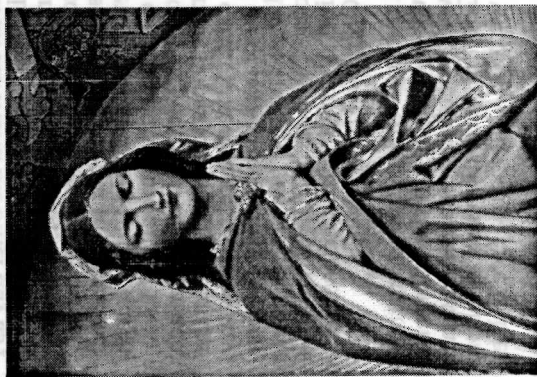


CONTENTS

From The Editor's Desk: <i>The End of My Resources</i>	3
Reflections on Amoris Laetitia: From Sign to Reality - <i>Giampaolo Dianin</i> 4	
Feast of the Month: In the Womb of A Woman - <i>Chino Biscontin</i>	6
Youth on the Move: Turn Your Dreams Into Reality - <i>Anastasia Dias</i>	8
Salesians for You! Heaven in the Storm: Fr. Simo Zakerian sdb 10	
Witnesses In And For Our Times: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.....	13
Lectio Divina: Even Jesus was on the Banks of the Jordan - <i>Chino Biscontin</i>	16
Quiespaces: The Surprising Embrace - <i>Pope Francis</i>	18
The End of the World - <i>Pierluigi Menato</i>	20
Fioretti of Don Bosco - 24 <i>Michele Molineris</i>	24
My Vocation Story: Fr. James Tuscano, sdb.....	28
Reflecting On Mary: Mary, Refuge of Sinners - <i>Maria Ko Ha Fong</i>	30
Newsbits.....	33
This One Should See Me Out.....	35



O God, who through
the fruitful virginity
of Blessed Mary
bestowed on the human race
the grace
of eternal salvation,
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,
your Son Who lives and
reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.

From The Editor's Desk

THE END OF MY RESOURCES

It's the beginning of another year, and a New Year like no other. And it's like walking into the unknown; we're really clueless. We've probably been helpless all along since we entered this terrible zone of COVID. These feelings welled up in me as I sat down to reflect on them in the light of my faith.

"My task was simplified the moment I realised I could do nothing by myself," wrote St Thérèse of Lisieux. Many of us must have felt the beginnings of despair, but for Thérèse it was different. She had an astonishing gift (in William Blake's words) for "*building a Heaven in Hell's despair*." She knew that it could have been called despair if she had not been a woman of extraordinary courage and faith. "Jesus allowed pitch darkness to sweep over my soul," she wrote. "This trial was not something lasting a few days or weeks. I wish I could express what I feel, but it is impossible. One must have travelled through the same sunless tunnel to understand how dark it is... I must have seemed like a child for whom the veil of faith is almost pulled aside. But there is no veil, but instead a wall which towers to the sky and hides the stars."

Those very sentiments came to me as I searched my soul in my helplessness during this time of crisis. Social distancing confined me to my premises here at Matunga but I heard stories of people who had entered that 'frightful tunnel'. I'm sure you've met them too. You who are reading these lines may well be one of them. If so, I bow in respect to your terrible suffering and I admit that I have never been there myself. I'd like to convey Thérèse's words to you which were also amazing! "I have never before felt so strongly how gentle and merciful God is. He sent me this heavy cross just at the time when I was strong enough to bear it... Nothing now hinders me... I no longer want anything except to love until I die of love. I am free and fear nothing."

A recent French biographer of Thérèse said she never had anything up her sleeve: no tricks, no escapes, no clever explanations, no blaming, no postponing... She remained always fully present and vulnerable to the experience. That is why God could give her so much.

I'm thinking of St. Peter who was quite often at the end of his resources. He had given up everything to follow Jesus around the country and learn from him how to live right. But he would be dragged even further beyond, like on that terrible night when he would catch nothing (John 21:3). That must have been like Thérèse's wall reaching up the sky and letting in no light. But, as with Thérèse, it was moment of recognition: "It is the Lord!" (John 21 :7).

Through these terrible times we realize that we don't all go willingly; we have to be dragged. The ego, the self-centred self, does not easily relinquish its hold. It is a matter of being dragged beyond ourselves. Where? To God and to those strange creatures, ... other people.

Love seeketh not itself to please/ Nor for itself hath any care/ But for another gives its ease/ And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair. William Blake (1794)

Fr. Ian Doullton sdb

FROM SIGN TO REALITY

Giampaolo Dianin

"The spirituality of communion. In marriage, the couple can experience a greater love, of which they are a real incarnation, however fragile and on the move"

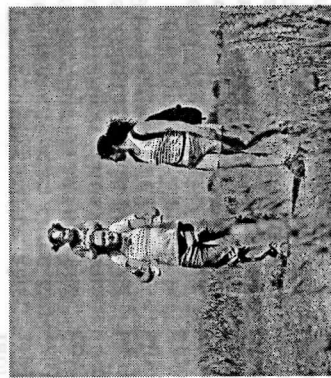
The vocation to love is an appeal that God addresses to every person and that each one can recognize as a deep yearning in his/her heart: "He chose us in love before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1, 4). It is a vocation that man and woman recognize not only in their hearts but also in their own sexual reality that leads them to come out of themselves to meet the other in that particular relationship which is a male-female couple: "A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh" (Gen 2, 24).

"Charity takes on different hues, depending on the state of life to which we have been called"; it is with these words that Pope Francis opens the ninth chapter of *Amoris Laetitia* dedicated to conjugal and family spirituality. Charity takes on the traits of conjugal love in the bond of a couple and leads us to reflect precisely on the first facet of family spirituality: communion. St. John Paul II used these precise words: "The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the lord for the Church His bride" (FC 17).

There is a logic that underlies every sacrament which we can define as a sign that points to some-

thing greater and makes it current and effective today. Let us take the Eucharist for example: the sign is the bread which, through its symbolic role, takes us back to the gesture of the love of Jesus: his being broken bread and poured wine; the term "memorial" tells us that it is not just a memory, but a gesture that actualizes what Jesus accomplished, making it valid even today, because that bread becomes true nourishment for the believer today, a gift from the Lord who asks us to be available to live according to the style of that gift today.

We can find the same logic in the sacrament of marriage: first of all, there is a sign i.e. the love of two people who intend to give themselves totally, to build a community of life, to be open to fruitfulness, to respect and love each other and to build a conjugal covenant. This sign evokes and refers to a benchmark likened first of all



to the love of God who loves man and wants to build a covenant with him and then to the love of Christ who loves his Church and gives his life for her. The sign is not only a remembrance of Jesus' gesture, but it becomes a memorial, i.e. it makes it current: marriage becomes a place where the couple can see, know and experience this greater love, of which this is a living sign, the incarnation that is real though poor, fragile and always on the move. It is a memory or memorial, but also an effective sign, first of all for the two spouses: God consecrates this love and makes it a sign, as happens with the bread, water and oil. The two spouses are consecrated in the sense that everything that expresses and concretizes their love is a sign and a reference. It is effective also for the Church: the believer needs to see this sign in order to discover God's face; without this sign the Church would be poorer. Finally, it is also effective for the world: the consecrated love of two believers becomes a witness today more than ever, in the face of the trivialization of love reduced to just an emotion, the denial of conflicts that lead to easy breakups and the denial of life or the quest for it at any cost.

If it is true that the sign is conjugal love, it is the first task of the spouses to make this sign grow so that it is able to point ever more clearly the reality to which it refers. The first task of spouses, linked to the identity of the sacrament they celebrated, essentially and simply calls them each to love each other. Before they do anything, before they perform any service within the Church, their commitment is to make their love grow in all its dimensions.

Pope Francis concretizes the spirituality of communion in the thousands of little gestures of affection with which the spouses celebrate, love and increase their communion. "In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place" (AL 315). Sexuality itself, so often viewed with suspicion, is nothing but the sacramental sign. We can say that when two spouses live their love to the point of sexual self-giving, they "celebrate" a strong moment of their sacrament, a real spousal liturgy of communion.

At the same time, communion is also a demanding journey because "Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask" (AL 315). The spirituality of communion is also a commitment, an asceticism, a renunciation of oneself in order to give oneself to the one loved. The many words of Jesus on love also apply to spouses: "If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 Jn 4, 12).

History has shown us the struggle of keeping the family and their relationship with God together, as if the latter required a certain estrangement from the reality of earthly things. The way of holiness that God points out to spouses does not lead them to escape from their condition as spouses and parents, but to encounter God within and through family experience. Pope Francis concludes thus: "Hence, those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union" (AL 316). □

FEAST OF THE MONTH

January 1, Solemnity of the Mother of God

IN THE WOMB OF A WOMAN

Chino Biscontin

A young woman bore in her womb Him who, in her womb guides the galaxies and the stars! That was how, not leaning on his almighty majesty, he came to meet us

My grandchild who, every now and again asks me to give him a book when he comes back from school (first grade), surprised me one day as he blurted out: "Grandpa, what was there at the beginning?" At first, I did not realize that the little pipsqueak, no more than six years old, had asked me a question that Greek philosophers had grappled with for not a few centuries. Placing him on my knee, I started telling me about the *big bang* from which, according to several theories, our universe would have originated. For a while he was very attentive, but then he butted into the explanation and wanted to know what was there in the beginning, before the *big bang*. I thought to himself: "We're now fully in the realm of metaphysics," so I proceeded to speak to him of God as the Creator of all that exists and added: "If you really want to get to the very beginning of the beginning, you will encounter the hand with which God formed everything that exists." Then I, very slowly read the boy the first chapter of Genesis.

