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CONTENTS

From The Editor's Desk: <i>The Bothering Black Hole</i>3
Matrimony or Cohabitation - <i>Don Giampaolo Dianin</i>4
No One Will Separate Us - <i>Maria Chiara Bregolin</i>6
Youth on the Move: What Brings Us Together - <i>Anastasia Dias</i>7
Fesat of the Month: In That Bread and In that Wine - <i>Don Chino Biscontin</i>9
Great Bible Heroes: The 'Greatest' Meeting of All - <i>Ian Pinto,sdb</i>11
Witnesses In And For Our Times: St. Paulinus of Nola.....13
Lectio Divina: The Future of Human- kind - <i>Don Carlo Broccardo</i> 16
Quietspaces: So Important to Give and to Bless - <i>Pope Francis</i>18
A Wreath on the Sea - <i>Pierluigi Menato</i>20
Fioretti of Don Bosco - 17 - <i>Michele Molineris</i>24
Salesian Saint: Bl. Zeffirino Namancura27
Reflecting on Mary: Mary: Receiving and Being a Sign - <i>Maria Ko</i>29
NewsBits.....31
<i>In a Cheerful Mood</i>32
<i>The Devotion of the Three Hail Marys</i>33
<i>Loving Children to their Loving Mother</i>34
<i>They Are Grateful to Our Lady & Don Bosco</i>34
<i>Thanks to Dear St. Dominic Savio</i>35



*Turn then,
most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy
towards us.
And after this,
our exile,
show unto us,
the blessed fruit
of your womb,
JESUS*

From The Editor's Desk THE BOTHERING BLACK HOLE

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5 (NIV)

It's the beginning of a new academic year and you're changing gears maybe and then you ask yourself: Do I ever have little places of discouragement that entangle my heart? I know in the bigger picture of life, things are good. But there's this little dark place. A little black hole. That sometimes doesn't feel that little. It hangs like a cloud – blocking the sun, casting shadows.

Maybe it's an argument you've had with a family member one too many times. Your relationship is good, but this one thing feels like a black hole.

Maybe it's an issue with one of your kids. He's an amazing child, but there is this one habit of his that baffles you, embarrasses you and causes you to fear. It feels like a black hole.

Or maybe it's a recurring frustration with a friend. She's amazing, but there's this one part of your friendship that darkens the collective good. And you can't figure out how to address it. Now it's happening more frequently, and it feels like a black hole.

I know. It's hard.

Recently, I was in one of my prayerful moments and desperately asking God to help me better process some of the hard situations in my own life. I asked God to shed some of His light on what I'm struggling through so I don't get lost. His voice wasn't loud or definitive. Just a slight shift of my thoughts to be more in line with truth, and I knew light was defeating my darkness.

I saw my prayer being gently answered; small changes were taking place, no grand finale I was hoping for but I noticed the beautiful symphony of hopeful notes in the in-between.

I began to realize that every time I turned to God and asked Him to shed light on my situation, I was trading a little of my struggle for a bit of His strength.

I began to realize that there was no black 'hole' at all. The 'whole' wasn't all bad. Yes, there are some issues to address and some tensions to manage, but I can't let my frustration darken my outlook. Doesn't Jesus remind you, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He also assures us that darkness cannot win against light, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). This truth should make you want to do something positive in this area today. Invest the time to make a little imperfect progress right there in your dark place. A dark place that won't be so dark with a little light cast upon it.

Fr. Ian Doultan sdb

MATRIMONY OR COHABITATION?

by Don Giampaolo Dianin

We see all around us a growing allergy towards the institution of marriage. It does not have the features of the refusal that characterized the sixties of the last century when protest against every institution was strong; today love no longer feels the need for an institution; strong passion, a roof over their heads and the will to get involved in the game of life as long as there's good understanding was enough.

In the past decades, those who chose cohabitation did so to give themselves a trial; to look for guarantees, to experience the union concretely. Some took it on because they did not believe in the institution; they considered it a piece of paper and the ceremony, irrelevant. Today, if you ask a couple why they have chosen to

live together, they might look at you strangely because they might not even understand the question. They might even tell you: 'Today we're doing it because everyone is doing it. Maybe sometime in the future, we will get married but for now, we don't see the need.'

Pope Francis dedicated numbers 131 and 132 of *Amoris Laetitia* to explain the profound meaning of the institution of matrimony. There is nothing formal, no external show, no yielding to lavish ceremonies, only a search for the profound links between the love of a man and a woman and their lives together; the intimately personal and social dimension of their existence; and this, even before their marriage takes on the features of the celebration of a sacrament.

Institutions, in general, do not

arise to complicate life or to interfere in personal affairs but they exist to make possible and facilitate our existence. We know, for example, that the State has many remits; but it exists to make the lives of people in a particular territory, habitable. The State builds roads and bridges, administers justice, investigates matters, and punishes transgressors so they do not harm others. Taxes are paid because we don't just have rights, we also have duties.

The man-woman bond and the fecundity of love are a precious asset; the happiness of people and the healthy growth of future generations are at stake. Societies have always felt the need to protect and promote this fundamental experience in the lives of people. It is not their intention to intrude into their intimate spaces but to help and support them; to guarantee the rights and duties that facilitate their development and growth.

Marriage is born to protect the love between a man and a woman. By getting married I tell everyone that we are together, and we ask them to respect our choice. By marrying me, I want to protect our love from even a stomachache or from the ups and downs and from crises that could lead me to destroy everything. This institution tells me: "Think about it, go slow, get help!" By marrying me I assure my partner of the rights and duties I assume because it is also justice, concreteness and commitment. By marrying me, I guarantee that children will have a safe place to grow up.

The Pope writes: "Marriage is much more meaningful than

mere spontaneous association for mutual gratification, which would turn marriage into a purely private affair. As a social institution, marriage protects and shapes a shared commitment to deeper growth in love and commitment to one another, for the good of society (AL 131).

Marriage could also lead to simply stopping or falling into boredom. In the past, it was said that "marriage is the tomb of love," imagining that a time could come when all enthusiasm would disappear. But cohabitation also has its risks: its provisional nature, uncertainty, the fear that the other could always leave and loneliness compared to the laws and guarantees that the State reserves for those who are married.

Marriage is not love's superstructure, but it has its essential aspects: I assume the responsibility for the person I love and I do it in front of everyone.

By marrying you, I tell you that I will be with you for better or for worse, in joy and pain. By marrying you, I promise to love you for life. By getting married to you, we give life to the conjugal "we" that surpasses everything, without eliminating, the individuality of each other. By getting married we embark on a good path that others have lived and trod and one that has been tried and has many indications that it will reach its goal. By marrying you I am telling you that you can trust me and that our love is not a passing feeling but a commitment that yearns to endure through time with all its struggles. □



STAYING TOGETHER

NO ONE WILL SEPARATE US

By Maria Chiara Bregolin Tezzon

I have been a God-fearing person and that is large because I came from a God-fearing family and we believed in the power of prayer and the intercession of the saints. I have been able to experience God's presence many times in my life and also in my marriage. And because I prayed fervently my husband was able to take his courage in both his hands and he decided to say 'yes.' We have recourse to the intercession of the saints to help young people find a husband and many testimonies bear this out and I add my testimony to that list.

Forgive this rather flippant introduction. Truly the theme of numbers 131 and 132 of *Amoris Laetitia* is something that would make my hands tremble. I am convinced that anyone who gets married today must be really brave.

I could not enter into the theme of cohabitation versus Christian marriage between friends and family without entering into an endless discussion on the reasons of one and the contraindications of the other.

So, I start with a choice: two baptized people who decide to live together and start a family without going through the sacrament of marriage; they have made a choice. I believe that, unlike many, cohabitation is also a choice in all respects: it is also courageous to take charge of one's life, leaving the nest to start one's own family, but not yet clear about the significance of a sacrament...It is with the courage of faith that one can throw one's heart beyond the obstacle and overcome the distrust in the future, the economic difficulties, the failed ex-

periences of other couples, the fear of approaching something too great and sacred in accepting the grace of Marriage.

I speak of many dear friends who have chosen to live together not because of the economic advantages or the vision of marriage as a "tomb of love" nor to give their day a bit of pep, that bit of insecurity that makes you say to the other that your love is not taken for granted. I speak of many dear friends to whom we have not been able, as married Christian couples, to make clear that there is no merit in choosing the sacrament. But it is only Grace; the Grace of having had examples of joyful marriages before us; the Grace of having been able to develop a moral choice though with a certain degree of unconsciousness.

