

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

MUMBAI

JANUARY 2018

VOL.19 NO. 9

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Grant we pray,
that we may experience
the intercession of her
through whom we were
found worthy
to receive the author
of life,
Our Lord Jesus Christ!

(From the Opening Prayer of the
Mass of the Motherhood of Mary)

From The Editor's Desk

TRUST GOD IN ALL THINGS

We don't linger long at the manger, do we? Our hearts are still Waglow and our spirits animated with visions of shepherds tending their flock. Wise Men who have journeyed from afar, and the Holy Family - Mary, Joseph, and their Precious Child. And then, before you know it, they've packed up and fled south to Egypt. I find it an irony of history that when Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem they were not met with any semblance of hospitality. And yet when they ventured into foreign territory, it's apparent that somebody took them in and provided a hospitable place for them to dwell while they awaited Herod's demise. Talk about trusting God in all things! How often we plan, make reservations, especially when we're going into a city where we know no one. Or, we go with a group so we won't get lost and we're sure that we'll have an assured welcome. Again, talk about trusting in God!

The story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt comes to us as we enter a new calendar year. We who experience and celebrate the annual trek to Bethlehem and the joy of Christmas morning will soon have everything packed up, prepared for our own journey to a new place in time. Though there are no Herods in hot pursuit, our thoughts are apt to touch on what must have been on the minds of Mary and Joseph as they headed into the unknown: the joy and surprise of things new and different? Would there be joy? Would they be constantly looking over their tired shoulders or would they have kept their ears peeled for the footfalls of Herod's soldiers? If they were directed to leave this place and go, it stood to reason that the One who 'ordered' them would order others in one-way-or-another to be there for this strange migrant couple from the 'back-of-beyond.' That's trust!

We do not easily admit to weakness or being needy, but Christian maturity embraces dependency on God. This is the nature of things. God has created all and provides for us out of all that is created. It's worth noting that from time to time Jesus arranged for the early disciples to experience a healthy dose of being pushed beyond their limits (e.g. feeding the multitude when they had no food). It was in these times they learned to trust God, to reach beyond knowing into the realm of faith. So it is with us. Epiphany invites us into receptivity in the midst of those life and family experiences which pull us beyond the limits of our own ability to cope and manage. The spiritual discipline here is for us to yield to the Spirit of Jesus who indwells us, and call out to God: "Abba! Daddy!" Herein is freedom, freedom from our own self-imposed belief that we are supposed to be able, to be competent. Freedom to be a child!

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

COPING WITH FAMILY PROBLEMS

Ian Pinto, sdb

The family is the basic unit of society. This sociological definition is common knowledge and is often quoted to define the family. Family is the microcosm that reflects the larger macrocosm: society. Family and society have a mutually influencing relationship. The health and atmosphere of the family reflects the health and atmosphere of society and vice versa. If families are divided, fragile, aggressive and value-less, society is bound to be fragmented, hostile, destructive and ethically unsound. On the other hand, if families are united, happy, peaceful, forgiving and upright then society too will be communitarian, peaceful, tolerant and ethical. While families influence society, society too influences the family. It is difficult for a fruit-bearing tree to grow in the desert, you know?

Everybody's Got Problems

Despite any attempts to romanticize the idea of family, it is basically and fundamentally a group of individuals who are tied together by bonds of blood and kinship. These individuals share many things in common but also differ in many other ways. One of the basic differences within a family is personality. Each individual in the family is different from the other, not only in physical characteristics but also in characteristics that are emotional, mental and spiritual as well. Since no two people are the same, friction is bound to occur when



the rough edges of both rub against each other.

"My parents and I never really saw eye to eye about anything. When I was younger it was just the simple stuff - the length of my skirt, how I chose to wear my hair or the movies I wanted to watch. But as I got older I found that there was a lot more that we didn't agree on - my choice of friends, what I wanted to study at university, political issues or how I chose to spend my weekends.

"I left home at 17 to study at a university in another city. Moving away from home has totally broadened my outlook on the world and has changed my opinion on lots of issues. Over the past two years I've met the most amazing people with the most extraordinarily diverse experiences. My circle of friends includes people with different religions, beliefs, values, cultures and different ways of approaching life. But the great thing is we respect each other's opinions. I've learnt to question what I've

been taught and not always agree just because that is what "everybody else" thinks.

"The first couple of times I went home to visit my parents I found it really hard to cope. I found it hard to deal with not being able to express my opinions as freely as I did when I was away from home. My mum didn't necessarily agree with my upfront attitude to life. While I was always out there trying to get people to take me and my beliefs and opinions seriously, her attitude was "why fight it... why not just go with the flow." It was really frustrating. I used to get really upset that my parents didn't agree with what I was doing."

When this young teen penned these words what she did was not only put down her own life experience of conflict and frustration in family life but also, in a way, she speaks about the experiences that everyone, I daresay, faces. The details may differ but the underlying truth remains steadfast. 'Everyone faces problems, difficulties, challenges, conflicts, frustrations and failures!' There is no denying that fact.

Scott Peck in his bestselling book, *The Road Less Travelled*, begins with these astonishingly plain yet insightful words: "Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult — once we truly understand and accept it — then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is

difficult, no longer matters. Most do not fully see this truth: that life is difficult, instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or subtly, about the enormity of their problems, their burdens, and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if life *should* be easy. They voice their belief, noisily or subtly, that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be and that has somehow been especially visited upon them, or else, upon their families, their tribe, their class, their nation, their race or even their species, and not upon others."

The family, which is a community of individuals, is not exempt from life's difficulties. Problems, difficulties, challenges, conflicts and frustrations are bound to occur at one time or another, in one way or another, so there is no need to be alarmed by it. What *needs* to alarm us, however, is how the family *cope*s with these setbacks.

Dealing with Family Problems

Each family deals with its problems in its own way. While there is no 'quick-heal' method, there are productive and counter-productive ways. How can you know if a method is productive or counter-productive? Simple. Look at the outcome. If a family member refuses to talk to another because of a misunderstanding or a past hurt, then that behaviour is counter-productive. Willing to listen and dialogue with one another is a sign of great maturity and a very productive way of resolving issues. So often we find ourselves in

a clash of wills. How can we proactively deal with our problems?

A letter to a newspaper advice column brought up an issue that frequently makes its appearance albeit in different guises in such columns: how to respond to difficult people, particularly obnoxious family members. A woman wrote, "My mother and I have had a poor relationship for years. She is self-absorbed, demanding and consistently hurtful. She seems to find great amusement in upsetting me and takes every opportunity to do so.... This kind of behaviour is typical of her, and I am tired of it. I have tried to discuss it with her, and she refuses to accept that she has done anything wrong. I finally decided to sever all contact.... The problem is that the rest of my family berates me for being "mean" to her. They expect me to maintain this destructive relationship."

Many people seem to think that such a situation can be dealt with in one of three ways:

1. Cut the offending family member and his/her family allies completely out of your life.
2. Grow a spine and fight back.
3. Try to let it go in one ear and out the other.

The second and third solutions seem to say, "Brave it out". I've heard many people doling out such advice in abundance. Do you think that helps resolve the issue? Let's suppose for a moment that it does. Are you aware of the damage it does to the receiver? Imagine being the butt of other's anger, frustration, sarcasm, pessimism and gossip for a period of a week? Can you pic-

ture that scenario? How do you expect to feel at the end of it? Now, multiply that by fifty years. That's what the receiver is 'supposed' to endure, just so that the conflict can be resolved!

Solution 1 seems easier and far less painful, but again, how productive does it prove to be? Divorcing yourself from your family is going to leave a scar whether you like it or not. Everyone develops emotional bonds with other family members no matter how 'good' or 'bad' they might be. Severing these bonds may produce a short-term solution but has long-term effects. Psychological studies show that unresolved dysfunctional family relationships quite frequently affect one's relationships with one's own children. Some abused children become abusive parents themselves, while others go to the other extreme and end up smothering their children with parental care and guidance. The later pattern sometimes results in a generation of, say, alcoholics begetting a generation of uptight teetotalers who then beget another generation of alcoholics.

Since none of these three prove to be productive, we are still left with the question: How can we constructively deal with family problems? Allow me to offer a few tips. These tips are not fool-proof and don't guarantee success but they have been tried and tested and found to be helpful. You may find that the tips offered are directed to the individual even though they can also be applied to the family as a whole. This is because change



often begins with an individual. Families that come together in an environment of openness to discuss its problems and collectively come up with a solution are the ideal. But since most families are not anywhere near that ideal, the option to bring about change from the level of the individual is the most viable.

The first thing I believe we ought to do is **pray**. Now you may wonder how prayer is going to help, but trust me, it does. Prayer may not change the situation or the person but it will definitely change you! Your problems may not go away after your prayers but you will receive the grace and the strength to face your problems and come up with amiable solutions. Prayer will remind you that you do not have to face your problems alone; God is there to support you. Surrendering your difficulties to God will relieve you from your pain, stress and anxiety, and help you see things differently.