I thought I had finally put to rest all those questions in that little head but instead, there was another question: "And God? Who made him?" I explained that God needed no beginning. I gave

him the example of a train starting from the last wagon right up to the locomotive. That is what makes the train run, but it does not need anything to make it run. The lad was quiet and pensive, curled up in an armchair all by himself till dinner.

Why, am I telling you all this? Because the feast of Mary most holy, the mother of God, with immense wisdom, was placed on the first day of the New Year. The beginning of the year alludes to the beginning of everything and, even further, to the One who started it all. In one of the books I gave my grandson there were fascinating pictures depicting galaxies. Billions of galaxies with billions of stars and planets that cover all that we can manage to put into words; speaking of lightyears. Beyond which we are unable to get our minds to fathom anything more.

Well, the Creator, holds the dance of the galaxies in the hollow of his hand. And we, on the basis of what we have learned about God in the Scriptures, dare to say, that this tiny grain, which is our planet Earth, is the object of his particular attention. Not only that, but we also dare to say that he knows each of us by name, he cares for us with such an immense love that, to say it with Jesus, he knows the number of hairs on our heads.

On this boundless horizon, our faith appears to have a dizzying courage; a courage that a six-year-old boy had, and which frightens scientists.

But our faith goes even further and affirms that a woman, born, lived and died on this Earth of ours, must be called "Mother of God." In reality, the title attributed to Mary most Holy could well be spelled out like this: "Mother of the Son of God." Mary did not give God a beginning, but generated Jesus, who is both a man like us and God like the Father. She generated that man who allowed the Son of God to come and dwell among us: because he to whom Mary gave birth, a man among men, was personally the Son of God.

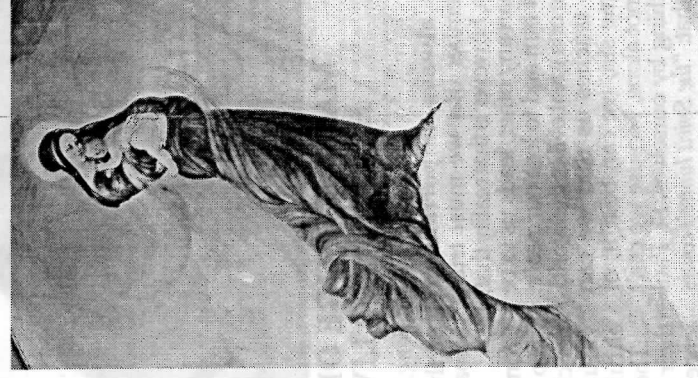
In the light of the immensity evoked by that dialogue with my grandson, what we have come to acknowledge in faith leaves us both amazed and fascinated. And what appears in the foreground, as we contemplate that avalanche of amazement, is the meekness and humility of the infinite Creator of the universe.

A woman bears in her womb the One who, in her womb, guides the galaxies. Thus, not using his almighty majesty, he came to meet

us through a path that can only be one of total love without shadows. Because it is Love (which we call the Holy Spirit) who made the great Creator so humble, He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, goes and dwells in the womb of a young woman. □

MARY THE MOTHER OF THE REDEEMER AND THE REDEEMED

We call the motherhood of Mary spiritual in order to distinguish it from the natural motherhood, through which she was the mother of Jesus only. Her spiritual motherhood towards us started at the very moment of the incarnation of the Word in her: in that moment, as she became mother of Jesus, she became also the mother of the Redeemer and the redeemed, who to be so needs to be united with him as branches to the vine or as limbs of the body to the head. This is that motherhood proclaimed by Jesus on the Cross, when pointing out to Mary he said to John as representing the redeemed humanity: "Behold your Mother" (Lumen Gentium 58).



TURN YOUR DREAMS INTO REALITY

Anastasia Dias

We're beginning a beautiful, new year. The past year might've been hard on us but we've got to keep our hopes up. We've got to believe that good things are on their way.

For most of us this is nearly impossible to accept. We find it difficult to comprehend that there are opportunities out there for us. We've made up our minds that like every other year, this year is going to be the same. We're longing for change. Nevertheless, we don't want to change our perspectives.

A few months ago, I was at a restaurant with a friend of mine. She kept complaining about how miserable her life was. She hated college, she hated home and she hated life. She told me, 'I can't bear to see any more of this.' The lady next to us overheard our conversation and she told my friend, 'Well, I know a place where there are people who don't have to see any of this.' My friend was happy when she heard this. The lady went on to say, 'There's a cemetery a few miles from here. If you go there, you'll never have to see any of these things.' My friend was mortified. Fortunately, she learnt a lesson she would always remember. And, I never heard her complain about anything after that day.

Personally, I can never forget those words. I realized that everything my friend had been complaining about, was what she had wanted at one point or other in her life. She had studied so that she could make it to college. When she was in college, she hated it and wanted to go home. At home, she hated to live with her family. Now, she wanted to work. Soon, she would start working and hate that too.

For most of us, this story is familiar, we want things in our life but when we get those things, they lose their value, or sometimes, we don't get what we want. Then we start believing that we can never achieve our goals.

If you belong to the second group, I have a story for you. There was once a young boy, the youngest of eight brothers. He was different from the rest of his family. This young boy was a loner. He spent most of the time in the fields, tending his father's sheep. Nobody thought much of him. Now, this boy could've thought, 'I am born to be a shepherd and live in these fields. My brothers are more talented than I. I can never achieve anything. This is my destiny.'

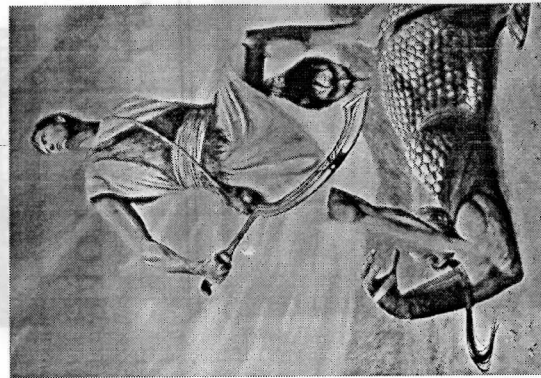
But he never thought in that manner. There were times he felt lonely in those fields. There were



January 2021

8

Don Bosco's Madonna



days when he felt he wasn't good enough. But he never lost hope. He knew he was born for a purpose, that he was predestined for greater things. He affirmed this to himself by saying, 'I will live to see goodness and mercy.' Because he believed in his dreams, they were fulfilled. The same shepherd boy lived to defeat a giant and became one of the greatest kings and conquerors of all time. His name was David. David's life and situations changed because he believed that they would.

Like David, there was another young man who had a vision for his life. He dreamt of a better life for himself and everyone around him. He wanted to lead his people and use his voice for causes he believed in. He ran for the state legislature. Sadly, he lost. However, this wasn't his only defeat. He lost a total number of seven times; rejected by the people he wanted to represent. Imagine this: you have a

dream but you can never achieve it, not because you don't believe in yourself but because people don't believe in your potential. This man could've thought, 'I'm a failure. Nobody believes in me.'

But, he didn't. He didn't need people to believe in him or support him. He realized that if he believed in himself and kept on trying, he would succeed. Because he never gave up on his dreams, they came true. This man lived to become one of the greatest leaders of all time.

His name was Abraham Lincoln. Like King David and Abraham Lincoln, we also have dreams and goals for ourselves. However, instead of working to achieve them, we spend time complaining, blaming others or talking about our failures. That is the way never to achieve anything.

We need to understand that there will be times in our lives where we feel dejected, lonely or depressed. However, we have a choice. We can choose to make it a habit to feel this way every time we fail or we can learn from failures and come back stronger. This choice is completely in our hands.

My mind always goes back to the lady in the restaurant. If life went completely our way, we would've been bored to death. Because, life happens differently, there is a driving force in each one of us to want to strive. If life wasn't filled with surprises, both good and bad we would stagnate. For any human being, stagnation is another form of death.

Next time you think of giving up, think of it this way. Do you want to be amongst the conquerors or the conquered? Do you want to be amongst the leaders or the followers? The choice is yours. □

January 2021

9

Don Bosco's Madonna

HEAVEN IN THE STORM

Interview with Fr. Simo, a Salesian in Syria

"We really came closer together during this war and we really felt like a family. We cried together. We were afraid together."

"We lived the joy of being together. The boys told us: 'Here at the oratory, we feel like we're in heaven.'"

Dear Simo, can you introduce yourself?

I am Simo Zakerian, a Salesian priest. I'm a Syrian of Armenian origin. I was born on July 2, 1978 in Kamishli, north east Syria, on the border with Turkey. My parents are from the Armenian Apostolic (Orthodox) Church. At home we speak Armenian and Arabic. I met the Salesians at the Salesian oratory when I was 12 and I grew up in that oratory.

I liked playing football and the Salesians gave me the opportunity to play and meet friends, so slowly, the Salesian house became home for me.