One can know the rule and know what the virtue indicates, yet still not have the Gift of Grace as the Gift of Marriage as a sacrament which: "[...] involves a series of obligations born of love itself, a love so serious and generous that it is ready to face any risk" (AL 131)

That "yes" that I said in the Church, before witnesses and society, tells the other that he can trust in my love, accept that to support our family there will not only be laws and the whole cultural substratum but also the grace of the Holy Spirit who works incessantly and keeps us young, alive and constantly demonstrating my love for you because you are my companion, partner, lover and friend.

On this journey, united as we are by the Gift of the Holy Spirit, no one dare separate us. □

WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER

by Anastasia Dias

While you're reading this, it may be a beautiful, sunny morning in the month of June. Or a warm afternoon. Even better, a still an evening. You may have woken up to bright rays of sunlight entering through your windows, grateful to be alive. Or you may be going to bed, with a smile on your face, eagerly waiting for tomorrow's dawn.

It's been almost six months since Covid-19 entered our lives. It's a cliché to say that our lives will never be the same again. Millions of people have been battling this disease while quite a few of them have already succumbed to it. Even though everything we've had seems lost, we still have one stronghold to seek refuge-hope in. The same hope that comes every morning through your windows, layered with happy rays of sunshine. The hope you carry with you when you go to bed every night. The hope for a better tomorrow, a tomorrow in which we will have defeated this virus.

Covid-19 is unquestionably one of the most unfortunate things that could and did happen to us. Nevertheless, it has given us time to look within ourselves and introspect and to

around us too; the time we said we never had for ourselves, for families and friends. Now, in the shelter of our warm homes, in the company of our loved ones, we realize how fortunate we are to have families.

We have begun to think of those who aren't as fortunate as us, who live on the streets, for instance. They're the one this pandemic has affected the most. We've reached out to them, sharing masks, food, clothing and even shelter.

It is in this time of crisis, that we've put away our differences and joined hands to beat the virus. World leaders have come together and encouraged us to stay at home and save lives. We are one large human family now, united by our differences and committed to eradicate Covid-19.

It is during this lockdown that



IN THAT BREAD AND IN THAT WINE

Don Chino Biscontin

The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is one of the most popular solemnities at the popular level: in many dioceses in the Catholic world it is accompanied by processions, a sign of Jesus who walks the streets of man

During his last supper with his disciples, Jesus makes a moving and heroic effort at communication. To understand the Eucharist it is essential that we try to understand what Jesus wanted to communicate on that dramatic evening of his arrest on the eve of his killing.

Four very strong emotions were welling up in his heart. First of all, there was anguish at the prospect of suffering and of violent death. Secondly, there was no less anguish about the fate of his mission, since the possible salvation of humankind depended on it. Moreover, Jesus had at heart the fate of his disciples who were associated with him during his public life and who would now have to face,

fragile as they were a difficult trial. The only possibility of the continuation of his mission was now going to pass into those weak hands and finally, and above all, a complete and total and loving surrender to His Father in trust, docility and total availability.

Jesus wants to communicate to the disciples, first of all, the meaning of the events that are about to unfold. From the outside, his violent end will appear as a denial of all that he had taught in the name of God and of his claim of the mediator between God and men. Seen from within the soul of Jesus, those events, a consequence of his total fidelity to his mission, is the incarnation of a faithful love



our human qualities of compassion and sensitivity that seem to have been lost a long time ago have been found again. This time they're put to good use, hopefully never to be hidden again.

We've been thinking of doctors and nurses; they have been sacrificing their own lives, working tirelessly, to save each and every patient breathing on a ventilator. Some of us decided that we're going to make a difference; we've gone to lend a helping hand to healthcare workers; so we left our homes for a while and worked with healthcare workers. We're also thinking of the army and the police who have left their families and the comfort of their homes to patrol streets, risking their lives to prevent the spread of the virus, to protect us.

These times are completely unprecedented; the virus has entered our lives and made us vulnerable. We understood our mortality and how an invisible virus can potentially kill us. At the same time, it makes us realize how powerful we are if we come together as a community. If, instead of looking at the things that make us different, if we look at one common trait, our humanity, we will be invincible.

We find joy in togetherness, in sharing and giving; even joy like never before. Joy that we concealed because we began to stare at the screens of our laptops and smart-phones. Now we begin searching, soul-searching.

We look into ourselves, find reserves of strength, unknown

and oblivious of for so long. Because of Covid-19 we are confronting our deepest and darkest fears, and are fighting them valiantly. When this is all over, we will have gotten rid of depression and anxiety that kept us from leading happy lives for so long. We are emerging as warriors.

Everything around us seems so different now that this might be far from over. We aren't afraid to spend time with our families for the fear of being judged, at least we are lucky enough to have them.

Nature had begun healing. There was no one to create an imbalance in the natural cycle because we humans have been hidden away for so long.

One can sense love all around. Gratitude for the simplest of moments. Life in itself has been the greatest gift we could ever have.

Human beings became more compassionate, sensitive and caring. This pandemic brings about the best in us. We will survive. This is enough for us.

Like my 6-year-old cousin brother, when asked about life in quarantine, simply said: 'Quarantine is when Dad has all the time in the world to play with me (and he wins every time). Mum doesn't hesitate to tell me another story at bedtime. My sister doesn't seem to run out of hugs. My grandmother smiles each time she sees me. I love being quarantined.'

To paraphrase him in simpler words, 'Life is the greatest blessing and we've just begun to recognize that.' □

THE 'GREATEST' MEETING OF ALL
John the Baptist and Jesus

Ian Pinto, sdb

"I tell you this: no one greater than John the Baptist has come forward from among the sons of women" (Mt 11:11).



...The word of the Lord came to John: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight and all humankind shall see the Salvation of God

which reaches its climax in the gift of his life: "Jesus, knowing that his hour had come, to pass from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13, 1); "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).



Surprisingly, for this reason, he, as their Lord and Master washes the disciples' feet: "The Son of man, came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). That is why he will offer bread and wine saying: "It is my body... and It is my blood," where the words "body" and "blood" indicate the person and life of Jesus.

Jesus still wants to communicate to the disciples his total confidence in God to whom he entrusts his existence and the mission that filled it. He will expire saying: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). The Father will save him from death: "You will not leave my soul in hell neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27).

The Father will also ensure the continuity of the mission and, with it, the offer of salvation will remain open despite the killing of his Son: "In this is love: it was not that we loved God; but that he loved us first and sent his Son as a victim for the expiation of our sins" (1 John 4:10). To Peter, he will say: "Simon, Simon, behold: Satan has sought to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, so that your faith may not fail. And when you have returned, strengthen your broth-

ers" (Lk 22:31-32).

With such confidence, Jesus says: "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). The supper takes place in the context of the Jewish Passover celebrations. Here the word "memory" indicates not only a mental exercise but the word "memorial" meant the real reappearance, here and now, of the events commemorated. For the Jews, it was the presence of the Power of God that was enacted in their liberation from slavery in Egypt; for the disciples, it was the presence of Jesus himself, through his love, which reconciles, heals, resurrects and saves. But the "do this" of Jesus indicates what he was doing with his disciples: being around a table for a friendship meal. Jesus refers to this meal with sinners, which now costs him his life and which he considers the clearest and most complete sign of the significance of his mission: lost men and women to whom God, through Jesus, offers reconciliation and salvation.

We recognize in that Bread and in that Wine the presence of Jesus himself and, without fear and with gratitude, we sit at the table with him, the Son, as his brothers and sisters. □

John and Jesus shared a special relationship. Not only did John baptize him and herald him as the Messiah, they were primarily blood relations. The first time they met, they were in their mother's wombs. Since we know nothing of Jesus' early life, we don't know whether he and John spent time together but it does seem quite probable. If Mary went to assist Elizabeth in her pregnancy, thereby showing a special relationship with her, she surely must have gone again later when both their sons were growing. So, Jesus and John might have had a few moments together and perhaps were quite familiar with each other despite the distance between them.

This much however is certain, John never spent as much time with Jesus as any of his disciples. The same is the case with Jesus, Yet, Jesus boldly declares him to be the greatest man ever born. John hardly knew Jesus, the Christ. All he knew was Jesus was his relative. Both of them were friendly relations before they ever became great stalwarts. John couldn't have known much about what Jesus did prior to meeting him at the Jordan. All that he might have heard were the stories his mother told him about how both, he and Jesus came to be born.

An Eye for the Messiah

What stands out in John is his sensitivity to God. He had developed over the years, possibly through intense fasting, prayer and penance,

an eye for the Messiah. We see this when Mary came to visit Elizabeth. Despite being only a foetus in the womb, he leapt for joy (Lk 1:39-45). We see it again when he went to the desert to encounter God (Lk 1:80) and finally, when he saw Jesus amid the crowds he was preaching to and baptizing (Mt 3:1-14).