We could **seek help** from competent or trustworthy people; it could be a psychotherapist, counselor, priest or even a good friend. Sharing your problems with someone wise could help

you experience freedom from your troubles. They can help you see things in a new light. Expressing your feelings and working with them could help you develop strategies for coping. When you talk to someone else, he/she can help you see the other side of the story. You perhaps may be able to step into the other persons' shoes.

There is nothing like **forgiveness** to give you peace of mind. Often enough, people hear the devastating words, "I never want to see you again!" from a parent, a sibling, or a child, and we all know what a devastating feeling that is. What happened to this family relationship? Where did the marriage or family unity go? Sometimes people would rather fight than make love! Or keep a grudge rather than forgive! You could go on suffering from the side-effects of a broken relationship or you could step up and forgive. I know that this is easier said than done, but hey, isn't that what Jesus commanded us to do?

"This I tell you: love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven. For he makes his sun rise on both the wicked and the good, and he gives rain to both the just and the unjust. If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do not even tax collectors do as much? And if you are friendly only to your friends, what is so exceptional about that?... be righteous and perfect in the way your heavenly Father is righteous and perfect" (Mt 5:44-48). □

HELP, MY SON'S ON THE CLOUD

Ermete Tessore

One question that – as a Salesian who works in high schools – I am frequently asked these days is: “Father, but, what’s going in our children’s heads?” That’s a question as old as humankind. The adolescent world has always raised doubts and anxieties in the minds of adults.

Youngsters are riding on this tumultuous advancement of technology and we should also get up on to that i-cloud to prevent what these new ways of communicating are doing to ingratiate their lives, their hopes, their values, and their faith.

Just think of the storms generated in society by the student movement in the mythical nineteen sixties. Today’s fears are inflated by the fact that youngsters are more deft at handling these modern technologies while we, educators and parents seem disoriented and distressed in the face of these digital platforms. Our children perceive our unconscious inferiority complex because of our mental stereotypes when we try to give outdated responses to their questions about what really matters.

Even traditional ways of handling on the Faith proves increasingly inadequate. The world of



the web, i-pods, smartphones, i-pads, chat, Face Book and Twitter are slowly raising walls that make intergenerational dialogue increasingly problematic. Young people are sprinting while adults are plodding along. In the case of the former, they remain without real role models to emulate while the latter feel more and more inadequate, almost ready to throw in the towel and relinquish their duty of educating. In my opinion, the question we heard at the beginning should be reversed. It should read: “What’s going in in the heads of a considerable number of parents and educators today?”

WHEN SHOULD WE SPEAK?

A youngster wastes so much time riding the tumultuous progress of technology. They are developing new behaviours: new lifestyles that sweep away

everything that smacks of tradition: values, emotions, relationships, religion, sensitivity, languages and sensibilities.

The way the youngster faces the day is astonishing. It starts with the i-pod that blares music into the ears of youngsters accompanying them to breakfast which is consumed in religious silence and then on the way to school. In fact, crossing them on the public transport or in the streets they seem like perfect monads, technologically armed in their isolated rapport with music. Once in school their i-pods are replaced by the smartphone and they begin chatting, messaging, photographing, surfing the web to check how authentic the teacher’s lecture is while reassuring their mothers that they love them using sweet words...but only virtually. All this is done beneath-the-bench to avoid the unnecessary barbs of the professors. After school in the company of the ever-faithful i-pod the youngster reaches his room only to jump into the arms of the laptop. Emails are read and responded, friends on Facebook are updated, Twitter is activated as also little peeks into porn sites, pirated movies and songs are downloaded avoiding copyright... and what of the adults? They are in the living rooms, kitchens, or in the study working and wondering what’s happening in their youngsters’ rooms. Lunches and dinners fail to break these stereotypes. Later the television takes the place of the computer...the only thing that remain constant...is non-communication.

I-pod, smartphones, i-pads,



Facebook and Twitter are raising high walls that risk compromising inter-generational dialogue.

“CONNECTED” PARENTS

Faced with this reality, a bit exaggerated but nonetheless realistic, what do you do? Very simple, abandon all fear, get rid of that psychological subjugation complex regarding these new tools of communication and begin studying them to enable you to use all these digital platforms and start surfing the digital world to meet your children once more. Only connected to their world will we be able to re-establish new educative relationships. We must even go onto the i-cloud to prevent the super-servers like Apple, Google and Face Book etc. from influencing their lives, hopes, values and faith. It is a task that no one can escape from. Without digitally-educated parents and educators on the cloud, they will never come close to God but remain at a distance from themselves and from real life, slaves of a cold virtual reality, efficient but heartless.□



SALESIAN SAINTS

JOSEPH QUADRIO

1921 - 1963

PRIEST, VENERABLE

Joseph Quadrio was born in Vervio in the province of Sondrio on November 28, 1921 to Augustine Quadrio and Giacomina Robustelli: a peasant family rich in the Christian life. God's grace had already taken possession of the child's little heart so that at the age of eight he had come up with a serious rule of life which concluded with the words: "I shall strive to become a saint." Having read the life of Don Bosco which was given to him by his parish priest, he felt drawn to join the Salesian family. In 1937 he became a Salesian and was chosen to attend the faculty of philosophy at the prestigious Gregorian University in Rome. Already at 20 years, he received his license with flying colours and began to teach philosophy at Foglizzo to the student clerics with clarity and depth. In 1943 he began attending courses in Theology at the Gregorian University while staying in the Community of the Sacred Heart (Sacro Cuore).

His inner life and his Salesian loving kindness were developing and manifesting themselves more and more. In 1946, in the presence of nine cardinals and also the future Pope Paul VI, he solemnly defended the theological dispute concerning the dogmatic definition of the dogma of the Assump-



tion of Mary into Heaven. This dissertation brought great honour to the Church and to the Congregation. He was ordained a priest in 1947 and graduated in theology in 1949 and in that same year he began teaching at the Theologate in Turin where his incisiveness left a deep impression on numerous students at the Pontifical Salesian University. In 1954 he was named "dean" of the faculty of Theology. In 1960 he was detected with a malignant lymphogranuloma. Fully aware, he continued as long as he could to teach and participate in community life. At the hospital he exuded such warmth and kindness to everyone. "The great miracle that Fr Ruami worked - he wrote a few months before the end - was an unmerited and soothing peace that rendered these days of waiting most beautiful and happy days of my life." He died on October 23, 1963. □



CL. CLARENCE MARTIS, SDB

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

I began my journey with Don Bosco when I entered Don Bosco Matunga in Std. 8 as a boarder. I loved the life in the boarding, which was filled with activities, entertainment, as well as studies and a good focus on the spiritual life. But the idea of a life as a priest did not appeal to me, so much so, when the Rector, Fr. Ronnie (of happy memory) asked me if I wanted to become a priest, I said NO.

After having completed my SSC with a distinction, I got admission to the stream of my choice - Commerce. A few months into my college life, a need arose at Don Bosco Matunga for a boarding master. I was asked if I was interested and I said YES. It was during the five years as a boarding master that I came in close contact with the Salesian brothers and fathers and I believe the seed of a priestly vocation was sown and began to grow from then on. And the day came when I was in my S.Y.B.Com and I plucked up the courage and went to Fr. Ronnie and told him that I wanted to



become a Salesian.

During these years of studying and living out my vocation I have experienced the love of God through various situations, life events and people who have come into my life, especially through my brother Salesians.

Looking back at my vocation journey, I have learnt that God loves us so much that he gives us many opportunities to realize our vocation. We only need to be aware of His calling and respond with a determined YES. □

A PRAYER OF POPE FRANCIS



*Lord, help me to be like you,
give me the grace of tenderness
in the most difficult circumstances
of life,
give me the grace of closeness
in the face of every need,
of meekness in every conflict.*

Witnesses in & for Our Times



VEN. BENEDETTA BIANCHI PORRO

One day in the summer of 1955, at the faculty of medicine in Milan, a female student showed up for a difficult exam at the end of her second year. Without warning, the professor called on her for the oral exam. At first, she didn't respond, then she blushed and shyly explained, "Professor, I am undergoing treatment for a disease of the nervous system—I can't hear anything, I hope to be healed. Please have patience with me. Could you ask me the questions in writing?" The students in the room began to laugh. Believing this to be a bad joke, the professor yelled, "Patience, patience! What's this? Who ever heard of a deaf doctor?" As he threw the confused and humiliated young woman's grade book against the wall, she murmured, "I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to offend you." The professor remained unyielding. Having been failed, the student left the room and told a friend, who had seen everything and was crying, "It does not mean anything. Listen—don't say anything to my mother for now; I will tell her tomorrow." And it was she who sought to excuse the professor to her mother. This student never



earned a medical degree, but today, from Heaven, she teaches countless "patients" the art of suffering well.

