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**Through the fruitful
virginity of Blessed Mary
may we be found worthy
to receive the author
of life, our Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son.**

(From the Proper of January 1)

From The Editor's Desk

A BOWL OF RASPBERRIES

In his wonderful novel *Strumpet City*, set in Dublin during the great recession in the earlier part of the last century, author James Plunkett tells of a vagrant Rashers Tierney. Rashes is dying. One of his mates says to him: "When you die and knock on God's door, what will God say to you?" Rashes answers: "God will say: 'Come in, Rashes, I know your knock.'" Rashes' God was real. Rashes was always knocking on God's door. God knew his knock. The God of Rashes was not in the future, not in the past, but in the present. "Now" is the only place where God is. God's now is eternal.

There's an old story about a young man who was searching for the secret of life. He heard about a great teacher living in the Himalayas who had the secret, so the young man decided to seek him out. It was after a hard and tortuous climb and many hardships that he finally came face to face with the wise man. He was in his cave, half-naked, dressed in shabby rags. His eyes were red and glassy from lack of sleep. The young man stood nervously before him. 'Teacher' he said, 'I have come a long way to ask you to share with me "the secret of life."' The old wise man responded: The "secret of life" is simple. 'Life is just a bowl of raspberries.'

The young man was astonished and could not believe the words he was hearing. He exclaimed in disbelief: 'Master. The secret is a bowl of raspberries?' The wise man paused a moment and asked in surprise: 'Do you mean to say, that life is not a bowl of raspberries?'

The wise man was witnessing to a great truth. You cannot eat raspberries in the past or in the future; only in the now. The next time you serve or are served a bowl of raspberries, take your time eating your dinner, enjoy the main meal, don't gulp it down, don't rush to the dessert, stop thinking of the raspberries. When the raspberries are served, eat them, savour them, enjoy them. The secret of life is a bowl of raspberries.

We live in a future culture, the mindset that says: 'Tomorrow I will do it. Tomorrow, I will turn to the Lord. It's always tomorrow. The likelihood is that I will baby-sit my grandchildren, and I will die without ever having lived. Henry David Thoreau has this marvellous line: "Oh, to reach the point of death only to find you haven't lived at all.'

Most people spend most of their lives in the two places that do not exist - the past and the future. The enlightened person lives in the "now." God is not tomorrow, God is not yesterday. God is now. Life is not yesterday. Life is not tomorrow. Life is now. Love is now. Once we realize that life is "now" everything appears the same - the world hasn't changed - the sun still rises and sets every day. What has changed is that we see with new eyes. Knock and life shall be opened to you. Look at this moment in the New Year with new eyes!

Fr. Ian Doultou sdb

DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION

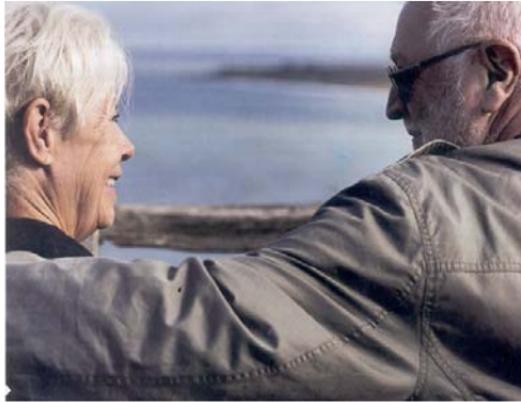
by Giampaolo Dianin

It seems that the safest and most effective antidote to solve the many problems in the life of a couple is dialogue. It is an important method but also very challenging

How many young lovers or couples when thinking of their future say: "The important thing is to talk to each other, just talk." Others add, perhaps a little more naively: "The important thing is to say everything, to be sincere, to say things that don't even count." It seems that dialogue is an effective and safe antidote to solve many problems that could arise in married life. Dialogue is certainly important but it is also very demanding: talking doesn't always coincide with our ability to communicate. Dia-

logue and communication are an art that involves words, but also the body, the head, the heart, ideas and feelings. On the never-ending journey that leads two people to become one flesh, communication is certainly an essential part of the experience of love.

We can imagine communication, using a domestic analogy, is like a beautiful cake with many layers which are the different styles of communication. The functional layer is one linked to the thousand and one practical things to be done; the intellectual



layer is the one consisting of different opinions; the emotional layer consists not only of words but also of silences, of non-verbal language and body contact; the deepest layer is where one discloses oneself concerning what one feels and suffers. It doesn't matter how thick or thin the layers are, what is important is that they are all there even if the deepest form of communication is a precious treasure and inevitably slightly rare, very often a very thin layer.

We might say that communicating is not just talking or expressing oneself. There is communication where there is listening to the other, a willingness to review one's way of thinking, mutual confrontation, and a quest for convergence or consensus.

Communication takes place when words are enriched by attention, when the voice is warmed by the heart and my ideas, confronting yours with the intention of arriving at a shared thought or goal that we can realize together. And even if we do not reach a consensus, that deep confrontation has enriched and modified us because we have taken on board each other's perspectives. The couple does not eliminate the uniqueness of each other; it requires this confrontation to lead to a new synthesis which is necessary when living together.

Pope Francis reminds us that dialogue requires time and patience. It begins from the ability to listen to the other until the other has expressed all that s/he wanted to say. Listening calls for silence, especially inner silence that provides a welcoming and hospitable space for what the

other needs and wants to say. We must recognize that we are often like sealed rooms with impenetrable walls: the other speaks but nothing gets in because we are waiting to open our doors to throw out our thoughts on to him/her. A valuable exercise could be to train oneself not to interrupt the other while s/he is speaking.

Listening and silence are made possible by humility which is the opposite of the claim that we possess the truth or that we know everything about the other. In order to communicate profoundly it is necessary to recognize that the other is a mystery, a surprise, a gift. People grow and change but those we think we know well – we are tempted to pigeonhole into a rigid moulds.

Humility leads me to give the other space, to let him/her live next to me with his/her identity, personality, thoughts and desires. The humble person always tries to put himself/herself in the other person's shoes in order to understand what s/he is experiencing inside and not just outwardly. The humble person does not pretend to reduce the other to his/her categories.

It is said that love makes us 'similar' but this word must be explained: love makes us approach the other, leading us to feel, to rejoice, to suffer with the other, making us more intuitive towards the other, but that does not reset our differences. Pope Francis writes that we "need to free ourselves from feeling that we all have to be alike" (AL 139). And precisely because we remain united yet distinct communication is absolutely necessary.

Finally, humility gives me the

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST FOR ALL

By Don Chino Biscontin

God wants the salvation of everyone without any discrimination, without any limitations: that's the extraordinarily significant of today at a time when walls are much spoken of

"Epiphany" means the appearing, the manifestation. The existence of the feast of the Manifestation of the Lord in the East goes back to the second century, but only in the fourth century does it spread further afield and the emphasis was given to the Baptism of Jesus. There the Father reveals the Son born as a man to save us and fills him with the Holy Spirit: God reveals himself as the most Holy Trinity. In those waters the Church is washed clean of every sin and the way of salvation opens up for her. During the same period, in Egypt, the birth of Jesus, the adoration of the Magi, his Baptism and the Wedding of Cana are all celebrated together.

In the West, meanwhile, 25 December is set aside to celebrate the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. The date was chosen to weaken the pagan holiday of the Victorious Sun. It is Jesus who is the true Sun that enlightens us and makes the earth fecund.

When the Eastern feast of the Epiphany reached the West, it emphasized primarily the manifestation of the Saviour to the Magi, the first of those who were not members of the People-of-the-Covenant but who nevertheless recognized in Jesus, their Lord and obtained salvation. But there are also traces of oriental complexity as mentioned in the



beautiful antiphon found in the Liturgy of the Hours: "Today the Church, washed of her guilt in the Jordan River, joins Christ her Spouse; the Magi rush with gifts to the royal wedding; and the water is changed into wine cheering up the table, Alleluia!" (Lauds, antiphon at the *Benedictus*)

strength to say uncomfortable things, to correct the other without hurting him/her. It is very different when you say: "You never listen to me" from saying: "Sometimes I don't feel I'm being heard." In the first case, it is a peremptory judgment, in the second case the delicate choice of words makes me as responsible as you in our effort to communicate. It is as if you are saying: "Perhaps it is only my effort; let us help each other to understand and seek the truth together."

