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*O merciful God,
 protect us
 in our weakness,
 that we, who revere
 the holy Mother
 of God,
 may,
 with the help
 of her prayers,
 rise up from
 our iniquities.*

*From the Common
 of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

From The Editor's Desk
 PEOPLE COME FIRST

In this fast-paced world, where both parents are working there is little time to 'sit and listen' and 'be there' for the family, let alone the Christian community. But there are still housewives who stay at home and for whom the kitchen and the stitching, the cleaning and folding of the clothes doesn't overwhelm; in fact, they still find time to be shining lights in the Christian Community of which they are an essential part. I salute them and am humbled at their silent witness.

One such person is Maureen. She would consider herself 'an ordinary housewife.' Her life revolves around her family. She is content at home and works hard to make it a pleasant place for her family. With her husband John, her son Paul and her daughter Eileen to look after, she has plenty to keep her going. But after the usual scramble to get everyone out on time in the mornings, she finds time to fit a personal Rosary into her daily routine. It is no big deal. Yet it is an integral part of her day. Sometimes people ask her how she manages it, with her elderly mother needing care and attention. But Maureen realizes that if something really matters to you, you will find time for it somewhere. Maureen is the one the neighbours go to when they are in trouble. Usually she can do something practical, like offering advice or lending a sachet of milk. Sometimes she can do nothing only listen. Even this helps the neighbours to see things in perspective. Like the time she was hanging up the washing above her kitchen stove and Lucy passed by with no Sean in tow. The toddler was now in play school. She invited her in and over tea they chatted. Soon Lucy was her old self again.

What is special about Maureen is that she is there for everyone. People feel they can go to her in time of need, day or night. Her home is a place where they feel comfortable. Her husband John takes all the comings and goings in his stride. As a Eucharistic Minister, his favourite duty is taking the Blessed Sacrament to the sick and the housebound. Seeing their eyes light up at the sight of the host is a humbling experience for him. He feels privileged that someone as ordinary as himself is part of this great event.

What Maureen and John are doing is simply bringing their love of God to their neighbours in the community. Not surprisingly, their Christian sense of caring has rubbed off on their children, Paul and Eileen.

The couple have had their fair share of worries and disappointments in life. But they have always been glad of the chance to help out in their community. It is a real satisfaction for them now to watch the seeds of love and caring they sowed coming to blossom in their children. Paul and Eileen have discovered, as they did, that reaching out to those who are less fortunate than themselves brings its own rewards.

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

GOOD NEWS IN EVERY CRISIS

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

We speak of the fruitfulness of the crisis because its good fruit is the possibility of strengthening the couple, of making love more real, of embracing limitation as an experience of life.

The vocabulary of the Italian language gives the term 'crisis' multiple meanings: cutting, separating, judging and choosing. Each crisis recalls a difficult moment that has reached its climax. Think of an illness which at some point reaches a 'critical' moment that could develop into a worsening or an improvement of health conditions.

Crisis also calls for a deep upheaval demanding a judgement on what is happening and a consequent decision. "The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises," writes Pope Francis, "yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty" (AL 232).

There are common crises, which happen in all marriages, and which it would be more correct to call challenges. Think of the challenge of the first few years, when there is a new life to set up, differences to be brought together, daily communication to be kept alive, the correct and wise relationship with the respective families of origin, the arrival of a child that breaks the balance that has been achieved and requires a little reorganisation of everything. These are evolutionary steps which become a task entrusted to the responsibility of the couple. They are life crises, unavoidable crossroads, stages of growth and



development in the life of a couple and a family. However, they can never be taken for granted, and they always entail a period of awareness, of gestation and also a necessary struggle to open up to synthesis and new approaches to harmony.

There are personal crises that inevitably affect and condition family life. Problems at work, the old age of one's parents, personal anxieties, fatigue and disappointments, health-related trials. The love affair is like a therapy that lays each of them bare, bringing out beautiful but also difficult aspects of their personalities. Aspects of one's history that have never been seriously addressed may emerge. It may happen, for example, that one of them cannot cut the umbilical cord with their parents and has to deal with this dependency, which hurts the new relationship and generates constant conflict.

Or else jealousy beyond measure imprisons the other who feels suffocated; in this case, it is necessary to question oneself and work on one's own insecurities and fragilities. The Pope writes: "Yet the fact is that only in their forties do some people achieve a maturity that should have come at the end of adolescence." (AL 239).

Pope Francis dealing with young couples dedicates many issues of *Amoris laetitia* to the challenge of crises showing how each one is not only part of life, but can become a real grace for the couple's journey. "Each crisis becomes an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it means to be married" (AL 232).

Crisis is not the antechamber of death; it does not recall an inevitable decadence or a kind of cruel destiny to be endured; "Each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart" (AL 232).

Faced with a crisis, people react in different ways: the immediate reaction is to become defensive, to minimise, to deny that there is a problem. Change is always uncomfortable because it requires commitment and it is natural to postpone it or think that everything will be solved in time. One can react by closing oneself off and isolating oneself without realising that in doing so one is distancing oneself and the bond is cooling. These ways of doing things "downplaying it, and hoping that it will go away. But this does not help; it only makes things worse, wastes energy and delays a solution" (AL 233).

On the other hand, there are positive attitudes towards every crisis that arises in a couple's journey: recognising the crisis, taking responsibility for it, creating space for dialogue, seeking the causes together, making choices or getting help. These are clear and precise steps: giving a name to the crisis, knowing that there are these crossroads in family life. Taking responsibility means getting away from the blame game, which is usually always the other person, and asking ourselves what I can do. Create space for dialogue because every crisis concerns the couple and, even if it is personal, the spousal covenant always involves the other. Look for the causes, discern and make choices that do not always

automatically solve the problem, but can open up a process of growth. Sometimes the two cannot understand what is going on, on their own, and so the assistance and accompaniment of someone else can be of great help.

"Crises faced well," the Pope concludes, "can become an opportunity to choose the other again as a travel-companion, beyond the limits of the relationship and accepting with realism that not all cherished dreams will come true. Every crisis can be a new "yes", enabling love to be renewed, deepened and inwardly strength-

ened." (AL 238). This is why we speak of the fruitfulness of the crisis, because its good fruit is the possibility of strengthening the couple, of making love more real and true, of embracing limitations as an experience that is part of life. We cannot deny that there are hardships, sufferings and inevitable pruning, but everything was already written in that initial promise: "In joy and in pain, in health and in sickness." Crisis is part of every love story and for two believers it holds the secret of that Easter mystery which is the mystery of love. □

GOD'S HOBBY

Bruno Ferrero (*Circles in water*, ed. Elledici)

Once a Roman princess asked Rabbi Jossi ben Chalafta: "What does God do all day?"

The good rabbi replied: "He puts couples together. He decides who should marry whom. This man to that woman, this woman to that man, and so on."

"That's not much, replied the princess. I can do that too. I can put thousands of couples together in one day. Rabbi Jossi remained silent.

What did the princess do? She went to her palaces, took a thousand slaves and a thousand slave girls and married them.

She said: "This one must marry that one, that one must be married to this one!"

During the night almost all the couples quarrelled and beat each other to pulp. In the morning they went to the princess. One had a broken head, another a bruised



eye, another a bruised nose ...

The princess sent for Rabbi Jossi, told him the whole story and concluded: "You were right. I realise that only God can bring men and women together."

Then a voice from Heaven was heard: "It is not easy for me either."

And no one doubts that. □

THE EUCHARIST MAKES THE CHURCH

by Andrea Canale

"His Body, sacrificed for us, is our food and gives us strength; his Blood, shed for us, is our drink and washes us from every fault." This is the profession of faith and the song of love which the Christian community joyfully repeats in celebrating the Solemnity of the Lord's Body and Blood. It is a celebration that touches the heart of the Church and brings us back to the deepest reason for her existence. "The Eucharist makes the Church," wrote the theologian Henry De Lubac.