Benedetta (Benedicta) Bianchi Porro was born on August 8, 1936 in Dovadola, a village in the province of Forlì, in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy. Her mother had a deep faith that she strove to pass on to her six children. As an infant, Benedetta was struck by polio. The disease was stopped, but her right leg was to remain shorter than the other. One day, during a game in the

schoolyard, a boy whom the little girl had bothered shouted to her: "Oh! The cripple!" Her brother Gabriel took it badly, leading to a fist-fight between the boys. The mothers ran to separate them. But Benedetta did not take offense: "He called me 'the cripple'—what is wrong with that? It's the truth!" These words reconciled the two boys, who resumed their game.

The great desires of a teenage girl

In 1942, the Bianchi family moved to Sirmione, on the shore of Lake Garda. In 1946, Benedetta began to confide her thoughts in a diary, in which the child often recorded her faults: "Mama told me that I am unbearable, I am ill-mannered and naughty." In 1949, she had to start wearing a corset to avoid becoming hunchbacked. She wrote that day: "I cried! The corset squeezes so hard under the arms! Before, I was carefree and felt almost like the others. Now, what a gulf separates us! But in life, I want to be like the others, a little more, perhaps. I want to be able to become someone." In school, the girl earned outstanding grades. In 1953, she noted, "Today is Easter. How I would like to rise from my sins and live only for God! Today, Gabriela and I philosophized a little about God and the immortality of the soul. What fools men are when they are ashamed to speak of these important things!"

On February 15, 1953, questioned by her teacher in a Latin class, Benedetta was unable to hear the questions. This hearing trouble happened again. She commented in her diary: "What do I look like when this happens? But what does it matter? Maybe

one day I will no longer understand anything that other people say, but I will always hear the voice of my soul, and that is the true guide that I must follow." In October, by dint of hard work, she received her high school diploma with honours. She then enrolled in the faculty of medicine in Milan. Her goal was to "Live, struggle and sacrifice myself for all men."

However, threatened with deafness, Benedetta experienced a period of discouragement. She felt the vertigo of nothingness. She wrote to her closest friend at the time: "You know, Anna, it seems to me that I am in an endless and monotonous swamp, in which I am sinking slowly, slowly, without pain or regrets, unaware of and indifferent to what will happen to me, even when the last ray of light from the sky disappears and the mud closes over me" "I am very often filled with doubts and I sink into the deepest skepticism."

Struggling with stoic determination against her handicap, Benedetta successfully pursued her studies. She learned to read lips; in oral exams, she answered questions in a flash, without letting on that she was deaf. In November 1955, she received permission to retake the oral exam from the summer before. This time, she was given the questions in writing, and she passed with excellent grades. But that very evening, she got a migraine and suddenly, her field of vision narrowed. She immediately had a premonition: "No, my God! Not my eyes!" One evening in 1956, the student showed a friend a medical treatise, saying, "This is my disease." She showed her the

photo of a patient stricken with neurofibromatosis (also known as von Recklinghausen disease). This extremely rare and incurable condition forms small tumors on the nerve centres, progressively destroying them. The auditory nerve is the first to be damaged, followed by the optic nerve and the other senses, and finally there is progressive paralysis. After examination, the dismayed doctors confirmed Benedetta's diagnosis. Then began a long series of hospital stays and operations intended to slow down the terrible process.

"A docile sheep in His hands"

On June 27, 1957, Benedetta underwent an operation on her head. Looking death in the face, she confided to her mother: "How happy I am, Mama, to be pure as I go to the Lord, without a mortal sin." The words of Saint Francis that she so loved came to her mind: "Praised be You, my Lord, for our sister bodily death, whom no living man can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin, blessed those whom she will find in Your most holy will, for the second death will not harm them" (*Saint Francis of Assisi, Canticle of the Creatures*).

As they were shaving her head, she felt humiliated, but had recourse to prayer: "While they were shaving me, I felt like a lamb being sheared. I asked the Lord that I might become a docile sheep in His hands." As soon as she came out of anesthesia, she touched her face: "They cut my facial nerve." The left half of her face was now paralyzed. The surgeon did not know how to ask her forgiveness for this profes-

sional error; she simply told him: "You did what you could; take my hand and be at peace! It was something that could happen—you are not the Eternal Father!"

From this time on, Benedetta received suffering less as a burden to be heroically carried, than as the mark of divine favour. Jesus called her to share His cross so that she might identify herself with Him. She let herself go, and found her strength in the Gospel, which she read every day, in Saint Paul, and in the psalms.

"Speak to the Madonna"

In May 1962, Benedetta left for Lourdes in a train specially outfitted for the transport of the disabled. At the hospital, in the bed next to hers was a 22-year-old woman, Maria, paralyzed like her. In a situation that was, humanly speaking, materially and morally hopeless, Maria had come to Lourdes to ask the Immaculate Conception for a miracle. She prayed constantly, but nothing happened. The day before they were to leave, the two invalids found themselves side by side at the Grotto. Maria was sobbing, Benedetta took her hand and pressed it in her own hands, as though to pray in her place. "Maria, the Madonna is here, looking at you! Speak to her, to the Madonna!" And all of a sudden, Maria rose from her stretcher. She gently took a few steps, still incredulous. And then, delirious with joy, she made her way among the wheelchairs, weeping with emotion and gratitude. Benedetta, happy for this miracle, nevertheless felt a pang of sadness in thinking that it was another who had been its beneficiary. Then she

regained her peace and abandoned herself into the hands of Mary. One year later, she would return to Lourdes, from where she would write, "I feel the sweetness of resignation. For me, that was the miracle of Lourdes this year. The Madonna gave me everything I had lost. She repaid all that had been taken from me, because I possess the richness of the Holy Spirit." On August 20, 1963, a nurse found the patient in ecstasy. Benedetta would confide to her that she had seen the Blessed Virgin, adding, "How beautiful the Madonna is!"

Meanwhile, Benedetta underwent several operations on her head. Before the last of these, on February 27, 1963, Benedetta admitted her fear to Maria Grazia, who reminded her of this passage from *Diary of a Country Priest*, a novel by Georges Bernanos: "If I am afraid, I will say without shame, 'I'm afraid,' and the Lord will give me the strength." For a long time, Benedetta softly repeated this phrase, and bit by bit, peace took hold of her. She thanked her friend effusively. The day after the operation, she announced that she was now blind, but she asked that no one tell the surgeon, so as not to sadden him. She accepted this cross of blindness that in 1955 had terrified her, and her soul was at peace: "There is nothing to do but trust in God, with eyes closed. I am in the process of living simplicity, that is, the stripping of the soul." How beautiful it is! One becomes so light and free!"

On January 21, 1964, feeling that the definitive meeting with Jesus her Spouse was very near, Benedetta made her confession

and received communion. During the night of the 22nd, she asked her nurse to remain close by, because Satan was tempting her: "Emilia, tomorrow I will die. I feel very ill." In the morning, her mother noticed that a white rose had opened in the garden. A rose in bloom, in January! She announced her discovery to Benedetta, who replied, "This is the sign I was waiting for!" She then reminded her of a dream she had had on the previous All Saints' Day: she went into the family burial vault and saw it decorated with a white rose dazzling with light. A little later, stricken by a hemorrhage, she died at the age of twenty-seven, murmuring, "Thank you."

"I will no longer be alone with fear"

After her death, Benedetta Bianchi Porro's influence has only grown. Countless people faced with suffering find strength and courage in reading the story of her life and her letters. Like Maria Grazia, they can say to her: "I will no longer be alone with fear, for you have taught me the value of prayer." On December 23, 1993, Pope John Paul II approved the decree of the heroicity of her virtues. The recognition of a miracle obtained by her intercession is now required for Venerable Benedetta to be proclaimed "Blessed."

On May 24, 1963, Benedetta confided, "I want to say to those who are suffering, to the sick, that if we are humble and docile, the Lord will do great things in us." Following her example, let us ask Jesus to make each one of us "a docile sheep in His hands." □



SEEKERS OF TRUTH

Cl. Ian Pinto, sdb

“What are you looking for?” This is a deep question that is bound to startle the listener and throw anyone off especially if the one asking that question is someone you look up to as a model or an inspiration. Some may venture to ask a favour or an interview. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to his disciples and solemnly proclaimed, “There is the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:36). In effect, what he was saying was, “there is the great one, the hero”.

John was a legend in his own right. He was extremely austere in his manner of living and had the power to convince people with his life-inspired rhetoric. For many, he was a great prophet bearing the word of God to the people of Israel. Some even thought of him as the Messiah, the hero who would save them from their troubles and establish a new state of justice, peace and prosperity. Instead of basking in the glory of the people's adoration John was humble enough to step away from the limelight and direct the attention to the real hero – Jesus. Great people

usually do not regard themselves as highly as others do. They are able to see themselves for what they are: people who are not perfect.