The life of the Salesians fascinated me and aroused many questions within me: who makes them do what they do? Why are they here serving us? How much are they paid? Why?

After the long experience with the Salesians, as a boy and a young man at the oratory, I decided to experience the aspirantate and the pre-novitiate in Damascus. In 2001 I began my novitiate in Lebanon and made my first profession in September 2002.

After my internship and philosophy, I went to Turin, to the Crocetta, to study theology. I was ordained a priest in the Armenian Catholic rite on September 11, 2011 in Kamishli. My first obedi-



ence after my ordination was at the oratory of Aleppo and I spent five years in that city, from 2010 to 2015. During four of these years there was a ferocious war! After Aleppo I was sent to Damascus and there, for two years I was the rector of the community. At the time of this article (2018) I had begun my service as Rector in Alexandria in Egypt. I am also the delegate for Youth Ministry in the province of the Middle East.

What was your family like?

Mine is a large family, we were eleven of us living in the same house. Grandma, dad, mom, six sisters, my brother and myself. My mother passed away in 2003 and in 2004 my grandmother. We were a very simple and quiet family. Currently all except two are married. After the war in Syria, they left with their children for Europe: Holland and Sweden. My dad and my sister are left in

Kamishli.

How did you know you had a vocation?

The priests in our country were a bit distant from the people, especially from boys and young people. When I went to attend Mass at the age of eight, I said to myself: 'one day I will be at the altar and raise the chalice and sing as the Armenian priest does.' Then I met the Salesians and I was surprised by the way they mingled among us and how they treated us with kindness and affection. They were two Italian Salesian missionaries. I fell in love with Don Bosco. Prayer and discernment did the rest.

What is the socio-political reality of Syria today?

There has been no Spring in Syria! The rebels, who are mostly fundamentalists destroyed our country. People from more than 80 nations came to fight against the Syrian army, which is the country's official army. They were all supported by the countries of the Arabian Gulf and the numerous countries around us. Before that, the Syrian people lived well in every sense: security, coexistence, socially, economically and their openness to the world. This war has taken us back more than 50 years.

Currently, the situation in the country is gradually improving. The violence is decreasing and security is returning once more. It appears that Russia and the US are coming to an agreement to end this critical situation in the country.

How do young people live?

The youth situation is very

difficult. Many young people have left their homeland and gone abroad, especially to Europe and Canada. The Syrians "within," the small and the great, have internal conflicts and have suffered a lot with so many fears and having to ruthlessly live with death every day. The economic situation is very difficult. It is a miracle that we survive. A dollar in 2010 was 50 Syrian pounds, today it is 500 Syrian pounds, so everything is increasingly expensive. It is a crazy way to live like this while the wages remain the same.

What happens now?

I think the future of Syria will be beautiful and bright, but that will take time. I am sure that as soon as this international conflict ends the Syrians will be able to rebuild Syria again. Above everything, rebuild the Syrian from within, being people of reconciliation, hospitality and peace.

What are some of the best experiences you've had?

Above all, experiences of faith and hope. I have learned so much from lay collaborators (Cooperators, catechists, animators, volunteers...). They taught me what it means to come and serve during war and in life-threatening situations. Yes, they've taught me a lot!

Personally, I don't know how we managed to carry on our activities while death surrounded us on every side. I really don't have a human answer. I have a faith response, yes. Both we (the Salesians), the animators, the children and the young people trusted in God; in his presence among us in those terrible

situations. While we could hear the roar of weapons and bombs outside, we continued to play, and study and pray inside. Among the most profound experiences there was also death. The death of our oratory members made us think a lot and reflect on life and the faith we have in God and in Jesus, our life and resurrection. What moved me was that our children and young animators lived those moments of pain with a strong faith in the Risen Lord, despite suffering and tears. Furthermore, war and suffering helped us to be more genuine and above all it strengthened among us the family spirit. With this war we have come closer to one another and truly feel like a family. We cried together and were afraid together, we rejoiced together. The boys told us: "Here at the oratory we feel we are in heaven." Outside the war was raging. Inside the oratory they lived with joy in their hearts, a joy that flowed from God; from the Eucharist and Confessions.

Who are your daily "members"?
Young people, children and families. In winter: catechism classes, group meetings, group sports, formation of catechists and animators, Sunday Masses, aid to the people. In summer, daily summer activities involving hundreds of children and young people. Every day, there were several spiritual direction sessions and moments of encouragement.

Do you find it difficult?
Yes, it is seriously difficult when you encounter young people who ask you to help them with a problem and you can do nothing about it. You can't change anything, especially when they lose a family member; or you've got to find reasons to encourage young people to stay in the country and not to leave their homeland; then there are the serious economic difficulties of families and young people. □



Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON

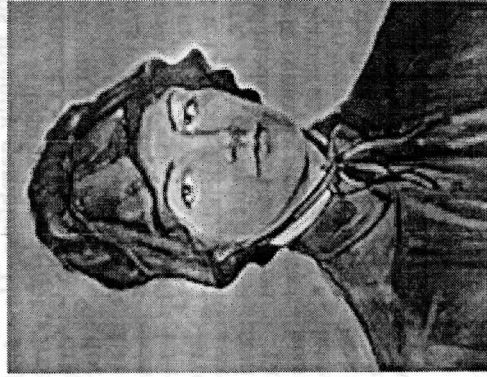
(4 January)

"Oh my God, forgive what I have been, correct what I am and direct what I will be."

EARLY LIFE

Elizabeth Ann Bayley was the youngest of two girls born to Richard Bayley and Catherine Charlton on August 28, 1774. Her father was a surgeon and her mother, was a homemaker. Both her parents' families were among the earliest European settlers in the New York area. Despite their immigrant status, they had established themselves well in the region and were looked upon as elite families. Elizabeth grew up in privilege and shared her mother's deep Episcopalian faith. Her maternal grandfather had been a priest of St. Andrew's Church on Staten Island for 30 years.

Elizabeth was born at a time when America was going through quite some political changes. 1774 was the year when the American nation was taking shape. The flag had just been approved and was beginning to gain popularity. The American form of government and the ideals it stood for was also in the process of being finalized. In the midst of all these political



developments, Dr. Richard offered his services to the immigrants who came to New York on ships and also reached out to native New Yorkers who were smitten by the yellow fever. Catherine ensured that the girls were not wanting in either care or support at their tender age. She shared with them her Episcopalian faith and instilled in them a concern for the needy.

Sadly, Catherine died giving birth to the couple's third daughter who also sadly passed away a few months later. Richard realized that he would not be able to bring up the girls himself and therefore married Charlotte Amelia Barclay who came from the notable Roosevelt family.

Elizabeth was a quiet girl who turned to reading to cope with her situation and interact with the world. Her family's wealth meant that they had a well-furnished library which Elizabeth loved to frequent. She read novels and the classics but had a special affection for the Bible. Her birth-mother had spoken to her about the Bible and fascinated her with its stories. When she discovered the book itself, she fell awestruck by the pictures that the Bible painted. Her faith was slowly springing to life. Her father was not a very devout man himself but through his own life of service, he showed his daughters the importance of loving and serving others. This message was reinforced whenever Elizabeth would accompany her step-mother on her charitable rounds, as she visited the poor in their homes to distribute food and other necessities.

MARRIED LIFE

At the tender age of 19, Elizabeth tied the knot with William Magee Seton, a 25 year old businessman. They were deeply in love and their blossoming romance was the talk of the town. The fire of their romance met the grace of God and very soon, children were filling the Seton household with life and love. Everything seemed so

perfect. The marriage was happy and the business was flourishing. During this happiness, Elizabeth notes down in her diary, "my own home at twenty - the world - that and heaven too - quite impossible."

The roses made way for the thorns and soon the happy family was facing tough challenges. William lost his father and inherited not just the family business but care for his seven half brothers and sisters. The sudden change of hands took a toll on the business which began to show signs of decline. With the decline of business also came the decline of William's health. He could not keep the business afloat and the burden for caring for a big family weighed heavy on him. Nothing seemed to work and before long, the couple were forced to file for bankruptcy.

In the years preceding the meltdown of the business, Elizabeth lived a model Episcopalian life. She was regular for communion and even had a spiritual director in whose guidance she put total faith. She used her wealth to reach out to the poor and needy just as she used to do with her stepmom.

CONVERSION

William was nearing death's door. His doctors believed that a change of weather would do him some good. William and Elizabeth moved their family to Italy, where William had some business associates who would also try and help him keep the family business afloat. Sadly, things didn't work out as they would have wanted and William succumbed to his illness.

January 2021

14

Don Bosco's Madonna

While in Italy, Elizabeth came in touch with Catholicism. She saw the difference in the way people reached out to her and the family in their difficult moments. Gradually, she was led to the Catholic faith. Her Italian friends helped her receive Catholic instruction and get into the Catholic mindset by living out the Gospel in concrete acts of love and charity toward one's neighbour. As she contemplated making the switch from Episcopalianism to Catholicism, she was struck by the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the conviction that the Catholic Church came down from the Apostles and Christ.

