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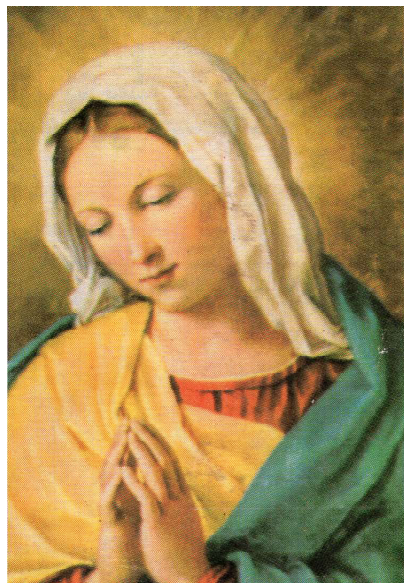
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*Through the help  
of Mary's  
intercession  
may we be  
protected in our  
weakness  
and rise up  
from our iniquities.*

*Adapted from the Common  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

From The Editor's Desk

WHY BOTHER BEING GOOD?

What keeps people on the straight-and-narrow is fear of God: the prospect of eternal damnation helps them to live good lives! How do you feel about that statement? Is this your image of God? Is it a fair image of God?

Fr. Gerard Hughes S.J. in his bestselling book, *God of Surprises*, speaks of 'Uncle George,' a distant family relative who was very powerful and interested in all the family. One day a little boy is taken by his parents to visit him, and 'Uncle Goerge,' looking very severe, addresses him in these words: 'Because I love you, I want to see you here once a week, and if you fail to come, let me just show you what will happen to you.' He then brings the boy on a conducted tour of the basement where an array of blazing furnaces are tended by little demons who hurl into the blaze anyone who fails to visit 'Uncle George' or to act in a way that he approves of.

On the homeward journey his mother asks: 'Don't you just love Uncle George with all your heart and soul?' Torn between truth and fear, the boy mutters, 'Yes I do'. But how long will the fear of 'Uncle George' and his dreadful threats keep him on the straight and narrow? And is 'Uncle George' not a sickening caricature of the God who so loves the world as to be willing to die to save everyone?

Is it surprising that so many people despair of Christianity if this is the central image they have about God's relationship with them? Those who stay in the Church with this image are to be admired, but their's is a sad situation because they are being denied access to the real God who is simply love.

Look at what happened in the lives of Peter and Paul, two of our earliest stalwarts. Peter, was drawn to Jesus and simply fell in love with this person who clearly loved him. Despite betraying Jesus in his hour of need, he experiences forgiveness and is given the wonderful task of looking after all those Jesus loved. In Paul's life the same thing happens. He experienced in a way that convinced him that Jesus loved him totally. His motivation for being good is expressed in the phrase 'the love of Christ urges us,' (2 Cor. 5:14).

But if that is so, why bother trying to be good? Because the Church doesn't simply hope in a passive way. At its best, motivated by loving confidence rather than by fear, it engages all its energies in working with God to bring about God's dream...a loving community where everyone is included.

Once you've experienced unconditional love, life changes and slowly you begin to see that in being loved by another person, you were in fact being loved by God. You met an escort of God's grace and stumbled upon the mystery we all need to be drawn into. Life just got a bit simpler and very, very complex after that. I chose to believe in a loving God because I met a loving person, who believed in God, and in me and in love!

*Fr. Ian Doulton sdb*

## THE GIFT OF “AMORIS LAETITIA”

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

*The Apostolic Exhortation “Amoris Laetitia – The joy of Love” written by Pope Francis and promulgated on April 8, 2016 brought together the results of the two Synods on the Family in 2014 and 2015*

**T**he reading of *Amoris Laetitia* was for us a moment of great emotion and profound joy. We would like to pass this joy on to you. It is the joy of a magisterial text which, in speaking of the family, brings us back to the essentials, to what is most important; and it does so in direct and simple language, for everyone. We could say that this is not a text for experts in the field, for pastoral specialists, but for “life experts, that is, for all of us who, in different ways are part of a family.”