Mark's Gospel takes us directly back to the origins: to the evening of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, in the "great hall furnished and ready" (Cenacle), where Jesus "eats the Passover" with his disciples. The narrative is simple; the atmosphere is solemn; the gestures have the sacredness of liturgical actions. Jesus celebrates the Passover of Israel, the memory of the liberation from slavery and he also celebrates his Passover: his time to "pass from this world to the Father" (Jn 13:1). And he does so with the gesture of the supreme gift, without reserve and without conditions: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." At Easter, the greatest feast of the year, Israel relived the passage of its liberation and remembered it with the sacred gestures inherited from the fathers

(cf. Exodus 24). In the afternoon, lambs were sacrificed to be eaten at the solemn evening meal. For seven days, only unfermented (unleavened) bread was eaten.

Jesus is part of this great story. And here are the disciples who, in Jerusalem, look for a room, prepare food and prepare whatever is necessary "for the Passover." But, in fidelity to the traditions of Israel, Jesus positions the sign of the fullness and novelty that is himself, his person and his work. The description of the evangelist Mark is, as usual, sober: "While they were at supper, he took bread and said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'Take, this is my

From the Sacrament of the altar there continues to flow, ever alive, the charity that must invade the heart of the believer and make him capable of loving as Christ loved.

body.' Then he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And he said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many".

That supper becomes the new Passover: our Passover, which is Christ. At the foot of Sinai (Exodus 19:18) God established his covenant with Israel. Now, in Jesus, that covenant becomes "new and everlasting." The attitude that best characterises it cannot be anything other than "giving thanks," as Jesus did at that supper and as the Church continues to do by celebrating the Eucharist in his "memory." This, in fact, is the Sacrament of the covenant between God and humanity; a sacrifice and a banquet of the new people of God. It is a sacrifice that perpetuates and recalls the cross, the death and resurrection of the Lord; it is a banquet that gathers the people of God and makes them sharers in the benefits of the paschal mystery, until the Lord's "return." Jesus said: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). Around the Eucharist dispersed humanity which is the family of God, gathers: it is Christ who, with his Body and Blood, unites it, nourishes it, guides it towards the eternal wedding banquet.

That is why the Christian community, from the very beginning, while celebrating the Eucharist, prays as follows: "Just as this bread that was broken was scattered on the hills and gathered together became one, so your Church comes together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom" (Didache, IX, 4). The Church, on her pilgrimage, adores, gives thanks, sings the "companionship" of her Lord and knows that she possesses in the Eucharist her "treasure," as St Thomas Aquinas calls it. And in the Eucharist the Church "reflects herself," because she finds in it her identity, her way of being, her form.

In truth, that Body "is given"; that Blood "is shed." To celebrate the Eucharist is to enter into the logic of the gift, of the offering, indeed of the sacrificial "handing over." The encounter with the love of Christ becomes the reason to encounter the brothers. Separating Christ from his brothers and sisters is as good as a "profanation" of the mystery being celebrated.

The Church, formed by the Eucharist, is simultaneously communion and service. From the Sacrament of the altar there continues to flow, ever alive, the charity that must invade the heart of the believer and make him capable of loving as Christ loved. From this love, which starts with the Eucharist celebrated in the "great hall" of the Last Supper, the earth will be renewed and even the desert will flourish. So, with insistence and trust, let us keep repeating: "Lord, always give us this bread." □

OPEN TO THE GRACE OF THE MOMENT

by Anastasia Dias

He had just dreamt about his family. Rubbing his eyes, he got out of bed as he realized how badly he missed then: his wife and two boys. They looked so full of life in his dreams. He wished he could be with them. But there was nothing he could do about it.

Five years ago, he had come to work in this town. He was a daily wage worker. He put the money he collected every day into a small box that he took home and gave all of it to his wife to run their household.

Home was far away. But, this place felt like home because he had been here for a long time now. Of course, there were times he missed the familiarity of his own house, his wife's smile, the hugs and kisses showered on him by his two sons, and the feeling of being truly at home, in a place where he belonged.

He went to the well and drew water to wash his face. There had been commotion in this town for the past few days, yet he made it to work each day with incredible difficulty.

He hoped things would settle down soon because each day's wage counted.

He dressed quickly and left for

work. The sun had risen in the distance. But, the commotion hadn't settled. It had increased.

The screams were louder than usual. The hatred in the people was growing too. But then there was the love too. The mob was split into two halves. Half of the crowd wanted the man dead; the other half wanted him alive but could do nothing.

Simon didn't care about any of it. He had to get to work. He pushed through the crowd and moved ahead. The cries of so many people made him feel nauseous. It was too early for so many people to wail. He had to move past these people.

He was almost in front of the crowd when he felt a tap on his back. He didn't turn to look. Then, he felt someone grab him by the shoulders. He turned around. He saw a Roman soldier point toward the man and the cross that He was carrying. "Help him," ordered the soldier. Simon was hesitant. He had to get to work but reluctantly agreed to take the cross. At that moment, he glanced in the man's direction. His face was battered. His head had a crown of thorns. His clothes were torn and drenched in blood.



Simon felt something he'd never felt before. Compassion. There was something different about this man, something that touched Simon. This man could never be a criminal.

Simon felt compassion for Him. Even though the man's face was unrecognizable beyond measure, there was something so kind about Him. The way he looked at Simon in the eyes and smiled, His crimson blood trickling down the sides of His cheeks.

That was the moment Simon realized that his daily wages did not matter anymore. Neither did his work. He was here serving a greater mission and purpose. He felt grateful that he'd been pulled out of the multitude to help this man carry His cross. He felt thankful they thought him capable of doing this. It was the least he could do for this kind man. So, Simon helped Him carry His cross to where they would crucify him. Simon had been "chosen" to help Christ carry His cross from a crowd of thousands of people.

You have just read the story of Simon of Cyrene, a man who was converted after his firsthand experience with Christ. And what a time to meet Christ, just hours before His death! Not only was Simon one of the early Christians, but both his sons too became followers of Christ and disciples of His message of love and peace.



What if Simon had never been compelled to carry the cross? He'd never have known the love and grace of Christ. He'd still be living his life without meaning or purpose.

What if we aren't compelled to step out of our comfort zone? We'd still be within our boundaries, on a fruitless pursuit of happiness, never knowing what life has to offer us.

We must learn this lesson from Simon's story to be open and receptive to whatever life offers us. If we are receptive to life, we are open to new possibilities and open to grace. If we are open to grace, like Simon, we will never fail to know the mission that we have been "chosen" for. □

EMMANUEL: from Burundi to Siberia

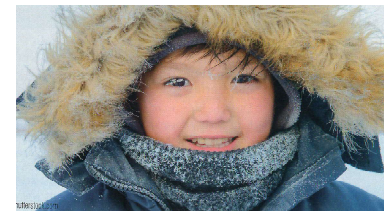
This is the coldest place on the planet, but the doors of the Salesians are always open

Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Emmanuel Niyoyitungira. I'm 35 years old. I am from Burundi. I have been a Salesian of Don Bosco since 2013. I come from a Christian family of nine, which includes my parents and seven children, of whom I am the eldest. Like many other young Burundians, I did my primary and secondary studies during a very difficult period in Burundi because of which we experienced much insecurity. I finished my basic studies in our region. After that I entered the minor seminary of Mureke in the diocese of Ngozi.

Why did you become religious and Salesian?

I became religious because I was very attracted to it as a child. And I cultivated this desire while I was in the *Focolare* movement and a group of singers I was part of at that time. Only after I decided not to continue my studies in the diocesan major seminary did I feel the desire to enter the Salesian congregation. I did not know them well at the time.



A Young Siberian

Through prayer, Salesian community life and several conferences on the mission, I nurtured this desire. Finally, I received the missionary cross during the 148th missionary expedition in 2017 from Rector Major Don Angel Fernandez, who sent me to Yakutsk in Russia. The beginning of the mission was not easy; and I worked hard to learn the language and to gain the affection of the people.

How did your family react?

My family's reaction was rather negative because of the unfamiliarity of this mission land. But we sat down together to seek the Lord's will through me, and they finally understood and promised to pray for the Salesians of Yakutsk.

What is your current role?

After four years of community life in Yakutsk, during which I attended university and organised an oratory, the Provincial sent me to study Theology at Crocetta: I am currently doing my first year of Theology.

What work you are doing?

In Yakutsk, in addition to university activities, I gave some English and French lessons to the young people who attend our oratory. But also, to students who wanted help with languages. We organised trips, catechesis, games, etc.



Emmanuel and his skaters

What are your young people like?