In 1805, she took the final step and officially joined the Catholic Church. Sadly, she did not find any sympathy or support from her family members. The family's reaction is understandable given that her father was a priest for many years and the family was of considerable status and repute. This lack of support did not deter Elizabeth in any way. She went on to open a school in Baltimore. This served the double purpose of providing her employment and a fixed income while also looking after the educational requirements of her children. A little later, she received an offer by a priest to run a school for girls. Her efforts met with success and very soon she found herself assisted by other young women. Gradually, this group developed into a religious community with Elizabeth as its head. They formed the Sisters of St. Joseph and were the first indigenous American congregation.

January 2021

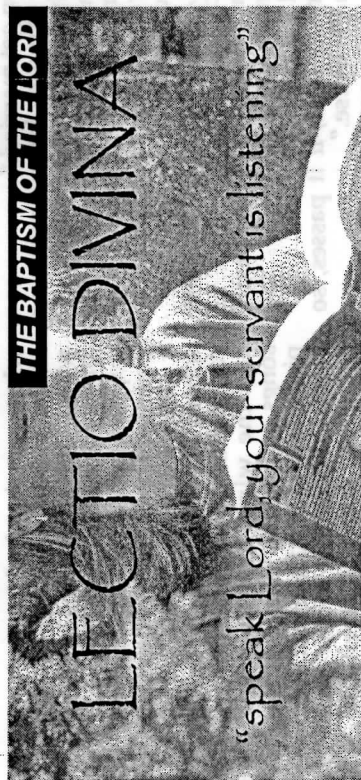
15

Don Bosco's Madonna

PERENNIAL LIGHT

Elizabeth is a pioneer of Catholic education in the United States. Her congregation sought to provide free education to Catholics in order to look after their educational and spiritual needs. Her passion for the faith led her to spend herself for the good of her wards and enlighten young minds with the knowledge of God and the world. Her personal experience with children and her commitment to Christian charity set her apart as an educator par excellence. This does not mean that she did not face any difficulties in this venture. She faced many difficulties as does anyone who is engaged in the art of education. Training young people is not easy. They will test your patience and try the limits of your tolerance but they will also shower you with love and affection if you are able to hold yourself in the face of all their childish mischief.

Elizabeth's life was marked by hardship and challenge but the stand out quality was her faith in the midst of it all. When her father-in-law passed away she accepted the extended family he left behind in faith knowing well that things will not be easy given her own already large family and their mediocre business. After she had founded her congregation, she was faced with the typical difficulties of leading and guiding her fellow sisters, many of whom did not agree with her views and sought to do things as they saw fit. Yet, Elizabeth did not lose hope. She clung on to the faith that was nurtured in her daily reading of the Bible, the daily reception of the Lord in Holy Communion and the daily interaction with the Blessed Mother, the mother of all believers and the way to Jesus. □



THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

LECTIO DIVINA

"speak Lord, your servant is listening"

EVEN JESUS WAS ON THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN

Chino Biscontin

For several centuries the people of Israel heard the voice of God through the prophets. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they were particularly close to God, so they could see with his eyes and judge events and the people by God's criteria. And they could speak in his name. Often, they began their messages with the statement: "Thus says the Lord," just as often they concluded saying: "The Word of the Lord." But a few decades after their return from the Babylonian exile (about five centuries before the birth of Jesus), there were no more prophets. The people of Israel suffered much during this period: "All our sacred symbols are gone, there are no more prophets left, and no one knows how long this will last" (Isaiah 74:9). In the meantime, the priests and scholars took care to put in writing what they called the echo of the Word of God, memories of the past and the preaching of the prophets.

Over the centuries, the conviction that gained strength was that when God decided to send the Messiah, he

would entrust a prophet with the work of preparing the people. It was thought that he would be the prophet Elijah who had not died but had simply been kidnapped in a chariot of fire and whisked off to heaven. Till today the Jew while celebrating Passover in their families always leave an empty chair, waiting for the prophet Elijah.

It is not difficult to imagine the great impression that the figure of John the Baptist made. He behaved like one of the ancient prophets, claiming to have been sent by God to prepare for the immanent coming of the Messiah. He invited everyone to take note of the new situation that God was causing in the history of his people and to take appropriate measures promptly. He conceived the Messiah as a judge who would separate those faithful to God from the sinners, assigning the latter to definite perdition: "He has his winnowing shovel with him, to thresh out all the grain and gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out" (Lk 3:17).

John operated on the banks of the River Jordan and invited those who listened to him to be baptized. A symbolic action that had three meanings: the first was to express one's will to convert and purify oneself from all sin; the second, a solemn commitment to behave beyond reproach henceforth. To understand the third meaning it must be borne in mind that the ford on the Jordan, near Jericho, where John was baptizing, was the one through which the people of the Exodus entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. So, John invited them to return and be faithful to the Covenant that God had made with the generation that received the Ten Commandments, the generation of the Exodus. The promise of the prophet Hosea comes to mind: "I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart" (Hosea 2:16).

It was especially among the working classes that the Baptist found an audience. The authorities and the priests of the Temple showed scepticism and coldness. He asked them a question: "Tell me, where did John's right to baptize come from: was it from God or from human beings? They started to argue among themselves: "What shall we say? If we answer, 'From God,' he will say, 'Why then, did you not believe John?' But if we say, 'From human beings' (they were afraid of the people because everyone was convinced that John had been a prophet). So, their answer to Jesus was, 'We don't know' (Mk 11:30-33).

For his part, Jesus, from Nazareth, before starting his mission, went to listen to John. He believed that this man really spoke in the name of God. Jesus will say of him: "I assure you that John the Baptist

is greater than anyone who has ever lived. (Mt 11:11). Amazingly, he was Baptized even though he knew no sin. The Gospel accounts of the event reveal that concern to get the people to understand correctly why Jesus behaved that way. True, Jesus was sinless. But cleansing of sins was not the only meaning of that baptism. It also meant opening oneself with faith to the proclamation of a new intervention, a definitive one; of God in the History of his people. An intervention that required trust in God, the joy of his renewed closeness to them, and his readiness to support them. It was necessary to set out a renewal of the Covenant between God and his people.

Jesus did not think in an individualistic manner. He was part of a people and so he shared their predicament, he joined their caravan like the others. The Gospel according to John says: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). That was how Jesus linked his destiny with that of his people.

His joyful readiness to trust in God, the Father in his new closeness and solidarity with his brothers, even in their sins, opens the soul of Jesus wide to the explosion of the Holy Spirit. It will be the Spirit who already dramatically fills him with his light and his strength for the mission during his forty days in the desert. He became exactly what made the Baptist call him: "Lamb of God" (Jn 1, 36). And again: "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. [...] He said to me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen it, and I tell you that he is the Son of God." (Jn 1: 32-34) □

January 2021

Quiet Spaces

A SURPRISING EMBRACE

This was a morning homily that Pope Francis gave on Thursday January 8, 2016 at the chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae.

The Holy Year of Mercy reminded us that "God always loves first," unconditionally, and he welcomes us just as we are, by embracing us and forgiving us like a father. At Mass on Friday morning, Pope Francis addressed especially those who acknowledge themselves as sinners, reminding them of the certainty of God's love.

The Apostle John, the Pontiff began, "continues to speak to the early Christians about the two commandments that Jesus taught us: to love God and love our neighbour." In the passage from the First Letter of John proposed in the day's Liturgy (4:7-10), we read: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God." And, Francis noted, "this word, 'love', is a word that is often used but, when you use it, you don't know exactly what it means." What then, is love? Sometimes, the Pope said, "we think of the love in soap operas: no, that doesn't seem like love. Or love might seem like enthusiasm for a person, which then burns out."

The real question then, is: "where does true love come from?" John writes: "he who loves is born of God", for "God is love." The Apostle does not say: "all love is God." He says instead: "God is love." John continues, saying that "God loved us so much that he 'sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him.'" Thus, "God gives his life in Jesus, in order to give us life," Francis affirmed. "Love is beautiful, to love is beautiful, and in heaven there will be only love, charity. So says Paul." And if love "is beautiful, one is always strengthened and grows in the gift of one's own life: one grows by giving of oneself to others."

Francis then reread another passage of the Letter of John: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us." This confirms that "God loved us first; he gave us life out of love, he gave life and his Son out of love." Therefore, "when we find God, there is always a surprise: it is first he who waits for us; it is he who finds us."

With reference to a passage taken from the Gospel according to Mark, which recounts the episode of the multiplication of loaves (6:34-44), the Pope asked that we look to Jesus. "Those people followed him to listen to him, because he spoke like one with authority, not like the scribes," Francis explained. "He looked at those people and went further. Precisely because he loved, the Gospel says, 'he had compassion on them,' which is not the same as having pity." The correct word is "compassion: love led him to 'suffer with' them, to be involved in the people's life." And, Francis said, "the Lord is always there, loving first: he is waiting for us, he is the surprise."

This is precisely what happens, the Pope recalled, to "Andrew when he goes to Peter to tell him: 'We have found the Messiah, come!' Peter

goes, and Jesus looks at him and says to him: 'Are you Simon? You shall be Peter.' He was waiting for him with a mission. [Jesus] loved him first."

The same happens "when Zachaeus, who was small, climbs the tree to better see Jesus," who "passes by, lifts his eyes and says: 'Zachaeus, come down, I want to go to supper at your house.' Zachaeus, who wanted to meet Jesus, realizes that Jesus had been waiting for him."