Until the arrival of Jesus on the scene, John was the celebrity. People came in droves to listen to his preaching and to be baptized by him. So much so, the religious and political leaders began to take notice. He could sway public opinion. But John was not interested in the name or the fame. He frankly revealed himself as “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: *Make straight the way of the Lord*” (Jn 1:23). His only concern was to fulfill his vocation, his calling – to be the herald of the Messiah or Christ and this he did to the very end.

When John revealed that one greater than himself had arrived (Mt 3:11), naturally many of his followers turned with interest to see who it was that their master spoke so highly about. The Gospel according to John tells us that immediately after John singled out Jesus as the “Lamb of God”, two disciples followed him. When

Jesus turned and saw them following him he posed the startling question: “*What are you looking for?*” (Jn 1:38). Jesus' question is interesting. He does not ask them why they were following him which seems like the more obvious though impersonal question. He rather asks them a very personal question: “*What are you looking for?*” If he had asked them why they were following him they would have probably said something vague like John the Baptist spoke highly of him or something along those lines but the answer Jesus was looking for was something deeper and more personal. Jesus was interested in knowing their disposition in following him. He wanted to know whether they were mere fans looking for something to cherish and boast about or were they seeking to be disciples.

Their reply showed that they indeed sought to follow him and become his disciples (Jn 1:38). Jesus welcomed them and they readily accepted his invitation. In John's gospel, this is Jesus' first call to his disciples. If you carefully read the passage you will discover that it was not Jesus who called them but the disciples who came to him. John the Baptist was a signboard showing the way to Jesus and his disciples were quick to follow his direction.

The two disciples of John who followed Jesus are the chief characters in the drama. Their behaviour reveals aspects of discipleship that we can reflect upon and learn from. The disciples were seekers. They were disciples in the real sense of the word. The word disciple has roots in the Latin word *discere* which means to lis-

ten and the corresponding agent word, *discipulus* which means listener. The disciples were earnest listeners as they were attentive to the teachings of John the Baptist and took his cue to follow Jesus who was greater than John and who would instruct them further in the way of truth. They were open to learning and were honest in their search for God. When John expressed his incapacity to take them very far and they followed Jesus on the word of John who assured them that he was in a better position to lead them to God.

Once they met and experienced Jesus they were eager to share their experience with others. They realized that all that John had said about Jesus was true. They did not have to rely on the witness of John anymore, they had seen, heard and experienced Jesus firsthand. Besides being honest seekers they were also enthusiastic about their spiritual life. After they had benefited from Jesus they wished that their friends and relatives could do so as well. Therefore they brought along others who they believed were also seeking God and who could benefit from encountering Jesus (Jn 1:41).

The disciples stand out as examples of individuals who honestly and sincerely seek God. Their desire to grow spiritually led them to leave John the Baptist who was their mentor for Jesus who was the Son of God. They were willing to take the risk of follow Jesus without knowing what was in store for them. They did not stop there, after they had encountered Jesus and experienced him they were inspired and bold enough to share their experience with others and invite them to experience Jesus. □

Quiet Spaces

HE WHO INTERCEDES ON OUR BEHALF

*This was a morning homily that Pope Francis gave on Thursday January 22, 2015
at the chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae.*

Jesus saves and Jesus intercedes: these are the two key words to understanding the essential point that is most important for our life. This is the truth of faith that Pope Francis reaffirmed in the Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning.

Present at the celebration were representatives of Rome's Slovak community. Welcoming them at the beginning of Mass, the Pontiff expressed closeness to the "courageous Slovak Church, which at this moment, at this time, is fighting to defend the family. Continue with courage!"

Meditating on the ministry of Jesus, the Pope turned to the day's Gospel passage (Mk 3:1-12), noting the repetition of the word "multitude". The passage tells us, he explained, that "the People of God find hope in Jesus because his way of acting, of teaching, touches the heart, reaches the heart because it has the power of the Word of God". And that "the people feel this and see that promises are fulfilled in Jesus, that in Jesus there is hope".

After all, Francis added, the "people were rather bored with the way of teaching the faith by the doctors of the law of that time, who loaded them down with many commandments, many precepts, but did not reach the people's heart". This is why, "when they see and hear Jesus, his proposals, the Beatitudes, they feel something moving inside — it's the Holy Spirit that causes this — and they go to look for Jesus".

But Mark the Evangelist, according to Francis, "wants to explain why so many people come to Jesus". The Gospel tells us that "He speaks with authority, He doesn't speak like the scribes, the Pharisees, the doctors of the law". Then "Jesus heals people" who, in any case, are "in search of self goodness". After all, the Pontiff acknowledged, "we are never able to follow God with purity of intention from the start", as they are instead "partly for us, partly for God, and the path is for purifying this intention". Thus, "the people go, seeking God, but also seeking health, healing". And for this reason "they threw themselves at Him, to touch Him, so that power would come out and heal them".

"Jesus is like this", Francis explained. "And this is a moment which recurs in Jesus' life". However, "there is something more important behind this". In fact, what is truly "most important is not that Jesus heals", which is also "a sign of another healing". Nor that "Jesus utters words that reach the heart", even though "this helps us to go on God's path".

To better comprehend "what is most important in Jesus' ministry", Francis returned to the message of the First Reading (Heb 7:25; 8:6),

where, he indicated two fundamental words: "Brothers, Christ 'is able for all time to save', in a perfect way, 'those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them'. Thus, he said, "Jesus saves and Jesus intercedes. These are the two key words".

Yes, the Pope repeated, "Jesus saves!". And "these healings, these words that reach the heart are the sign and the beginning of salvation". They are "the way to salvation for many who begin to go to hear Jesus or to ask for healing and then turn to Him and feel salvation. See then, Francis said, the more important thing is not that Jesus heals and teaches, but that He saves. For "He is the Saviour and we are saved through Him". This is "more important" and it "is the strength of our faith".

The second key word is "intercede". Indeed, the Pope recalled, "Jesus has gone to the Father and from there He still intercedes, every day, at all times for us". And "this is something current: Jesus before the Father, who offers his life, the redemption, showing the Father his wounds, the price of salvation". And like this, "every day Jesus intercedes". This is why "when we, for one reason or another," feel "a little down, let's remember that it is He who prays for us, intercedes for us continuously". However, he noted, "we often forget this". But Jesus did not "go to heaven, send us the Holy Spirit, end of story! No! Presently, every moment, Jesus intercedes".

In this regard, Francis suggested that we pray with these simple words: "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me. Intercede for me". It's important, he continued, "to turn to the Lord asking for this intercession". The crucial point is what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, reminding us that we have "such a grand high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven". This is "the crucial point: that there, we have an intercessor". And the Pope said not to forget "that the Lord is the intercessor: the saviour and the intercessor", adding that "it will do us good to remember this".

In conclusion, the Pontiff continued, "the multitude seek Jesus", trailing "that scent of hope of the People of God who await the Messiah, and they try to find in Him health, truth, salvation, for He is the saviour and as saviour He still today, at this moment, intercedes for us". Francis ended with the hope "that our Christian life may be ever more confident that we have been saved, that we have a saviour, Jesus, at the right hand of the Father, who intercedes. May the Lord, the Holy Spirit, enable us to understand these things. □

(by L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 5, 30 January 2015)

LITTLE GIRL, GOODBYE

From Fr. Ian Doulton's collection of stories

Every father and mother and each one of their children will eventually go through an experience very similar to the one Jim, Eleanor and their daughter Virginia lived through. I'd like to bring it to you in the words of the father.

When it comes to growing up, some kids can be pretty, pretty sneaky: my daughter Virginia for instance. It can't be more than a couple of years since I brought her home from the hospital in my arms all wrapped up in a shawl and bonnet. My wife Eleanor insists it's been fifteen years! Last Sunday, the three of us were driving home from church when the news was fed to the 'father.'

Eleanor told me that we were going to have dinner early this afternoon since Virginia was going out on a date... I was surprised that Eleanor allowed her to go.

She said: "Well, of course, she's a big girl now. A little movie date won't hurt her. Ah, don't worry, we've had talks." She sounded confident and in control. We drove back home in silence. Virginia said nothing but as soon as we arrived she dashed out of the car telling me that she had to get her hair 'done.' That - for me - was a shocker. Why, it was barely a year ago we had to get her out of shorts and into a dress. First, she was going to be a nun when she grew up. Then she was going to buy a ranch with a certain H. Cassidy and chase rustlers and now it was boys!

My wife practically helped me out of the car and up to the front

door which was opened by the other fourth of the family: Little Gayle. When the time comes for her for her first date we'll be worried about the boy.