Of all the people Jesus encountered in his lifetime, no one saw him for who he really was except for John the Baptist. Most of them began to believe in him only after he performed miracles or spoke with authority. John was the only one who declared on sight that Jesus

was the chosen one of God (Jn 1:29). Despite the attention he was getting and the faith people were putting in him, John was sensitive to the truth: "I am not the Messiah" (Jn 1:20), "I have been sent before him. Only the bridegroom has the bride; but the friend of the bridegroom stands by and listens, and rejoices to hear the bridegroom's voice. My joy is now full. It is necessary that he increase and that I decrease" (Jn 3:28-30).

Mouth for Truth

It's no secret that John had a sharp tongue. He was not one who backed down from speaking the truth. He never minced his words and ultimately, this is precisely what cost him his head. Right now, I don't want to shift the focus so much on John's stand for truth. Here, what I want to point out is his courage to testify to the truth. As quoted earlier, he said very emphatically, that he was neither the Messiah nor a prophet. He was convinced that he was called to be the "voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord!" (Jn 1:23)

I'm sure he would have enjoyed having his own band of followers, people who adored him and hung to every word. Anyone would like that, but not John. When he saw Jesus walking by, he declared to the disciples who were with him, "There is the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36). He invited his own disciples to follow the one who was greater than himself. His disciples took up his invitation and left his side to follow Jesus. This is a mark of great humility. How many people do you know who would willingly lower themselves before someone genuinely greater? I know for sure that I struggle to be that kind of person and that I have

met hardly a handful of people who would do something like that!

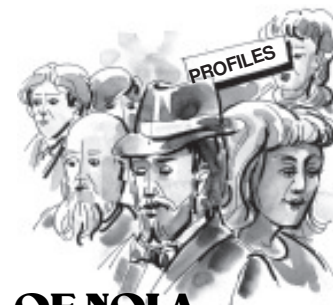
What's very clear is that John sided with truth. He knew that there was no virtue in living a lie. Jesus was the chosen one, not he, and ultimately, people would find salvation only through Jesus and not through his baptism.

Hands for Saving

The final point I want to make regarding the character of John was that he had blessed hands. God used him to wash away the sins of repentant people and give them a new lease of life in the waters of the Jordan. Jesus himself submitted to being baptized by John. John's baptism became a turning point in many people's lives. An important question to ask is 'How did he come to possess this power?' The answer is quite simple: God. John gave God the better part of his life. Like many good and holy Jews before him, he eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah. God rewarded his steadfastness and devotion by making him an instrument to herald the coming of the Messiah.

John is perhaps not one of the most popular Biblical figures. I don't think many would take his name if you asked them to name a few individuals from the Bible but one cannot deny his great contribution to the history of salvation. John shows us in his own simple way, how God can use a person to fulfill his plans. On our part, we need to devote time to being with Him, praying, preparing ourselves and surrendering to His will. God wants people to herald the Good News of His love, mercy and salvation. Can we be the instruments He is looking for? □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. PAULINUS OF NOLA 354 - 431

Pontius Meropius Paulinus was born at Bourdeaux in 353. "Everyone," says St. Jerome, "admired the purity and eloquence of his diction, the delicacy and loftiness of his thoughts, the strength and sweetness of his style, and the liveliness of his imagination." Such were the talents of Paulinus in his youth, while a desire of pleasing men yet divided his heart. Probity, integrity, and other moral virtues were endowments of his soul still more admirable than his learning.

When he came of age, he took as a wife, a Spanish lady of sincere piety, and one of the most accomplished of her sex; her name was Therasia, and she brought him a great estate in land. The prudence, generosity, affability, and other social and religious virtues of the young statesman attracted veneration and esteem wherever he came he gained many friends and clients in Italy, Gaul, and Spain and in all he countries had displayed his talents during fifteen years in the discharge of various employment and affairs both public and domestic. But God was pleased to open his eyes to see the emptiness of all worldly pursuits



and to inspire him with a more noble and innocent ambition of becoming little for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The conversations of St. Ambrose at Milan of St. Martin, whom he had met at Vienne, and of St. Delphinus, bishop of Bordeaux, gave him a relish for retirement and strong sentiments of a more perfect virtue.

Paulinus had made some advances in virtue but was not yet

perfect and his wife, though yet young and in a condition to enjoy the world, was the first to excite him to a contempt of whatever is not God; and they mutually encouraged one another to forsake all, that they might more perfectly follow Christ. In this resolution they retired first into Spain and passed four years in a little country solitude, from 390 to 394, in exercises of penance and devotion. There they lost their only son, an infant, whom Paulinus calls a holy offspring, because he had been purified by baptism. They buried him at Alcalá, near the bodies of the martyrs Justus and Pastor. The holy couple lived from that time, by mutual consent, in perpetual chastity; and Paulinus soon after changed his dress to signify to the world his resolution of forsaking it, and he determined to renounce the senate, his country, estate, and house, and to bury himself in some monastery or wilderness. The saint sold all his estates and distributed the price among the poor as he did also the estate of his wife, with her consent, who aspired with no less fervor to Christian perfection. This action was much extolled by all true servants of God, but severely condemned by the slaves of the world, who called his piety folly, hating God in the works of his servant because contrary to theirs. The rich forsook him; his own slaves, his relations, and brothers, refused to pay him the common duties of humanity and charity, and rose up against him, so that he became as one unknown to his brothers, "and as a stranger to the children of his mother."

Thus while the world despised him, he justly and courageously

despised it again and gloriously trampled it under his feet. In his poverty and obscurity he became the admiration of the universe, and persons of the first rank travelled from the remotest boundaries of the empire to see Paulinus in his little cottage, as St. Austin and St. Jerome witnessed. Therasia confirmed him in these good resolutions and was not inferior to him in virtue.

St. Austin, being then only a priest, in 392, commended his generous resolution, calling it, the glory of Jesus Christ. And exhorting Licentius, a young nobleman who had formerly been his scholar, to a contempt of the world, he wrote thus to him, "Go into Campania; see Paulinus, that man so great by his birth, by his genius, and by his riches. See with what generosity this servant of Christ has stripped himself of all to possess only God. See how he has renounced the pride of the world to embrace the humility of the cross. See how he now employs in the praises of God those riches of science, which, unless they are consecrated to him who gave them, are lost."

The saint had indeed, for the sake of virtue, forsaken all that the world could give; he had despised its riches, honours, and seducing pleasures and had trampled upon its frowns and all human respects. Courted in the world by all that would be thought men of genius, and caressed by all that valued themselves upon a fine taste, he had courage to renounce those flattering advantages; and with honours and riches he had made a sacrifice also of his learning and great attainments, only that he might consecrate himself to the

divine service. Yet this was only the preparation to the conflict. Wherefore not to lose by sloth the advantages which he had procured to himself, he laboured with all his strength to improve them to his advancement in virtue.

Paulinus would not choose a retreat at Jerusalem or Rome, because he desired to live unknown to the world. His love of solitude, and his devotion to St. Felix, determined him to prefer a lonely cottage near Nola, a small city in Campania, that he might serve Christ near the tomb of that glorious confessor, which was without the walls of the town. He would be the porter of his church, to sweep the floor every morning, and to watch the night as keeper of the porch; and he desired to end his life in that humble employment. But he was promoted to holy orders before he left Spain. The people of Barcelona seized on him in the church on Christmas-day, in 393, and demanded with great earnestness that he should be made priest. He resolutely opposed their desire and only at length consented on condition that he should be at liberty to go wherever he pleased. This being agreed to, he received holy orders from the hands of the bishop. The citizens of Barcelona were, indeed, in hopes to fix him among them; but the next year, 394, after Easter, he left Spain to go into Italy.

He saw St. Ambrose at Milan, or rather at Florence, who received him with great honour and adopted him into his clergy, but without any obligation of residing in his diocese.

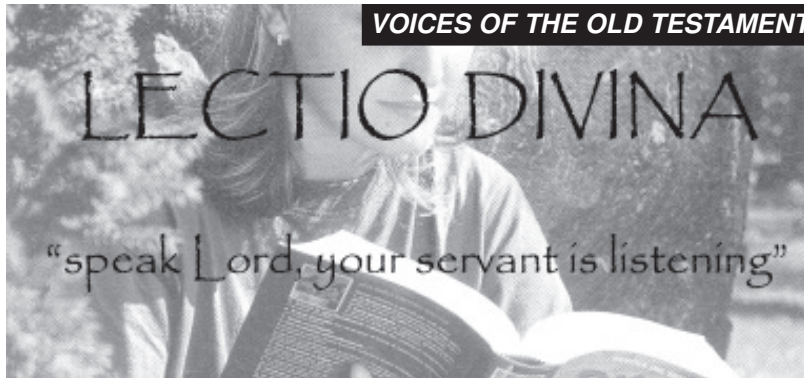
St. Paulinus had spent fifteen years in his retirement, when, upon the death of Paul the bishop

of Nola, about the end of the year 409, he was chosen to fill the episcopal chair. Uranius, a priest of that church under our saint, who has given us a short relation of his death, to which he was an eyewitness, testifies that the holy prelate, in the discharge of his duties, sought to be beloved by all rather than feared by any.