Francis then recalled the story of Nathanael who, "a bit skeptical, goes to see the one whom they say is the Messiah." Jesus says to him: "when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." So, "God always loves first." The idea is also recalled in the parable of the Prodigal Son: "when the son — who had spent all of his father's inheritance on vices — returned home, he realized that his father had been waiting for him. God is always waiting for us first. Before us, always. And when the other son didn't want to come to the feast, because he did not understand his father's attitude, his father went to find him. And God is this way with us: he loves us first, always."

Thus, the Pope said, "we can see in the Gospel how God loves: when we have something in our heart and we want to ask the Lord's forgiveness, it is he who is waiting for us, to grant forgiveness."

This Year of Mercy, Francis said, is also in part so "that we may know that the Lord is awaiting us, each of us." He is waiting "to embrace us, nothing more, in order to say: 'Son, daughter, I love you. I let my Son be crucified for you; this is the value of my love; this is the gift of love.'"

The Pope recommended that this truth always be pondered: "The Lord is waiting for me, the Lord wants me to open the door of my heart, because he is there waiting to enter." It is unconditional.

Of course, someone might say: "Father, no, no, I would like to, but I have so many ugly things inside!" Francis' response to this was clear: "It is better! Better! Because he is waiting for you, just as you are, not as they tell you that 'one should be.' You should be as you are. This is how he loves you, he embraces you, kisses you, forgives you."

The Pope then offered a concluding exhortation, inviting us to go with haste to the Lord and say: "Lord, you know that I love you." Or if "I don't feel like it, to say this: 'Lord, you know that I would like to love you, but I am such a sinful man, such a sinful woman.'" Do so with the certainty that he will do as the father did "with the Prodigal Son who spent all his money on vices. I will not let you finish your speech, I will silence you with an embrace: the embrace of God's love." □

THE END OF THE WORLD

Adapted and translated by Ian Doulton
from stories by Pierluigi Menato

"Have you heard? Thursday everyone's going to die."
"Will we all die? How will it happen?"

"There's a comet coming. It will collide with the earth; the earth falls apart and all of us... Imagine what will happen to us! We'll all fall into an abyss, down to the 'depths,' and there...my dear...."

"Who told you that?"

"Everyone's talking about it. Even the newspapers are very clear about it. The precise time when the comet passes by is also mentioned, if I'm not mistaken. Sometime after midnight. Oh yeah, in short...it's down there somewhere..."

"So, I'm sorry, this will be the end of the world."

"Precisely, you're quite right; it's the end of the world!"

"When did you say it'll pass by?"

"Thursday night. And we'll stay up because, if we've got to die, it's better that we watch it with our eyes open for the last time in this world. So, at least we'll be able to say something to those on the other side, don't you think?"

"Sure, that's some comfort; but in short...my dear, there is one thing I must say: whoever thought of this comet thing got it right: we're going to die, all of us: the poor, the rich, the young and the old? Right? We go with a jolt and then a chasm opens and swallows us up, all screaming, if we have time to scream, that is. Even those nightclub singers,

when their gig is over! I almost like the idea, because for once, the same law applies to everyone."

Listen to those two talking about people: men and women, boys and girls, even the waiter at the nearby pub, the lady walking to the supermarket, everyone. No doubt, they're all talking about the comet.

The pharmacist was the first to leave the chattering group to concentrate on what he called: "planetary motions." The banter at the bar now languished and drifted toward the subject of the comet whose return was talked about after seventy-six years, seven months and thirteen days.

Perhaps, the only one, who spoke about it with some competence was Father Benedict of the nearby Elmsworth Abbey. Just by doggedly walking around the county and asking for donations he managed to set up some sort of seismic-astronomical observatory at the monastery. So, what he said to the people around was considered the absolute truth. And the good abbot had been restless now for some days. Every now and again the monastery bell rang; people asked for more details about the comet.

Someone asked: "Father, since I have to get married, should I take this news into account?"

"My son, it's always bad to give advice in such cases. Get married, then we'll see."

"What if we all die?"

"Then don't get married."

"But what if...we don't die?"

"Then get married."

Five minutes later, there was another knock:

"Father Benedict, I have a bill that expires on Thursday: but according to the news, what can they do if I don't pay up?"

"Son, that's a matter for your conscience."

"What if the comet doesn't pass?"

"So much the better."

"And if it passes?"

"Then my dear, if it passes, so much the worse."

Yes, but poor Father Benedict was summoned by Fr. Geronimo, fearing that the poor monk would soon lose his patience. So, since he had little to die for, he thought it best to offer everything to God and get on with his ministry as an astronomer and a director of souls.

Up, in the little house hidden among the cypresses and olive trees on the hillside, surrounded by boxwood and oleanders, there was someone talking.

Two sisters, no longer young, shy and frightened; always kept to themselves by their contemplative way of life. They dedicated themselves to doing good with the sole purpose of exercising true Christian charity. These two elderly ladies now trembled at the mere thought of the huge catastrophe that seemed to loom over the whole world.

They asked their trusted maid, a woman as frightened as her mistresses, what would happen on that terrible night if the world were completely torn apart. They looked anxiously at the sun blazing across the countryside looking for tell-tale signs, sure signs of a first warning...but

what were they looking for?

The fields were ripe with wheat, like a vast blonde mass, all gold and studded with bright poppies contrasted against the blue sky. The hillsides and slopes, a patchwork of varied hues, spread like a brightly coloured carpet during that great summer and the wind, arousing new songs among the foliage of the pines and oaks and like vast deep breaths descending to the great boundless ocean of green and blue. Everything spoke of love and eternity.

In those days, Oswald, a man with few scruples, profiteer of the humble and the timid, appeared with a yellow envelope under his arm at the back gate. He crossed the garden full of flowers and asked the woman who had come to open the gate: "the ladies?"

"What do you want?"

"Oh, my dear, I need to speak urgently to them about something very important and very interesting."

That faithful maid had been gone a while leaving Oswald waiting in the damask walled parlour which had paintings of ancestors, nobility, prelates, loyalists, soldiers, artists...on the walls.

When the ladies eventually appeared, one more timid than the other, spying each other's gestures and movements, the visitor bowed low after which, with a smooth tongue began to speak.

He could not help but deprecate the fate of the planets, the fickleness of the constellations, the precariousness of the satellites, like men, they were always at odds with each

other. And as if that were not enough, this comet was now coming to collide with the earth and the inevitable and decisive catastrophe was in the offing hurtling irreparably towards poor humanity.

How many precious properties would be lost and how much inheritance left behind! To whom? What a fatal destiny.... "But in this world," Oswald went on, getting more fervent, "even in the extreme circumstances of life, it was always necessary to use one's common sense, calmly trusting in God, the only infallible judge of our good and evil. Above all we should try to help those in need so that we will be gratefully remembered by the poor and the humble."

In the immanence of this disaster Oswald turned into a philanthropist. He offered to help them set their affairs in order helping channel their bequests towards public and private charities like hospitals, retirement homes, schools, kindergartens and homes for abandoned

children, etc. etc.

He suggested that the "ladies" leave their assets to a pious congregation of sisters. But they had already prepared a deed of donation of their assets, possessions and anything else that had. Accepting that he had already been outwitted he offered to take their deed of conveyance to the competent authority for his endorsement.

The two sisters, stunned by his long speech, looked at each other confused. Then the elder of the two ventured: "But most certainly. We have bequeathed everything down to the last brick of our property; all of it."

The other didn't say a word so he looked at the younger sister who was yet to open her mouth and he questioned her again with his eyes and saw a sense of resignation which caused her to say: "Would you like us to read the deed of donation?" "Gladly."

The little man dressed like a dandy put his gold-rimmed glasses on his sly eyes and read aloud, in a solemn voice, emphasizing the most salient phrases of the document that highlighted the generosity of the worthy donors to the "most revered and noble house of Count Meynard." Immediately after that came the date of the space for the signatures.

One more, the two sisters



exchanged a resigned glance. Then both, silently signed the document in a single copy with trembling hands. And taking it with delight, Oswald was off.

That Thursday evening the whole town seemed very restless. People flocked into the town square by the side streets to see what would happen at that hour.

The sky was windswept and clear, all bedecked with stars. A cool breeze from the hills swept down through the houses of that little town. After the heat of the day it felt so soothing. Here and there, there were some formidable "farewell" dinner parties. A little before midnight the mood began to change. Speeches rambled on, speaking neither of heaven nor earth; outrageous songs, laughter and reveries went on... At ten, after having played all the typical folk songs, people were still singing and laughing in the courtyard of the Town Hall. The girls were laughing at their own comments and at what they saw.

All of a sudden, a police car screeched to a halt in front of the village fountain. The chief, fed up that the whole shebang had gone on for quite some hours now, wanted to make himself understood: "If you don't get over with this, I'll slap you inside, you and the comet."

"But we've just warmed up, officer..."

"Other than warmed up, you're all like barrels full of wine!"

"Oh, it was the dinner."

"Ok lads, that's not the spirit! If I denounce you for insulting the police, it will be all the worse for

you!"

It was almost midnight and everything still smelled heavenly. Everyone's eyes turned to the sky; but up there, it was just calm and dark blue with the stars twinkling merrily. Then, like a huge deep sigh, time seemed to move toward the hours before dawn. A rooster crowed from a distant barn and, in the distance, a faint glow heralded that dawn was breaking.