Concluding his reflection on dialogue in the family, the Pope makes an apparently banal statement, but in reality it is very wise: "For a worthwhile dialogue we have to have something to say" (AL 141).

There is not only the difficulty of communicating because of our differences; often there is also poverty of communication because we are impoverished on the inside because we do not take care of ourselves as persons and the

development of ourselves as a couple and a family. "When neither of the spouses works at this, and has little real contact with other people, family life becomes stifling and dialogue impoverished" (AL 141).

The domestic hearth must be nourished and each one brings his/her own wealth, the things s/he does, relationships s/he lives, hardships each encounters. To be a good couple it is not enough to love each other, it is necessary to have a life project that we can build and realize together; it is a project that makes our living together alive, always new and open. And this project cannot only concern the children who, when they arrive become the only topic of every conversation: the life of the couple comes first and must continue after the children. It may seem trivial but it is true that to communicate, it is necessary to have something to say to each other and also to want the other to be the first interlocutor; loving oneself means this too. □

TELL ME FIRST

He was big and rugged with brusque ways. She was sweet and dainty and they were married. He lacked nothing. She looked after the house and brought up their children.

The children grew up, got married and left home. It was a story like so many others. But when all the children were settled, the woman lost her smile; she grew thin and listless. Soon she didn't even get out of bed.

Worried, her husband admitted her to hospital. Famous doctors and specialists came to her bedside. No one could discover what she suffered from. They simply shook their heads and rubbed their chins.

The last specialist took the big man aside and said to him: I would simply say: "your wife no longer wants to live!" Without saying a word, the big rugged man sat by his wife's bed and took her hand. Her little hand was lost in his huge palm. Then, with his booming voice he said firmly: "You will not die!" "Why?" She asked, breathing lightly. "Because I need you!" "Why didn't you tell me that first?"

From that moment the woman began to improve. And today she is fine. Meanwhile, doctors and specialists continue to wonder what kind of disease she had and what extraordinary medicine had made her recover so quickly.

Bruno Ferrero - (*Quaranta Storie nel Deserto*, editrice LDC, Torino 2007)

This feast, as we have come to celebrate it today, offers us the right interpretation of the existence in God's plan of a "chosen people." The election of a people does not have as its object some who are rejected on the contrary, it affirms that the election is for a mission: that of spreading the divine light over the whole world. This is how it is proclaimed in the splendid first Reading of the Mass for the Feast: "Behold, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the peoples; but on you the light of the Lord will shine" (Is 60, 1).

And so, this feast vigorously affirms that God wants salvation for everyone without any distinction or limitation: "God, our saviour, wants everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, for there is one God, and there is one who brings God and human beings together, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself to redeem everyone" (1 Tm 2, 4-5).

The significance of the Epiphany is extraordinarily timely in this era of walls and barriers, nationalistic and xenophobic boundaries, even racism and contempt for diversity. The story itself mentioned above

proves that it is precisely dialogue between different peoples that becomes everyone's wealth.

If it is the will of God for everyone to be saved, the very nature of the Church is missionary by its very nature: the Church is missionary or it betrays the will of her Lord: "Go, therefore and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28, 19-20).

And it is on this essential aspect of the mission of the Church that Pope Francis continually returns, speaking of an outgoing Church and the missionary task of every Christian. He writes, for example, in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded. The Church which "goes forth" is a community of missionaries whose disciples take the first step, are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice" (EG 23-24). □

ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHANGES YOU



"In order to find Jesus, we also need to take a different route, to follow a different path, his path, the path of humble love. And we have to persevere. Today's Gospel ends by saying that the Magi, after encountering Jesus, "left for their own country by another road" [...] Like the Magi, they left home and became pilgrims on the paths of God. For only those

who leave behind their worldly attachments and undertake a journey find the mystery of God." (Pope Francis on the Solemnity of the Epiphany, 2019)

BECAUSE I THINK YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL

Anastasia Dias

Rachel was the youngest of three children, all were girls. She was a dusky, chubby brunette in contrast to her lean, pale, blonde-haired sisters. Her family wasn't fond of her because she didn't look like any of them. They always made sure to let her know that they thought she was fat, ugly and stupid, constantly comparing her to her elder beautiful sisters.

Rachel became a victim of verbal and emotional bullying by her own family. As she grew up, she started showing symptoms of bulimia (binge-eating and purging) as a result of poor self-esteem. 'You're definitely not one of us', her mother cruelly remarked after Rachel was diagnosed with bulimia.

By the time she was 18, Rachel had severe body-image issues. She left for college, determined to never come back home. Her family had always made her feel unwanted and unloved. She had tried her best to fit in, but just couldn't; she wasn't like them. College was the best escape from this cage of hopelessness she was locked up in.

While in college, she was very conscious of her appearance. Her weight constantly fluctuated. Within the first few months she

had started dating a guy with severe anger problems. He was physically abusive to her and told her, "You better stick around with me, 'coz no one's gonna date a fat girl!" Different words, the same sad truth.

I met her on campus, sitting aloof. On a closer look, I noticed her nose bleeding. 'Oh my gosh Rachel, what happened?'

'He was drunk. When I asked him why he was drunk, he hit me in the face.'

'How dare he? We need to stop this, let's make a complaint.'

'Anne, just let it be. I deserve this. No one wants to go out with me; at least he's there for me. I guess this is the way it is.'

I was astonished at Rachel's revelation. She was willing to accept an abusive boyfriend because she felt worthless. She continued:

'I'm born ugly, Anne. I hate myself for who I am. I binge-eat and then feel guilty and puke. Ever since I was little, everyone told me I was fat and stupid.'

'Rachel, you are beautiful, just because you are who you are, remember that you can't change yourself. Your value doesn't depend on how you look or what people say. Looks are superficial. You are special in your own



FROM JEALOUS TO ZEALOUS

Saul's Encounter with the Lord

by Ian Pinto, sdb

unique way. The ones who love you will love you for who you are and stick around through the worst. You deserve someone worthy of your love, someone who loves you completely, for the person you are!

After my meeting Rachel, I questioned myself, 'If it doesn't really matter: why do we still call people fat, ugly and stupid? Why do we still judge people based on the colour of their skin and appearance? Why wouldn't we like to hang out with someone who we believe isn't as "cool" as we are?'

The answer is because we live in a society where fear and judgement prevail. No one is appreciated for who they are, they are expected to become someone's else's version of them. Because of family or peer pressure, we condition ourselves to believe that. And this gives rise to an endless cycle of worthlessness.

Like Rachel, youngsters have been brainwashed with a family member's various ideas of perfection or the way others perceive beauty. And when we don't fit into that mould, we are thrown out or forced to get out, not because we are ugly, fat or stupid, just different.

* * *

Our idea of beauty is greatly influenced by the most superficial and material standards set before us. The Instagram feeds and Snapchat-filtered selfies we see everyday featuring skinny supermodels, muscled celebrities, billionaires living "the life" influence us a great deal. We stop appreciating who we are, we become critical of ourselves because we aren't like them and eventually we condemn ourselves. In

real life too, the captain of the football team, the popular girl-squad in college, the cool-kids on the block are people we would want to be like and hang out with.

This lack of gratitude and excess of wants gives rise to anxiety, judgement and hate. If we stopped bullying the weak kid who can't stand up for himself/herself, we would have a world where people can be who they want to be. If we stopped labelling people with names that insult them or their personality we would have a world where people are happy to be themselves without the fear of being judged for who they are. If we stopped judging and discriminating people just because they don't fit into our idea of "cool" and we focused on loving them instead, we would create a world with less people who end their lives every 4 seconds because of a negative self-image.

From the beginning of time, we have been going around with people who perfectly fit our idea of perfection, whatever that is. We love, and love conditionally. 'I love you because you make me happy, you make me laugh, you make me realise my true worth... the list goes on.'

Instead of hating, judging and bullying we need to start loving unconditionally. Let's give love a chance. Let's say 'yes' to love, a full 'yes.' 'I love you for who you are, even if you are different from me or my idea of beauty, perfection, whatever. I love you because you are worthy, worthy of love. And, I love you because in this world of hate, we need to start loving and loving unconditionally.' □

There were many young men in Israel around 30 AD but none was as passionate about his Jewish faith and jealous of the rising popularity of *The Way* - what the followers of Jesus were called before the name Christian was given to them - as Saul. Over the years, I'm sure you have heard a lot about Paul. We read his letters very often at the Mass. He is a favourite of many charismatic preachers because of his powerful insights into Divine and Christian life. He is also hailed as one of the greatest saints and missionaries of the faith.