It was with those words that the Miano couple began their commentary on Pope Francis’ Post-Synodal Exhortation on April 8, 2016 presenting it to the press on the day of its promulgation. Those

few words contain the entire significance of the text dedicated to conjugal love, the education of children, preparation for marriage, the challenges of family life and many other topics that touch all the dimensions of a family’s existence.

**Despite its length, which could discourage some, reading this document warms the heart, offering us concrete existential glimpses without avoiding its realistic treatment of difficult issues and without obscuring the beauty of the views it offers.** The language is not doctrinal but experiential, it smells of the aromas of home; it is not afraid of the disorder that reigns within the walls of a home, especially when



there are small children, and it succeeds in making a couple taste the beauty, dignity and greatness of their lives, not running away from reality, but showing that it possesses the features of a sacred space and a salvific story.

It is a document that does not idealise marriage and the family, but succeeds in revealing the dignity of what is fragile, imperfect, often disordered while opening up paths of growth, indicating gradual stages and small steps; not harping on perfectionism, but situating it within the great river of mercy. The family that Pope Francis envisages is not a pre-packaged model, but “it-is-what-it-is” with that sober realism that suggests to the Church a truly pastoral conversion.

Leafing through its pages, one gets the impression that the Pope is giving the floor to families to recount their lives in the light of faith, and where they are unable to do so, he tries to help them look beyond. *Amoris Laetitia* shows us a Church that goes to school with families and at the same time helps them to reread their lives through an evangelical lens; a Church that walks with people, that becomes a travelling companion without judgment, without separating the good from the bad, the near from the far, the “regular” from the “irregular.” But this does not mean that it is lax, but rather it is demanding as it patiently points out an ideal while it accompanies the couple step by step; it is a Church that is a beacon, but also a torch.

**There are many precious pearls in the text that could be read and enjoyed even beyond the complete reading of the**

**document.** The long commentary on Paul’s hymn to charity, the little treatise on the education of children, the account of the grammar of relationships, the insistence on the theme of dialogue and communication, the seasons of love and family spirituality. Every page is infected with joy and a contemplative attitude that knows how to find beauty even in wrinkled marriages, tested by time and its challenges, but no less beautiful for that. And then there is the long treatment of difficult situations such as broken bonds. Certainly, everyone has gone to read the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter first, which deals with so-called “irregular couples.”

**The Pope does not offer simple solutions, but indicates a path** that revolves around these steps: 1) everyone must feel part of the Church and be integrated into it; 2) it is a matter of discernment because every situation is unique and the Pope suggests a long series of questions with which a couple must confront themselves with the help of a spiritual guide; 3) the objective is to evaluate “what exclusions can be overcome” keeping in mind the discipline the Church has indicated. All this should be done gradually and within the great river of God’s mercy. This last theme will certainly be the subject of much discussion and distinctions, but the road is marked out.

We have already presented this document step by step in the pages of this magazine. For now, it is enough to arouse in our readers the desire to get back to reading it once more, calmly and without haste so as to savour the beauty of their own lives as spouses and parents through the words of the Pope. □



**THE HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY:  
OCEANS OF TREASURES**

by *Chino Biscontin*

*A humble French nun, Margaret Mary Alacoque, following some apparitions, dedicated herself to spreading devotion to the Heart of Jesus demonstrating his infinite mercy for everyone.*

In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a book by a Dutch theologian, Cornelius Otto Jansen, entitled *Augustinus*, was published. It was condemned by the Church but became very popular especially among intellectuals and the religious elite, giving rise the trend of thought called 'Jansenism.' It provoked a pessimistic, fearful and cold spirituality. It spread mainly in France, but also crept into other parts of Europe.