The two sisters, watching the sky from their window, were in each other's arms waiting for the end of the world.

Tired and exhausted from the long vigil, they trembled with horror at the slightest rustle of the leaves, the distant squeak of a bird or the whisper of the wind as it came down from the neighbouring hills. They shut their eyes and were truly terrified when from time to time a luminous trail shot across the sky; something that happens often every summer in the night sky.

In all their lives, they too had never felt like this. The earth seemed to quiver with excitement when dawn was about to break.

Peasants, in large groups, happily went down to their fields carrying their scythes prepared to harvest their wheat; they thought it best as they looked up at the clear sky. The bleating of flocks and the sound of cow bells along the hillsides accompanied by the songs of young girls in love. At that moment an impetuous concert of birds greeted the rising sun in praise of the Lord.

And the two women, remained poor, humbly weeping at their plight. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 24

by Michele Molineris

74. Don Bosco tested (1858)

In 1858, in Rome, Don Bosco was glad to meet Fr. Bresciani once again, who, one day, meeting him with others, said to him: "How do you manage to win the hearts of youngsters so easily?"

- Do they want to see me? - replied Don Bosco. - Just watch me.

Not far away he saw a group of urchins intently gambling. He went towards them and stood right in their midst. One of them said: - What are you doing here?

- What do you want? I want to be friends with you.

- Who says so? Get lost and don't disturb us!

- But if I'm your friend... while I'm here, I've brought you a beautiful medal which I want you to have to remember me. I want you to keep it as a memento of a friend who loves you very much.

Then the little urchins began to pull off their caps, stretch out their hands to him and to thank him for the mementos.

- Not only that - said Don Bosco - I want you to give one to your mum and dad...

What followed was very touching. He wanted one for his grandmother and for his sister and little brothers; then there was the usual press around Don Bosco that everyone in Turin was used to.

When he left them, those youngsters thanked him with touching words and kept repeating: - Thank you Father,

thank you.

Don Bosco went back to where he had left and found them all shocked. He himself heard them say: 'Only you, Don Bosco can work those miracles. Anyone wishing to imitate him would fail.' (Francesia, *Vita di Don Bosco*, 222; v. Also: EBM V, 601).

75. A son who saves his father (1858)

A government employee at Turin who had enforced laws detrimental to the rights of the Church was grievously ill. He also had not been to the sacraments for many years because he had lost his faith through regular reading of irreligious publications. His druggist, who had been told by the doctor that the patient would hardly survive another day, promptly informed the pastor. The latter, knowing the patient would have nothing to do with priests, asked Don Bosco to try to save his soul.

Don Bosco went immediately. To his surprise, on calling at the man's house, he was joyfully welcomed by his lively young son who was a faithful member of the Valdocco festive oratory. His father loved the boy very deeply as he was everything to him, his only happiness in life. Sometimes, the lad would offer his father the crucifix to kiss; the man, though not religious - would comply so as not to hurt his feelings. At other times the boy would say, "Dad, let me ask Don Bosco to give you his blessing. It would do you a lot of good. It will make you better." His father would decline but always so as not to pain him. Later, the father would mutter to himself, "Such superstitions these priests put into

January 2021

24

Don Bosco's Madonna

the heads of the young!"

As soon as he saw Don Bosco, the boy immediately exclaimed, "Oh, Don Bosco! Come to my dad! He is very sick!"

"Is he? Then please go in and tell him I am here."

"Dad will surely be happy to see you!" he replied, hurrying to his father's bedroom.

"Dad, Don Bosco is here! I can bring him in, can't I?" Without waiting for a reply, he ran back, took Don Bosco by the hand, and led him in, saying: "Come! Dad wants your blessing."

Don Bosco tried to hold back, wanting to know what the father had said and insisting he be better announced than that. But the boy did not give him a chance, half leading and half pushing him into the room.

The sick man gave Don Bosco an angry look which he ignored. "How are you sir?" he asked kindly.

"As you can see," was the dry response.

"Cheer up! Albert will pray for you, and I'll do the same."

"Don't bother. I don't need that. Forget it."

The youngster, embarrassed by the rude reception, walked out of the room. Availing himself of the privacy, Don Bosco went on, "Don't you believe in the power of an innocent child's prayer? Still, I didn't come here to talk about that. I just wanted to say hello. I think highly of you."

He then began a friendly conversation that gradually softened the patient and put him into a better mood. Noticing his favourable reaction, Don Bosco said at one point, "It's getting late, and I don't want to impose on you

January 2021

25

Don Bosco's Madonna

any longer. May I give you a blessing before I go?"

"As you wish," the patient replied rather coldly but without ill feeling. Don Bosco then called in the boy.

"Why are you calling my son?" the man asked him.

"I want him to say a Hail Mary with me, for you"

"It's not necessary. Don't bother him."

But Don Bosco insisted, and when the boy came in, Don Bosco said to him: "Albert, let's say a Hail Mary together for your dad. He's quite sick, and we must ask Our Lord to spare him. Were he to die, you would be all alone, you'd lose your best and dearest friend, and you would be exposed to moral dangers with no one to guide and help you. Your inexperience could lead you to sad consequences. And then, at the end of your life, how much you would regret not having a friend at your side. And what a tragedy if you should perhaps be parted from your father through eternity!"

Such thoughts Don Bosco briefly, prudently, and strongly expressed to the boy, while meaning them for the father. Somehow, he was describing the father's own life who had been an orphan from his early youth. Albert was crying, while his father tried to hide his feelings with only too little success.

"Come now, Albert," Don Bosco went on, "let us kneel and say not one, but three Hail Mary's." After the prayers, he sent the boy out of the room and said to the father: "Please make the Sign of the Cross." The man indifferently obliged as Don Bosco blessed him. "Then Don Bosco blandly inquired of his studies, the

positions he held, his boyhood, youth and adult life. The patient gradually opened up and Don Bosco tactfully extracted from him all that was essential for sacramental absolution while gently probing his frailties. Finally, seeing that the patient was very tired, he said to him: "Now, if you wish, I'll give you absolution."

"Absolution? I must first make a confession, and I have no intention of doing that."

"You already did. What you told me was quite sufficient."

"You mean it?"

"I certainly do!"

"I can hardly believe it!"

"Now make an act of contrition and God, most good and merciful to those who are sincerely sorry, will forgive you everything."

At these words the patient broke into tears and sobbed, "God is good indeed!"

The emotion exhausted him alarmingly. Fearing he might only last a few more hours as the doctor had warned, Don Bosco hastened to ask a few more questions. Then, since the patient was willing to do all the Church required, he gave him absolution. Finally, after promising to take care of Albert, he sent word to the pastor to hurry with Holy Viaticum. He came quickly and brought the Holy Oil, but had barely time to administer the sacrament with one anointing. (EBM VI, 17-19)

76. Don Bosco in search of money (1858)

On January 20, 1858, Don Bosco was faced with a large debt, but he had no money at all. His creditor had already waited a considerable time and would brook no further

delay. By the twelfth of the month nothing had turned up to give Don Bosco a glimmer of hope. In these straits he called a few boys and told them, "Today I need a special favour from Our Lord. While I'm in town, I want you to take turns before the Blessed Sacrament and pray for my intention until my return." The boys complied.

As Don Bosco was walking near the Vincentians' church, a stranger greeted him and asked, "Don Bosco, do you happen to need money?"

"Do I! I am in dire necessity."

"Then take this!" And he handed him an envelope containing several one-thousand-lire bills.

Don Bosco hesitated in astonishment, doubting the man's sanity or seriousness.

"Why do you give me this money?"

"Just take it and use it for your boys."

"Very well, many thanks! May Our Lord reward you! Do you want a receipt?"

"No."

Don Bosco took the money. "At least tell me your name," he begged.

"It's not necessary," the stranger concluded. "The donor wants to remain anonymous. He asks only for prayers. The money is yours to do with as you please." And he quickly walked away. Obviously, this was an intervention of Divine Providence. Don Bosco immediately paid his creditor. (EBM VI, 94-95)

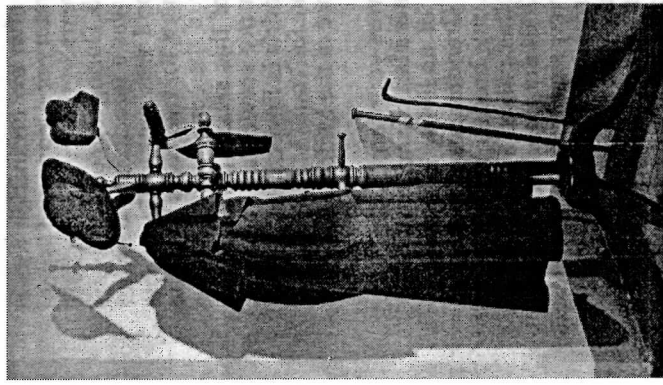
77. Don Bosco's Prescription (1858)

In 1858, Don Bosco and Don Rua went to Rome. After travelling eighteen miles along the shores of

the Mediterranean, our travellers entered a little town called Palo.

