can't swim?"

"No, I can't," he replied. "Can pilots fly?"

### Bulletin Bloopers

Several members who have been in hospital are not on their way to recovery, for which we are thankful.

The Jack and Kill Daycare is looking for someone to help part time on Saturdays.

What are you doing for Lunch Tuesday? Local Funeral Director Barry Gilbert will talk about the benefits of cremation. □



## 'LET GO' and 'LET GOD'

Br. Bryce Fernandes, sdb

Today after many years I am delighted to look back on my journey to the consecrated Salesian life and how it all began.

The way was certainly not simple but I enjoyed it. I vividly remember my early childhood. I am the second child in my family, pampered and loved. I have memories of eating meals with my family, playing cards, watching TV, playing games with my dad and brother, and lots more. Those were my human experiences with the family. But that was not all, every day our family would pray the rosary; we were also taught to spend time in personal prayer. Because of our parents, we always attended Masses and grew fond of the church and the Catholic Faith. My brother and I became altar servers, we would serve Mass whenever we went to church. I thank God for such a happy and blessed childhood.

That was also the time I came in touch with priests who had an impact on my life: Fr. Tony Correia, Fr. Eric Alphonsus, Fr. Robin Gonsalves, Fr. Diego Fernandes, Fr. Renwick Dabre, and Fr. Marshal Lopes. I was inspired by those holy and simple priests who encouraged me unknowingly on my vocation journey. Fr. Marshal helped me to discern my vocation in my initial stages.

But things weren't going to be the same. Though I received so



much love from my family, relatives, and friends I was quite the prodigal; rash and carefree, bunking classes, not interested in studies and rather coarse in my behaviour.

All this went on till my 10<sup>th</sup> Std when I went through a period of depression and meaninglessness. It was a tough phase. I even started questioning the purpose of my existence. The world around me was changing too. I felt empty within and longed for something more. And that was it! That was my turning point. I decided to take my life into my own hands and begin a journey far away from home at Don Bosco's Lonavla.

During the first month itself I started missing my family, my cute little cousins with whom I spent most of my time, my relatives and

friends. There were days I sat crying by myself in the chapel because I missed them. But there was no turning back now. In Lonavla, I had to make my bed, fold my clothes, wash them, and iron them too. At times I had to work in the wash rooms and the baths, something I had never done before. That was very difficult for me. I had to take my studies seriously. But I gradually made new friends and started enjoying life in Lonavla. I learned music, games, and other skills. My prayer life improved and I deepened my relationship with God. The Fathers and brothers around me helped me a lot. I was discovering the true beauty within me. Two years later I was another Bryce that the world would see.

Don Bosco Lonavla had done much for me and when it came to deciding whether to go home or join Don Bosco's seminary I readily opted to stay with Don Bosco. I wanted to live generously and help youngsters like myself. Yes, my parents and the folks around me were surprised at my decision. They never expected me to follow through. Honestly, like anyone else, I was afraid and hesitant to answer this call. I had questions, doubts, and fears. Would I be able to make it up to the end? There was a risk, but what relationship doesn't go through a phase like that? To begin that journey, I had to 'let go' of many things, detach myself of worldly things in order to let God enter. When we leave our families, God takes our place there. That is why we make this sacrifice because we are 'called' to something greater.

There were times when I felt like leaving because of situations and

problems and misunderstandings with people around me but I did not quit. After all, how could I? On this journey God had opened my eyes, I had seen the misery of people around me and I had experienced their thirst and longing for God, and I had walk with them. I felt called, chosen, blessed, broken, and given to everyone.

Earlier my life was a 'curse' to the people around me but now it had become a 'blessing' not only to my family but to so many others. I have journeyed with many families and today I am a part of their lives. I have met many people, heard their cries, spent time with them spreading the message of God's Love for them.