Gayle gave me one look and asked: "Pops did you have another flat tire?"

Eleanor told the two of us to set the table while she was going up to help Virginia dress up. This made little Gayle look confused. Was there something she had missed out? Was there some secret they shared that she didn't know about? I felt sorry for the little girl and I told her: "Oh, Virginia has a date." "Eh? What's that?"

I said: "Virginia's going out with a boy."

Curious as she was she asked again: "What's his name?"

"Well, they forgot to tell me."

I was tense and tired and I simply said: "I don't know...now will you be quiet for a minute?" Then I relented and tried in my own amateurish way to explain what a 'date' was and this was how the conversation went: "Believe me kid, she'll listen today. It's part of the plot, a plan...You see, women plot to trap a man. They are setting the trap right now, your mother and Virginia. All I know is that today the cocoon opens and out comes a beautiful butterfly." Gayle giggled and said: "Oh, pops...you talk funny." "I feel funny" was all I could reply.

We had just finished dinner when the doorbell rang. It's astounding what the sound of a doorbell can do to people in our house. Virginia was standing in the downstairs hall in her bath-

robe trying to learn to put on lipstick smooth and even. In a very audible whisper Eleanor called Virginia upstairs. That left me to face the boy. But I sat transfixed in my chair. It was Gayle who leaped to the door. She led in a thin red haired youth most of whose face lay behind glasses and black frames. He sat on the edge of the chair. I knew just exactly what he was going through. This is the on-guard stage: keep the conversation neutral. Remember it's her old man. He was a little shifty and kept looking at his watch: "I'm a little early..." I tried to calm his nerves and told him that it was Virginia who was late...and he agreed. Then what followed was equally nervous for both of us: "That's right, she is." I broke the awkward silence: "Well, how do you like the Giants this year, I think they're going to be great?" He agreed too. Then I went on: "Yeah, think the Dodgers will take the pennant?" He added: "They could..."

This was getting interesting: "I would like to see the Dodgers beat the Yanks." Surprisingly, he added: "I would too." Then I thought this was going pretty far so I tried to round off the conversation: "But I always get a thrill when the Yanks win..." to which, he added: "Me too..." Then I realized that I didn't know what to call him: "Say, what's your name..." "Eddie."

Silence and a lot more of the same and then we heard a noise at the stairs. We looked up together. It was Virginia. She descended as slowly and as elegantly as a girl who has received last minute signals from her mother. The boy helped her on with her coat and

we all said: 'Good bye.'

He had a car out front. I say a car. It was actually four fenders sagging against metal and glass. The car shuffled off slowly in a cloud of blue smoke and Gayle wanted to know where Eddie was taking her big sister. "Oh, to the movies," I said, "...trying to hide my nervousness. Gayle went on: "Oh I know that, but which movie...we've got fourteen in town."

My nervousness was turning to irritation again: "I don't know which movie." Just then Eleanor came down to tell us that she had watched the young pair take off and she concluded: "He looked like a very nice boy." I was not so sure but I added: "Yeah, very sweet." "What's his name?" I asked. "Eddie," she said and then I went further: "So he told me, but Eddie what?" Then we realized that neither of us knew his surname. I became a little concerned that we didn't know much about 'Eddie.' I was getting irritated: "Our precious daughter goes out on her first date and we don't even know the boy's name." Eleanor sounded casual adding that his name was 'Eddie-something-or-other.'

Both of us looked at our watches. The show was just starting so we had some time to work out our confusion. But I was still rather disturbed and even anxious: "In case they don't come back we can always explain to the police that you not I let our child go out to some movie with a boy whose name is Eddie something-or-other... by the way...where does he live." I asked only to find out that Eleanor was as clueless as I was: "Frankly, I don't know exactly where he does live... well,

it's somewhere around here..." That was not funny and I was even more anxious: "Good, good, very good, and his name is Eddie and he lives somewhere in this county. This county has only seventy two towns so it should be easy to run him down."

Eleanor seemed to keep her cool and tried to be real. It was the middle of the afternoon and they were at a movie. They left in a car and neither I nor Eleanor knew the make of the car. Was it a Chevy, or an old Plymouth or...

I went out into the kitchen and got a beer. I had a kind of a miserable feeling that nothing but a cold bottle would help. Then I went back to the front room with Eleanor and Gayle. We waited ...people walked by in front of the house. Boys and girls passed arm in arm on Sunday afternoon strolls...only our child stepped into a strange car and disappeared. Only ours! The hands of the clock moved reluctantly from minute to minute.

It was suddenly five-fifteen and I was nervous. Eleanor was sitting reading her book when I looked up and asked: "The show should be over by now. Where did she meet him, Eleanor?" "At the drug store...he works behind the soda pop counter. He's really a very nice boy. I suppose you can tell that from his name..." I was edgy and I couldn't stem my irritability. Eleanor was still her patient and composed self. She simply tried to be rational. The movie was just over and they couldn't fly home in five minutes. There must have been traffic and they were slowed down. I got up from the couch and went to the window overlooking

the front gate: "If this is ever going to happen again we're going to know what movie, where he lives, and what's his first, last, and middle name."

Gayle who came in exclaimed: "Pops, it's a quarter to six and Virginia isn't home yet."

"Gayle, your mother and I know perfectly well, how to tell time." I snapped at her. Now I sensed that Eleanor seemed to get a bit worried: "Jim, you don't suppose they had some trouble with that car of his." Then both of us began to worry that perhaps they were in an accident; either they had been run in by someone or Eddie was not a very good driver and he had run into someone. When everything was quiet again, uncomfortably too quiet I blurted out: "Which one of fourteen movies have they gone to see?" It seemed too quiet and somber and edgy: "Then maybe you can tell me why we're sitting around as if we're at a funeral?" Eleanor knew and so did I. This was a kind of funeral. The life of a little girl had ended here this afternoon.

We'd lost something priceless that we'd had for fifteen years. Until this afternoon, our child's present, and her future lay in our hands. From now on, she would face a life of her own in a world which, even at its best, is cold, hard and full of strangers. The break had to come but was Virginia ready for it, ready in heart and soul? I knew her mother was wondering the same thing. Underneath all the kidding and the concern about car wrecks we were making an examination of conscience. God had entrusted Virginia to us. He had given us fifteen years in which to prepare her to face life

on her own. If anything went wrong at the beginning it was bound to be our fault.

It wasn't just this boy or his car that we worried about; it was Virginia's future which had to be built on the foundation we had laid. Was it strong enough? Would she remember to say a prayer when something that looked like fun dropped its mask and turned out to be sin? Her mother and I were old fashioned enough to believe that the most precious thing Virginia owned was that cleanness of heart which would one day make her a happy wife and mother. Had we taught her everything necessary to guard her future without spoiling her present? If we had failed in this responsibility, we would have to answer to God someday for....

Suddenly the doorbell rang and jerked us all out of our stupor. Everybody leaped for the door at once. Gayle had a slight lead. Eleanor was the first: "Oh Virginia..."

She seemed so unruffled and composed: "Hello mother! Hi pops?" Eddie looked rather apologetic: "We're a little late...we stopped to have a soda." As usual Eleanor tried to smooth out the edginess of the moment: "Oh, you're not late at all...won't you stay and have supper, Eddie? We're just getting ready to eat and we'd love to have you."

"Thanks a lot but I've got to get home for supper. I'm late now..." And he turned to go.

Everybody started saying goodnight to somebody. Virginia got a nudge from her mother. It was gentle enough to move a road-roller uphill and Virginia

immediately thanked Eddie for such a nice afternoon. Eddie said he should thank her...and finally when he got that over with...he went home. Eleanor and Virginia went off some place and I retired to the kitchen and I hunted up another bottle of beer which I needed very badly. At the kitchen table I ruminated which means I drank it slowly and did a lot of thinking.

There was a collective sigh of relief and we all went our ways getting ready for supper when Virginia came in: "Oh, there you are pops..." She was rather ruffled and upset: "What's the matter Virginia...you look very excited." "Well, its mother, she says she's practically a nervous wreck because I was late coming home. That's so silly, because there was nothing to worry about."

"No?" I looked up at her.

"Pops, don't tell me you were worried?" She was surprised. "Virginia, you do know how to use a telephone." I said. She thought it was 'kid's stuff.' Then I tried to explain to her: "Look, we were timing you for a movie, not a movie plus a soda. Don't you think a quick change of plans needs some announcement? It would save your mother and me a few extra grey hairs."

Virginia began to notice the worry written large across my face: "Oh I'm sorry Pops, I just never thought. I'll phone you next week if we have a soda... because Eddie wants to take me to a show next week too can I?"