Here the coachman invited the passengers to disembark, because he intended to rest the horses and feed them. Having to stop for an hour, Don Bosco and the cleric Rua took advantage of a nearby inn. The seasickness, the custom duties, the concern of travelling companions had prevented them, indeed, almost made them forget to eat. A table was immediately prepared and the two hungry travellers ate everything that was set before them.

Meanwhile, the man who had served them had huddled in a corner of the room, wrapped in his cloak so that he looked like the



Don Bosco's Travelling Apparel

image of death. Halfway through lunch, the man approached Don Bosco and asked: "Reverend, you were seasick, weren't you?"

"Very true but now I've got a terrific appetite," replied Don Bosco.

"Well, reverend, listen to me. Don't eat any more food it would cause you trouble. You've eaten enough. I'm familiar with these things."

Don Bosco thanked him and, having begun a conversation with him, he learned that the man was suffering from fever so severe that he felt reduced to death.

"Do you know of any medicine for my illness?" asked the waiter.

"Yes, I do," answered Don Bosco. "Oh, if it would do me good, I assure you I would be very grateful."

"I have it: but first I need to know I'm talking to a good Christian."

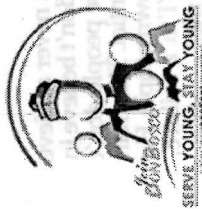
"Yes, I'm a Christian."

"Well, from today you begin to say an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary*, in honour of St Aloysius to the Blessed Virgin, and this for three months. On Sunday, go to Mass and if you have faith, be sure the fever will leave you."

"I haven't been practicing for a while now."

"Precisely for that reason," Don Bosco concluded "and trust in God. In the meantime, leave it to me. I'll prescribe you an antidote that will keep all fevers away forever."

So, he took a piece of paper and wrote his prescription with a pencil, recommending that he take it some pharmacist. The hotelier was beside himself with joy, not knowing how to express his gratitude, he kept on kissing Don Bosco's hand again and again (EBM V, 532). □



MY VOCATION STORY

CALLED IN LOVE TO LOVE

Fr. James Tuscano

I thank my God every time I think of my special call; a call to love, for I have been called in love by almighty God. I thank my God for having called me to be a Human being, a Christian, a Religious, a Salesian and a Priest. I thank God for making me very special for His kingdom, especially for young people. I thank God for my loving, caring, pious parents, my brothers and family members who have nurtured my vocation and have been my strong support in serving the Lord.

The seed of my vocation was sown very early in my life, as I am blessed with several priests and religious nuns in my family. My parents always cared, loved, and encouraged me in my desire to serve the Lord, and already from my school days, they allowed me to be close to Jesus and His beloved mother Mary. As a youngster, I enjoyed going to church, though I never had an opportunity to serve Mass. I cared for people and would always lend a helping hand to those who were in need and I visited the sick.

Though my uncle late Fr. Ignatius Tuscano, a diocesan priest was a model for me, I owe my vocation to my beloved aunt Sr. Vinalyathia SHM. She has stood by me, encouraged me, and accompanied me throughout my journey. My parents, relatives, friends and parishioners knew about my call

and thought I would follow my "uncle" as a diocesan priest. But God had other plans for me.

It was late Fr. Francis Kharja who introduced me to my Father, Guide, and Friend St. John Bosco in a three-day camp held in my parish. Though studying in class XI (Commerce), I was a wild-card entry for the Spoken English Castle at Don Bosco Borivali. Young Salesian theologians, brothers, and the priests of the community mingling with the campers in a manner that I least expected, filled my heart joy and impressed me immensely. The Salesians laughed, played, sang, danced and even dined with us. They accompanied us. They were part of us. If these followers of Jesus could express such joy and happiness in what

they were and in what they exhibited then I who always wished to be happy must be part of them. It was there that my heart made a choice and a decision. I expressed my intention to my parents, my uncle priest and my beloved aunt to be a Salesian, to follow the Lord "the Don Bosco way." Fr. Anacleto D'Mello spoke to my dad at his native place and then James Tuscano left his home for his Salesian home.

Coming from a Marathi background with poor knowledge of English and poor communication skills made life in the initial stages very challenging. The superiors and companions always encouraged me and especially corrected my English. I lost my elder brother during my initial formation and though it was a huge blow to my family, they stood by me. I still feel the loss of my elder brother. I remember my mummy's words: "We have offered you to the Lord and the Lord will take care of us; you be faithful to Him." I recollect the words of Mama Margaret to little Johnny: "When a family offers their son to God to be a priest or religious God sends His angel to take his place in that family." My family has experienced the presence of God and His angel in their lives in so many ways. My family is blessed with two priests. My younger brother is a diocesan priest. What is interesting to know is that I was the assistant of my own brother (Fr. Nilesch Tuscano) at Don Bosco Lonavla.

My Salesian life has been an enriching journey. Salesians - young and not so young have played an important role in my life. Many have touched me spiritually, emotionally, and socially and I have truly grown. Mother Mary,

the Help of Christians has never let me be alone. She has always protected me and I have seen miracles through her powerful interventions. I can enumerate numerous miracles in my life through the power of the rosary and the recitation of three Hail Mary's. My life is full of miracles. My poor eyesight was of great concern before being admitted to the novitiate. Mother Mary healed me of a very serious illness during my first year of Practical Training. I have experienced Mother Mary's protective hand during an attempt on my life in Chhotaudepur on Christmas day, during the Godhra riots on my way home from the Sunday oratory, and once again during an accident less than two years ago.

"Called in Love to Love," my ordination motto has made me a person who loves especially the poor and the young. My love for the poor grew stronger during my intellectual formation at Don Bosco Koregaon Park, Pune. It was thanks to Fr. Vincent Rasquinha, sdb that I was inspired to be with the poor and for the poor. I enjoy the company of the young people and though many wish to accompany the young I have often felt that youngsters accompany me on my journey helping me to be a worthy instrument of God. The theme "Love Calleth, Love Sendeth" of my first profession continues to inspire me to be a happy and loving Salesian forever. God loves me and I love my God through my vocation being with the young and for the young. □

+91 8482951815

vocations@sdbnb.in

joindonboscomumbai





MARY, REFUGE OF SINNERS HELPS US TO LIVE WELL

Maria Ko Ha Fong, FMA

It is always important to remember that we must trust God. Sin, however is that reality that, more than any other, leads us to be afraid of him and to lose our peace. Sin is the one great evil of the world. Jesus teaches us that we can overcome sin, we can beat it; of course, not alone, because we can't do anything by ourselves. St. Paul affirms that: "the Spirit himself comes to help us in our weakness, for we do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with signs that words cannot express. And he who searches the hearts knows the desires of the Spirit praying for the believers for he prays according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27). With God's help we can do everything because "nothing is impossible for him" (Lk. 1, 37). Jesus invites us, through the power of our good will, to do our part completely to get out of sin.

How often we read this word in the Gospel: "Repent" (Mt. 3, 2); change your life for the Kingdom of God is at hand! The Kingdom of God is in our midst, it is realized in every moment. The Eucharist, the sacraments, the gifts that God gives us are all expressions of the advancing

of the Kingdom that is making inroads into our life.

From Selfishness to Love

To be converted requires an inner change: a move from things to values, from egocentrism to altruism.

Those who really want to change their lives must have this experience (of conversion), because the Lord asks us to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5, 48). But how is this possible? If nothing is impossible for God, nothing is impossible for those who trust in him, because the Christian life is a pathway to holiness. Each of us is asked to make some progress along this path every day, following the Lord's invitation to change our mentality.

Let us not be afraid: God, who knows our heart that from its depths cries out for forgiveness, so he forgives us even before we ask him, because he reads there our desire to want to be forgiven. We are the ones who must want to change by nurturing feelings of patience, kindness, mercy and love.

We must not be afraid of temptations: everyone is tempted; Jesus was, and Mary too. They would not give in. We too, with their help will not sin. If the temptation is severe remember that word from the Gospel: "Come to me all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11, 28).

Jesus doesn't say that it will all be easy, he speaks of a yoke and of its weight, but he also tells us that they are sweet and light (Mt. 11, 30)

Overcoming Fears

There is no reason to be afraid because the Word of God, our Christian experience is nothing but the proclamation of the merciful goodness of God that invites us to look up and not to crumble in the face of our miseries however large or small they are. God's mercy is infinitely greater than our sins.

But we must let God create a new heart within us, a new mentality and new values. There is only one way for us to get out of sin and that is Jesus, the only mediator of God's forgiveness and the unique and irreplaceable way to salvation. This way is made visible through various other paths that come all together in him.

Don Bosco reduces these paths down to three: a love of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, for Mary Help of Christians and love of the Pope. That means, fidelity to Christ, to Mary and to the Church

Trust in Mary

On this journey towards forgiveness and salvation Mary always has a fundamental place. We lift up our eyes to her because want to grow in holiness and through her intercession eradicate sin from our lives. She has been given to us by God

as our helper so we can more easily reach Christ.

She is the Lord's greatest collaborator. Our unique mediator is Christ but he uses creatures and more than anyone or anything else he uses Mary; she is mother in the order of grace in the life of our soul and she has a mission of leading us to salvation which she began already during her earthly life and it goes on today.

After the apostles and disciples fled, Mary gathered them together. The Acts says that "They all gave themselves to constant prayer with one mind, together with some women and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers." She gathered them around her, she comforted and consoled them. In prayer they discovered the courage to wait for the Risen One.