My dear young people this is how God works when you surrender yourself into his hands. The road you take may be attractive and glamorous. You may be attached to gadgets, people, food, and places. Being attached is not bad, but these attachments make us empty and that vacuum only God can fill. I was a misfit in society but from the very beginning God had marked my destiny. If He is calling you, don't be afraid. Be generous with your life because the Church needs you. Let the desire grow and as you discern your call, like Mary learn to say 'Yes' in faith. Do your best (*your part*), God will take care of the rest (*His part*).

*I have called you by name and you are mine'. Isaiah 43:1*

(brycesdb1991@gmail.com)





## THINKING OF MARY TODAY

Garcia Paredes

**W**e need to think of Mary from the perspective of faith which it is not just a religious faith in God, but a faith that involves the following of Christ. Why?

The Church today must fulfil its mission during a very difficult time. Especially in the first world, but not there only, she finds herself living in a society that for some time, has no longer been conscious about religion. There are many who no longer even have religious doubts! Atheism, agnosticism or indifference, are characteristics that define the life of not a few of our contemporaries. What is worse is that this situation also affects the people of God to some extent. An extremely worrying trend is the exodus of believers to the world of unbelief.

In this situation, to contemplate on the Blessed Virgin Mary does not mean being reduced to merely recalling her figure, a purely intellectual remembrance. In the Church's mind, thinking of her becomes an ecclesial event. What the church remembers takes place, that is, the Church enters

the recalled event, since she remembers it before God and in the Spirit of God.

**Thinking of Mary means experiencing her presence.** She reminds us of our origins since she was with the nascent Church; with her we begin to be a Church of faith, with her we are beloved disciples of Jesus. Mary "is hailed as the pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity" (LG n 53). Already in the fourth century, St. Ambrose, speaking to the faithful, assured them that within each of them was the soul of Mary to glorify God. Mary's "yes" to God, despite all the very serious difficulties to which she was subjected, becomes a lesson and a model for all Christians. We need to be heirs to the faith of our fathers and mothers. In particular, heirs of the one who was and continues to be "our Mother in the faith." In her, we have *the* model of a methodology to persevere in the faith.

**Thinking of Mary is especially important in a world that relativizes everything** that is rarely

based on what is authentic, solid, fundamental or absolute. The Gospel figure of Mary is marked by a consistency of life, by interior unity and by the integration of all the aspects of the life that she lived. Mary knew how to integrate her divine motherhood with her attentiveness towards the needy; her spiritual maternity and her belonging to the post-Easter community into one and the same project of faith. Mary was consistent from beginning to end. She was simply "the believer," the believer by her presence and surrender, day or night, close or far. When the Church fixes her gaze on Mary, she learns to be coherent, to maintain firmly and faithfully the convictions that were born out of meditating and interiorizing the word of God; to learn to be faithful in the most adverse of circumstances; not to be dominated by fear and always to have a *Magnificat* of hope on their lips.

**Thinking of Mary in the midst of a humanity** wherein three quarters of them live in abject poverty, where justice and peace are constantly violated. It means taking her side with her eschatological hymn, the *Magnificat*. Thinking of Mary in these circumstances is to contemplate her as the woman who leads the denunciation of injustices and proclaims the alternatives of the Kingdom. It means taking hers and her Son's side in an alternative world. Mary, as at Cana, continues to say, as she beholds the extreme poverty and undignified situations of her children scattered all over the world: "They have no wine!" Mary wants to accelerate the "hour" of



*The Madonna of the Gospel teaches us to ponder and meditate on the teachings of Jesus*

salvation for so many who no longer resist suffering, injustice and war. The Woman's tears constantly fall in this "valley of tears" and implore the arrival of the Kingdom in an uninterrupted *Magnificat*.

**Thinking of Mary means giving rise to a church capable of opting more decisively for the poor and for liberation.** The memory of Mary pushes us to a daring praxis. Mary did not prevent her son Jesus from exercising his mission to ensure the Kingdom; rather, she anticipated his hour: Mary even consented to the oblation of her Son without struggling to be by his side. Mary did not want an incipient Church to be permanently worried about her, to venerate, assist or take care of her; rather she contributed to the missionary enthusiasm of

the apostles, accompanying them with her intercessory prayer and presence.