But who was he before he turned into this influential apostle? I'm sure his conversion story, sometimes dubbed *'The Greatest Conversion Story Ever Told'*, is familiar to us but we might not know much about him prior to that. There are reasons for that; first among them is that there isn't much written about him; secondly, more often than not, stress is heavily laid only on his conversion and post-conversion story. Only those who study scripture might come across his biography but for the most part, ordinary believers like ourselves are in the dark. So let us try to fill in on his origins and discover the man who put Christianity on the map.

Who was Saul?

Saul was born in approximately 5 AD in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (modern-day Turkey). His parents were Jewish but they possessed

Roman citizenship, a rare and coveted privilege that would stand Paul in good stead later on in life (Acts 22:24-29). By profession, Saul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3); it's possible that that was his family business. Scholars say that around 10 AD, Saul's family moved to Jerusalem. It was here that he began his studies of the Hebrew Scriptures under Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He took his studies very seriously and went on to become a thoroughbred Pharisee (Acts 26:5).

Blinded by his zeal, Saul grew increasingly jealous of the popularity of *'The Way'*. The Pharisees never took a fancy either to Jesus or to his disciples. They found him to purposefully break the law that they valued so highly and employ subtly convincing arguments to justify his intolerable behaviour. What began during the lifetime of Jesus carried on even after His Resurrection. Saul bears witness to this fact. When Stephen, a disciple of Jesus, accused the Pharisees in a similar fashion like his master, for betraying the Law of God, "they were enraged and gnashed their teeth against Stephen" (Acts 9:54). As he began to prophesy in their midst "they shouted and covered their ears with their hands and rushed together upon him. They brought him out of the city and stoned him" (Acts 9:57-58). Saul was present when this drama unfolded. In fact, Saul approved of the killing and later embarked on a rampage against

followers of Jesus, putting them, men and women, behind bars and even ensuring their death (Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1).

How did God use Him?

While on his way to Damascus to arrest and extradite Christians back to Jerusalem, Saul was confronted by the very One whom he was persecuting (Acts 9:1-19). His encounter with the Lord transformed him radically. He changed not only his name but his life as well. Gone was the Pharisee who cared only for the letter of the Law, a lover of God and humankind was born in his place. Here are a few other characteristics of Saul that Jesus used to spread the Good News:

* Education – *Saul was a well-educated man. Judging from the quality of his speeches and writings, he was an able orator and a proficient writer. Hands down, he is one of the best writers of Biblical books. It's no coincidence that the Church decided to include 13 of his letters in the Biblical Canon. Some of the most profound theological ideas are found in Paul's epistles. Not to mention, some of the best advice on how to live Christian life.*

Jesus used Paul's education to spread knowledge about Himself. None of the apostles, with the exception of Peter, Matthew, James and John, have written works that outlasted them. Why is that? Simply because they were illiterate folk. God used them in another way to spread the message of His Kingdom. Since, Paul was highly educated, God used him in a powerful way to share the Good News both in speech and writing.

* Passion – *Saul was full of zeal and enthusiasm. He made it his life's mission to learn the Law and keep it.*

That was until he met Jesus. Jesus turned his passion for the Law and the Jewish faith into a passion for Christ and His message of love. God used his passion to spur him to undertake missionary journeys and bring the Good News to those who had not yet received it. His missionary journeys took him across the Roman Empire and even beyond (Acts 13-21). Besides, carrying the Good News he also worked wonders through the Spirit of God, who used him as a vessel to bring healing to the infirm and even life to the dead (Acts 14:10, 16:8, 20:10-12)!

* Courage – *Paul documents the struggles he had to undergo on account of his faith: "The beatings I received are beyond comparison. How many times have I found myself in danger of death! [...] I have been continually in hazards of travelling [...] I have worked and often labored without sleep, I have been hungry and thirsty and starving, cold and without shelter" (2 Cor 11:23-27).*

If not for Paul's courage, the gospel may never have reached the places it did. Paul was responsible for establishing numerous churches across continents. He helped the Jews understand the true meaning of the gospel and even made it understandable to the Greeks and Romans. He challenged Peter and the other apostles when they hesitated to extend the community to the Gentiles. All this and more was possible only because Paul was a courageous man. God boosted his courage and used his generosity to perform wonders.

The life of Paul shows us that God can and will make use of our gifts to spread the light of the Gospel provided we are ready to offer them up to Him. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. VINCENT OF SARAGOSSA (FIRST MARTYR OF SPAIN)

(Commemoration: 22 January)

Saint Vincent has gone by many names over the years. Some know him as Saint Vincent of Zaragoza others, Vincent of Huesca. For the moment lets call him Saint Vincent the Deacon.



Vincent was born in Huesca, near Saragossa, Spain, sometime during the latter part of the 3rd century; it is believed his father was Eutricius (Euthicius), and his mother was Enola, a native of Osa.

Vincent spent most of his life in the city of Saragossa, Spain, where he was educated and instructed in the Catholic religion. He was ordained to the diaconate by Saint Valerius, Bishop of Saragossa, and commissioned to do the preaching in the diocese.

Because Valerius suffered from a speech impediment, Vincent acted as his spokesman. When the Roman Emperor Diocletian began persecuting Christians in Spain, Vincent answered in the

bishop's name and both were brought before Dacian, the Roman Governor. He spoke eloquently for both his bishop and his church, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and condemning paganism.

By order of the Governor Dacian, he and his bishop were dragged in chains to Valencia and kept in prison for a long time. Then Valerius was exiled, but Vincent was subjected to many cruel torments. He was stretched upon a rack, torn with metal hooks, and laid upon a frame of sharp iron bars heated from beneath by fire; lard and salt were rubbed into his wounds; and amid all this he kept his eyes

raised to heaven, and remained unmoved. When even this cruelly failed to break his will, he was again imprisoned and thrown into a solitary dungeon the floor of which was strewn with broken crockery that added to the agony of his already lacerated body.

Vincent declared that God sent the angels of heaven to comfort him. His cell, he said, was illuminated with a heavenly light, and might have been filled with roses, so sweet was its fragrance. He sang hymns as he suffered, so that even the jailer was astounded. As he looked into the cell of the tormented saint and saw him upon his broken knees, suffering agony yet singing the praises to God, he was overcome by wonder, and confessed in that hour his conversion.

On hearing this, the Roman governor was infuriated, but finding all his efforts to unnerve his victim were useless, gave orders for the torture to stop - perhaps to win Vincent by clemency or to prevent him from becoming a martyr. For a time Vincent had some relief. The faithful were permitted to gaze upon his broken body, probably in the hope that they would abandon their faith. Instead, they came in troops, kissed the open sores, and carried away as relics cloths dipped in his blood. The gentle hands of Christian women tended his wounds. When Emperor Diocletian received word about the strength of St. Vincent, he was deeply enraged, and dumbfounded by his victory over death. He sent word to Spain to

have St. Vincent cleaned and his wounds treated. He told them to put him in a luxurious room. To clothe him in the finest clothes and lay him in a bed stuffed with feathers and to sprinkle the bed with rose petals. Diocletian thought that if torture did not bring an end to St. Vincent then the opposite would. It was in this bed that Vincent expired dying the death of a martyr. But he did not survive long and died of his injuries in prison on January 22 in 304. When he died, the anger of the authorities was renewed. His body was thrown in a bog as prey to the wild birds and beasts, but it was strangely preserved it is said by the protection of a raven. When any wild beast or bird tried to attack the mortal remains of the saint, the raven drove them away. Thwarted, Dacian had Vincent's body sewn into a bag, tied to a stone, and cast into the sea. But in the night it was washed ashore, and again loving hands gave it reverent care and secret burial. After peace was restored to the Church, a chapel was built over the remains outside the walls of Valencia. His feast day has been celebrated on January 22 since the persecutions ended in 312. He was the protomartyr of Spain. There can be no doubt of Vincent martyrdom; however, much of the legend and mythology of hook; (2) with a gridiron with spikes; (3) torn with hooks and burned with torches; or (4) his corpse protected by eagles or ravens.