According to Jansen, after Original Sin, man could only do evil. Only grace could enable (it would be better to say: compel) man to do good. But grace was not given to everyone, only to a few of the predestined ones. For the majority of humanity, there would be nothing but a destiny of damnation.

A humble (even persecuted and often humiliated) French nun, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), in a Parish

convent of the Visitation sisters at Laray-le-Monial, was called by Jesus and on his instructions, succeeded in spreading this devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was a devotion that emphasized the Lord's love for everyone, trusting in his infinite mercy, the sweetness of total trust in him.

St. Margaret Mary wrote: "The Divine Heart is an ocean full of treasures of every kind, where poor souls can surrender their every request: it is an ocean of joy where one can drown all one's sorrows; an ocean of humility, where we can drown all our folly; an ocean of mercy for those who are in anguish and an ocean of love

where we can immerse our poverty."

As can be seen, it is a spirituality quite different from Jansenism. It is a spirituality that bespeaks a trusting, reassuring, grateful and hopeful attitude, which places the loving union of the soul with Jesus at



its centre. St. Margaret also gave a form to the devotion to the Heart of Jesus: she suggested approaching Eucharistic Communion every first Friday of the month for nine Fridays in succession, assuring devotees that in this way they would certainly be saved. In the Jansenist approach, Eucharistic Communion was dreaded and shrouded in much fear. She also suggested devoting an hour every Thursday to meditate on how much Jesus loves us, remembering his agony in Gethsemane. Finally, she suggested that on Friday after *Corpus Christi*, the feast of the Sacred Heart should be celebrated throughout the Church. This was promulgated in 1765 and in this way, this affect-ionate devotion of love became universally known.

St. John Eudes (1601-1680), a Norman priest full of zeal and charity, also a devotee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, had the honour of spreading devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which, with Pius XII became a

devotional feast day for the whole Church, to be celebrated the day after the feast of the Sacred Heart. The Saint, in fact, always kept these two devotions together, explaining that for nine months the Heart of Jesus had been beating next to the Heart of Mary and that at the foot of the cross Mary had shared the suffering love of her Son for our salvation.

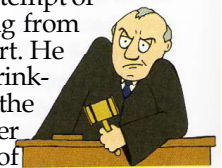
Devotion to the Heart of Jesus draws our attention to his real and concrete humanity which is in every way similar to ours except in sin, and emphasises his love, made visible by the lance that pierced him on the cross: a wound that remains open even in the body of the Risen Lord. It is from that wound of love that the gift of the Holy Spirit comes forth to us.

Devotion to the Heart of Mary introduces a note of maternal tenderness into our way of living the faith and, after all, into our way of conceiving of God, who, as John Paul I taught: "He is father, and even more so, mother" (*Angelus of 10 September 1978*). □

**NO SPEAK**

Donagh O'Shea

He was sentenced to seven days in prison for contempt of court, though contempt was the farthest thing from his mind; in fact he was only trying to help the court. He was a dock worker in Cork harbour who had gone drinking with a German sailor. The sailor misbehaved in the city and was arrested and brought to court. The docker went along to show solidarity with one who was of his kind. When the judge asked if there was anyone present in court who would act as interpreter, the docker raised his hand in a spirit of friendship. He was invited to the front of the courtroom and seated near his drinking partner. The proceedings began and the judge said, "Ask the accused to state his name." The docker turned to the sailor and uttered as gutturally as he could, "Vot iss your name!" And that's how he got himself a week in jail. When you like someone it's remarkable how little of his or her language you need to know. A shortage of vocabulary can bring people back to their shared humanity, as an abundance of it may drive them apart. The German sailor was acquitted. □



## 'GO AND GET THE JOB DONE'

by Anastasia Dias

"Go and get the job done." I say this to myself when I'm required to do something. As soon as I am given a task, I make sure I do it. Looking back at the past 20 years of my life, I understand that I wasn't always this way.