Our young people are poor and come from troubled families. They are generally in search of the meaning of life; but because of many years of living in obscurity, they are afraid to commit themselves and to break away from previous beliefs; they live their ancestral practices or ignore any transcendence. In short, they are poor young people; idle; wandering here and there looking for peace and security.

How is the Church in Siberia perceived?

I would say that in Siberia, the perception of the Catholic Church is very complex: some see it as a twin of the Orthodox; others see it as a sect of the Orthodox;

some no longer know it; others prefer not to be interested in it, and so on.

What about the Salesians?

In general, the term ‘Salesian’ is much less used. Those who come to our house prefer to use “Casa Don Bosco.” So, the Salesians are seen as workers, good educators committed to helping Don Bosco’s young people.

What are the most beautiful features?

I would like to underline the atmosphere that reigns in our small community, the commitment of the faithful, the mutual trust between the Salesians and the parents of the young people who come to the oratory, the understanding between the Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic Churches. There is good cooperation between the Catholic Church and the government, as well as various governmental and non-governmental institutions.

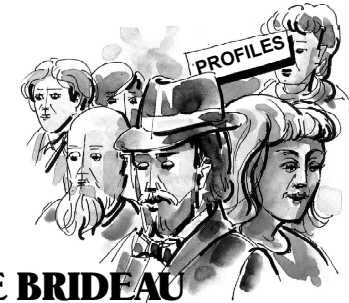
What problems do you encounter?

Having seen that the mission in Yakutsk suggests the conjunction of energies, I can say that there remains the problem of personnel, the lack of infrastructure, the lack of various activities and climatic constraints.

What is your dream?

Our dream is to see a mission in Yakutsk develop, with young people involved in the oratory, to see a church full of young people, to bring young people to Jesus. □

**Witnesses
in & for
Our Times**



**ST. MADELEINE BRIDEAU
(July 17)**

Ian Pinto, sdb

The French Revolution

We have all heard about the French Revolution. Perhaps, some of us might have studied it in our school days. What is often left out is the effect it had on Christianity. We will look at one heroine who stood out on the Christian side of the story. Her name might never be mentioned in the volumes written about the time of the revolution but her name is written in gold in heaven and in the Church. She is *Sr. Madeleine Brideau*.

Before we discuss Sr. Madeleine, let us first put the revolution in perspective. The French Revolution might appear on the surface to be a political upheaval but it carried so many undercurrents that swept across nearly every aspect of social life. I would not be exaggerating if I said that it brought about a near total transformation of French culture and society. It literally turned things on their head (no pun intended).

Violence was the order of the day. Mob mentality generated such vicious attacks that they could never be replayed on a



silver screen without being censored. Years of deprivation, anger, resentment and negligence brewed a thunderous concoction that steamrolled the aristocracy and every other institution that linked up with it – the Church included.

According to William Bush, the author of *To Quell the Terror*, a book which narrates the story of the Carmelite martyrs of Com-

piegne of whom our heroine was one, wrote that there were enormous amounts of Christians who were martyred during the early years of the revolution either by guillotine, mass deportations, drownings, imprisonments, shootings or mob violence and sheer butchery. The Church was in peril. Matters were brought to a head when the French Revolutionary government declared in 1790 a Civil Constitution of the Clergy by which it reclaimed land and titles bestowed on the Church and its leaders by earlier rulers and people of importance and subjected the Church to civil *ad hoc* laws which also meant that religious could no more live and call themselves as such without incurring punishment.

Needless to say, there was general pandemonium and panic within the Church and in society. Thinking about holiness at a time like this seems pure fantasy and yet, so many of our Christian brothers and sisters did just that. They put Christ before themselves and surrendering to His divine love they gave of themselves to their last breath for the sake of the good and for the sake of love. Here is where the strength of the Church is seen. Despite the multiple hits she took, she still stood; beaten but not defeated, "*struck down but not destroyed*" as St. Paul would say (2 Cor 4:9).

Flowers of Hope

The community of Carmelite nuns at Compiègne in Northern France was founded in 1641. On account of its fervour and the fidelity shown by the sisters there, many joined them. The French Court took kindly to them and

supported them in word and deed from their inception. Life seemed to be sailing smoothly and every woman admitted there seemed to be focused on doing good and pleasing her heavenly bridegroom, Jesus.

However, once the tides turned with the coming of the Revolution, the Convent came under scrutiny and the sisters began to be harassed. Shortly after Bastille Day on August 4, 1790, government officials along with armed guards stormed the Convent and began interrogating each sister. What they were actually doing was less interrogation and more intimidation. They tried to sway the sisters from their religious commitments. They asked them to choose between abandoning their religious life and thereby saving themselves or disobeying the Government order and facing death. One can easily imagine what the sisters chose.

Jesus said to all those who follow him: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). The Carmelite sisters had made their choice when they entered the convent and vowed to live a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. They weren't going to go back on their word now. Come Easter of 1792, the Mother Superior, Teresa of St. Augustine asked her sisters to prepare themselves for martyrdom. They had chosen to follow Jesus and this cross was given to them to bear. They would not abandon it but would carry it to Calvary and there be prepared to lose their life for the one who gave his life first for

them.

Shortly thereafter, the Convent was closed down and all its belongings seized. The sisters were forced out and made to find a new way of living. The superior arranged for them to live in apartments in different parts of the city and got them civilian clothes since they were not allowed to wear the religious habit any longer. But this did not work out very well. Their apartments were ransacked and they were found to be guilty of continuing to live as a religious community while harbouring anti-revolution feelings.

The Odour of Sanctity

The sisters were condemned to death. They were publicly humiliated as they were carried to their place of execution on an open cart. People shouted insults and threw things at them while the sisters lifted their hearts and voices to God by singing prayers and hymns.

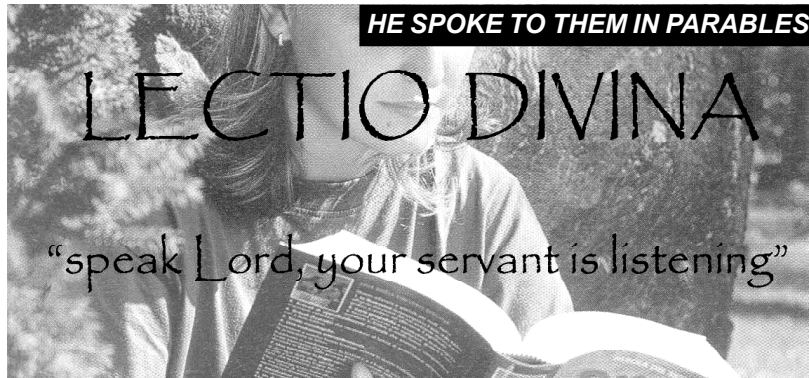
Once at the guillotine, the sisters consoled each other and forgave their executioners. Then beginning from the youngest, they were beheaded as they sang Psalm 116 - a psalm of thanksgiving and a fitting conclusion to their passion. Their voices filled the musty air with sweetness as each one was silenced by the falling blade. The foul smell of hatred and bloodshed was slowly making way for the sweet scent of holiness.

The sisters were among a group of 30 odd Christians who were put to death that day. They are

the first victims of the French Revolution to become saints. Devotees attribute their martyrdom to the end of the Reign of Terror during the Revolution. Ten days after they were killed, Maximilian Robespierre, the man behind the violence met the same fate he willy-nilly dealt out to others.

There isn't much known about each of the martyrs except what was written by one of the sisters who was not arrested with the others since she was away at the time. Sr. Marie de l'incarnation wrote the *History of the Carmelite Nuns of Compiègne* which was published in 1836. This story later inspired a novella (*The Song at the Scaffold*), a film (*Le Dialogue des Carmélites*), a play and an opera (*Dialogues of the Carmelites*).

Since the information is scarce I cannot say much about our heroine: St. Madeleine. However, there is one thing that she is noted for doing as the sisters were being condemned. She bartered a fur shawl she possessed for a cup of chocolate that was shared among the sisters who were being starved while they were held. This act of hers perhaps, helped the sisters pull through the days of internment and interrogation. Her memory ought to be marked by her bravery and serenity as she went to her death. She gave everything she had for love of the Lord; that is the real martyrdom. Her death while tragic would not mean much if not for her selflessness. But her generosity to the point of death is what makes her a candidate for sanctity. □



THE MERCILESS SERVANT

by Carlo Broccardo

Peter asks: how many times must I forgive? And Jesus answers: the perspective is not right. Forgiveness is not a question of "how much", but of "how", it's not the numbers that count, it's the heart that counts.