**Thinking of Mary in the Church reminds us of our vocation to be saints**, that is to say, to give ourselves without reserve to God, our vocation and our radical following of Jesus; our vocation to be temples of the Spirit. Thinking of Mary becomes an accusation of our mediocrity, our bourgeois lifestyles, our evangelical minimalism. But whoever entrusts himself to Mary receives the stimulus to realize “the truth of the Church.” Thinking of Mary means rediscovering the meaning of losing oneself, even one’s body and the total gift that implies the gift of virginity of those called to the consecrated life.

**Thinking of Mary** must lead Christian denominations to draw out of their hearts the sword of division and strive for the reunion of “all the scattered children of God,” brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Thinking of Mary must lead us to intensify in our families the evangelical alternative of Christian marriage; of the vocation to paternity and maternity.

**Thinking of Mary is an invitation to ordained ministers to personally welcome, like Mary, the faith they will then proclaim with authority.**

Two thousand years ago, the new Eve was born. A new world began to dawn. Light conquered the shadows. Dawn had a woman’s face. And in her, God was sowing the seeds of life and the Spirit made her grow in grace and beauty. Two thousand years ago, history began to offer the first symptoms of its fulness. Although



Mary passed unnoticed in Israel, through her God was preparing the greatest revolution history had ever witnessed.

After two thousand years, Mary, the New Eve, has not distanced herself from us. Mary, the resurrected woman is always in communion with us and shares Jesus’ constant intercession on our behalf. Through His resurrection, He remains in the ecclesial assembly so that we can truly say: “In union with the whole church, let us remember and venerate above all, the glorious ever virgin Mary” (Eucharistic Prayer I)

As we face the third millennium, there is no room for anguish. God has preceded us with a beneficent sign: “then a great sign appeared in the heavens: a woman...” (Ap. 12, 1) □

## NEWSBITS

### MILAN

At a series of conferences in Milan, the Nobel Prize-winning economist **Amartya Sen** underlined how **Pope Francis** is helping people to understand and discuss problems and to create awareness about many current social issues. “He is the only person who is in a recognized position of authority and who helps people to reason about issues regarding Humanity.”

The Idea of *food entitlement*, which is constantly being brought into focus by Pope Francis and Amartya Sen, opens up the door to the many concerns for which solutions must be found.

Amartya Sen is talking about the example of Pope Francis who makes of course the difference in this world, but it does not necessarily mean that one has to be religious or Catholic because Francis in doing so represents not only the Head of the Catholic Church, but He is the Head who is speaks for Humanity in the sense that He acts in a way to get people thinking on these issues.”

Sen is one of the most influential eminent voices on these very important issues regarding poverty and inequalities, with his studies on hunger and famine, he has offered the world the possibility to see these problems in a different light, a different point of view on how to handle them, showing that the first thing to be clear about in understanding hunger and its persistency, is the need to see food deprivation as an economic problem rather than as a narrowly defined “food problem.”



In his book *Poverty and Famine* published in 1981 and in his studies more than 40 years ago, he tried to use a concept that he called “food entitlement.”

The basic idea of food entitlement is extremely simple and elementary. Since food and other commodities are not distributed freely to people, their consumption in general - and the ability to consume food in particular - must depend on the basket of goods and services that people can respectively buy or have entitlement to.

Food entitlement should be one of the fundamental issues of the new development Agenda with which the UN will define the new millennium goals, this is the fundamental issue - respond to the imperative that access to necessary nutrition is a right of all.

Sen’s words again when talking on Pope Francis: “He speaks for Humanity and there is no formula for doing it other than demanding attention, and letting our voice be heard. If you are hopefully in a relevant position of course the result will come more easily otherwise it will be necessary get together, to let our voice be heard.” □

## THE VILEST OFFENDER

by Kathleen Easton

**D**o you have a favourite hymn? My late mother, who converted to the Catholic Faith at the age of eighty-eight, loved *To God be the Glory* which she knew well from her former church. I was delighted to find it in our Catholic hymn book, and arranged for it to be sung at her funeral in 2001.