I've spent countless days, months and years of my (little) life thinking that I wasn't good enough. This had always been my first thought whenever I was appointed to do a task at school or in college. I remember being told, "You're not good enough." People reiterated it whenever I shared my dreams and aspirations with them.

The sad part was: I believed those people. After all these years of self-doubt I ask myself, "Why did you believe them when they told you that you couldn't achieve your goals or that your dreams would never come true or that you weren't capable of doing the things you dreamed of doing?" I didn't have an answer to my own question! Nevertheless, I did have a choice.

When I entered college, these thoughts occurred more often than before. In college, I was required to do a lot of tasks and assignments. Before I could begin doing them, these thoughts showed up like uninvited guests. They said,

"You're not good enough. Why are you wasting your time? You're not capable of handling these things." Whenever a big opportunity came my way, I dodged it. Innumerable opportunities passed me by while I was busy trying to get these thoughts out of my head.

One day, I looked at myself in the mirror. At that moment I didn't just see my face in the mirror. I saw my long-cherished dreams that never came true and my secret longing to accomplish them. But my dreams had been overshadowed. They were overshadowed by people's opinions of me and my dreams. I had taken to heart (read: seriously) whatever I was told. I had believed that the opinions of others mattered. And that was the problem!

That day, I made a choice: If I wanted to, I could continue living as the girl who sacrificed her dreams because of what she had been told. Or, I could choose to wrestle with these thoughts and get them out of the way; I chose the latter.

I stopped running away from opportunities, just like I had done for years. No! If I was given a task and that nasty thought came to mind, I wouldn't shrink back. I would go ahead with the task. I chose to face my thoughts



unafraid.

In my heart of hearts, I knew that I was gifted. I was willing to put in time and effort to accomplish my long-cherished dreams. That was the reason I made that brave decision that day. And from then on, day by day, I started doing more and more of what I had wanted to do for so long. Gradually, I had completely gotten over of my low self-esteem.

If you're reading this and struggling with unpleasant thoughts and low self-esteem, I want you to know that you're not alone. When I look back, I wish someone had told me this, but, no one ever did. That is why I want to share with you this true story, so that you realize that you are not what other people say or think you are. You are not even what you think of yourself; and, you can achieve much more than you have ever dreamed of.

Let's read through this story together: In a land that was invaded by foreigners, there lived a young boy. He sat threshing wheat and hiding it from his oppressors. His country and people had been invaded by the neighbouring country. He had heard and seen the invaders stealing his people's grain and killing their livestock. His people would starve to death if things didn't change. Little did he know, he was the game-changer.

As this boy ground wheat in a mill, he saw a stranger before his eyes. The stranger starts saying unimaginable things. He called the boy 'a mighty warrior.' He told him that it was in hands to destroy the enemy and save his country.

The boy said: "How can I? I am not good enough." The boy didn't stop there. He went on to say that

his family was the weakest in the land and was despised in his family. His family always looked down on him.

Even though he was struggling with low self-esteem, he believed that maybe...just maybe he was a warrior. He was capable of defeating his oppressors. And, he went on to defeat them.



The young boy's name was Gideon. Gideon was a great judge and valiant warrior who saved Israel from the hands of the Midianites. Gideon was victorious despite a great numerical disadvantage, he had just 300 soldiers with him. Gideon is remembered even today for his victory. He is seen as a mighty warrior because he got rid of his low self-esteem and discouraging thoughts and emerged victorious. (*The Book of Judges Chapters 6-7*)

Very often, you and I may question our self-worth like Gideon did. We can either choose to avoid life. Or we can choose to garner the courage and face every situation bravely. We can choose to accomplish our dreams, putting aside every thought that tells us otherwise. The next time you doubt yourself, call to mind Gideon's story. Every time you question yourself, remember Gideon's course of action and say to yourself "Go and get the job done." □