We are in chapter 18 of the Gospel of Matthew and Jesus is talking to his disciples about matters concerning community life. As usual, Matthew is very orderly: the first part of Jesus' teaching concerns the relationship with the little ones and ends with the parable of the lost sheep (we will read it later, in Luke's version). The second

part of the teaching concerns the relationship with the brethren; first the Master urges fraternal correction, then forgiveness. This second part ends with the parable of the merciless servant, which is the one we are going to explore today.

It all begins with Peter asking a question: "Lord, if my brother



wrongs me, how many times shall I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Who knows why he came up with this question, what was he thinking of? In any case, Jesus' answer is simple and cannot be misunderstood: "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Which is like saying: Peter, you must not put limits on forgive-ness. You must forgive always. And then Jesus tells the parable: "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants..."

In the beginning, everything is normal: a king has lent money, now he is getting ready to collect his dues, when a servant shows up who owes him 10,000 talents. We do not know for sure how much a talent was worth at the time of Jesus in Palestine; it must have been between 6,000 and 10,000 denarii. So, ten thousand talents was about 60 to 100 million denarii. You will say to me: we know as much now as we did then; but just think, to get an idea, that a worker earned about a penny a day. So, this guy had accumulated a debt that is equivalent to 100 million working days.... An enormous amount!

Another possibility, to realise the figure, is to consider that all the taxes collected in one year in the reign of Herod Antipas were about 200 talents. Herod did not have time to reign that long to collect, from all the subjects of his kingdom, the 10,000 talents that the protagonist of the parable had accumulated as a debt by himself. Here we are talking about trillions.

The parables sometimes have

improbable, exaggerated elements. After all, they are fictitious stories, and we must ask ourselves: why this absurd figure? The answer comes immediately thereafter: because it makes the servant's wickedness even more evident: he is not willing to forgive his friend a hundred denarii, when his master has just forgiven him a hundred million. The disproportion is evident; the servant's wickedness is clear.

But Jesus adds a detail, when he gives words to the master: "Should not you also have pitied your companion, as I have pitied you?" The master was not interested in figures, but in sentiments: mercy and compassion. This was what was lacking in our servant, who in fact was described by all as "merciless." And it was on this that Jesus draws his conclusion at the end of the parable: "So also will my heavenly Father do to you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Peter had asked: how many times must I forgive? And Jesus answers: the perspective is not right. Forgiveness is not a question of "how much," but of "how"; it is not the numbers that count, it is the heart that counts. When I am able to perceive the other as a brother; when I am able to look at him with the eyes of God, to love him with his heart; when I believe that even he who has offended me is loved by God as a child; then I will be so free within myself that I will not take into account the evil received nor the times when I have already forgiven. □

Quiet Spaces

SPEAKERS WITHOUT AUTHORITY

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Thursday, June 26, 2014

People need a “good shepherd” who knows how to understand and touch the heart. Just like Jesus does. And it’s him that we have to follow closely, without being influenced by those who “speak about abstractions or moral casuistry,” from the many who “faithlessly negotiate everything with the politically and economically powerful,” from the “revolutionaries” who seek to start “so-called wars of liberation” based on politics or on a thinking far removed from the people.

Pope Francis focused on these four approaches during his Mass on Thursday, 26 June. The Pontiff highlighted, first of all, the truly vast number of people who followed Jesus: “Let’s consider the day of the multiplication of the loaves, there were more than five thousand.” There were people who followed Jesus closely, “along the way.” And the Gospel says that they followed him “because Jesus’ words touched their hearts: the amazement of finding something good, great.” Jesus “indeed taught them as one with authority, not like their scribes.” The day’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew (7:21-29) speaks of this amazement.

The Pope recounted that “the people needed teachers, preachers, experts with authority.” That those who “had no authority” spoke, but their words failed to reach the people, “they were far removed from the people.” The word was that Jesus, instead, “spoke in a way that touched the heart of the people, and which answered their questions.”

Pope Francis chose to speak about “these scribes, who in that time spoke to the people” but “whose message didn’t reach the heart of the people, and the people heard them and left.” He described four types.

Surely “the best known group was the Pharisees,” the Pope continued. He highlighted, however, that “there were also good Pharisees.” But “when Jesus referred to the Pharisees, he spoke about those who were bad, not the good ones.” They were people who “practised rituals of God, of religion, a series of commandments” and out of ten “they made more than 300!” In short “they loaded this weight on the people’s shoulders” “You must do this! You have to!” They reduced faith in the living God to casuistry, ending in “contradictions of the cruellest casuistry.” And the people, for their part, “respected them, because people are respectful, but they didn’t listen to these casuistic preachers.”

Another group the Pope referred to “were the Sadducees: this group had no faith, they had lost the faith.” And thus, “they carried out

their religious function by making deals with the powerful: politically powerful, economically powerful.” In short, “they were men of power and they bargained with everyone.” However, “the people didn’t follow them either.”

“A third group was that of the revolutionaries,” the Pope explained. In that era they were often called zealots. They were the ones who wanted a “revolution to free the people of Israel from the Roman occupation.” Thus, “there were also guerillas there,” but “people have common sense and know how to tell when the fruit is ripe and when it isn’t.” And so, “they didn’t follow them.”

Finally, “the fourth group” was made up of good people: the Essenes. The Pope described that “they were monks, good people who consecrated the life of God: they practised contemplation and prayer in the monasteries.” But “they were far from the people and the people couldn’t follow them.”

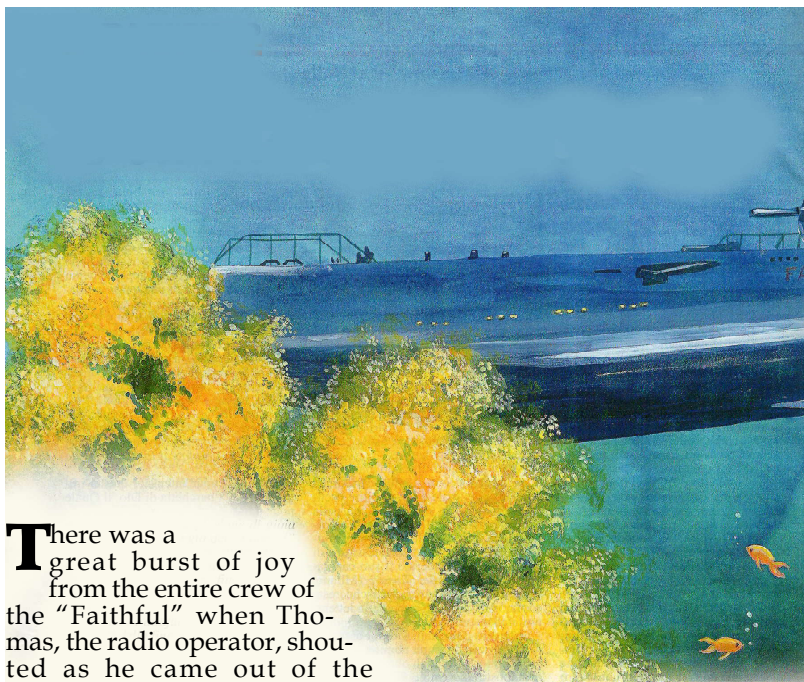
Thus, the Pope recounted, “these were the voices that reached the people.” Yet “none of these voices had the power to warm the heart of the people.” Jesus, on the other hand, managed to do so. And this is why “the crowds were amazed: they heard Jesus and the heart was warm,” because his message “touched the heart” and he “taught as a person with authority.” In fact, Pope Francis continued, “Jesus drew close to the people; Jesus healed the heart of the people; Jesus understood the problems of the people; Jesus wasn’t ashamed to talk to sinners, he went to visit them; Jesus felt joy, he was pleased to go and be with his people.” And Jesus himself explains “why,” the Pope indicated, referring to the Gospel of John: “I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.”