"I'll say yes, but you go and ask your mother. She has a little questionnaire we'd both like you to fill up in advance..." □

THE POSTAL SERVICE OF 1800'S PIEDMONT AND DON BOSCO'S CORRESPONDENCE

by Natale Cerrato

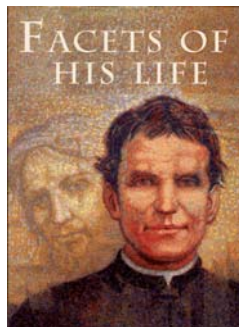
Postal Service in 1800's

Piedmont
Postal service in Piedmont in the first half of the 19th Century was already the monopoly of the Kingdom of Sardinia and was carried out by means of couriers.

On December 13, 1818 a decree had established a new system for the dispatch of letters which required that 5, 25, and 50 cents be paid as stamp duty. These stamps were popularly defined by the illustration on them depicting "the horses of Sardinia."

In 1831, the cities and towns with offices or postal distribution centres in Piedmont amounted to 155 and the total number in the entire Savoy states amounted to 227. Within these states the sender could post an un-franked letter in a post box at hand or he could go to the nearest post office and have it franked or maybe registered. It must be noted that correspondence was a practically a practice of the elite.

From 1836 postal rates were calculated in 5 cent slots based on the distance travelled. It began to be calculated on the distance a crow flies from the post office of origin to the destination. After 1840 the system established in England was accepted. This held that within the boundaries of the state the same tariff should correspond to the same weight regardless of the distance travelled.



In the Cavourian (Sig. Cavour) decade the postal service advanced greatly. From 1851 postal stamps came into force in Turin and in the rest of the states. All letters had to have postage stamps affixed: 5 cent stamps were black in colour, 20 cent stamps were orange; 40 cent stamps were pink. From 1861 the current denomination was accepted.

During this time the first railways gradually replaced stagecoaches. Since municipal distribution systems would never be adequate to reach the outlying villages, from January 1, 1857 a rural postal service was established to reach the most remote farmsteads.

In the 1860's in Turin, post offices other than the central post office opened many suburban branches. There was no lack of smaller post offices along the same railway routes. The collection of letters took place five times a day and all correspon-

dence was received at the central office or on the railway station before 11am in the morning so it could reach the first trains on the following morning.

Foreign correspondence for some time followed a different system depending on the destination country. Generally the sender had to pay for handling en route to the border while the postage from the border to the stated country was paid by the recipient. The postal system functioned in this fashion: postal vessels and postbags were taken on by "vapori" from various countries. The ship "Mino" for example, which sailed from Lisbon in 1877 and which took the Salesian missionaries to America carried Royal British mail.

Don Bosco's Correspondence

For about half a century Don Bosco maintained correspondence with his collaborators, benefactors, ecclesiastical and civic authorities and people of every class from the King and the Pope to his boys at Valdocco. His letters were casual and straightforward; some were written to encourage the reader, others to conduct business, to solicit funds, to attend to business matters; some were petitions to the Holy See and to the Government. They were sober and clear, in good humour at times but deeply spiritual with no frills or abstractions. Several thousands have been collected but many more are most certainly part of family archives, in dioceses and communes of Italy and abroad and many more will have been lost forever.

It should be pointed out that much of Don Bosco's correspondence was hand-delivered but in

the cases that we cite, letters were regularly dispatched by post also.

Don Bosco wrote to Don Rua on December 19, 1864 at the Salesian House of Mirabello (a town 13km from Casale, and in turn 75km from Turin):

"I'll leave for Casale at three; and seeing that it will be difficult to reach Mirabello, may I suggest, if it's possible, take a little walk so we can meet, I'll be there till 6 in the evening..." (E 379)

You will notice that Don Bosco writes from Turin to Don Rua who was at Mirabello, on December 19 that he was coming to Casale and would remain there till 6 in the evening. He requested Rua to come to Casale. If you can make the calculations, the letter could not have arrived at Mirabello in less than 24 hours.

On December 19, 1866 Don Bosco writes from Bologna to Don Rua who is in Turin: "I am in Bologna, this evening, I'll be in Gaustalla, and I'll leave in the evening for Turin 'if God wills it' (E 520). The letter naturally had to reach before his return to Turin; so, that means in less than 24 hours from Bologna.

On July 1, 1871 Don Bosco writes from Rome to Don Rua who is still in Turin:

"This evening I'll leave for Florence where I'll stopover for two days to try and collect some money if possible... Greet our dear youngsters and tell them I'm eager to see them. I hope to be with them on Tuesday... When I reach Florence I'll let you know the time of my arrival" (E 916).

So, Don Bosco writes from Rome on Saturday July 1, saying that he'll stop in Florence for two days and hopes to be in Turin on July 4.

He'll let them know the exact time (of his arrival) when he reaches Florence. From this it is evident that Don Bosco presumes that the letter will arrive in Turin in three days at the latest. If in two days he would write once more from Florence, what can we deduce?

Yet once again: On September 6, 1871 Don Bosco writes as usual to Don Rua from Sestri Ponente about 20km beyond Genoa:

"God-willing I will be in Turin at 11.20 in the morning. I believe that we are going to Magna Felicità for lunch in anticipation of the feast of Our Lady... where we might have a little chat" (E 938).

In this case, the post must have arrived at its destination within 24 hours. For those who might want to know who Magna Felicità was: she was an old maid who worked in the laundry at the Oratory. Her name was Felicità Orselli who came to be called "Magna" (= aunt). Old spinsters in Piedmont were addressed thus.

We will let readers prudently make their own deductions regarding the postal services in the time of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco's Prolific Letter-Writing

Don Bosco wrote with great speed and responded to everyone even the littlest youngster. To read all the letters that came to him every day without being disturbed he would retire after lunch to the Convitto on Via S. Francis of Assisi or sit in a café near the shrine of the Consolata from where he wouldn't move till every letter and piece of paper had been gone through. Then, when he returned home, he would spend perhaps half the night writing replies. This

went on for about 20 years. And when he could no longer do this, his secretary Don Joaquim Berto, left only the most important letters to Don Bosco whose handwriting had become so illegible that only Don Berto could decipher it. In a letter to Mother Cristina Gazzelli, of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Don Bosco admitted:

"Apologies for this poor handwriting of mine; at 67 I've not yet learned to write. I don't know when I'll learn to write a little better (E 2338).

But there's little need to preoccupy ourselves with Don Bosco's handwriting; there's less need to look for his literary style or for treatises on pedagogy or asceticism. His letters reflect daily life and everyday problems, and his many engagements and above all the early years in Piedmont. It is sufficient to peep into a letter he wrote to a merchant in Castelnuovo d'Asti on September 9, 1853 to acknowledge what the latter had requested:

"My dear Sig. Conti, Everything is ready for our Paolino; come when you can.

1. bring a note, as brief as possible;
2. the books he has already been using in school;
3. a good dose of a willingness to study and live a good Christian life.

Since I am up to my neck in expenses, bring whatever money you can. We're going ahead with the help of the Lord, as Fr. Cafasso says.

The Lord bless you and your family,

Truly yours,
Affectionately, Fr. John Bosco,"

(cf. *La stampa*, 2 giugno 1929, p. 3)

As one can see, *Piedmontese*

abounds in his letters but topics are dealt with clarity and brevity but his style would be streamlined over time. Don Bosco's use of *Piedmontese* in his writings was gradually Italianized over time and the saint never made any effort to conceal his deep *Piedmontese* emotions in his letters.

Don Bosco's Letters to his Salesians and the Benefactors

But Don Bosco betrays his emotions in his letters to his sons and to the benefactors about his work. It was his custom to write personal letters every year to his Salesians in America, the priests, clerics and coadjutors, leaving out no one. He wrote to each one according to his needs and abilities. Typical is the letter he addressed to the Coadjutor Sappa on January 31, 1881. He was a gardener and jokingly he played on the *Piedmontese* meaning of his surname (Sapa = hoe) and he wrote:

"My dear Sappa, Strive, my dear, to learn to know your name that you are not to hoe but to do all things well. I have heard often from you. Do as much good as you have done in the past. Work and obedience will be a blessing to you. God help you always to give good example. Pray to God for me and I will pray for you too that we should be with Jesus Christ forever.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco.

Turin 31.1.1881. (E 2136).

But a letter of particular significance and one which was left un-posted and was destined for the benefactors who supported the Salesian works and it said:

"My dear Benefactors,



Don Bosco wrote many letters, most to his benefactors

I feel the end of my life approaching, and that the day is near at hand when I will have to pay the common toll to death and descend into the grave.

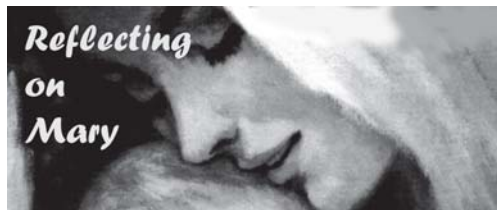
Before leaving you forever here on earth, I have to pay a debt that I have with you and thus gratify a great desire that I have in my heart.