St. Paulinus lived to the year 431. Three days before his death he was visited in his last sickness by Symmachus and Acyndinus, two bishops, with whom he entertained himself on spiritual things, as if he had been in perfect health. The joy of seeing them made him forget his distemper. A little later a priest of Lucania arrived, who brought him fifty pieces of silver, sent him for a present from a certain bishop and a layman. St. Paulinus gave thanks to God, gave two pieces to the bearer, and paid the merchants for the clothes. He slept a little at night but awaked his clergy to Matins according to his custom and made them an exhortation to unanimity and fervour. — After this he lay silent till the hour of vespers, when, stretching out his hands, he said in a low voice, "I have prepared a lamp for my Christ," Psalm xxxi. The lamps in the church were then lighting. Between ten and eleven at night, all who were in his chamber felt a sudden trembling as by some shock of an earthquake, and that moment he gave up his soul to God. He was buried in the church he had built in honour of St. Felix. His body was afterwards removed to Rome and lies in the church of St. Bartholomew beyond the Tiber. □

Adapted from:

Butler's Lives of Saints, London



THE FUTURE OF HUMANKIND

Don Carlo Broccardo

On the evening of Holy Saturday, during the Easter Vigil service, the first reading is always taken from the first chapter of the book of Genesis; the great story of creation. It is a poetic and impressive narrative punctuated by some repeated themes. One of the refrains is that, as God proceeds with creation he stops occasionally to look at his completed work with satisfaction and “sees that it is good.” All that God had created was good and only good. When Adam and Eve begin their existence (here we enter the second chapter of the book of Genesis), God prepares for them a garden rich in vegetation and fertile: a veritable garden of delights (especially for those who live in an arid land like Palestine). It was not just a beautiful place. They could eat of all the fruits that grew in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they could live a totally peaceful life.

There was peaceful coexistence between humans and the animals that were created for them. There

was peace between man and woman, created for each and facing each other (says Gen 2:18). The biblical narrative expresses this reality by saying that they were “both naked,” the man and his wife “and they felt no shame” (Gen 2:25). They had nothing to hide and nothing to fear. Finally, and this is most important, both of them lived in serene communion with God who walked with them in the garden. This is obviously an anthropomorphic image (God thought of as a human being) but it gives the reader a fair idea of familiarity and the attitude of living together in peace.

On June 1, the liturgy offers us a passage from the third chapter of the book of Genesis (Gen 3:9-15) in which we see how the whole peaceful scenario simply went up in smoke. Humans, as we know, transgressed God’s commandment and wanted to eat – at the instigation of the serpent – the fruit of the forbidden tree. That was how the peace of the garden was shattered.

Genesis 3:9-15 takes up the

three aspects of the preexisting peace that we saw earlier but this time, in reverse order. First of all, the relationship with God is broken; the Bible invites us to imagine God going out for a walk with Adam in the morning and he does not find him; then he calls him and Adam responds: “I hid because I was afraid.” Since when did God become scary?

Since Adam ate of the tree that he was not supposed to, he realizes that he is naked and now he feels helpless and vulnerable.

That was the same feeling he had in front of the woman; just a few verses earlier we read that they ate of the fruit and “their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed together fig leaves and made aprons for themselves” (Gen 3:7). They now felt vulnerable and so they had to “protect” themselves from each other’s gaze as well as the gaze of God. And they were right, because Adam’s first reaction, when he was discovered by God was to blame Eve: “The woman you put with me, she gave me to eat and I ate.” Not that he had many other alternatives. However it was sad to see how immediately the mutual accusations began.

Finally, the serenity that existed with the animals is also broken because Eve in turn now blames the serpent and because in the end announces a future of interminable struggle. There would be enmity not only between the woman and the serpent but also



between their children: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your lineage and its lineage,” says the Lord.

What we read or will read on June 1, could be the saddest page in the Bible; a page that makes us reflect on how we human beings are capable of ruining even the most beautiful things!

Think of how we are slowly destroying creation with pollution; or the wars of hatred that infests the land; there is even killing in the name of God! Like humankind on the whole, we are able to ruin even the most sacred of things. What future are we leaving for the generations to come?

But the story of Genesis does not end on a tragic note but with what tradition calls “the Proto-Evangelium” which is the first proclamation good news: “I will make you and the woman hate each other – says the Lord to the serpent – her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring’s heel” (Gen 3:15 TEV). The lineage of Eve, that is, the whole of humankind, will always be threatened by the evil one. We are not to be naïve. Till the end of time humankind will have to “fight” the temptation to ruin everything but in the end, we will make it; we will smash the head of the evil one. It may seem impossible that humankind will overcome evil, but we know that nothing is impossible for God. □

Quiet Spaces

SO IMPORTANT TO GIVE AND TO BLESS

Pope Francis' Homily (Edited) on the Occasion of the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, on Sunday, 23 June, 2019 at Church of Santa Maria Consolatrice, in the Roman Quarter of Casal Bertone

Today, God's word helps us to appreciate more deeply two verbs that are simple, yet essential for daily life: to speak and to give.

To speak. In the first reading, Melchizedek says: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High... and blessed be God Most High" (Gen 14:19-20). For Melchizedek, to speak is to bless. He blesses Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed (cf. Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8). Everything begins with blessing: words of goodness create a history of goodness. The same thing happens in the Gospel: before multiplying the loaves, Jesus blesses them: "Taking the five loaves, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples" (Lk 9:16). A blessing turns five loaves into food enough for a great crowd: the blessing releases a cascade of goodness.

Why is it good to bless? Because it turns a word into a gift. When we bless, we are not doing something for ourselves, but for others. Blessing is not about saying nice words or trite phrases. No, it is about speaking goodness, speaking with love. [...] How many times have we received words of encouragement, or a sign of the cross on our forehead? We were blessed on the day of our baptism, and we are blessed at the end of every Mass. The Eucharist is itself a school of blessing. God blesses us, his beloved children, and thus encourages us to keep going. [...] We come to Mass, certain that we will be blessed by the Lord, and we leave in order to bless others in turn, to be channels of goodness in the world.

This is also true for us: it is important for us pastors to keep blessing God's people. Dear priests, do not be afraid to give a blessing, to bless the People of God. Dear priests, continue to bless: the Lord wants to bless his people; he is happy to make us feel his affection for us. Only as those who are themselves blessed, can we in turn bless others with that same anointing of love. It is sad to think of how easily people today do the opposite: they curse, despise and insult others. [...] Let us avoid being infected by that arrogance; let us not let ourselves be overcome by bitterness, for we eat the Bread that contains all sweetness within it. God's people love to praise, not complain; we were created to bless, not grumble. In the presence of the Eucharist, Jesus who becomes bread, this simple bread that contains the entire reality of the Church, let us learn to bless all that we have, to praise God, to bless and not curse all that has led us to this moment, and to speak words of encouragement to others.

The second verb is to give. "Speaking" is thus followed by "giving". This was the case with Abraham who, after being blessed by Melchizedek, "gave him a tenth of everything" (Gen 14:20). It was

the case, too, with Jesus who after reciting the blessing, gave the loaves to be distributed among the crowd. This tells us something very beautiful. Bread is not only something to be consumed; it is a means of sharing. Surprisingly, the account of the multiplication of the loaves does not mention the multiplication itself. On the contrary, the words that stand out are: "break", "give" and "distribute" (cf. Lk 9:16). In effect, the emphasis is not on the multiplication but the act of sharing. This is important. Jesus does not perform a magic trick; he does not change five loaves into five thousand and then to announce: "There! Distribute them!" No. Jesus first prays, then blesses the five loaves and begins to break them, trusting in the Father. And those five loaves never run out. This is no magic trick; it is an act of trust in God and his providence.

He tells his disciples straight out: "You give them something to eat" (Lk 9:13). Why do we have to give them something to eat, if they came to hear our Teacher? If they didn't bring their own food, let them go back home, it's their problem; or else give us some money to buy food". This way of thinking is not wrong, but it isn't the way Jesus thinks. He will have none of it: "You give them something to eat". Whatever we have can bear fruit if we give it away - that is what Jesus wants to tell us - and it does not matter whether it is great or small. The Lord does great things with our littleness, as he did with the five loaves. He does not work spectacular miracles or wave a magic wand; he works with simple things. God's omnipotence is lowly, made up of love alone. And love can accomplish great things with little. The Eucharist teaches us this: for there we find God himself contained in a piece of bread. Simple, essential, bread broken and shared, the Eucharist we receive allows us to see things as God does. It is the antidote to the mindset that says: "Sorry, that is not my problem", or: "I have no time, I can't help you, it's none of my business". Or that looks the other way...