And this is “precisely why people followed Jesus: because he was the good shepherd”. Certainly, the Bishop of Rome stated, “he wasn’t a casuistic and moralistic Pharisee; nor a Sadducee who made political deals with the powerful; nor a guerilla who sought the political freedom of his people; nor a contemplative from a monastery. He was a shepherd.” He “spoke the language of his people, he made himself understood, he spoke the truth, the matters of God: he never negotiated the matters of God. But he spoke of them in such a way that the people loved the matters of God. This is why they followed him.”

Here then is the key question to ask ourselves: “Who am I pleased to follow? Who influences me?” A question which, Francis concluded, must push us to ask “God, the Father, that he allow us to be close to Jesus, to follow Jesus, to be amazed by what Jesus tells us. □

THE LAST MESSAGE

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb



There was a great burst of joy from the entire crew of the "Faithful" when Thomas, the radio operator, shouted as he came out of the transmission cabin: "Commander, sir, we are finally returning to base!"

For a few weeks now there seemed to be signs of their term coming to an end. It had been felt by all on board the *Faithful*, and the pious optimists had said:

"Who knows, maybe it won't be over sooner than we thought..."

But nothing more was known, because the submarine, destined to keep watch off the coast of Brisbane (Australia), had never been able to make contact with other ships, and its crew had lived for several months without exchanging messages and news

with other crews.

And now, however, the Admiral-in-Chief's cablegram was clear: "I order Faithful to return to base San Francisco as soon as possible.

Never had an order from the Supreme Commander been met with such enthusiasm. And half an hour after those words had been uttered in Commander Browne's robust voice, the crew began to celebrate, as if to repay themselves for all the trials and tribulations which they had endured during the long months at sea. The whisky and gin, which until then had been jealously buried in the larder and the

sailors' hiding places, were brought out! There were Toasts! And banjos out! And Music!

The very strict Browne shrugged his shoulders: he could not oppose the will of his crew, who had been very disciplined throughout the war, and were now eager to make some noise. He could do it, because now there was no danger threatening the submarine and its brave sailors.

Only Thomas was not taking part in the feast of drunkards and songsters: dutiful as ever, he had just taken a drop of whisky offered to him by Allan the quartermaster, and had gone back to the transmission cabin.

And there he was, looking at the screen, when he felt a thud. What had just happened? He didn't even have time to get up

when a second thud, much stronger than the first, shook the "Faithful," followed by a dark roar.

Without any hesitation he realised what had happened: the hull had certainly struck one of the many coral reefs that were the nightmare for sailors and their superiors, and now, lo and behold, it was sinking.

The "hurrahs" had ceased immediately. Now only frantic voices were heard shouting and repeating orders:

"Man the deep rudder! We must go up again! Let's not lose our heads!"

Without anyone coming to tell him, Thomas had begun transmitting the S.O.S., followed by the instructions that the



captain had let him know an hour earlier: "149° 17' East 28° 73' South "Faithful" hit coral bank we're sinking S.O.S."

He had repeated the message for the fourth time, when Allan shouted at him:

"Come on... Hurry up if you want to save yourself!"

Instead of listening to him, Thomas finished the message, and began it again for the fifth time. No one was answering yet: he would not leave the device until he had received a reply.

"S.O.S. 149° 17' East..."

The submarine had ceased to descend; on reaching the bottom, some twenty yards below sea level, she was rapidly taking in water through the hole opened in her hull by the coral reef, and the water was already overflowing into all the compartments with a chilling noise.

Far away, Allan's voice called again:

"Thomas, hurry up!... We're getting out... You can save yourself if you come out now!"

The Faithful's radio officer did not move: he continued to send out the message that was meant

to save his comrades. And as he repeated the S.O.S. for the umpteenth time, he thought:

"What would become of them, shipwrecked in the waves, if some ship did not come to pick them up?"

Now the water was pouring into the cabin, rising rapidly, rising all the time. And no one answered, from the immensity of the ocean.

"Good God! Is it possible that no one heard me? The water is going to flood the batteries... it will prevent me from transmitting further...."

But lo and behold, the batteries, in fact, were almost submerged, a voice came to Thomas: "We are coming ... Destroyer "Parkins... Come on...."

Thomas felt an infinite serenity in his heart: the old "Parkins" would collect the castaways, nobody would be missed, nobody except him... And he thought of his mother who had waited for him in vain, of the blonde girl to whom he was engaged, of his little brother Edgar... And then, having said goodbye to those dearest to him, he raised his thoughts to God, and waited bravely for the end." □

LESSON FROM NATURE

Nature has gentle moments: soft winds, sprinkling rain, warm sunshine, floating petals. But nature also has incredible power to harm and hurt: earthquakes, thunderstorms, floods, the constant cycle of predation and death, pain and disease.

When we learn to recognize that this power and this gentleness are part of the same nature, we can begin to face the paradox of our own potential for gentleness and destructive power too.

Sr Stan Kennedy in Gardening the Soul



FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 30

by Michele Molineris

157. One dies willingly with Don Bosco (1867)

In a letter from Rome (1867) to Cav. Oreglia, Fr Francesca wrote among other things: "Yesterday evening around six o'clock Don Bosco was having supper in the house of Countess Calderari. Many noblemen were attending the supper; when a servant arrived carrying a letter from the Marquise Villarios addressed to Don Bosco.

He took the letter and read: "Your Reverence Don Bosco, a young man of 17, belonging to the wealthy family of... is seriously ill with dropsy and, in the doctors' opinion, he only has a few hours left to live. So far he did not want to hear about confession, but says that he would be willing to confess to only one priest: Don Bosco. He protested that if not, he would die without the sacraments. The mother wept disconsolately over her son's obstinacy. The whole of Rome knew of this young man's distressing disposition and was anxious about his fate. Don Bosco held souls too dear to let even one perish. Go there at once and leave any business."

Don Bosco read it, folded the letter quietly and went on with his supper. Afterwards he gave an audience to several people. Fr Francesca impatiently pulled him by the cassock saying: "But come on Don Bosco; it's about a soul! Hurry up!"

Don Bosco replied: "I'll

positively see him!"

At 7 o'clock in the evening he went towards that house and was at the sick man's bed. What a moving scene. The poor young man was so pale that his face was indistinguishable from the bedposts supporting his head. His eyes shone with the fire of fever. He was pitiful and almost repulsive. A single small lamp lit the room. The young man, seeing a priest enter, guessed who it was and raised himself on his elbow.

"Ah! Don Bosco!" he exclaimed, and with his free hand he sought Don Bosco's. He clasped it, kissed it and wept. He then made an effort, threw his arms around Don Bosco's neck who had bent down to say a word to him, repeating: "Hear my confession, Don Bosco, hear my confession!"

The mother could not find words to express her joy at Don Bosco's arrival and her son showed it to her, constantly holding on to the saving hand of the good servant of God.

Everyone withdrew and after half an hour Don Bosco left the room. His mother was waiting for him in the room crying and said: "Thank you, Don Bosco, thank you! It was the Lord who sent you!"

The whole family surrounded him and wanted to be blessed by him, after having received a medal of Mary Help of Christians.

At ten forty-five he left the house feeling blessed. Oh, the angel of God will rest close to that unfortunate man, nor will he move except to lead him to heaven (In fact he died shortly afterwards).

"One dies so well after a visit from Don Bosco!" say the sick of Rome." (MB VIII 696)

158. The traffic accident (1867)

On 24th May 1867 Don Rua wrote to Cav. Oreglia and among other things he mentioned: "In the first days of the month Don Bosco made a journey to Saluggia, where the parish priest lived under the nightmares of assassins, who had already tried to kill him twice. From Livorno Vercellese he had to continue the journey by a coach in which there were already three other people.

The one who was driving the horse and the other two were all intent on showing Don Bosco the beautiful countryside, telling him the story of the farmsteads they met along the way, when suddenly all four had a terrible accident; three were thrown to the ground, Don Bosco alone, who had time to say: "Mary Help of Christians, help me!" remained in the buggy, limiting himself to tapping his chin on his knees because of the shock.

Fortunately, the others had only a few bruises or scratches. The coach had run into a kerbstone, which the driver of the horse had not noticed. All three of them got up from the ground and accused each other of being the cause of the fall. The one was accused of not having paid attention to what he was doing; the other was told that he should not have pointed out certain houses or objects and so distracted the attention of the one holding the reins.