The debt I must pay is one of gratitude for all that you have done ... we have founded many schools and hospices... With your charity, we have established missions... with your charity we have set up printing shops... we have erected many chapels and churches where for centuries and centuries until the end of the world, the praises of God and of the Blessed Virgin will be sung every day and many souls will be saved...

Although I am weary and drained of strength, I wish I could go on talking forever. I recommend my boys to you, for I am about to leave them. Yet now I must stop and lay down my pen...

Farewell, my dear benefactors... Salesian Cooperators, farewell!" (*EBM 18,529-530*)

This letter was not sent and it reveals the 50 years of the correspondence of Don Bosco and his heart. □



LIVE THE EUCHARIST WITH MARY

by Silvio Longobardi

That Night in Bethlehem

To speak of Jesus in the Eucharist, we should begin from that bright night when the Word appeared in flesh; that night when Mary “gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger” (Lk 2:7). Till then only the angels were able to contemplate the mystery of God made man.

That night, the human eyes of the Virgin were the first of all human creatures to see the divine light hidden in the fragile humanity of only a little newborn baby.

“Tell us, Mary what did you see along the way?” are words from the Paschal sequence. That is the same question we can ask the Virgin of Nazareth: “Tell us, Mary what you saw that night? What went through your mind when you held your little boy in your arms? Did you hear the choir of angels? Did you see the mysterious light that God had promised through the prophet Isaiah (Is 9, 1)? And what did say to your child while he suckled at your breast and took in the milk of life? You did not know it, O Mary, but that night the Eucharistic ministry of

the Church began; that ministry that has been practiced through the centuries. We thank you, O most pure and beautiful mother, because you are full of grace and we ask you to turn your gaze full of love and rapture also to us.” Christian spirituality has stressed the intimate connection between the ministry that Mary lived and the Eucharistic experience. The liturgical sequence of “Corpus Christi” invites us to sing along: “Hail true body born of the Virgin Mary!” “Yes, the consecrated Bread that we receive through the Church is the icon of that Body that God gave to the world through the Virgin Mary. In the encyclical “Redemptoris Mater” (1987) John Paul II writes that the motherhood of Mary “is particularly felt by the Christian people at the Sacred Banquet – the liturgical celebration of the mystery of redemption – in which Christ is made present in his real body, born of the Virgin Mary (n. 47). So we ask that the Virgin sustain our fragile faith.

MARY, THE EUCHARISTIC WOMAN
In the encyclical “*Ecclesia de*

Eucharistia,” (2003) the last one of his long pontificate, John Paul II dedicated an entire chapter to Mary, entitled “the Woman of the Eucharist” (nn. 53-58). The Virgin of Nazareth, the Pope writes, “can guide us to this Blessed Sacrament because she has a profound relationship with him” (n. 53). He points out three stages of transition: the first step takes place at Nazareth when in fact, she accepts the annunciation, she receives and protects the Son of God in her womb, becoming the first tabernacle; then she brings Jesus to the house of Zechariah, here Mary appears as the ark of the New Covenant, a covenant not written in stone but in the recesses of her heart. And finally, on that night in Bethlehem, the young girl of Nazareth gives Jesus to the world, revealing him to the shepherds, as the first monstrance. These stages take place in quick succession in the incident of the Wedding at Cana in Galilee. That day Mary was the protagonist at a very embarrassing incident when she said: “they have no wine” (Jn 2, 3).

The mother asks Jesus to intervene and give the new wine, the wine of joy and fidelity. Without knowing it, without being fully aware, her request anticipates the hour of the Passover, the announcement of the new covenant and the new life that God wants to give to everyone through his Son. Cana is the foretaste of the Eucharist. At Cana Mary seems to say: “Do not waver, trust in the words of my Son. If he was able to change water into wine, he can also turn bread and wine into his body and blood, and through this mystery



bestow on believers the living memorial of his Passover, thus becoming the ‘bread of life’” (John Paul, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 54).

TO LIVE THE EUCHARIST WITH MARY

At the beginning of the third Millennium John Paul II proclaimed a Marian Year, the Year of the Rosary (2002-2003). And immediately after that he called for a Eucharistic Year (2004-2005). The chronological sequence recalls that the ancient adage is still valid: “*per Mariam ad Iesum*” (To Jesus through Mary). We come to Jesus through Mary. Therefore if we wish to nourish our love for the Eucharist we must go through Mary. We go to Mass with Mary, the Mother of Jesus and we live this entire communion with her.

Mary is the creature who “found favour with God.” (Lk 1, 30) That is why she teaches us to walk in the paths of grace, to live every Eucharist as an ever new gift of Providence. □



walking with the Church

The True Cross, Missionaries Today

From St Martin's Messenger, Ireland

Q. *I believe the cross on which Christ was crucified was found at some time in history. What is the story behind the find finding of the cross?*

A. There are various versions concerning the finding of the true cross. The most commonly repeated version is the one concerning Helena, the mother of Constantine the Emperor. She is reported to have been sent by her son, the Emperor, to look for the true cross. She uncovered three crosses at the site of the Holy Sepulchre, over which had been built a pagan temple. She assumed them to be the crosses of Jesus and the two wrongdoers. A dying woman was brought in and she was touched with each of the three crosses. The third one cured her and that cross was proclaimed the cross of Christ. A portion of the true cross was kept in the new basilica built over the sepulchre, in Jerusalem. Other pieces were taken elsewhere. There were so many supposed splinters of the true cross at one particular period of history, that no one doubts that most of these were fake. When Jerusalem was captured in 612, the conqueror who was the King of Persia, took with him that section of the cross

which had been carefully guarded in Jerusalem. Some 15 years later it was brought back to Jerusalem after the Persian King was defeated in battle. The relic was returned on or about the 14th September and so we celebrate the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross on that day.

Q. *I know that in the past missionaries went to 'foreign' countries to preach the Gospel. Do they still do that?*

A. At one time a big part of the challenge for a missionary was leaving one's own country and culture to go and live in foreign lands. Today, they still cross borders. It is still a basic part of the missionary activity. But there is an ever growing awareness of new boundaries which are no longer just geographical. The new boundaries may be anywhere in the world; with youth, the poor in large cities, migrants, refugees, victims of war and long-term conflict, indigenous peoples, marginalized women and children. All of these are crying out for the Good News if the Gospel to be brought to them. This is the big challenge for today's missionaries. □

NEWSBITS

BENIN

Exactly one hundred years have passed since the famous experience that took place during the last Marian apparition of Fatima, on 13 October 1917, when immediately after the three shepherdesses had seen Our Lady, a crowd of seventy thousand people flocked to the Cova di Iria during a violent rainstorm and witnessed the "miracle of the sun", as they watched, with their naked eye, the star that seemed to come closer, change colour and dance around the sky. Several non-believers also witnessed that "miracle", such as the news reporter of a professed secularist newspaper. Now something similar seems to have happened in Benin City, Nigeria, on the occasion of the re-consecration of the country wanted by the bishops. In communicating the decision, the bishops recalled that Nigeria is going through "a period marked by tensions, unrest and a general sense of despair and dissatisfaction". There are institutional problems, "cases of selective application of the rule of law", as well as unequal distribution of resources, corruption and impunity.

On the morning of October 13th, at the re-consecration ceremony, led by the Archbishop of Jos, Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, president of the Nigerian Episcopal Conference, 53 bishops took part together with more than 1000 priests, 2000 religious and about 55 thousand faithful. In the afternoon, after the celebration, the witnesses tell us, there was a heavy downpour followed by the appearance of the sun changing colour and



"dancing". According to Father Chris N. Anyanwu, director of social communications - this unusual phenomenon gladdened the hearts of the pilgrims present at the celebration and many of them have attested that what they saw, recalls the experience of Fatima in 1917. Certainly, the great joy of the participants in seeing these signs showed through the enthusiasm of their faith that Nigeria will no longer be the same.

The testimonies have been reported on the Facebook page of the Episcopal Conference and this has led to the thought of an explicit form of recognition of the event. However, that web space cannot be considered an official expression of the episcopate and there are no statements in this regard. The bishops took note of the account of the faithful and saw them rejoice for their experience. At a time when only negative news arrives from Nigeria - from the scourge of fundamentalist Islamist terrorism to abductions such as that of Italian priest Maurizio Pallù, who has been recently released - the solar phenomenon at the end of the storm has drawn attention to the act of consecration to Mary decided by the bishops of the country. □ (*La Stampa*, 22/10/2017)

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Medical Destination

Lady: "Well, Doctor, was my operation a success?"
Man: "I'm not your doctor, I'm St. Peter."

Painful Pleasures

Bus Driver: "Madam, are these seven children yours or is it a picnic?"
Busy Mother: "They're all mine and I assure you it is no picnic."