In our city that hungers for love and care, that suffers from decay and neglect, that contains so many elderly people living alone, families in difficulty, young people struggling to earn their bread and to realize their dreams, the Lord says to each one of you: "You yourself give them something to eat". You are not alone, for you have the Eucharist, bread for the journey, the bread of Jesus. Tonight too, we will be nourished by his body given up for us. We will feel blessed and loved, and we will want to bless and love in turn, beginning here, in our city, in the streets where we will process this evening. The Lord comes to our streets in order to speak a blessing for us and to give us courage. And he asks that we too be a blessing and a gift for others. □

A WREATH ON THE SEA

By Pierluigi Menato, TA/ID



All that was left of his father was a photograph: a slightly dimmed sepia-toned portrait that was also fast fading with age. It stood on the chest of draws in a tin frame; before it was a bouquet of fake flowers but made so well, they seemed almost real.

Every now and again, Philip stopped to look at it and felt a twinge in his heart because that image was as faded as the image in his heart, which would one day or other completely disappear from his memory. Yet, a year had not gone by since his father had disappeared, swallowed up by the sea, just like what happened long ago to his uncle Andrew and his cousin Michel. The fate of fishermen who become too familiar with the sea is sometimes treacherous.

Philip was left with his mother and his Grandfather Daniel, a fisherman too. They lived in the

little house by the old pier. It stood amid the sound of the fishing boats on one side and the sea on the other. A fisherman's house is small, always smelling of fish, seaweed, iodine and sea salt; just two small rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom.

Philip slept with his grandfather in the kitchen and had for his bed an old net hooked up to the wall with a nail like a hammock. His grandfather slept on a straw mattress that, during the day, was rolled up in a corner. There in the only bedroom, slept his mother, it was where he was born and from where, for the last time, his father had left that morning, at dawn, when the sea as calm as a dead cat had towards evening turned utterly insane, so made that it had swallowed up both men and boats.

Since his father had disappeared, every time they spoke of him she burst into tears, it was heart-wrenching for the poor woman. He could no longer utter his father's name. He just said "he" when she was there, his name no longer came to her lips. Grandfather Daniel raised his head from the book he was reading by the light of the oil lamp and nodding his head, but said nothing. Philip was already in bed and could hear his mother whispering and crying softly as she washed the pots and pans while Philip stared up at the ceiling. Because he couldn't sleep the poor boy glanced out of the window to see through the misty panes the silver stars that

seemed entangled in the nets that were spread out to soak up the night dew.

Only much later did the boy fall asleep; he was unable to sleep till he heard his mother sigh as she got into bed in the other room. He would have liked to jump out of bed and run to comfort her with a hug and a kiss but he didn't dare. He was possessed by an invincible shyness. Grandfather Daniel said that men must swallow their tears, die of a broken heart, but never cry or show fear. So, Philip, who would have liked to do so many things for his mother, did not even whisper what he felt in his heart; it would remain there shut up in a shell like a peanut.

It was almost a year that his father had disappeared and the acute pain, sharp and scorching remained shut within the walls of that poor house. By now grandfather Daniel had taken the boat out to sea and he often took the boy out with him to teach him how to stand at the helm or to pull in the nets.

Every time Philip went out

fishing with his grandfather, his mother kissed him on the forehead but never said a word. She remained there at the door looking at the boat as it slowly receded on the waves. Her face turned pale and seemed to grow stone cold; only her lips moved slightly in prayer.

Spring was over and the carnations on the window sill had faded. They were exposed throughout the sunny summer afternoons. The fishing boats on the still green water bobbed up and down throwing up golden reflections. It was already September and with it came sudden storms and squalls which slapped the cliff side with sprays; all that could be heard were the sounds of creaking masts and trees. It was nearly October with some stormy and other sultry days. The sea crashed against the shore cracking hulls that seemed to groan like tortured creatures.

One evening towards the end of October, Grandfather Daniel came home with a great bundle of yellow and white chrysanthe-





mums.

"We need to prepare a wreath..." he told the mother. "Next week we'll be getting into November and it will be All Souls Day on the second."

"Oh, yes, it's already All Souls Day..." she repeated. Then taking the bundle of flowers she went and shut herself in her room.

Philip dared not say anything. "Wreaths" he thought "on All Souls Day were taken to the graves of loved ones. My poor dad doesn't have a grave."

At supper, while eating soup, the boy raised his head of tousled hair at one point, as if to say

something.

"Grandfather Daniel..." he murmured...

"What is it?"

"Oh, it's nothing...I wanted some bread..."

"It's in front of you, dear..." said his mother, giving his shoulder a little squeeze.

It was not the bread he wanted. Philip wanted to know where the chrysanthemum wreath would be taken, but the question stuck in his throat. The evening before All Souls Day the sea turned rough and ugly.

It was a feast day and they went to Mass walking along the

walls by the sea front to protect themselves from being hit by the gale that came in from the sea. When they returned from Church, his mother murmured something to Grandfather Daniel; Philip could catch only a few words.

"Don't be afraid," replied the Grandfather, "the sea will be calm tomorrow."

The night was terrible and it made Philip whisper: "Our Lady, protect us!" From his suspended hammock Philip heard the screech of the wind and the roar of the lightning. A bolt struck the masts of the fishing boats in the dock. Another streak struck a tree nearby, sending splinters bouncing on the roof above the boy. The boy jumped up terrified and then he immediately stuck his head under the covers not to have to see the glow of the lightning through the window, as it lit up the kitchen where Grandfather Daniel slept serenely on his straw mattress.

As the sky turned pale with the first sign of dawn, the wind seemed to calm down and the sea only stirred a bit; the waves were coming to the shore more calmly now as if to forgive the outburst of the night before.

Kissing him on his cheek his mother woke up Philip. She was already dressed. "Get up," she said, "Grandfather is already outside. We have to go."

"Where?"

"Today is All Souls Day. We're all taking a wreath to your poor father."

When the boy was ready, his mother took him by the hand and they went to the pier. Grandfather

was already in the boat untying the sail ropes.

"Hurry up, come on," he shouted to the boy and his mother, when he saw them approaching. The mother sat in the bow wrapped in a woolen shawl, holding the wreath in her hands. Philip stood next to his grandfather who held the tiller and was adjusting the sail.

The sea had the colour of molten lead and large bituminous coloured clouds swirled on the horizon. The boat, driven by the wind-swelled sails, left the dock quickly. Gradually, Philip saw the land move away, the tangle of masts and white cottages on the coast gradually disappeared.

The old man then looked at the sea.

"Here, perhaps..." he whispered, and he got up to lower the sail, tying the tiller.

The waves had now calmed down and the boat barely pitched on the immense expanse of grey waters.

The mother tried to stand but fell back on the bow, sobbing:

"I cannot..." she murmured, "I cannot."

Grandfather Daniel came up to her and gently took the wreath from her hands and gave it to Philip, who, after a little hesitation, threw it into the water. Then they all made the Sign of the Cross. "Let us kneel" said Grandfather to the boy who was standing beside him, "and pray to the Lord that those who have died at sea may rest in peace."

The mother was crying, her face in her hands. "Amen," she murmured, "Amen!" □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 17

by Michele Molineris

46. Room of Chestnuts (1853)

One evening after supper, while Don Bosco was engaged in his customary role of teaching, two sinister-looking men appeared at the Oratory and asked him to rush to the bedside of a man in a nearby neighborhood called "Cuor d'Oro." The man was dying and wanted to make his confession. Ever ready to provide spiritual assistance, Don Bosco quickly turned over the class to someone else. As he was about to leave, realizing that it was already dark, he thought it prudent to have some of the older boys accompany him. "There's no need," the two strangers said. "We'll escort you there and back. Their presence might upset the sick man."

"Never mind!" Don Bosco replied. "My boys always enjoy a walk. When we'll get there they will wait for me outside." Reluctantly the two men led the way.

When they came to the house, they ushered Don Bosco into a room on the main floor, telling him: "Please wait here a moment while we tell the patient you're here." The boys-among whom were Cigliutti, [John] Gravano, and [Joseph] Buzzetti - remained outside. In that room there were several men gathered festively around a table. Seemingly they had enjoyed a fine supper and now were leisurely savoring or pretending to savor chestnuts. After greeting Don Bosco very respectfully and praising him enthusiastically, they invited him to sample some chestnuts. Don Bosco courteously declined, saying: "Thank you, but I really don't feel like any. I just had my supper."