But Don Bosco soon put them

at peace: "Why on earth are you accusing each other, when all three of you are innocent? The horse was not in the wrong; the carriage, which serves us very well, was not in the wrong; you who were driving and you who were speaking were not in the wrong either, because each of you had a good intention of doing his part well. The wrong... lies with the one who planted that kerbstone there!"

The comrades laughed heartily, although they could still feel their skin burning; they got back into the coach and happily completed their journey." (M.B., VIII, 801).

159. They will talk! (1867)

Fr Francesca says: "One of the last days (in Rome) I went early in the morning to see one of our first Cooperators in Rome. Despite the hour, I was ushered in and found her with her daughters. There were five of them.

Remembering Don Bosco's recommendation, I spoke to the oldest, who could have been six or seven years old. I saw her mother look at me sadly, and then she said: "She is mute! The others have the same misfortune."

These words involuntarily escaped me: "It is a very painful thing for a mother!"

"I understood that I had made a mistake and I tried to relieve her from that pain, to save myself; I almost didn't have time, because she prevented me, saying with a certain hesitation: 'Do you know why I am all dedicated to Don Bosco's works, and I almost make a fool of myself? Because he said to me: "Give Mary Help of Christians the amount you would have

to spend on doctors and medicines, and I assure you, that all your daughters, one after the other, when they reach the age of eight, will acquire speech, and will never lose it again."

I leave my readers to guess the portentous expectations of Countess Calderari. She then wrote to us, and the documented testimonies are preserved: everything happened as Don Bosco had foretold." (Francesia, *Two Months with Don Bosco in Rome*, 243).

160. The story of a brick (1867)

On 9th September 1867 at dinner with Don Bosco there were also some foreign priests, who the next day would have to take exams together with others from the Oratory. Don Bosco said to the foreigners: "If you pass, you must bring a brick for the church."

"All right," they answered.

"And you?" he said in a low voice to an old priest who was at his side, as a guest that evening.

"Yes, yes, me too: count me in," whispered that venerable priest.

And Don Bosco began to narrate: This is what happened concerning the brick: A certain Don Ghisolfi had had a bad arm for a long time. Finally, the illness reduced him to such a state that the doctors, after taking advice, judged it incurable and such that it had to be amputated. Poor Fr Ghisolfi announced this and said: "I want to do an experiment first, I want to recommend myself to Don Bosco, so that he can tell me

what I have to do in honour of Mary Help of Christians in order to obtain a cure.

In fact, he wrote to me and the answer was that if he had recovered and he would bring a brick for the church. After a short time, he was perfectly healed and sent a brick by the railway.

Think of my amazement when I received that object. As soon as the brick arrived, I broke it to see if there was any money inside. There was nothing. Many people were present, among them Bishop Dalmazzo. I thought it was a joke; I didn't know where it came from: on the address there was only a signature: *A poor priest*.

After a while, Don Ghisolfi came in person to the Oratory and asked if a brick had arrived.

"Ah! Is it you who sent that brick?" Don Bosco asked him!

"Precisely!" replied Ghisolfi.

"What a meticulous theologian!"

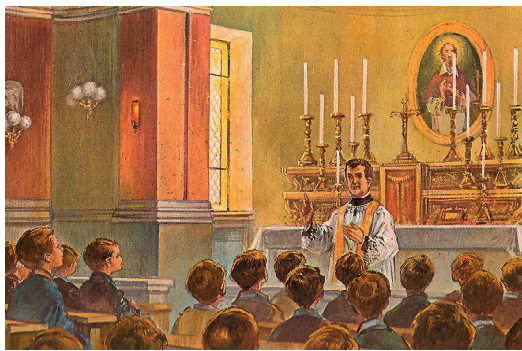
"I thought that with the Lord we had to be literal." So, he laughed and made an offering. He had already made several others earlier (EBM., VIII, 402).

161. Exorcisms (1867)



On the evening of the 9th September 1867 Don Bosco said at the good night: "Every day, my dear children, we see that great wonders are worked through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. A few days ago, a cripple came here to my room with crutches and through the intercession of this good mother, he left carrying them on his shoulders.

Now I want to tell you about another wonderful event. Today, an offering was sent to me for the healing of someone who was believed to be possessed by demons. This happened only yesterday, the day of Our Lady's Nativity. When I went to Acqui a fortnight ago, I passed through Strevi. There was a woman there who had not been herself for a year and who was believed to be possessed. This woman could no longer be spoken to or prayed for: she was doing all those acts that are proper to possessed people. She was presented to me. The bishop was with Don Pestarino, the parish priest of Mornese. The bishop's servant and other people asked me if the poor creature was possessed. The bishop said to me: "See if it is necessary to



exorcise her: I give you the faculty."

I found out how long she had been in distress, and what strange things she was wont to do, but I would not make any judgment at present. In order to learn more about the matter, I took a medal out of my pocket and, holding it tightly and hidden in my hand, I approached her to see if she would make any gesture or noise; for the devil does not ordinarily stand in the presence of a medal of Our Lady or of other blessed objects without showing manifest signs of repugnance.

But seeing that the medal was of no use, I told everyone to kneel down and pray to Mary Help of Christians. We all knelt down, the husband, the children and the bishop himself. I also made the sick woman kneel down and I asked her to pray with us. She obeyed me, prayed for a moment, but soon ceased, and it was no longer possible for her to articulate a syllable. The family attested that they had not been able to make her pray for about a year.

So, I told them to say the following prayers every day: Three *Hail Holy Queens* to Mary Help of Christians and three *Our Fathers* and *Glory be's* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. I also set a time when, if she was cured, they would send an offering to our church. This time was fixed for the Nativity of the Most Holy Mary on the 8th September, which was yesterday. I added that they should prepare the sick

woman to receive the sacraments and lead her to make her confession and communion. After this we parted.

A few days later I was told how it was impossible to get the woman to confess, because she continually burst into horrible blasphemies. I answered that this should not be taken into account, but that they should continue to pray to Mary and to urge the unhappy woman to confess. So they did.

When the 1st of September came, they tried to dispose her in some way for confession. Having waited for an hour when there were not many people in the church, they brought her in and began to urge her to confess. But every good word was useless, because she continued to utter blasphemy after blasphemy. When she saw that the priest was about to begin, she began to make gestures, to shout, and with such contortions that, in order not to give scandal to those who entered the church, she had to be taken home.

Having been warned, I gave orders that she should be taken to the sacraments on the morning of the Nativity. On the eve of the feast, those at home said to the sick woman: "Tomorrow morning we must go back to the church, so that you can make your confession."

When night came, she became furious: it seemed as if all the demons of hell were in her. As soon as she lay down, she began to scream, to chirp, to clap her hands, to sing and to shout. She uttered all sorts of voices: now she sounded like a pig, now like

a lion, now like a dog, an ox, a cat, a wolf. Now she uttered the most horrible blasphemies against God, now the most horrible imprecations against men. And she would get up, dance, or make other ridiculous gestures.

Her relatives said no more, but trusting in Our Lady they prayed. The day of the feast dawned and the woman, to the amazement of all, calmed down and asked: "What time is it?"

"It is day," she was told.

"And what day is it today?"

"It is the day of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mary. Do you want to go with us?"

"And where should we go?"

"We must go to church, so that you can make your confession and take communion as Don Bosco told us."

"Yes, yes, let's go!" she answered.

Those were the first words she said in her right mind, after about a year of insanity. And she confessed and received communion quietly, as if she had never suffered weakness of mind, and gave thanks, to the edification of all those in the family. Today they wrote to me that she was perfectly cured, as if she had never been ill.

I therefore conclude, my dear children: if Our Lady does so much for the body, imagine how much more will she do for the soul, if we ask her for her graces. I have not told you this fact so that I may believe that you have the devil in you, God forbid, but so that you may see how much we must trust in Mary. (M.B., VIII, 938). □



THE VIRGIN WHO PONDERERS

by Silvio Roggia

Faith, charity, hope: the path and the forward thrust of Christian living. Mary has helped us to rediscover the treasure present in these, which are the "ABC" of being Jesus' disciples and through which she shines as a model for the Church. These are ways of being that are not suddenly learned like learning something new or being able to do something unusual on a computer... It takes a long companionship, as the twelve did with Jesus, to make his way of life become our way of life.