He is honoured as patron in Valencia, Saragossa, Portugal, and other places, and is the pa-

tron of bakers, roof-makers, sailors, schoolgirls, vinedressers, vintners, tile-makers, and roofers.

Saint Vincent is the patron saint on Acolytes. Many Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican parishes are members of The Order of Saint Vincent. This is a lay order for men, woman and children who serve at the altar of our Lord.

Prayer

Almighty God, whose deacon Vincent, upheld by you, was not terrified by threats nor overcome by torments: Strengthen us to endure all adversity with invincible and steadfast faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading

"To you has been granted in Christ's behalf not only that you should believe in him but also that you should suffer for him." Vincent had received both these

gifts and held them as his own. For how could he have them if he had not received them? And he displayed his faith in what he said, his endurance in what he suffered. No one ought to be confident in his own strength when he undergoes temptation. For whenever we endure evils courageously, our long-suffering comes from him Christ. He once said to his disciples: "In this world you will suffer persecution," and then, to allay their fears, he added, "but rest assured, I have conquered the world." There is no need to wonder then, my dearly beloved brothers, that Vincent conquered in him who conquered the world. It offers temptation to lead us astray; it strikes terror into us to break out spirit. Hence if our personal pleasures do not hold us captive, and if we are not frightened by brutality, then the world is overcome. At both of these approaches Christ rushes to our aid, and the Christian is not conquered. (From a sermon by Saint Augustine of Hippo.) □

BURNING THE OLD YEAR

Burning 'Mr. Old Year' is a New Year's tradition in some cities of Colombia. It requires the participation of the entire family. It is a lot of fun; they fabricate a big stuffed male doll that represents the old year. Then they stuff the doll with different materials. Sometimes they put some little fireworks in it to make it more exciting at the time they burn it. Also, they put things inside that they don't want anymore, objects that can bring sadness or bad memories. These things will burn with the old year, meaning that they want to forget all the bad things that happened during the past year. They dress it with old clothes from each member of the family. Then, on New Year's Eve at midnight, they set the doll on fire. This symbolizes burning the past and getting ready to start a happy New Year without bad memories of the old. □





'MAY GOD BE WITH YOU ALWAYS'

Fr. Carlo Broccardo

The Book of Numbers is not among the best known books of the Old Testament, yet every year, on the first day of the year, the first reading is taken from this book! Even this year, the first passage from the Bible that we will hear (or that we have heard, if you are reading these lines after January 1) will be from the Book of Numbers 6, 22-27. They are words that have passed into history as “the Blessing of Aaron.” Some might also remember them as the blessing of St. Francis because the Saint of Assisi made them his own when he used them to bless his brothers.

But let us begin, by trying to situate this passage in the book as a whole. We all remember the events of the Exodus: the people of Israel reduced to slavery by the Egyptians raise their prayer of lamentation to heaven calling on God for help. The Lord hears their cry and intervenes to liberate them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. That is how God freed his people from

slavery. Having left Egypt, God’s people face a long journey across the desert to reach the Promised Land. It will last forty years; not a short time! The Book of Numbers tells us of some of the stages of this journey; we could say that it contains the second part, in which Moses is finally able to bring the children of Israel to the edge of the Promised Land.

However, in the Book of Numbers there are not only stories about what happens during this long journey, there are also rules and laws that God gives to the people – always through the mediation of Moses. The reading that we are going to delve into today is from one of these rules. It is addressed to the priests, to whom God dictates (or better: God tells Moses to tell Aaron and his sons, who are the priests) the words they will use when the Israelites come to them asking for a blessing.

Among the ancient people of Israel, asking for a blessing was

a widespread habit. It was usually the priests who blessed the people in the name of God; this was why the directives were given to Aaron and his sons.

The book of Sirach recounts the story of a priest named Simon, who “raised his hands over the assembly of the children of Israel to give them the Lord’s blessing to glorify his (own) name. The whole assembly prostrated themselves once more to receive the blessing of the Most High. (Sir 50:20-21) The passage from the Book of Numbers tells us precisely the words that the priests utter in blessing over the people. This should consist of three invocations.

The first: “**May the Lord bless you and keep you.**” The blessing of the Lord in the Old Testament is anything but an abstract concept; the servant of Abraham, sent to search for a wife for Isaac his son says this to the family of Rebecca: “The Lord has greatly blessed my master, who has become powerful. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, slaves, camels and donkeys” (Gen 24, 35). To invoke the Lord’s blessing therefore means to wish his protection and every other good thing on earth.

The second: “**The Lord let his face to shine upon you and give you peace.**” It is still very precise language with which he hopes that the Lord will give him his help and benevolence. Psalm 31 indeed says it thus: “Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors; let your face shine on your servant and save me in your mercy” (vv 16-17); equally Psalm

80: “Arouse your power and come to us. O God, bring us back, let your face shine on us and we shall be saved” (vv 3-4). God’s face shines when he comes to save us and free us from our enemies.

The third invocation is similar to the second: “**The Lord lift up his countenance to you and give you peace.**” To better understand the meaning of this image it is useful to consider the opposite, “to hide his face:” “When the people abandon me – says God to Moses – and play the harlot with other gods, on that day my anger will be kindled against them; I will forsake them and hide my face from them and they will be devoured.” They will be struck by numerous and grievous diseases and on that day they will say: “Have these ills struck me because my God is no longer with me?” (Dt 31,17) Wishing that the Lord turns his face to someone is therefore a poetic way of saying: the Lord be with you always.

When someone comes to them – God says to the priests – say this: may the Lord be in your midst always; that in every event of your life he may be at your side. It is the wish that the Church addresses to her children at the beginning of a new year. It is the wish we could exchange with one another when we meet each other at the beginning of this New Year. Paraphrasing the words of the rite of Marriage we could probably say: “The Lord be with you always, in joy and in pain, in sickness and in health and every day during this year that has just begun.” What more beautiful greeting could there be? ☐

Quiet Spaces

THE DAILY STRUGGLE

*This was a morning homily that Pope Francis gave on Thursday January 19, 2017
at the chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae.*

The heart of every Christian is the site of a "struggle". Each time the Father "draws us" toward Jesus, there is "someone else waging war with us". Pope Francis highlighted this message in his homily at Santa Marta on Thursday morning, 19 January. Reflecting on the day's Gospel passage (Mk 3:7-12), the Holy Father focused on the reasons that lead man to follow Jesus, and to examine how the following is never free of difficulty. Indeed if we do not fight temptations each day, we risk having simply a formal and ideological religion.

The Gospel passage, the Pontiff noted, makes repeated references to a "multitude": "a great multitude followed Jesus from all over". The people in "this crowd were throwing themselves at him, to touch him". It was a crowd "warm with enthusiasm, which followed Jesus with warmth and came from all places: from Tyre and Sidon, from Idumea and from beyond the Jordan". A great multitude "made this journey on foot to find the Lord". And in facing the insistent crowd, one might ask: "Why did this multitude come? Why this enthusiasm? What did they need?". The Pope suggested many motivations. "The Gospel itself tells us that there were sick people who sought to be healed" but there were also many people who came "to listen to him". Indeed, "these people liked hearing Jesus, because he did not speak like their doctors", but instead, "with authority". Certainly, the Pope emphasized, "it was a multitude of people who came spontaneously: they weren't brought on buses, like we have seen often when protests are organized and many have to go 'to verify' the presence, so as not to lose their job".

These people "went because they felt something". And they were so numerous "that Jesus had to ask for a boat and set out from the shore so that the crowd did not crush him". But what was the real motive, the profound motivation? The Pontiff said that "Jesus himself explains in the Gospel" this sort of "social phenomenon. He says: 'No one can come to me if not drawn by the Father'. In fact, Francis clarified, whether this multitude went to Jesus out of "need" or because "some were curious", the true reason is seen in the fact that "this crowd was drawn by the Father: it was the Father that drew the crowd to Jesus". And Christ "was not indifferent, like a stagnant teacher who spoke his words and then washed his hands. No! This crowd touched Jesus' heart". We read in the Gospel that "Jesus was moved, because he saw these people as sheep without a shepherd".