## FATHER JORGE CRISAFULLI

### A passionate and dynamic missionary in Sierra Leone

#### Please introduce yourself?

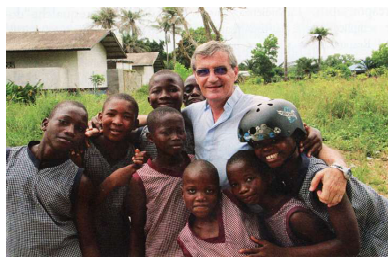
My name is Jorge Mario Crisafulli. I am an Argentinean Salesian priest and a missionary. I joined the Salesian Congregation 38 years ago. I have been a priest for 28 years and a missionary in English-speaking West Africa for 22 of them. I was born in 1961 in Bahía Blanca, in the same hospital where Blessed Artemide Zatti had died ten years earlier. This has been an interesting coincidence in my life, as I am a Salesian from Patagonia. I grew up in the land of Don Bosco's dreams, reading Don Entraiças' books and listening to the experiences of great missionaries like Cagliari, Milanese, De Agostino Stefanelli and Fagnano. The life of Ceferino Namuncura, Artemide Zatti and the very young Laura Vicunia also fascinated me.

#### Why did you decide to become a Salesian?

From a faith perspective, I think mine was not so much a decision as a choice "from above" and an inner call. Logically, my brother Alejandro should have become a religious and a Salesian. I was younger and was the most "messy and absent-minded" of the whole family. Whenever there was a commotion, at school, in the playground or in the street... I was ready to say "I'm in." Relatives and friends found it hard to believe but this is God's

logic: he calls whoever he wants, whenever he wants and for whatever purpose he wants. It was I who was invited to respond to that inner call. Behind this call there were several signs that dotted my path: my involvement in various groups and the witness of Salesians who were true saints: Don Renato Razza, coadjutor Juan Espinardi and many others. It was a great help to me to have had a very close priest friend, my spiritual director, with whom I talked about my life and my vocation. I think he always saw in me the signs of a potential religious and missionary vocation.

I was also fascinated by Don Bosco, his life, his mission and his tireless activity to save the poorest of poor children. Don Bosco was different from all the other saints whose lives I had read: a close, friendly and fascinating saint. I said to myself: "I want to be like Don Bosco. It's not so difficult to be like him." For my child and adolescent mind, it was an achievable ideal. "I will be a new Don Bosco, I want to be Don



Don Bosco's Madonna

Bosco," I thought.

#### Why choose to be a missionary in Africa?

For the same reason: God was behind my missionary vocation. He wove his call with fine and delicate strands, with whispers, suggestions, concrete people, strong feelings...

In 1975, on the occasion of the centenary of the Salesian missions, many films on missionary activities were shown in the theatre of the Don Bosco school. I was fourteen years old and I said to myself: "One day I'll go on a mission. I want to be a missionary in Africa." When I was sixteen, I joined a missionary group that worked among the Mapuche in the South part of the Argentine province of Rio Negro. I remember that we wrote in a memo that said: "it is one thing to see poverty on television and in magazines and another to smell it and touch it." That contact with misery and injustice was a decisive moment. A "metanoia" took place, a change of direction in my life. It was, as if I came out of myself: I discovered and felt the pain and suffering of people and felt an inner fire calling me to leave everything to follow Jesus, but it would be fourteen years before the superiors gave their consent for my departure for the missions, the promised land, the Africa of my dreams.

#### What were your experiences as a Salesian?

My fundamental experience has been to feel at ease and happy wherever God sends me: my time of formation, my first years as a



priest in Patagonia, working in the youth and vocations ministry, teaching, celebrating the sacraments, working in the poorest neighbourhoods, in the Salesian oratories. I can say: "I am happy here among you." In Africa my most beautiful experience was evangelisation: there is nothing more beautiful than telling a young person that God created him, loves him and cares for him. After a "good night," a child approached me and told me that it was the first time someone had told him that God loved him and cared for him, because until that day he had always felt that God had forgotten about him. I think this is the most beautiful experience that we Salesians have: telling young people that God loves them infinitely and unconditionally.