Mary, whom we have already mentioned as a pilgrim of faith, is a woman on a journey, as Monsignor Tonino Bello writes: "If the characters in the Gospel had a kind of built-in odometer, I think that the ranking of the most tireless walkers would have been won by Mary. She travelled to Nazareth and back, to the mountains of Judah, to find her cousin, with that sort of rapid zest mentioned by Luke, who assures us that she "reached the town in haste." From there to Jerusalem for the presentation in the temple.

Clandestine expatriation to Egypt. Cautious return to Judea with a travel warrant issued by the Angel of the Lord, and then back to Nazareth. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem with a group discount, and doubling the route with an excursion through the city in search of Jesus. Among the crowd, to meet him wandering through the villages of Galilee, perhaps with the half-idea of making him get back home. Finally on the paths to Calvary, at the foot of the cross, where the wonder expressed by John with the word *stabat*, rather than the petrification of pain for a failed race, expresses the statuesque immobility of one who waits on the podium for the prize of victory." So wrote Monsignor Tonino.

What consoles us, more than Mary's steps on the dusty roads of Palestine, are the paths that her heart and thoughts had to travel until the end, to become an ever more faithful disciple of that Son who is greater than she is, mystery of light, salvation, faith, hope and charity for all humanity... a mystery.

Let us leave suggested images. Let us come to ourselves. To be disciples, that is, to walk behind the Master, in the company of her and of those who follow him more closely, like Mary...how does one do this today?

Mary has some concrete means, right at hand, to suggest to us for the "now," as we insistently repeat to her at every Hail Mary: "pray for us sinners now." Because it is precisely there that we can actually play our part.

Luke allows us a glimpse, almost in passing, into one of the most surprising phases in the life of the family of Nazareth because of the absolute silence with which it has been handed down to us. Jesus, Joseph and Mary lead the simple life of their fellow villagers for thirty years. Thirty years without the Gospel giving us even half a page about such a precious time, since it was Jesus' time, a time in which God walked among us and revealed himself, made himself visible as he is in the face of Christ.

"His mother kept all these things in her heart": this is what the Gospel says about "his mother" during those thirty years. A companionship with Jesus, which matured through the heart.

There she had welcomed the announcement and now there the Word bore fruit, just like the seed in the parable that takes root and sprouts where it finds good soil, but which always needs its long seasons to reach maturity.

Would this be the help for the "now" we so urgently need? Perhaps we were expecting something more quickly effective, something "quick fix," where you



Mary felt all these things in her heart. Listening is an art of the heart, of the whole person who knows how to be docile to the Word of God.

see the effect within an hour. Instead, Mary shows us thirty years of meditation.

Being disciples like Mary

This was how the Word was incarnated. The nine months that separate the feast of the Annunciation from Christmas celebrate a beginning! But the more beautiful and great the beginning, the more substantial the path must

consequently be in terms of life, development and growth, and the beginning is the first step (first: therefore all the others must follow...). The Word takes root and bears fruit if once the seed has fallen into good soil it germinates there and accepts the challenge of a long winter, of a fruitful spring and on and on...

If this is how it was for Mary, how can we expect to rush through the stages and not accept the logic of gradualness, of constancy, of continually starting again, of "watching," without giving in to sleep...

Will it be an empty wait, like the one in the antechamber at the dentist's or on the platform of a train station, where we try to kill time?

Herein lies the secret. To succeed in making our long journey not an insignificant calendar of months that are always the same, but a today that is always new because each "now" is filled and illuminated by his Word, which warms and gives vigour to the heart, as it was for Mary.

In fact, we are told that in order to be true disciples of Jesus in these years we must:

1. Rediscover our Baptism (faith, charity, hope...).

2. Take the Word of God back into our hands, so that it can enter our hearts. Put ourselves in the company of the Word: this is how we can now follow in Christ's footsteps on a daily basis.

"Your Word embraces the universe," says the psalm: for the saints everything speaks of God. But for us, who find it hard to listen, who are fragmented because of all the noise, worries and temptations that risk drying up

those clods of good soil that we do have within us, it is better to concentrate our efforts on the essential: let us start from the Gospel. If we are open to the Gospel, there is everything there to make our days an uninterrupted and fruitful maturing in the wake of the Word made flesh, of Christ the Lord.

However, before asking ourselves how to be more attentive to the Gospel in practice, given that this will be a commitment that will accompany us throughout our lives, let us pause for a moment to verify and consolidate the underlying motivations. Are we really convinced of the importance of listening? What is so precious hidden behind listening to the Word of Scripture that makes the Pope's liturgical invitations in this direction so pressing?

Taking faith, charity and hope into our hands with Mary at our side has already enabled us to realise how the gift infinitely exceeds the expectation; what God wants to offer us, what he has prepared for us, the intensity of his presence and his care for me, for each of us, are so disproportionately great compared to me, that I can barely perceive or glimpse some reflection of his truth, his charity and his promises.

If this is so, we understand that with God it is much more urgent to learn to welcome than to learn to propose our own things to Him: wiser to listen than to speak. And holier to obey than to demand.

Listening, more than a disposition of the ear, is an art of the heart, of the whole person who

*...a today
that is always new
because each "now"
is filled and illuminated
by his Word,
which warms
and gives vigour
to the heart,
as it was for Mary.*

little by little knows how to make himself docile, in tune, capable of grasping the smallest desires of the one he loves and not just the biggest headlines, written in block letters, of what the other has publicly declared. This is what happens in relationships of affection between us: children with their parents, between fiancés, between those who truly know how to love. This is how it is with the Lord. St Francis de Sales, a giant of spirituality, wrote: "Lovers of God cannot stay without thinking of him, without breathing for him, without aspiring to him and talking about him."

Gradually replace our thoughts with God's; resonate in unison with what pleases God, to the point of confusing ours with his will; John XXIII: "outside of God's will there is nothing that interests me anymore."

It is listening to the Word that makes us like this, because if I sincerely listen to it, its thoughts become the focus of my attention,

and they become more important than my bubbles or my little projects. Little by little I learn to breathe the fine but pure air of the Spirit more willingly than the stale air, even if it is so local, that easily fills our chatter, magazines, TV programmes, and inevitably my imagination, with envy, jealousy, futility and so on. Even if I were a strong personality, capable of absolute self-control and therefore free in my thoughts and master of my feelings, listening to the word of God, listening daily and constantly, would still be the most urgent and necessary thing, because, as Father Cabra writes, "the distance between you doing things well and salvation goes beyond the order of billions of light years. It is the same distance that passes between time and eternity."

In short, the Pope is quite right in pointing out to us the road that Mary travelled: to become "Listening" to God. In concrete terms, walking day by day in the company of the Gospel, so that little by little we may break our mould and let God's thoughts, what pleases Him, become the centre of gravity of our lives. Einstein said that "it is easier to break the atom than a preconception." To change our minds, to change our mentality, is a truly Godlike endeavour: only He can do this if we, morning after morning, grant Him an audience, and cure ourselves under the light of His word. Sometimes it burns, but it is precisely then that it does us the most good. □



MY VOCATION STORY

FR. ARTHUR J. LENTI SDB

1923 - 2022

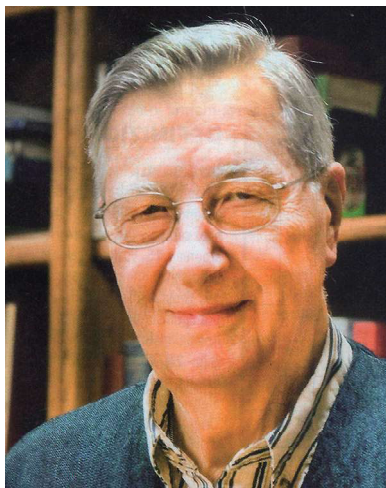
Fr. Mike Mendl, sdb

The Salesian Congregation has lost a giant

Fr Lenti was born on 31 January (incidentally, Don Bosco's feast day), 1923 in Bassignana, Piedmont, in the same Monferrato area as Don Bosco, the parents of Pope Francis and many other Salesians. He entered the novitiate of Colle Don Bosco in 1939, made his first profession in the United States, in Newton, on 14th September 1940, his perpetual profession, again in Newton, on 10th August 1946, and was ordained a priest in Turin, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, on 2nd July 1950.