"Then you won't refuse at least a glass of our wine," they chorused. "It's one of the best; it's from Asti." (A province near Turin renowned for its excellent sparkling wines).

"No, thank you. I never drink except at meals; it upsets my stomach."

"Oh, come now; a little sip won't hurt you. It will even help your digestion. You could at least drink to our health!"

So saying, one of the men reached for a bottle and filled all the glasses. Since he had deliberately set out one glass too few, he placed the bottle on the table and went to fetch another glass which he proceeded to fill from a second bottle standing near it. He then offered it to Don Bosco who had not failed to observe the maneuver. Obviously they were offering him a poisoned drink. Without betraying his suspicion, Don Bosco lifted the glass and toasted the ruffians; then he put it down on the table again, excusing himself. "You can't do this to us," one of them protested. "You're offending us," another broke in. "This wine is of the very best! Drink to our health!" they all shouted.

"I already told you that I don't feel like drinking, and now I'll add that I cannot and will not drink it," Don Bosco replied.

"Yes, you will!" they shouted again. With these words, two of them grabbed Don Bosco by his shoulders and told him: "We won't swallow this insult. Drink you shall, and by force, if necessary."

Don Bosco was in a tight spot. He could not physically resist, nor would it have been prudent to do so. Therefore, he decided to try his luck, saying: "If you really want me to drink, let go of me, or I won't be able to hold the glass steady."

As soon as they released their

hold, Don Bosco instantly darted to the door. Fortunately it was not locked, and he quickly opened it. The sudden appearance of four or five husky young men between 18 and 20 years old curbed the belligerence of the men. Their spokesman very meekly said: "Well, if you don't feel like drinking, you don't have to." "Maybe one of my boys might like this drink," Don Bosco remarked. "Oh, just forget it," they replied. (Don Bosco would certainly not have given that drink to the boys; his suggestion was simply a ruse to force them to show their hand more openly.) "Well, then, where's the dying man?" he asked. To save face, one of them led him to a room on the next floor. The dying man turned out to be one of the two who had come to fetch him at the Oratory. Don Bosco asked him a few questions, but the scoundrel, after making a prodigious effort at self-control, finally burst into laughter, saying: "I'll make my confession some other time." Don Bosco left the house immediately, thanking God for the protection he had received.

After hearing the whole story the next day, some boys made their own private investigations. They learned that a certain individual had offered a good dinner to these hired hatchet men after they had promised to make Don Bosco drink a little wine which he had prepared especially for him. Don Bosco never forgot that room; even during the last few months of his life, whenever he went out on a walk with one of us, he would point it out, remarking: "There's the chestnut room." (EBM IV, 486-488)

47. I won't be there anymore, but you will be there (1853)

An old prophecy assured Father Rua that his life would last at least

thirty-five years more. So he himself testified:

"In 1853, while preparations were afoot in Turin for the centennial celebrations of the miracle of the Blessed Sacrament, our good father Don Bosco wrote a pamphlet to help prepare the faithful for the solemn anniversary. I was then sixteen and acting as his secretary. A few months after the close of the festivities, Don Bosco and I were returning from the summer residence of our good friend, Father Matthew Picco, where Don Bosco used to spend a few days every year to work at his writing in the peace of the countryside, availing himself of the extensive literary, historic, and scientific knowledge of the learned professor. When we reached the city's outskirts, not far from the Great Mother of God Church, our conversation turned to the recent centennial celebration and the popularity of his pamphlet. At one point, Don Bosco, looking to the future, remarked: "When the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary is celebrated in 1903, I shall no longer be here, but you will. As of now, I entrust its reprint to you."

"I gladly accept so welcome a task," I replied, "but what if death should play its tricks on me before then?" "Have no fear! Death will play you no tricks, and you will be able to carry out the task I am now entrusting to you." Hearing him speak with such conviction, I then and there put aside a copy of the pamphlet to have it on hand for a reprint in 1903."

He did indeed reprint it, prefacing it with a statement similar to the above and also mentioning his 1868 illness and recovery.

48. In clergyman (1853)

Bishop [John] Cagliero told the Salesians: One evening in 1853 Don

Bosco came home dripping wet from a torrential downpour. When he got to his room he wanted to change, but his mother could not find him another cassock. He was disappointed because the boys were in church waiting for him to lead the devotions in honor of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, and he did not want to let them down. Then his eye chanced on a used, long overcoat and a pair of white trousers which I believe Marquis [Dominic] Passati had brought for some boy. Without any hesitation Don Bosco donned them, put on a pair of clogs, and trudged downstairs to church. It was dark in the church, but the boys could not help noticing his strange garb. They smiled sympathetically because they knew that he was poor for their sake.

Another year, during the month of May, he was again caught in a downpour. Since he had no other cassock to change into, he had to wear a long overcoat that a fellow priest had given him. It did not reach to his heels, and that is why - as he preached the May sermonette from the pulpit - we could see to what extent his socks had been darned.

A humorous episode occurred around 1854 or 1855. One day Don Bosco had to send [the cleric Joseph] Rocchietti to town on a very important errand; noticing that the boy's shoes were worn and bursting at the seams, Don Bosco took off his own and gave them to him without further thought. On his way out, Rocchietti said laughingly to his companions: "I wonder how Don Bosco will manage today. He has no other shoes." That was quite true! Worse yet, when he tried to borrow a pair from Buzzetti, Rua, and others, he found that they, too, had only the shoes they were wearing, and none were Don Bosco's size. Finally

someone managed to find a pair of clogs. It should be remembered that it was the height of summer. When dinnertime arrived and Don Bosco came down the stairs, the strange clatter and unusual footwear attracted the boys' attention, exciting their laughter. The amusing aspect of the incident was that around three o'clock a servant came from Count [Louis] Giriodi to ask Don Bosco if he would go to assist a sick member of his family at once. Don Bosco wanted to take a coach so that no one would notice his clogs, but it would have taken too long to find one, since they were rather scarce in addition to being expensive. He therefore asked the servant to accompany him. As they trudged along Via Dora Grossa and across Piazza Castello to Via Po, No. 53, Don Bosco kept close to the buildings, hoping that his cassock would hide his unusual footwear. After administering to the patient, he was about to leave when the servant hinted that Don Bosco might not need to be escorted back. "I'm afraid I do," said Don Bosco. "But why, if I may ask?" "Because I need someone to block out the view of my clogs." "Good heavens," the servant exclaimed, and went straight to Count Giriodi to tell him about it. The count hastily dressed and accompanied Don Bosco himself through the narrow, deserted alleys. On reaching Via Corte d' Appello, he took Don Bosco to a shoe store at No.8, run by Mrs. Zanone, a widow who was well known to both of them, and whispered to her that Don Bosco was wearing clogs because he had no shoes. The lady, who had warmly greeted Don Bosco, was greatly surprised, and she instantly fitted him with the finest shoes she had in exchange for his clogs, which she kept as a precious souvenir of the event. □

SALESIAN SAINTS

ZEFFIRINO NAMANCURA STUDENT, BLESSED 1886 - 1905

The sanctity of Zeffirino is an expression and fruit of Salesian Youth Spirituality, comprised of joy, friendship with Jesus and Mary, the fulfilment of one's duties and a commitment to help others. Zeffirino is convincing proof of the fidelity with which the first missionaries who were sent by Don Bosco to Argentina, succeeded in replicating what he had done at the Oratory of Valdocco: to form young saints.

Zeffirino's life is a brief parable of just 19 years, but rich in teachings. He was born in Chimpay (Argentina) on August 26, 1886 and was baptized two years later by the Salesian Missionary Fr. Milanese, who had mediated the peace agreement between the Mapuce (an indigenous tribe located between Chile and Argentina) and the Argentine Army. He was eleven when his father enrolled him in the government school at Buenos Aires. He intended to make his son the future defender of his people. But Cifferino was not happy there so his father took him to the Salesian College of "Pius IX". Here he began his adventure with grace which would transform him into a heroic witness of the Christian life. At once he showed a keen interest in his studies, was enamoured by the practices of piety, he loved his catechism and



was appreciated by everyone, his companions and his superiors. Two experiences set him off towards the peaks of sanctity: the life of Dominic Savio, of whom he became an ardent imitator, and his First Communion, at which time he promised uncompromising fidelity to his great friend Jesus. At that time the little lad found it difficult to "fall in line" and "be obedient to the sound of the bell" but he soon became a model.

He took as his model of life Dominic Savio; following his "simple recipe" for sanctity which Don Bosco, the "Father and Teacher of Youth" gave little Dominic one day: Be always happy, do well your duties of piety and study, and help your companions." He was the soul of the recreation and the referee too, and his word was accepted when there was a dispute. Zeffirino's piety exceeded the Salesian culture, solidly

rooted in the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. For this reason he assumed the role of sacristan. With the slow and prayerful manner in which he made the sign of the Cross he impressed all those who saw him.