Therefore, the Pontiff explained, "the Father, through the Holy Spirit, draws people to Jesus". It is useless to look for "all the reasoning". Every reason can be "necessary" but "is not enough to make one finger move. You cannot move" or take "a step with only apologetic

reasoning". What is truly necessary and decisive, however, is "that the Father draws you to Jesus".

The decisive point for the Pontiff's reflection arrived when he examined the last two lines of the brief Gospel passage proposed for the day's liturgy: "It is curious", he noted, that while this passage "speaks about Jesus, speaks of the crowd, of the enthusiasm" and of the love with which "Jesus received and healed them", there is also something extraordinary. It is written: "whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God!'".

This, the Pope said, is precisely "the truth; this is the reality that every one of us feels when we approach Jesus" and what "the impure spirits try to impede; they wage war on us".

Someone might object: "Father, I am very Catholic; I always to to Mass.... But I never have these temptations, thank God!". But it isn't so. The response is: "No! Pray, because you are on the wrong path!", because "a Christian life without temptations is not Christian: it is ideological, it is gnostic, but it is not Christian". In fact it happens that "when the Father draws people to Jesus, there is another who draws in the opposite way and wages war within you!". Thus Saint Paul "speaks of Christian life as a struggle: a struggle every day to win, to destroy Satan's empire, the empire of evil". This is the reason, the Pope added, that "Jesus came, to destroy Satan! To destroy his influence on our hearts".

This final notation in the Gospel passage highlights what is essential: "both Jesus and the crowd" seem to disappear, leaving "only the Father and the impure spirits, that is the spirit of evil. The Father who draws the people to Jesus and the evil spirit who tries to destroy, always!".

In this way we understand that "Christian life is a struggle" in which "either you let yourself be drawn to Jesus, through the Father, or you can say 'I'm tranquil, at peace'.... But in the hands of this multitude, of these impure spirits". However, "if you want to go forward you must fight! Feel the heart struggling, so that Jesus may win".

Therefore, all Christians must make this examination of conscience and ask themselves: "Do I feel this struggle in my heart?". This conflict "between comfort or service to others, between having a little fun or praying and adoring the Father, between one thing and the other?". Do I feel "the will to do good" or is there "something that stops me, turns me into an ascetic?". And also, "do I believe that my life moves Jesus' heart? If I don't believe this", the Pope warned, "I must pray a lot to believe it, so that he may grant me this grace". (by <http://www.osservatoreromano.va>) ☐

THREE MAGI FOR CHRISTIAN

Adapted and translated by Ian Doullton
from the stories by Pierluigi Menato

They called them the “Three Magi: because – just look at the combination! Gaspar Oliver, Belthshazzar Baptist and Melchior Extross and they were all on the same ship. In fact, Gaspar, Melchior and Belthshazzar were three old non-commissioned officers who couldn’t – for the life of them – agree with one another but they loved each other like real brothers.

Their ship was the most outdated of the Reserve Squadron: a venerable, battered old torpedo-warning vessel, a relic of a bygone era which, though going full blast – could much effort reach seven miles an hour if it persisted undaunted and it was called the “Antelope.”

“The Three Magi” of the “Antelope,” a boatswain, the chief gunner and the helmsman, rivaled each other in terms of their beards, taking turns to be on board with majestic livery. Forced to live in the same cabin, caged and very uncomfortable the three had to sleep in bunks that seemed to have been designed by Procrustes (the legendary manufacturer of torture-beds), the “Three” quarreled from morning to night.

However, they were very unhappy; these old sea wolves distracted by many journeys and adventures had remained unmarried and now, too late, they bitterly regretted not having the true consolation of all men: a son or little grandson who could tug at their beards, rummage the

drawers, unscrew the stars off their coats, untie the ribbons on their sleeves and commit all those other delicious pranks that would make any ancient grandfather go wild!

One very bad day the “Antelope” which was sailing in heavy seas beneath stormy skies into the straits of Sicily telegraphed a miracle: they had reached nine miles an hour at the risk of bursting its boilers.

A terrible tragedy had befallen the country. It was one of those misfortunes that no human power could prevent. Reggio Calabria and Messina were destroyed by the earthquake (1908). There were smouldering piles of rubble and several shattered graves strewn everywhere.

The “Antelope” sailed into the harbour of Reggio at dawn on January 3. For the next few days all the crew including the “Three Magi” did their utmost to rescue whomever they could with that generous impulse that is so typical of sailors.

Miracle of miracles, they found him moaning in a little cot. Two thick beams at an angle formed a huge robust arch which prevented the debris from coming down, keeping that fragile three year old child safe. Among the horribly disfigured corpses, this little child exhausted by hunger,



moaned pitifully now and then but it was totally unscathed: one innocent survivor of the decimation of his entire family.

“He looks like the baby Jesus!” Moved and anguished, the “Three Magi,” bent over the little bed. They remembered that it was the eve of the feast of the Epiphany.

When the little chap felt refreshed enough and had regained his strength aboard the “Antelope” they tried very hard in their own rustic way to com-

fort him. With typical maritime ingenuity they improvised little toys and puzzles to keep little Christian cheerful and distracted.

“Christian.” They called him this because this was the name embroidered on the little boy’s shirt.

But the little chap was frightened and refused the gifts, dismissed the sailors and did not want to see anyone in the ship’s infirmary. He only yelled “mama!” That was pitiful to

hear. Then after much cogitation the "Three Magi" discovered the remedy to pacify on the feast of the Epiphany.

By mutual agreement, taking inspiration from their collective nicknames: Gaspar, Melchior and Belthshazzar, with a little help from the ship's tailor, they improvised cloaks, scepters and crowns (beards they already had) they entered the infirmary carrying in their hands, little gifts wrapped in coloured paper, candy, chocolates, sweets and other 'Epiphany gifts.'

The effect of those extra gifts was truly magical. Christian calmed down as if by magic and looked at them in amazement and began to clap his little hands with glee.

Thanks be to God, what a relief! Each of the three, without speaking to the other, decided to adopt the little boy.

While the "Antelope" was sailing towards Naples with some of the wounded, the Captain of the ship found a few minutes to listen to the three men who, for some days were furiously disputing and even boasting of their right to adopt Christian.

Keeping in mind that they were in the presence of their captain each of them pleaded their case with fervour and precision. Gaspar was the first to hear the little boy's cries; Melchior had removed the first boulder and Belthshazzar was the first to take the little orphan into his arms.

"The Orphan!" the captain who listened with much emotion interrupted Belthshazzar in a strange voice.

"But are you really sure that Christian is an orphan?"

They were stunned.

From the latest ship's dispatch he picked up a card and in a slow voice he read:

"To the Captain of the Antelope: Signor and Signora Marietti came to Naples on business and recognized Christian in a photograph published in the "Afternoon Courier" as their son. They come to collect him when you dock. Admiral De Andreis."

"Did you understand that?" The parents were not in Reggio the night of the earthquake! Christian must have been sent to relatives or uncles or aunts!"

It was all there, the news was very straightforward. They marvelled at the announcement; it was like a miracle.

"Well, my friends" the captain concluded with a smile, "be reasonable, what more could we wish for, for "our" Christian? He has found his mother and Father again!"

They came on board to take the little boy back. "He" a well-to-do businessman, "she" a kindly housewife; happy, and beaming, between laughter and tears they covered him with kisses, "Christian, Christian."

With tears in their eyes too the "Three Magi" waved adieu forever to their lost grandson from the gangway... but they consoled themselves that at least for one day they had all really been the Magi, whose lives had been brightened by a ray of light and joy: like the baby Jesus! □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 12

by Michele Molineris

III THE 1850s (1850-59)

39. Don Bosco is one of ours (1850)

On August 14, 1850, when the Siccardi law against the clergy had given rise to the maltreatment and the eviction of the religious, it was also decided to give the Oratory a mortal blow to drive away Don Bosco. In an attempt to remove him from the scene, the anticlericals planned a hostile declaration against the Oratory on that day in order to drive Don Bosco out of the city. The plan had been kept secret, but on the scheduled day, Signor Volpotto, the same individual who had been instrumental in helping Don Bosco on other occasions, came to Oratory to warn of the impending danger and advised him to flee. Don Bosco instead, called his mother and told her not to forget to prepare him his supper. "Why tell me that?" Margaret exclaimed. "What makes you think I won't?"