He lived practically all his Salesian life in what became his adopted home, the United States of America, and spent his talents engaging above all in the apostolate of teaching and research.

When the Salesians of the two US Provinces decided to send their theology students to the Pontifical College Josephinum (PCJ) in Worthington, Ohio (a suburb of Columbus), in 1967, Father Arthur was chosen to join the faculty. For the next 8 years he taught the 3 core Old Testament courses (Pentateuch and History, Prophets, Wisdom) as well as the elective courses. He was in great demand not only among Catholic seminarians, but also among the students of the



Lutheran and Methodist schools that formed a theological consortium with the PCJ.

In 1975, the San Francisco Province called Father Arthur back to California to serve on the theology faculty for the Province's young confreres at Don Bosco Hall in Berkeley; students enrolled in either the Dominican or Jesuit schools. Within a few years the province transformed Don Bosco Hall into the Institute of Salesian Studies (1984) for advanced studies in Don Bosco, Salesian history and spirituality and related courses, open to English-speaking confreres from around the world for a one-year programme.

His writings on the Founder of the Congregation have been numerous. "Don Bosco. His pope and his bishop," for example, focused on the relationship of the Saint of Youth with Pius IX and with the Archbishop of Turin, Monsignor Lorenzo Gastaldi.

But the work for which Fr Lenti will be most remembered is certainly his "Don Bosco. History and Spirit," of which the author himself said: "I have entitled this research 'Don Bosco, History and Spirit' because it is a 'history' of Don Bosco's life and work in a particular epoch, which generated a new religious and political reality and therefore also shaped his way of thinking and acting. 'Spirit' because through discernment, interpretation and acceptance, Don Bosco discovered the meaning of this new world and responded with courage to the challenges arising from it: his vocation."

"The first two chapters dedicated to the study of the sources and biographical tradition of Don Bosco are priceless jewels for historians, social scientists and researchers," declares Professor Rodriguez, of the Comillas University. With a hermeneutic approach, Fr Lenti identifies, evaluates, compares and often corrects documents and interpretations about Don Bosco that were previously considered unquestionable. He strongly and definitively combats myths and superficial visions. Father Rodriguez concludes: "This is an extraordinary work, rich in arguments and themes, an excellent and successful effort that harmoniously combines a realistic vision

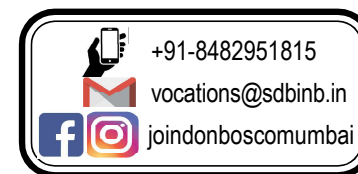
of Don Bosco's life and work and his genuine religious motivation."

On 25 January 2008, the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley conferred an honorary doctorate on Fr Arthur J. Lenti in recognition of the outstanding contribution of his scholarly work to the study of Don Bosco's life, as well as in recognition of Fr Lenti's many years of service to the Church and the Salesian Society as an educator and writer.

Beyond his erudition, Father Arthur was appreciated by countless confreres, students and friends who appreciated not only his vast knowledge (in numerous fields beyond Scripture and Salesianity) but also his friendliness and generosity. Fr Tim Ploch, one of his students at PCJ and later his Provincial in California, complimented him on his total dedication to the Word of God and St John Bosco and compared him to St Francis de Sales as a scholar and a gentleman.

"As Salesians," wrote Fr Lenti, "we can understand 'spirituality' as the medium in which we move and relate to our brothers in the community, to the boys, to the people who share our mission of educating and evangelising the young; to the people in general."

In essence, spirituality is love, it is charity." □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Playing Time

A prisoner in jail received a letter from his wife: "I have decided to plant some vegetables in the back garden. When is the best time to plant them?"

The prisoner knowing that the prison guards read all mail, replied in a letter: "Dear wife, whatever you do, do not touch the back garden. That is where I hid all the money." A week or so later, he received another letter from his wife: "You won't believe what happened. Some men came with shovels to the house and dug up all the back garden." The prisoner wrote another letter: "Dear wife, now is the best time to plant the vegetables."

Horse Looking

One day a man passed by a farm and saw a beautiful horse.

Hoping to buy the animal, he said to the farmer: "I think your horse looks pretty good, so I'll give you \$ 500 for him." "He doesn't look good, and he's not for sale," the farmer said. The man insisted, "I think he looks good and I'll up the price to \$ 1000!" "He doesn't look so good," the farmer said, "but if you want him that much, he's yours."

The next day the man came back raging mad. He went up to the farmer and screamed. "You sold me a blind horse! You cheated me!"

The farmer calmly replied, "I told you he didn't look good, didn't I?"

Laundry Comments

A young couple moves into a new neighbourhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees

her neighbour hanging the wash outside.

That laundry is not very clean," she said. "She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, but remained silent.

Every time her neighbour wound up hanging her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?"

The husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

School Notes

The following notes from parents excusing their children from attending school have been around a while but if you haven't seen them, I'm sure you will get a kick out of them: "Please excuse Freddie from being away yesterday because he had the fuel."

"Please excuse Michael from being absent on January 30 because he was aleing."

"George was absent yesterday because of a sore trout."

"Please excuse Betsey from being absent. She was sick and I had her shot."

"Joseph has been absent becuz he had two teeth taken off his face."

"My son is under doctor's care and should not take fysical education. Please execute him."

"Please excuse Ralph from school on Friday. He had very loose vowels." □

GOD ALONE SUFFICES

Patricia Walsh

When someone asked me one day what was my kind of religion I had to think for a few minutes. I could say I was baptised into the Roman Catholic Church at a time when I was quite oblivious to its significance. My earliest memories of matters religious or Godly stem from a certain day when I might have been about four years old and my mother told me the story of Jesus on the Cross. I can remember even now how upset I was at what had happened to Jesus; what they had done to him. Why had they killed him?

Religion is important to me.

The practice of my religion is important to me. But I know God expects more of me. I believe that when I get to Heaven the Good Lord will look at me and say – "How much joy did you spread around when you were down there? Did you try and show love to everyone you met in life?"

Sometimes I have a little chat with Him about that. I point out that loving everyone is easier said than done, especially when I come up against individuals who are, to put it mildly, decidedly unlovable. He doesn't answer me so I guess I will have to work that one out for myself.

Truly grateful to God. Most of the time I remember to be truly

ONE LAST THOUGHT

grateful for all my blessings. However, being human, I sometimes have my moments of rebellion. I take Him to task for certain matters. Why, for example, could He not have given me a decent pair of feet? Then the next moment I think – It's OK Lord, don't mind my grumbles. Your poor feet must have hurt too on the rocky way to Calvary.

I mowed the lawn yesterday. It suddenly struck me that that is how my soul must look after a good confession, vowing to keep it always so. Good intentions, good resolutions but not easy to keep. After all, the Lord does not expect perfection from us in this life. He does of course expect us to continue to strive for it, to persevere in trying, in making an effort.

My religion is a comfort to me, a wonderful comfort. I would find it difficult, if not impossible, to live without it. The knowledge of God's all-embracing love, the precious gift of my faith, the expectation of Heaven. In the end, that is all that matters – living my life for and with God and then seeing Him face to face. I often reflect on the words of Saint Teresa of Avila: "Let nothing disturb you/Let nothing dismay you/Everything passes/Patience reaches all that it strives for."

He who has God/Finds he lacks nothing./God alone suffices. □

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

JULY 2021

For the elderly

We pray for the elderly, who represent the roots and memory of a people; may their experience and wisdom help young people to look towards the future with hope and responsibility.

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MARY FOR US

The resurrection requires a prerequisite, on our part, of being good, true Christians, of knowing the destiny of being truly inserted in the source of life which is Christ, of being from now on attracted and absorbed in his mysterious existence. Christ is life: we must be Christians, we must be united to Christ, because if we really want the miracle of his risen life to be ours too, we must act in such a way as to believe and work according to the indescribable union with him. And the most important thing in our present time. And here Our Lady, with her Assumption into Heaven, guarantees us the possibility of ascending too, if we are, like her, united with Christ. *St. Paul VI*, 15 August, 1969

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

Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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