Multi-Purpose

Farmer: "You must be brave to come in a parachute in a hundred-mile gale like this."
Stranger: "I didn't come down in a parachute. I went up in a tent!"

Real Concentration

A veteran colonel always closed his eyes when he took a drink. When questioned concerning this habit he readily explained: "The sight of good lickah, suh," he said, "always makes my mouth watah, suh, an' I do not like to dilute my drink, suh."

Drastic Measures

When a doctor called at a house to attend a confinement had been upstairs a few minutes, he came down and asked for a corkscrew. The anxious father-to-be gave him one, and he went upstairs. A few minutes later he came down again and asked for a screwdriver. He went back with it and left the head of the house chewing his nails. On the third trip, he asked for a chisel and mallet. "Good heavens, Doctor," the worried husband said, "is everything alright?" Is it a boy or a girl?" "Don't know yet," replied the doctor. "Can't get my medicine case open."

January 2018

A Word Edgewise

Wife: "What's the idea? You yawned four times while I was talking to you."
Hubby: "I wasn't yawning, I was just trying to say something."

Settling scores

"Well, Pat," said a friendly visitor at the bedside of a dying man, "have ye made peace with God and denounced the devil?"
"Shure," said Pat, "I've made peace with God but I'm in no position to antagonize anybody."

Two for One

A gentleman came into a Paris barbershop with a small boy one day and explained that since he had an appointment in the neighbourhood he would like his own hair cut first. This accomplished, he handed the boy up into the chair, urged patience upon him, and departed. When the boy's hair cut was finished, the gentleman had not returned, and the barber told to boy to wait. A half hour passed. "Don't worry," said the barber reassuringly. "I'm sure your father will be back soon." The boy looked startled. "He isn't my father," he said. "He just came up to me in the street and said, 'Come along, let's both get a hair cut.'"

Grass Miscalculation

At the circus in Madras last year a man was observed near the camels. He picked up a straw, placed it squarely on the camel's back and waited. Nothing happened. "Wrong straw," he muttered, and hurried off. □

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Don Bosco's Madonna

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.

In July 2016 I suffered a blackout and was unconscious for quite some time. After a while I regained consciousness and was helped to my bed. I was rather stunned as to what caused me to fall and I suffered memory loss for those few moments. My family Doctor was contacted and explained the symptoms. He advised immediate hospitalisation. I was taken to hospital and all relevant tests were carried out. Apparently it was diagnosed that that there was a temporary blockage of the artery connected to the brain which caused the "blackout." After three days and conducting of various tests I was discharged. Fortunately I suffered no harm to myself when I fell. I owe this good fortune to our dear Mother Mary to whom I have the devotion of reciting the Three Hail Marys every morning and night. Thank you dear Mother Mary.

WJG
In 1952, I was a small boy and in school. My dad started the devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary, to Don Bosco and Dominic Savio, our three great patrons. Since then we have continued this ardent devotion to the present day without fail and we have received innumerable favours, big and small. I used to walk to the end of the hill, pray earnestly and patiently non-stop where my petro-chemical plant was in Chembur, Bombay. I could see the statue (above the Shrine) very clearly whether in the day or the night and I would pray the three Hail Marys either in the day or the night. I was working shifts. I also asked her a great favour: *Mother please take me to Canada.* It took a long time; maybe it was a test but I didn't give up. She heard my humble and fervent prayer. Finally today, I am living in the best country in the world, living peacefully and happily with my family. A million thanks to the "Trio". I confidently say: *Pray with faith and believe you will receive. Francis (Frank) Fernandis, Halifax, Canada* My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary and all the saints for the many favours received through the recitation of the three Hail Marys, and especially for the gift of a job for my son. Sweet Mother keep him always under your mantle of care. *A. Lobo, Mumbai*

Ever grateful thanks to Mother Mary for sorting out the house, property and work related problems and saving my mother from the serious effects of a brain stroke.

MHSDSC

January 2018

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Don Bosco's Madonna

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I had a very bad fall from a bench while trying to fix a chart on the classroom board. Miraculously I escaped with mild bruises but no broken bones. Praise and thanks to Jesus and his beloved Mother Mary for saving my life and sparing me from any fractures.

Mrs. Sharon Castelino

My sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians for helping my son to get a new job. Also for his successful surgery and for many other favours. Mary was always with us.

A Devotee

My dearest Mother Mary, when I write this thanksgiving my eyes are filled with tears and my heart full of gratitude. Thank you my mother for helping my son pass at IIT Kharagpur at the first attempt. He passed with an excellent rank. My elder son is doing exceptionally well in his engineering studies. I am equally thankful to you Mother for blessing me with a wonderful family, a loving husband, happiness and above all the excellent behaviour of my sons. Whenever I went to my Mother she was always there for me. I continue to implore your protection and guidance and ask you to keep us under your mantle.

Mrs. Shanti Rose Thomas, Kerala

Heartfelt thanks to Mary Help of Christians for the successful operation of my son-in-law Peter Geudens.

Philomena Ferro, Mumbai

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

My sincere thanks to the Divine Mercy, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Antony for helping to vacate the tenants from my son's flat. I also thank Mother Mary for granting me many other favours.

Agnes

It was August 24, 2017 when I was taken to Holy Family Hospital operation theatre at 8 am. I began the Holy Rosary and prayed to Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco till I came out of the hospital on September 4. Today thanks to Our Lady's blessing I had a successful heart operation. All praise to Jesus and Mary.

Edgar D'Souza, Mumbai

Thank you Mary Help of Christians, St. Dominic Savio and St. John Bosco for giving my daughter-in-law Edna a safe and normal delivery and the gift of a healthy baby boy.

Mrs. Lourdes Alvares, Mumbai

Thank you Jesus, Mother Mary, the Holy Spirit and the Guardian Angels for good health and happiness; for my grandchildren's success in their exams and many favours received. Special thanks for keeping my daughter and her family from unknown calamity.

Fernandes, Mumbai

Thank you Lord Jesus and our Beloved Mother Mary Help of Christians for helping my sister Grace and for the miraculous cure from a severe allergy. Bless and protect us always.

Rosie de Souza, Goa

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Thank you Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for granting my great-grand-daughter-in-law a safe and normal delivery and the gift of a baby boy.

Mirs Piedade Gomes, Mumbai

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for granting me many blessings, especially for the gift of a healthy baby boy after a seven year gap of a girl and many other blessings for which I am grateful.

Minella Lobes, Goa

My special thanks to Mother Mary, Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for a safe and normal delivery of a baby boy.

Lucia Remedios, Goa

Thank you dear Blessed Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for blessing my daughter with a baby boy after five years.

Mrs. Antoneth Coutinho, Mumbai

I am grateful and thankful to the Most Holy Trinity, Our Lady, all the angels and saints in heaven and my dearest Dominic Savio for protecting my sons and my family from all evils in this modern world.

I am equally grateful for helping my son pass his IIT entrance examination at the first attempt itself with an excellent rank. He is presently studying at IIT Kharagpur. My elder son is doing exceptionally well in his engineering studies. Dear St. Dominic Savio please continue to bless our happy family.

Mrs. Shanti Rose Thomas, Kerala

My deep gratitude to the Infant Jesus of Prague and Our Blessed Mother and St. Dominic Savio for the safe delivery and the gift of a baby girl to my daughter. Mother Mary give them good health and keep them always in your care.

A. Lobo, Mumbai

Thank you, Our Lady and Dominic Savio for the gift of a lovely baby girl Caitlyn to my cousin and for many other favours received.

Lalita Valles, Mumbai

Our belated but sincere thanks to the Infant Jesus and Mother Mary for saving us from accidents twice on the Nasik Highway and back from the Infant Jesus shrine. Thank you Divine Mercy, St. Anthony, St. Dominic Savio and Mother Teresa and all the saints for the many favours and blessings we received.

The D'Cunhas

JANUARY

Religious Minorities in Asia

That Christians, and other religious minorities in Asian countries, may be able to practise their faith in full freedom.

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on 1st & 2nd of every month
Date of Publication: 1st of every month

Subs: (one copy Rs. 20/-); **Inland Rs. 200 p.a.; Airmail: Rs 500 p.a.**

MARY WAS THERE

My granddaughter Anjali was suddenly hospitalized with a life-threatening blood clot right before her final exams last year. By the grace of God and the intercession of our Blessed Mother the surgeons were able to remove the clot and she was able to successfully complete her exams. A million thanks from the bottom of my heart to the Infant Jesus, Mary Help of Christians, Sts. Jude and Anthony for hearing my prayers. A nerve was accidentally damaged that left one leg paralyzed. All the neurologists thought chances of recovery were slim. In a second miracle she has regained nerve function and is able to walk without crutches and brace with a month. Thank you so much dear Jesus and Mary!

Mrs. L. Fernandes, USA

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

The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (*Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail*)). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors. Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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