"Because," replied Don Bosco, "I want you to know that no matter what happens I'll be here."

According to Volpotto's warning, a mob was to march on the Oratory around four o'clock, but no one appeared either that day or the day later. What had happened? After a noisy demonstration against the Oblates of Mary, the rabble was about to march on

the Oratory when one of them, who knew Don Bosco and had been befriended by him, stood on a wayside stone and shouted at the top of his voice, "Listen to me, friends! Some of you want to go down to Valdocco and heckle Don Bosco. Take my advice. Don't go! It's a weekday, and you won't find anybody there but Don Bosco and his old mother and a few poor boys he cares for. Rather than heckle him, we should shout, 'Long live Don Bosco' because he cares for and helps the sons of the people."

Another member of the mob rallied to Don Bosco's support, shouting, "Don Bosco is not a friend of Austria! He does a great deal of good. He's a man of the people! Let's leave him in peace. No need to shout for or against him. These words had the effect of calming the mob. They changed their plans and decided to demonstrate against the Dominicans and the Barnabites (EBM, IV, 68).

40. Mom, it's him! (1850)

In 1850 in Turin the father of a family from Savoy had become a protestant, exchanging his faith for money. This pitiable man wanted his wife and son to do likewise, but his hopes were in vain, for the good woman remained steadfast in her Faith and kept their young son equally firm.

One night the boy dreamed that he was being forcibly dragged to the Protestant church. While he struggled, a priest appeared, set him free, and led him away. The next morning he told the dream to his mother who had been seeking for a way

to shelter him in some institution in order to protect him from his father's evil design.

During that week someone suggested that she visit Don Bosco at Valdocco and inquire about placing her son there. She took the boy there on Sunday morning and since it was time for Mass, they went into the chapel. Just then Don Bosco entered the sanctuary to celebrate Mass. The moment the young lad saw Don Bosco, he cried out, almost beside himself: "Mom, it's him, it's him. It's really him!" Don Bosco was the priest he had seen in his dream. The young boy was very excited and the mother was in tears. Mr. Bonino, who had at fist the youngster to keep quiet, realized that he could not hush him and led the mother and the her son to the sacristy. Before he could finish taking off his sacred vestments, the boy ran to him and, hugging his knees cried, "Please Father, save me!"

Don Bosco accepted him into his hospice and the little Savoyard remained at the Oratory for several years (EBM IV, 5).

41. He leads a sheep back to the fold (1850)

Once, in 1850, while going from Carignano, Don Bosco also managed to bring a lost sheep back into the fold. He had met him in the prison of Turin, and now he met him on the carriage as a coachman. Sitting next to him on the coach, he soon got him to speak of his life. It turned out that he hadn't made his Easter confession and the reason was that he didn't find a priest to go to. He would have gladly con-

fessed to the last priest who heard his confession a long time ago, because he seemed to be very sympathetic towards him and treated him with the respect that was required.

They had not recognized each other, and Don Bosco asked him: "What was the name of this priest you liked so much?"

"Don Bosco, I don't suppose you know him."

"I certainly do! I'm Don Bosco!"

The coachman stared at him, then gradually recalling his features and recognizing him, he exclaimed, overjoyed: "This is wonderful, but how can I make my confession here?"

"That's no problem. Give me the reins and kneel down," Don Bosco said.

The man complied at once, and while the horses slowly went their way, the coachman made his confession. This incident we came to know from Father Michelangelo Chiatellino, and it, like most of the others, took place before 1850 (EBM, III, 61-62).

42. Lottery numbers (1850)

In 1850 Count Camillo Cavour was all for the Oratory. It was surprising to see how Don Bosco came to harness the support of illustrious figures who opposed the Church. With their enticing manners, their generous promises to help his charitable works, their offers of honorific titles and decorations, and their favourable responses to his many petitions, they seemed to pose a threat to his love and loyalty to the Holy See and his faith. The boys of the Oratory were preferred to others who belonged to long-established institutes of

charity, and they were chosen to draw the numbers in the State Lottery. On alternating weeks for many years two of the smaller boys, wearing special insignia, performed this official task and in this way earned a fee which was given to the Oratory. Unaffected by this favouritism, Don Bosco continued to uphold the cause of God with heroic fortitude and with no regard to or fear of what people might say (EBM, IV, 73).

Don Bosco would listen, ask questions, and request explanations, thus encouraging people to continue in the same vein. His interest in what they had to say showed a personal concern, and he always managed some word of praise and esteem for all. However, he could also steer futile, frivolous conversation into spiritual channels, turning their very importunity into a means of doing good. His advice always bore good fruit; his utterances, effortless and gracious, became unforgettable norms. One might say that his was the magic of transforming all conversations into spiritual gold. The following fact demonstrates this:

One day in 1862 two men came to ask him what numbers to play in the lottery, convinced that if he did tell them, they would win. He tried to sidetrack them, but they refused and impatiently kept saying "That's not what we came for! We want to know what numbers to play."

"All right, then, play five, ten and fourteen."

"They thanked him and were about to go, when he added: "Let me explain why I gave you those numbers."

"You don't have to!"

"That's where you are wrong!"

"All right, then, let's hear it."

"Five stands for the five commandments of the Church; ten stands for the commandments of God; fourteen stands for the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; if you play these numbers, you will win heavenly stakes."

On another occasion he told his callers to play two and four symbolizing respectively confession and Communion and the Four Last Things - death, judgment, heaven and hell. Other occasions called for similar witty answers (EBM, VII, 12-18).

Don Bosco visited Count de Villeneuve on the 9th April 1885. There were many guests all having a good time; their cheerfulness was enhanced by Don Bosco's pleasantries. When speaking of the game of lottery, he remarked that some people would come to him to ask him for a number they might play, to whom he would laugh and answer, "My dear, if I only knew such numbers, I would be the first to play them!"

Then he said that on one occasion, he had written "Faith, Hope, Charity" on a visiting card to rid himself of people who would press him for numbers. He folded the card, saying that they were not to unfold it until a given time. They obeyed and looked up the numbers corresponding to the three theological virtues in the Cabala. When they played them, the numbers won and they came back to see him and give him a fair amount of money as a donation (EBM, XVII, 403). □

AUGUSTUS CZARTORYSKI 1858 - 1893 PRIEST, BLESSED

Augustus Czartoryski was born in Paris, in exile, on August 2, 1858. In fact, for about thirty years his noble lineage, linked to the history and the dynastic interests of Poland had emigrated to France and from Palazzo Lambert, on the banks of the Seine, directed a vast movement among their compatriots to restore unity to their homeland that had been dismembered by the great powers in 1795.

At the age of six, his mother died of tuberculosis: a trait she would pass on to her son. When sickness manifested its first symptoms in the boy, August began a long pilgrimage in search of health which he would never regain: Italy, Switzerland, Egypt and Spain were the main stations on his route. But health was not the main object of his quest: another quest, far more important coexisted in his young soul: his vocation. It did not take him long to realize that the life of the court was not meant for him. At the age of twenty, writing to his father, he said, among other things, alluding to the worldly parties that he was forced to attend: "I confess I am tired of all this. These useless amusements torment me. I am annoyed to be obliged to attend so many banquets."



Much influence was exercised on the young prince by his tutor Joseph Kalinowski who had spent ten years of forced labour in Siberia and who became a Discalced Carmelite thereafter. He was canonized by Saint John Paul II in 1991. He was Czartoryski's tutor for just three years (1874-1877) but he left his mark on his young protégé. It was he who would propose figures like Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and his compatriot Saint Stanislaus Kostka as ideals to guide the young prince on the path of his vocational search. He was enthusiastic about his motto: "Ad maiora natus sum" (I am born for greatness). "The life of St. Aloysius by Father Ceparant to me from Italy" writes Kalinowski, "had a decisive effect on the spiritual progress of Augustus and opened the way to an easier union with God."