We do not ask Mary to grant us forgiveness because God alone is the one who forgives, but she intercedes on our behalf for this forgiveness.

Let us implore Mary to pray for us now and at the hour of our death; "pray for us sinners" we say with confidence so that she may implore the Father and his Son Jesus to give us the strength of the Spirit to help us abandon ourselves to believe in her work of mercy and to change our lives. Mary is a mother who cares about us; she doesn't neglect, reproach us or send us away. She welcomes us as we are only to make us better: *O Lord, my heart is not proud nor do I expect too much. [...] I have quieted and stilled my soul, like a weaned child on its mothers' lap.* (From Psalm 130)

It is comforting to know that this mother, on whom we lean, in whose arms we take refuge, is Mary. □

Keeping the beat

Basil Rathbone was visiting Victor Borge in his hotel room, and the Dane was telling the actor of the versatility of the piano. He told Rathbone that he could even tell time by the piano.

The actor was sceptical; so Borge sat down and crashed out a few bars from a Sousa March.

Immediately, there was a pounding on the wall and a sleepy voice rumbled angrily: "Stop that noise, you idiot! Don't you know it's one-thirty in the morning?"

To be on Top

A little boy, taken to the ballet for the first time, watched curiously as the dancers cavorted about on their toes. "Mummy," he whispered loudly, "why don't they just get taller girls?"

Political Figures

Accountant to his fellow worker: "For a minute this deficit really had me worried...I forgot I was working for the government."

Frenzied Courtesy

A taxi was creeping slowly through the rush-hour traffic and the passenger was in a hurry. "Please," he said to the driver, "can't you go any faster?" "Of course, I can," the cabbie replied. "But I ain't allowed to leave the taxi."

Efficient Exit

After several practice-drills, the employees of a government office invited the fire chief and his staff to watch them go through the drill.

With the ringing of the fire alarm, six hundred employees evacuated the four-storey building in three minutes and ten seconds.

"Everyone was proud and pleased - until the buzzer sounded for quitting time that afternoon and someone timed that evacuation."

This time the building was cleared in two minutes flat.

Sound Strategy

The most popular record in the bar and grill is a record which is nothing but sound of a lot of typewriters going. It's played everytime one of the regulars phones home to report that he's working late at the office.

Diet Economy

The Sales Manager was going over one of his salesmen's expense accounts. "Just look at this!" he demanded. How can you spend \$ 50 on food in a single day in this small town?" "It's easy," answered the salesman cheerfully, "You just skip breakfast."

Transmission Trials

"She told me," a woman complained to a friend, "that you told her the secret I told you not to tell her."

"Well," replied her friend in a hurt tone, "I told her not to tell you I told her." "Oh dear," sighed the first woman. "Well, don't tell her I told you that she told me." □

NANTES, FRANCE

A Rwandan is facing up to 10 years in prison after he confessed to deliberately setting fire to the city's Gothic cathedral.

French media reported the 39-year-old man, named only as Emmanuel A, admitted lighting two fires in the area of a 17th-century organ and a third floor above an electrical panel in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul July 18 and a third above an electrical panel.

The man is a Catholic who had been working voluntarily at the cathedral as a warden and had the keys to the building because he was responsible for locking it up on the day of the fire.

He was questioned by police following the blaze and released without charge but rearrested on July 25. He confessed to arson later that day.

Nantes prosecutor Pierre Sennes told the Agence France-Presse news agency July 25 that the man has since been charged with "destruction and damage by fire," an offense that could carry a penalty of up to 10 years in jail and \$175,000 in fines.

The prosecutor's office also revealed that the man came to Nantes several years ago and had applied for refugee status without success, culminating in an order in 2019 for him to leave France.

The cathedral in Nantes is considered to be a jewel of French architecture. It was built between 1434 and 1891 and has been designated a historic monument by the French government because of its architectural significance.



Debris caused by a fire inside the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in Nantes, France, is seen July 19, 2020. French police have charged a cathedral volunteer with "destruction and damage by fire" in connection to the blaze. (CNS photo/Reuters/Stephane Mahe)

More than 100 firefighters had contained the blaze within two hours of it breaking out, and they stopped it from spreading to the main body of the church.

The choir organ at the west end of the building was destroyed, however, along with much of the choir area and some stained-glass windows.

A July 22 statement issued by Fr. Francois Renaud, the administrator of the Diocese of Nantes, said the fire had weakened the fabric of the cathedral and that it would be closed for repairs, which could take years to complete.

"Most of the costs will be borne by the state, which owns the building," he said, adding that the diocese would need to find funds for a new organ and the replacement of the choir stalls.

"The cathedral struck those who entered it with its light and the elevated gaze it elicited. It offered everyone peace conducive to

Regd RNI no. 9360/57;
Postal Regn. MNE/89/2018-2020
License to post without prepayment
posted at Mumbai Patrika Channel Sorting Office
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

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

A follower of Christ

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay. The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

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

You can help by establishing a Perpetual Bursar with:

Rs 5000/-, 10,000/-, 15,000/- for a boy studying for the priesthood;

But any amount, however small, will be gratefully received.

Send your offerings by Payee cheque or Draft on Mumbai banks;

MO/PO/INTL MO/BPO/Bequests, Wills, Perpetual Burses, all favouring Don Bosco's Madonna or Bombay Salesian Society or Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, (Trustee).

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

January 2021

36

Don Bosco's Madonna

recollection and prayer. We are deprived of our cathedral. But we are not deprived of the light and peace given to us by the Lord of this place. With or without a cathedral, our church will know how to shine, I am sure," he said.

The blaze came just over a year after a fire severely damaged Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, though the fire in Nantes was much smaller by comparison.

OXFAM

The world's poor and marginalized people are suffering the most from climate change impacts, though they contribute the least to the carbon emissions that are driving global warming, according to new research by Oxfam.

The 3.1 billion people who make up 50% of the world's poorest population generate just 7% of the cumulative emissions that are harming the planet, the Oxfam research shows. Meanwhile, the 63 million people who make up the world's richest 1% generate more than double that amount, or 15% of the total.

"Over the past 20 to 30 years, the climate crisis has been fuelled and our limited global carbon budget squandered in the service of increasing the consumption of the already affluent, rather than lifting people out of poverty," the report, jointly published with the Stockholm Environment Institute, noted.

"The two groups that suffer most from this injustice are those least responsible for the climate crisis: poorer and marginalized people already struggling with climate impacts today, and future generations who will inherit a depleted

carbon budget and a world accelerating towards climate breakdown," the report observed.

Former Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon noted in a comment on the report that it "shows once again that to tackle climate change we must fight for social and economic justice for everyone. My indigenous people have long borne the brunt of environmental destruction, and now is the time to listen, to integrate our knowledge and to prioritize saving nature to save ourselves."

The data show emissions by sub-Saharan Africa account for less than 1% of the total. Yet the African continent is already bearing the brunt of negative climate change impacts, Sulemana Issifu, director of research at the Centre for Climate Change and Food Security, told the Alliance for Science.

"Climate change threatens the very existence of humanity," Issifu said. "Although industrialization in Africa is very low, other models have shown that if climate change becomes very severe, Africa stands the chance to be the greatest casualty."

African agriculture is already being adversely affected by heavy downpours that result in flooding, as well as drought — both of which could be consequences of climate change, he observed. Climate change is also promoting the spread of pests on farms across the continent, Issifu said.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared at *Cornell Alliance for Science* and is republished here as part of *Covering Climate Now*, a global journalism collaboration strengthening coverage of the climate story appearing in the *National Catholic Reporter*.

34 Don Bosco's Madonna

January 2021

ONE LAST THOUGHT

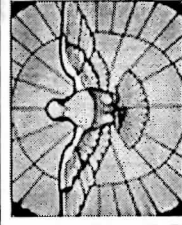
THIS ONE SHOULD SEE ME OUT



I met an old friend the other day as I walked down the street. Advancing age and declining health had taken their toll on him and he leaned heavily on his stick. He caught my glance at his new jacket and said with a laugh "This one should see me out." I knew he didn't expect to live too much longer. He hopes to be ready when the Lord calls. Like the rest of us, my friend is not perfect. He will be the first to tell you that he has much baggage to shed, imperfections to overcome, but he is a Christian man, an unselfish helpful man who to my mind is growing daily closer to God. Will the Lord call him this year? Only the Lord knows.

Will the Lord call anyone of us this year? He alone has the answer. Have we got baggage to shed, imperfections to overcome? Of course, we have! Prayer and the sacraments help us maintain a close friendship with God but perfection and final purification will only come to us when we meet God face to face in Heaven.

2021 begins with the Feast of Mary the Mother of God. Let it not be 'just another year' but twelve months in which we will try to move forward, try to change. "... To be perfect is to have changed often." — Cardinal Newman. We ask Mary our Mother to be with us throughout the year. With her help we can renew ourselves and little by little overcome those weaknesses which cause us to stumble and fall at times.



Yes, naturally stupid are all who are unaware of God, and who, from good things seen, have not been able to discover Him—who-is, or by studying the world, have not recognized the Artificer.

Wis: 3:1-4

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

JANUARY 2021

Intention for evangelization - Human fraternity
May the Lord give us the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions, praying for one another, open to all.

January 2021

35

Don Bosco's Madonna