However, there was an amendment to the lyrics of one verse.

In our former church we had sung the lines,

*'The vilest offender*

*who truly believes*

*that moment from Jesus*

*a pardon receives'*

In the Catholic book, the same part of the same verse reads:

*'And every offender*

*who truly believes*

*that moment from Jesus*

*a pardon receives'*

'Such a slight difference, but so significant. I preferred the original, and not only because it conformed to the hymn writer's intention.

The great thing about the Christian faith is that it offers forgiveness, and a personal forgiveness at that— from Jesus Himself!! Why? Because He said so.

Remember the Good Thief? The robber hanging on another cross alongside Our Lord on Good Friday? This man repented of his sins as he hung dying in agony, and Our Lord's words to him were clear and unequivocal:

*'Today, you shall be with me in paradise....'*

### No one excluded from God's forgiveness

Well, you may say, the man was only a thief! But would Our Lord have offered him this magnificent blessing if he had also been a murderer? Of course, He would! His forgiveness is always unequivocal: it is as unconditional as His love. He knows when a person truly repents, so His decision as Judge of all mankind is perfect and irrevocable. Unlike earthly judgements, the Final Judgment means just that: there is no Court of Appeal!

Sometimes the idea of complete forgiveness is impossible for Christians to accept. At best, it is accepted half-heartedly. OK, we say, in moment of superficial generosity: I'll forgive him for that, but I can never forgive her for this...

We have no right to withhold forgiveness. After all, we promise



it in our everyday prayer, the greatest and most important of all Christian prayers:

*'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.'* How many of us realise when we say those words so glibly each day, perhaps many times each day, what we really mean? That little word 'AS' in between our supplication to God on our own behalf and our promise to Him regarding our treatment of others—is vital. We are asking Him to forgive us in the same way and to the same degree as we forgive others!!

So, if we refuse to forgive others totally — why should God forgive us?

Thankfully, in His mercy we believe that He will. Yet we continue making our daily promise to forgive others just as mercifully, unconditionally, and totally as He does. A tall order? Of course, it is!

### Child killer dies

In early November 2002 one of the two most hated child killers of all time in the United Kingdom died quite suddenly at the age of sixty. This person was jailed in the 1960's and had been in prison ever since. More than one appeal had been made for her early release by various campaigners —

including Catholic Lord Longford — and turned down by at least three successive Home Secretaries of the British Government. All agreed that this particular killer should remain in jail for life. Her name was Myra Hindley - RIP. Was I the only one in England to cross myself and say the prayer which begins *Eternal rest...* when I heard of Hindley's death? I should think not. The next day, I heard other Christians express similar sentiments on BBC Radio. The Executor of her Will — a Catholic priest said pretty much what I have said above, that the Lord's Prayer reminds us to forgive others — no matter what they have done.

Myra Hindley converted to the Faith before she ever killed, and — as one newspaper put it — 're-converted' whilst in prison.

Who are we to say that her conversion — or even reconversion, whatever that means — was not genuine? How do we know whether Christ has forgiven a woman whom a great majority of British people consider, quite simply, to be the *vilest offender*? We do not know either answer, but we know — and trust — a Man who does.

*'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'* Mt 5 :7 ☐

## APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

FEBRUARY 2021

### Violence against women

*We pray for women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded.*

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### MARY WAS THERE

Mary was there in one of the most important moments of my life. A couple of days ago I got my UK driving license, one of the most toughest in the world to obtain. Two days earlier I was extremely anxious and on the day of my test I was so nervous I felt as if my heart would pop. I just continued to pray and remain focused. Just before stepping out of the house to take the test I carried the rosary with me. The moment I sat in the car a sense of calmness prevailed and for the entire time of the driving test I continued to remain calm. After the test was complete I was blessed with my driving license on my very first attempt. Mary was with me all along and without her this would never have been possible.

*A follower of Christ*

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

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

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