Meeting Don Bosco was a de-

cisive event. Augustus was 25 when he met the saint for the first time. This happened in Paris, precisely in the Lambert Palace where the founder of the Salesians celebrated Mass in the family chapel. Prince Ladislaus and Augustus served at the altar. "I've wanted to meet you for a long time!" said Don Bosco to Augustus. From that day on, Augustus saw in the holy educator the father of his soul and the arbiter of his future. Don Bosco had become the point of reference for this young man's vocational discernment. This priest from Turin however was always very cautious about accepting royalty into the Congregation. It would be the Pope himself Leo XIII who would resolve all doubts. Once the will of Augustus was tested, the Pope concluded: "Tell Don Bosco that it is the will of the Pope that you be received among the Salesians." "Well, my dear," Don Bosco immediately replied, "I accept. From this moment on you belong to our Society and I want you to belong to it until death."

At the end of June of 1887, after he had set his affairs in order in favour of his brothers, the young Augustus was sent to San Benigno Canavese for a brief period of Aspirantate, before beginning the novitiate that same year under the guidance of the master, Father Julius Barberis.

In those years, while he was doing his studies in Valsalice, there was also Fr. Andrea Beltrami and they struck up a deep friendship. Together they studied foreign languages and

helped each other to ascend to the summit of sanctity. When Augustus' illness grew serious the superiors asked Andrea to stay with him to assist him.

Tested by suffering, on April 2, 1892 he was ordained at San Remo by Monsignor Tommaso Reggio, bishop of Ventimiglia. Prince Ladislaus and his aunt Isa did not attend the ordination. Don Augustus' priestly lasted barely a year which he spent at Alassio in a room that overlooked the boys' playground. He died in Alassio on the evening April 8, 1893, Saturday in the Easter Octave sitting in the armchair that had been used by Don Bosco. On Monday he exclaimed: "What a beautiful Easter!" to the confrere who was looking after him without imagining that he would celebrate the octave in heaven. He was thirty-five years old; five of which as a Salesian. On his First Mass card he had written: "For me one day within your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. Blessed is he who lives in your house, forever singing your praises" (Psalm: 83).

Augustus Czartoryski, the young prince had developed an effective method of discerning the divine will. He presented all his questions and doubts to God in prayer and then in a spirit of obedience followed the advice of his spiritual directors. That was how he understood that his vocation was to live a life of poverty serving the poor and little ones. That was the same method that helped him throughout his life we might say, to realize the designs of Divine Providence in a heroic way. □



JOURNEYING WITH A GROWING CHILD

don Giorgio Chatrian

Joseph and Mary found Jesus among the doctors. "They were astonished to see him, and his mother said to him, "Son why have you done this to us? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously" (Lk 2'48). Jesus tells them that he was dealing with matters of his Father. "But they did not understand his words" (Lk 2, 50).

How many difficulties there are between parents and children! It almost always starts during pre-adolescence. Their journey together is full of misunderstandings, rarely-shared dreams, conflicts, reciprocal violence, disillusionment, loneliness, regret... in many families some replies seem to be like the lyrics of a song.

"If I think back to the time I spent with Jesus your Son, O Father, several emotions rise in my heart. I'm thinking of the first time he called me "mama" or when he came walking across the room on his wobbly little legs till the time he ran and dove in to my arms.

I made him repeat the names of



things he found around the house or along the path to the well when he accompanied me to fetch water. It was so beautiful when he began to repeat from memory some verses of the Psalms praising your greatness as Creator, your mercy in forgiveness, the possibility of always having recourse to your assistance, O God.

In particular, I remember that evening, when the table was

cleared and only the empty bowls and the pitcher of water remained he stood up and recited the whole "Shema Israel." It was as if he could, for the first time, communicate and put into words your invitation, O Father, to make his profession of faith about the beauty of your commands: to love you with all his soul and strength and in your name to love others.

I think these precepts have always been fixed in his heart – they are still your words – but from then on, knowing them by heart, he would have been able to explain more precisely the marvels of your love O Father. You freed our fathers from the slavery of Egypt and then accompanied them to the Promised Land and you did it out of love. He thanked you because you wanted to share your life with us through this commandment of love.

I must acknowledge Lord that seeing this Son of yours grow up was a very special experience. Days went by and sometimes weeks when he seemed like any other child, a boy like every other boy. Since he began to walk, he went around, curious, rummaging throughout the corners of the house to see what was there, taking things in hand and sometimes putting it into his mouth and then realizing that it was not...edible.

One morning he even took the bowl of oil and it slipped from his hands, smearing all his clothes; the fragile terracotta pitcher shattered into a thousand pieces. I even scolded him: he had to learn to take care of things.

When he was a little older he



happily went out with his friends, playing along the street in races, competitions, always new and happy games. They infected each other with joy. The women in the house thanked you O Lord, for the gift of their brats, those little gems that blossomed on that branch of their lives.

I too was happy to hear more and more about my son and proud when they told me that he had my eyes and my sweet strong character.

But sometimes as he grew there were questions that arose. First of all, he was surprised that as he grew up he had the marked propensity of a leader among his friends. He always proposed to them the most interesting games and when he explained it to them precious time was lost because there were more ideas. He sometimes acted as arbiter in a quarrel and held up his hand in judgment and pacified both parties.

Often when speaking to us or his companions he seemed to be unusually natural for his age peppering his conversations with appropriate and precise quotes from Scripture. That was fascinating but at the same time mysterious when at home or in a secluded place, in the shade of an olive tree or by a babbling brook he seemed to get away from everything and

everyone and he entered another dimension but he seemed to be long there.

Did her reflect or did he pray?

He seemed to be in touch with someone. That kind of behaviour and those experiences could not have come from either Joseph or me...

What were the signs of your hand on him, O Father? Certainly your hand was there! And certainly he got in touch with you as if he were listening to you, feeling your closeness. I confess, I took time to understand more concretely that he was your Son because he was mine, O Father.

And to think of it, the angel had told me that the child in my womb was, in reality your Son, God Most High!

An important step in realizing who Jesus seriously was, was when, on the way back to



January 2020

Nazareth, after having celebrated Passover in Jerusalem, we did not see him in the caravan as it wound its way slowly along the sunny Judean roads.

He was now twelve years old and had already given signs of being a little man so we didn't worry; he would certainly be playing among his peers, or simply chasing them around among the people, the pack of animals or somewhere in the larger group.

But he wasn't there!

We returned to Jerusalem with our hearts in our mouths. Joseph was more anxious than I. The joy of finding him again, in the temple in discussion with the doctors manifested incredible authority for a twelve-year-old. This thought turned into a painful observation: We were beginning to lose Jesus who was no longer ours but yours, O Father, only yours and so it was normal for him to stop by your house and take care of your affairs.

Our children are not ours they are gift from you so it is not for nothing that we invoke you Father and travel the path that you point out to us. The road sometimes (often) is a different one from the one we have planned by ourselves. And this is the subtle pain that goes on for years as the children grow and we must learn to contemplate this through reflection and prayer.

But in a certain sense, because we are parents, it gives us a sense of pride to have completed the task you entrusted to us: to prepare them, and give them wings so they are free to fly into the skies of life. Thank you, O Lord. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

A General Scourge

A party of Z-reservists were about to rehearse an important attack and were being addressed by the General.

"There are," he began, "certain essential differences between a rehearsal and the real thing. In the first place, there is the absence of the enemy. In the second..."

He turned to the Sergeant-Major "tell the men the second essential difference," he said.

"The presence of the General," replied the Sergeant-Major triumphantly.

Toddler kudos

A four-year-old watched his father for the first time take round the collection plate. Then he let out a yell: "Hooray! Daddy won!" which reverberated throughout the church.

Sight Unseen

Magistrate: "Have you anything to say before I pass sentence?"

Burglar: "Yes m'lord. It's a bit thick being identified by a bloke who kept his head under the bed-clothes all the time."

Bar Integrity

"You seem to have plenty of intelligence for a man in your position," sneered a barrister, cross-examining a witness. "If I wasn't on oath I'd return the compliment," replied the witness.

Unforgettable association

Mr. Kimball was an ardent worker in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and told his wife a pathetic tale of a donkey he had rescued from

a cruel master that morning. When he had finished, she said loudly: "John, I'm so glad you told me. I shall never see a donkey again without thinking of you."

Impenetrable Defence

An officer in the army was giving a talk to his soldiers before going into war. This was one of the first things he said to them: "Now, you must be very careful, because the enemy has a new weapon which can pierce one inch of wood, so keep your heads down!"

Equine Positives

Photography is a strange business," mused the young man.