In 1903, when he was sixteen and a half years old, Monsignor Cagliero accepted him among the aspirants in Viedma, the capital of the apostolic vicariate, to start studying Latin. One day - Francesco De Salvo seeing Zeffirino, who was already a Salesian aspirant, arrive on horseback with lightning speed, shouted to him: "Zeffirino, what do you like best?" He expected an answer referring to horse riding (an art the Araucanos were famous at) but the boy, braking his horse replied: "To be a priest." And then he galloped on.

It was during those years of personal interior growth that he took ill with tuberculosis. He was brought back to his native climate, but that was not enough. Bishop Cagliero then thought that he would receive better treatment in Italy. His presence did not go unnoticed. The newspapers wrote admiringly about the "Prince of the Pampas." Father Rua had him sit at table with the Superior Council. He was given a private audience with Pius X who listened to him with interest and even gave him his *Ad Principes* medal. In the Salesian college of Villa Sora, in Frascati, Zeffirino - who had encountered some difficulties in studying Italian - came second in his class. His school report reveals that he stood out in his study of Latin; an important requirement to become a priest. On

Marcy 28, 1905 he had to be hospitalized at the *Fatebenefratelli* hospital on the Tiber Island where he died on May 11, leaving behind the impressive impression of inimitable goodness, diligence and cheerfulness. In this regard we have this touching testimony from a Salesian Father Iorio. Three days before Zeffirino died, Father Iorio had gone to visit him. He was told by the young Zeffirino, now dying: "Father I will be leaving soon, but I recommend this poor young man next to me, to you. Come back often to visit him... he suffers a lot! At night, he almost never sleeps. He coughs a lot".

A comment of his sums up his entire life's programme: "I want to study to be useful to my people." In fact, Zeffirino wanted to study to be a priest and return to his people to contribute to their cultural and spiritual development as he had seen the first missionaries do. A saint is never like a meteorite that flashes across the sky of humanity, but rather the fruit of a long and silent gestation in a family and among a people. That expressed in Zeffirino their best qualities.

The life of Zeffirino is an invitation for us to believe in young people, even those who have just been evangelized; that they may discover the richness of the gospel which does not destroy anything of what is truly human, and the systematic contribution of education in this wonderful work of configuring the human person so that he is able to reproduce in himself the image of Christ. □



MARY: RECEIVING AND BEING A SIGN

by Maria Ko Ha Fong, FMA

Mary leaves her home to begin her journey; a metaphor for a "pilgrimage of faith" along all the stages of her life. She leaves Nazareth behind and with it the "sign" the angel gave her: "Even your relative Elizabeth is expecting a son in her old age, although she was unable to have a child, and she is now in her sixth month" (Lk 1, 36). In the modest little home of Zechariah, the elderly Elizabeth waits for the son that is going to be hers by 'amazing grace.' For Mary, this fact must be a proof of God's power before which "nothing is impossible" (Lk 1, 37).

Nothing is Impossible for God

When Sarah, Abraham's wife laughed in disbelief at the thought of still being able to bear a child in her old age, the Lord asked her this question: "Is this perhaps something impossible for the Lord?" (Gen. 18, 14) So, the son of promise bears the name Isaac which means "God smiles on you" and it is a wonderful sign of God's benevolence (cf. Gen 21, 7). To those who are discouraged and overwhelmed by suffering Isaiah invites us to trust in the One who

can do all things: "See, the Lord's arm is not so short that it cannot save, nor is his ear so hard of hearing" (Is 59, 1). He loves to do surprising things: "See I'm doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not see it?" (Is 43, 19). Trusting firmly in God, Mary makes her way to the hills. That's why in her famous hymn, she can say in an explosion of joy that the Lord for her is her "Saviour," the God who does "great things" in her and around the world; he is a God who "never forgets to be compassionate" and extends it "from generation to generation over those who respect and love him" (Lk 1,47.49-50).

Mary the dawn

Mary's faith was strengthened by the "sign" that God offered her, but in reality, Mary herself is a sign given by God to all of us as a sign of hope and comfort" (*Lumen Gentium* n. 68). In fact, Mary marks the dawn that precedes the rising of the sun, the eruption of Salvation in history according to the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold the virgin will conceive and bear a son" (Is. 7, 14) and the fact of her existence which marks "the fulness of time" (Gal. 4:4).

While Isaac, Sarah's son and John, Elizabeth's baby bear the message that God can do all things, Mary's Child *is* the God who does all things, the Almighty God who becomes a human being, weak and insignificant. In Mary's journey of faith, there is a kind of circular design: as she discovers the sign of God in others she realizes that she now becomes a sign of God for others. This is what we can hold on to in their lives. This beauty is fully revealed when Mary meets Elizabeth.

Mary and Elizabeth: two women thrust forward into the future because of what's in their wombs; two women who hold within them an unspeakable mystery, a wonderful miracle. Just becoming aware that they have become the object of God's particular predilection unites them. They realize they have a common mission to collaborate with God and this makes them explode with a song of praise and blessing; the experience of this unusual motherhood (one a virgin and the other sterile) makes them lean on each other.

A Vocation to Receive

The miracle God worked in Elizabeth was a "sign" for Mary and helped her to say "yes." Now the miracle in Mary becomes a "sign" for Elizabeth which makes her pronounce an act of faith. So the two women become one for the other the place of the discovery of God; the epiphany of his greatness and that is why they praise and thank him. While they recognize each other as "signs" they become profoundly aware that they are both by this mystery which they respect and which now becomes a song. Both of them

confront this faith which causes a mutual prophecy to spring up by the power of the Holy Spirit and together they become signs of God's solidarity with human kind; what God does in them he does in us for the world.

Furthermore, Mary's encounter with Elizabeth in this emblematic situation of pregnancy (two pregnant women) is a paradigmatic sign that reveals her deep solidarity with women of all time. In Mary, the woman recognizes her own dignity; she discovers that in God's plan she is a place where the newborn is prepared, a womb for the future, a place from where God will come forth. In Mary, woman becomes more profoundly aware of her vocation to receive, to care for, to give and to nurture life, thus generating hope. In Mary, the woman learns to live this miracle, to stay in this mystery and to cherish the beauty of love. Every woman recognizes in Mary "a sister." As she recognizes the "great things" the Almighty has done in her she is given to us as a "great sign" of hope in Almighty God. The Church on its pilgrimage as she faces difficulties throughout history looks to Mary shining before her as a "sure sign of hope and consolation" (*Lumen Gentium* 68).

That is why St. Paul VI ends his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, inviting us to raise our eyes to Mary, a prophetic sign of hope: She "offers a calm vision and a reassuring word to modern man the victory of hope over anguish, of fellowship over solitude, of peace over anxiety, of joy and beauty over boredom and disgust, of eternal visions over earthly ones, of life over death" (n.57). □

Bulgaria

"To you, who know the tragedy of emigration, let me suggest you not to close your eyes, your heart and your hand to those who knock at your doors." Pope Francis in Sofia spoke to the Bulgarian people, three weeks after the European elections, he focused on a theme, that of migrants, crucial in this election campaign. And his words resounded loud and clear throughout the Old Continent and in particular in the Eastern States where today waves of foreigners slam against barred doors.



Bergoglio is worried about the turbulence that threatens European stability, he often reiterates appeals to the values of unity and solidarity on which to root the "soul" of the Brussels institutions. And in this sense, what Francis said on the plane that took him from Rome to Sofia was worth mentioning. Francis expressed his appreciation for the title "Saving Europe" from the book written by Enzo Romeo, Tg2 correspondent. The Pope mentioned the fact that the symbol of the EU - the crown of stars - originates from

the image of the Immaculate Conception: "They did not want to mention the Christian roots but God avenged himself in this way", he commented with irony, referring to the failure to include the role of Christianity in the Lisbon Treaty.

In Bulgaria, Catholics are just 1%, compared to 84% of Orthodox and 8% of Muslims: this is why the Pope's visit did not upset the Sunday of the capital, in the streets and squares of Sofia one can easily go for a stroll and visit the Cathedral of Saint Aleksander Nevsky, the Orthodox churches and the commercial streets of the center. But at the same time there was a pleasant surprise for the Catholic world: at the mass in Knyaz Alexandar square the people present were more than expected, 12 thousand and not the expected 7 thousand.