"Because it develops negatives, I presume?" queried the young woman, with a queer accent on the word 'negative.'

"Not exactly, that. But, as an example, the other day I had my picture taken in my riding-clothes not on a horse, you understand, but just standing in my riding outfit, with my whip in my hand. And today I received a letter from the photographer, stating that the pictures are all mounted and ready for me!"

Class Clarity

The teacher was more than disappointed, she was annoyed. Not a boy in the class could name the two birds she had drawn on the blackboard. "Come now," she pleaded, in a final effort, "one of them is a robin and the other is a thrush. Can any boy tell me which is the robin?"

A voice droned up from the last boy in the back row: "The one beside the thrush, miss!" □

ADULTERY: TWENTY ONE TIMES

by Vincent Travers, OP

I remember preparing for my fourth confession as a seven year old. I was looking for a way to lump together my usual sins of pretending not to hear my parents when they called, causing trouble in school, not saying my prayers, telling lies, fighting with my sisters, being late for meals, and so on. Since I wasn't sure I would remember all these sins, I looked for a word that would summarise them. Since we were told the commandments covered all sin, I knew I would find the elusive word in the list of ten. I rattled the commandments off to myself. When I got to "Thou shall not commit adultery," I said to myself, adultery is the word I am looking for. Adultery must mean, not obeying adults. Why else would they call it adultery? I didn't know any better, because Sister Stan's explanation was pretty vague. She told us that adultery was a big sin. It made your soul turn black, and you would go straight to hell if you were hit by a car. It was such a big sin that most people never did it in their whole life. But

here was I, a seven year old, and I had already committed adultery twenty one times, in just one week. I was very careful when crossing the road!

Kindness of our God

Finally, Saturday came and I headed off to the parish Church with my sister. She must have had a good week. She was out in less than half a minute, smiling angelically.

Now it was my turn. He pulled the slide. He was a young priest, just ordained. He'd probably never heard of adultery committed twenty one times in one week. He might collapse and die in shock, and the people would want to know what whopper I had confessed.

I had worked out my strategy. I decided to start with a little sin: "I missed morning and evening prayers nine times." I knew that would not get his attention, so I quickly made it twenty times. Next I said, "I fought with my sisters seven times." At the last moment, I decided to make it twenty seven times to



make sure I was making an impression. Then I dropped my voice and tried to bury the adultery part, and quickly whispered "adultery twenty one times." I then raised my voice and closed with something not so serious, "I wouldn't get up when I was called in the morning for school." The ploy didn't work.

The priest raised his voice loud enough for every sinner in Church to hear him say, "Did you say adultery? You committed adultery?" There was a long pause, and I knew I was in for it. Eventually, after what seemed like an eternity, the priest said, "How old are you? What grade are you in?" I knew I was in big trouble.

"I'm seven and a half years old."

"I thought so," he said. Then he said, "I don't think you committed adultery. But even if you did, do you know that Jesus forgives you and loves you more than ever."

"Yes, Father!"

I felt thoroughly cleansed of all my sins. I knew now, I could cross the road without fear of going to hell if I was hit by a car. When I stepped out of the confessional, a sea of faces stared at me. I could hear my sister's voice, several rows away, saying in a stage whisper, "What did he say to you?" I have never forgotten the words, "Even if you did what you say you did, Jesus forgives you more than ever."

Gospel of Grace

The simple most fundamental shift the Catholic Church made during the Vatican Council was in our thinking of grace, namely,

that we do not earn God's approval or favour. Grace is a gift. It is completely free. It is universal and offered to everyone. This means that a loving God is active in our lives at all times, and there is nothing we can do about it.

Many Catholics have yet to make the shift in their understanding of grace. God is biased in our favour. We do not have to please or appease him. God's love is not determined by our behaviour or lack of it. Indeed, there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. No amount of pride, envy, jealousy, injustice, adultery, sexual sins, racism and so on, can make God love us less. God already loves, as much as an infinite God can love.

Amazing Grace

The picture gets even bigger. God's world is expansive. It's a world of utter graciousness. It is a world of amazing grace. There is nothing you can do to make God love you less. "Oh, come off it you are saying - how about murder or rape?" I sincerely hope you don't do murder or rape but if you do, you haven't changed God's mind. God hasn't stopped loving you. God's love is unilateral. It is one-sided. God declares in scripture, "I will be faithful to you, no matter what, even if you are unfaithful to me."

Gift

True grace can be resisted. A gift is only a gift when we accept it. Mary had to say "yes" to be filled with the power of God the Most High. (From *St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland*) □

NEWSBITS

San Benigno Canavese) - On 5 July 2019 the Salesian community of San Benigno Canavese celebrated its 140th anniversary. The history of this Salesian site, which is just twenty kilometers from Turin refers to the times of the first foundations started by Don Bosco himself.

After starting and consolidating the Oratory at Valdocco, followed by the first other Turin oratories, and after seeing the Salesian Congregation recognized by the Holy See, Don Bosco found himself in Turin with a problem of "abun-

dance" of devotees and professed. Attention fell on San Benigno.

The Salesians arrived in San Benigno Canavese on 5 July 1879. The First Director of those novices was Fr. Giulio Barbers.

The first workshops were soon set up the following autumn for artisans of various kinds and over time there were various transformations.

In recent times there was an employment centre to help young people find and start work. Today it welcomes about 900 students every day. (ANS) □

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.

My sincere thanks to Our dear Lord and Mother Mary first helping my daughter get her visa to the US and then for saving my daughter in the US from a major accident. Her car was totally smashed and both she and her friend escaped without a scratch. I devoutly pray the 3 Hail Marys. Please continue to protect her as she completes her Ph.D.

Mrs. Y.L. Fernandes

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Thank you, Mother Mary for saving me from a heart attack. It was the first day of the novena (June 18th) when I felt a pain and began perspiring profusely. I was rushed in time to Raheja Hospital for a stent and was saved. (A.P.Dias)

Our sincere thanks to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for favours received and for helping my daughter to graduate. A Devotee

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



On reaching this great milestone we sincerely thank Blessed Mother Mary, St. Dominic Savio, Don Bosco for all the blessings and graces bestowed upon us during our fifty years of matrimonial bliss. During this journey we are blessed with four children - 2 boys and 2 girls. The last two were twins, a girl and a boy. Our relatives were very supportive in their upbringing. In addition to the above 4 we have seven grand children and we support them, helping them whenever needed. *Rachel and John Thoman,*

Sydney, Australia

Sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for all the blessings received. *Mr. Fatima Tanzania Almeida, Goa* We are immensely grateful to Our Blessed Mother, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for our new redeveloped home.

Mrs. Carmen Pereira, Mumbai

My grateful thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary Help of Christians and Saint Dominic Savio for helping my daughter score good marks in the HSC board examinations and also for favours received. Continue to shower your abundant blessings on us and keep us in your care.

A Devotee

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Thank you to Mother Mary and Saint Teresa for curing me of my sickness. Also thanking Sacred Heart of Jesus, Fr. Agnel, Saint Joseph Vaz and Infant Jesus for all favours granted.

Mrs. E. Travasso

My sincere thanks to the Precious Blood of Jesus and Mother Mary for many graces received. Sorry for the delay. *Peter Lobo*

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

JANUARY 20120

Promotion of World Peace

We pray that Christians, followers of other religions and all people of goodwill may promote peace and justice in the world.

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MARY WAS THERE

I was barely able to understand what my daughter was saying on the phone from Qatar. It was the 31st March 2019 at 12 noon. Her husband had been in a motorbike accident as he was returning from his night shift. I could only pray the *Three Hail Marys* continuously. He was taken to the Govt. Hospital. About 5 hours later the scans declared that his left leg was badly damaged. The reports showed that there was no injury to either the skull or the spinal cord. I continued to pray to Mother Mary for his cure. Today he is recuperating in a wheel chair but it was just protection of Mother Mary that he is safe from any harm that could have seriously effected his skull or back bone and left him maimed.

Mrs. Trufina Consalves, Mumbai

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

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

To help a poor lad to reach the priesthood, is a privilege

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Please address all correspondence to:

**Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, sdb.,
SHRINE OF DON BOSCO'S MADONNA,
Matunga - MUMBAI - 400 019 - INDIA**

Phone/Fax: 91-22- 2414 6320, email: dbmshrine@gmail.com