Faced with the highest authorities from President Rumen Radev to Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, Francis pointed out that, "thirty years after the end of the totalitarian regime", Bulgaria finds itself "confronting the phenomenon of those trying to enter its borders, to escape wars or misery, and try to reach the richest areas of the continent." A matter that the Pope would face even more clearly the following morning, when he visited Vrazhdebna, which welcomes Syrian and Iraqi refugees. *Vatican Insider, Domenico Agasso Jr.*

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Sacred Self-Infliction

Gilbert Chesterton used to relate a conversation overheard in a tram in Dublin during the Eucharistic Congress of 1932. The week had been one of lovely weather, but as it drew toward the end of the celebration, the sky darkened, and a storm seemed imminent.

"If it rains now," an Irish woman said somewhat tartly to her companion, "He'll have brought it on Himself."

Twin Tongues

In Leipzig where about one-third of all street names have been changed since the Russian occupation, trolley conductors are required to call out the old as well as the new names to make it easier for visitors to find their way. The other day the conductor of a car passing through the centre of the city made the required announcement: "Karl Marx Square, formerly Augustus Square."

A passenger about to alight shouted back, "Auf Wiedersehen" (goodbye), formerly "Heil Hitler."

How You Cut It

A kindly priest was accustomed to drop in on his good friend Pat, for a chat. One Friday he called on his Irish crony and found him eating sausage. He gave him a tremendous dressing down, but Pat countered with the defense that sausage wasn't meat.

"Oh yes, it is," said Father, "and for penance you can draw me a load of wood."

Dutifully Pat went about fulfilling his penance. He hitched up his old box wagon, drove it to the saw mill, loaded it up with sawdust and was dumping it on the priest's wood pile when the priest saw him.

"Pat! Whatever are you doing, dumping that stuff in my yard?" he scolded.

"That's your wood, Father," said Pat.

"But that isn't wood at all," said the priest.

"Well, if that isn't wood," returned Pat, "them sausages ain't meat."

The Sweetest Part

"Bill used to call his house over there, 'the Nutshell.' Wonder why he changed the name?"

"He got tired of having funny people calling to ask whether the kernel was in."

What Providence

"How's times around here?" inquired the tourist.

"Pretty tolerable," responded the old man, sitting idly on the stump of a tree: "I had a pile of brush to burn, and the lightning set fire to it and saved me the trouble of burying it."

"That was good."

"Yes, and I had some trees to cut down, but the cyclone took 'em down for me and saved me the trouble."

"Remarkable! But what are you doing now?"

"Oh, just waiting for an earthquake to come along and shake the potatoes out of the ground." □

THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



The devotion of the THREE HAIL MARYS is a very simple yet most efficacious devotion. Everyday, recite Three Hail Marys, adding the invocation: "O Mary, My Mother, keep me from mortal sin." Many people recite the Three Hail Marys as part of their morning and night prayers. To practise this devotion in time of danger, stress, special need or temptation, is a sure means to obtain Our Lady's help.

Dearest Mama Mary. It is only by your grace that I have come this far in clearing up my financial debts. Yes, by saying your powerful 3 Hail Marys daily in the midst of my financial difficulties. They were not going away but I can now handle them one day at a time. Mother Mary, always be by my side and guide and guard me.

Candida, Mumbai

Thank you dear Mama Mary for being there with me during my financial crisis and saving me one day at a time. The 3 powerful Hail Marys are a real blessing to me through times of disaster and difficult times. I love you Mama Mary. Be with us always and forever. *Candida, Mumbai* I am most grateful to Our Lady, through the recitation of the three Hail Marys. I had lost hope of my son who was to appear for his Class XII board exams. But with the help of Our Lady, my son not only appeared for the board exams but also succeeded.

Wendy

Sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary for helping me and my family during our difficult times. Keep our family always in your care and protection.

A Devotee

My sincere vote of thanks to Jesus and Mary for favours granted.

A Devotee

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, through the recitation of the three Hail Marys, for the graces granted.

Myfanwy Almeida

My sincere thanksgiving to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary for all the mercies received.

Joseph Mascarenhas

Thank you dear Mama Mary for taking me through the daily financial difficulties by reciting the three Hail Marys. Nothing is more powerful than this. Mama Mary, be with me always like the bright star showing me the way.

Candida, Mumbai

Thank You Jesus, thank you Holy Spirit and Our Lady for giving me back my lost handbag along with all its contents intact.

Marina Correa, Mumbai

My grateful thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for all the graces and blessings received by me and my family through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys; and also for granting my son a good job. Blessed Mother Mary keep me and my family safe under your mantle blue.

Mabel D'Cunha, Mumbai

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Thank you Divine Jesus and Mother Mary for saving my husband from continuous nose bleeding. I owe everything to you for saving his life. I also thank you, Mary Help of Christians and I thank you for all the favours I have received.

A Devotee

I am deeply thankful to the Divine Mercy of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for protecting my husband during his 26 years of cancer and for blessing our family. Jesus and Mother Mary keep me and my family always under your loving care.

Rose Gomes, Mumbai

My sincerest gratitude to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary for the many favours granted to my family: for restoring my health, for my daughter's acceptance to a good college. For Mira's internship and job offers. For your continued grace and blessings on my mother Ashalata, the pillar of our family. For my husband's professional peace and salvation; that I started writing again; for sending us the right people to fix and assist with our home; for our immigration papers coming through after a long time; for showing me the way when I was adrift; for healing my daughters through their journeys.

Mrs. P. Samagond, Australia

I thank you Mother Mary for the gift of a baby girl many years back. My first child after two years of marriage. My thanks to Jesus and Mary for their love and mercy.

C.O.

**THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO
OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO**

I thank you Almighty God, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Don Bosco and all the saints for the safe delivery of our baby girl after eleven years.

Naveen and Rita D'Souza

Dear Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Jude for curing me of my illness.

A Devotee

Our sincere thanks to Our Lady, Don Bosco and all the saints for all the graces and blessings bestowed on me and my family and protecting us from all harm.

Naomi M.

My grateful thanks to Our Lady and Don Bosco for favours received.

E. Serrao

I was praying for my niece to find a suitable partner. A million thanks to the Divine Mercy, Mother Mary, St. Joseph and the saints for this and all the other favours received.

Olga Cabral, Mumbai

My grateful thanks to the Divine Mercy, Mother Mary and Don Bosco for healing my husband and for many blessings bestowed upon our family.

Mrs. Rose Gomes, Mumbai

Our sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Heart of Mary and all the saints for favours received and for keeping us in good health.

Elizabeth Pires, Mumbai

**THANKS TO DEAR
ST. DOMINIC SAVIO**



Sincere thanks to the Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for curing my niece's son of high fever. Our sincere thanks to Our Lord and Our Lady and Dominic Savio for blessing our daughter with a safe delivery and the gift of a normal baby girl after five years of marriage.

Prudy Rodrigues

Thank you dear Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for many favours received.

Cheryl Gracias, Goa

Dear Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a normal baby girl a year and ten months ago.

Christine Dores, Dubai

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the safe, full term and

normal delivery of my daughter Christiana Lobo.

Angela Mascarenhas, Pune

We are grateful to Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of a healthy baby boy after ten years of marriage.

Sumi and Nijith, Kerala

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the success of my grandson in his Std. XII exams.

Mr. & Mrs. P.O. Silveira

My grateful thanks to the Holy Family, St. Anthony, Mother Teresa, Don Bscio and St. Dominic Savio for their intercession in answering my prayers and for helping my grandson Raoul to pass his C.A. Exams with flying colours.

Michael and Fausta Almeida

Mother dearest, I once again extend to you a big thank you. With grateful heart, I want to express my eternal gratitude to you for giving Ravi a very good job of his choice. Thank you for always being available to us and giving us physical, emotional and mental strength to carry on. Throughout the years your assuring presence and support has strengthened our faith in you. We thank you very much for heling us out when we needed help most. Dearest Mother always guide and keep us healthy and safe. Our grateful thanks to Don Bosco, Dominic Savio, St. Jude, St. Anthony for always being there.

Ramona D'Costa, Mumbai

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JUNE 2020

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MARY WAS THERE

I cannot but recall that Christmas of 2017 when I was hospitalized in critical condition. A minor cut on the heel of my right foot had, despite treatment, resulted in a crater-like wound that had turned septic and gangrenous. Diagnosis recommended immediate amputation of the foot. We were told that, in medical experience, the hard epidermal cover of skin, is never regenerated, implying that the hollow caused by the wound would stay life long. We could only hope and pray. Preliminary treatment was started and to the surprise of all, the foul smelling discharge stopped in a few days and later the sepsis lessened and the wound showed signs of healing. And even more amazing to the doctors was the fact that the epidermal cover on the heel, had begun to re-grow! It was as if our dreaded forebodings and pain had been washed away by the power of prayer. Today I can stand on my own two feet, confident and grateful that when I called, MARY WAS THERE.

M. J. Chaves, Mumbai

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

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