#### What kind of work do you do in Freetown?

It is very beautiful work, at the heart of the Salesian mission and in line with Pope Francis' call to

be a missionary and outgoing Church. We have started eight programmes for children in a situation of risk: a shelter for street children, a shelter for girls who have been abused, a shelter for minors removed from prostitution, the "Don Bosco on Wheels" programme which is a bus that travels the streets to identify cases of children in vulnerable conditions, a programme for orphans of Ebola virus, a free, confidential and anonymous telephone line that operates 24/7 dealing with children in critical situations; and other such programmes. Four Salesians, including myself, are in charge of the management and we have 106 social workers. Maybe some people think of us as an NGO, but we keep telling ourselves and the educators that we are much more than that, that we have something other NGOs don't have: God's love and God's grace. This makes all the difference. Social service helps, grace and love transform from within!

### What is the social situation of Sierra Leone?

Sierra Leone is a predominantly Muslim country, rich in natural resources (who does not remember the film 'Blood Diamonds' by Leonardo Di Caprio?): diamonds, iron, copper. Recently, Coltan mines have been discovered, a material used in the production of batteries for mobile phones. The country has plenty of wood, fertile land and water. Unfortunately, Sierra Leone has been very badly managed and is still suffering the consequences of



eleven years of civil war, one of the worst in the world in terms of war crimes committed. There is a lot of poverty, I dare say misery. Many people, especially boys and girls, eat only once a day. Women, girls and children are the main victims: abuse at a very young age, early marriages, female genital mutilation and sexual abuse are the order of the day. The Ebola virus and natural disasters such as the 2017 floods have contributed to bringing to its knees a country that wanted to recover after the end of the war. Education levels are low, with a high dropout rate, and vocational and technical education is virtually non-existent.

### What projects are you currently working on?

We have several in mind. One ongoing project is the shelter for girls living in prostitution. There are more than 2500 girls living and working on the streets of Freetown. Our dream is to get as many of them off the streets as possible: to offer them a home, food, clothing, medical care, to trace and reunite them to their families, to enable them to attend school and vocational training courses. Since we started in July 2017, we have already managed to offer concrete help to 146 of them. The dream continues and we keep our activities going. □

# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## ST. BONIFACE (June 5)

by Ian Pinto, sdb

### A DARING MISSIONARY

Boniface was ordained a priest at the age of 30. A little over a decade later, he left for the missions of Utrecht. Some years earlier, a countryman of his, Willibrord along with some companions had begun catechizing the people of Frisia. By the time Boniface was ordained, Willibrord had become a well-known figure and was given the title 'Apostle to the Frisians.' Boniface was inspired by his example and wished to work as a missionary.

When the chance arose, he left for Frisia and spent a year with Willibrord: learning from him and sharing knowledge and experiences. Despite their zeal, they couldn't succeed since that territory was severely disturbed by war. Willibrord withdrew to an abbey that he had founded in Echternach (modern day Luxembourg) while Boniface returned to his mother monastery in Nursling.

The following year he went to Rome to meet Pope Gregory II. Pope Gregory gave him the name 'Boniface' after a legendary 4<sup>th</sup> cent. martyr, Boniface of Tarsus, and appointed him bishop for Germania. There are two interes-



ting things to note here: Firstly, Boniface had never been to Germania and had little missionary experience and secondly, Germania was not a diocese in the sense that we understand it. The Church wasn't yet set up in Germania and hence, there obviously wasn't a diocese. Boniface was tasked with leading the missions at Germania and gradually establishing the Church there.

Boniface realized that if he had to establish a foundation then he would first need some support. From his earlier missionary adventure, he knew about the Frankish military leader and governor, Charles Martel. With his help and influence Boniface got a foothold in Germania. When he went to Rome to apprise the Pope of the situation and update him on the development, he was conferred with the pallium and declared an



Archbishop.

With this new responsibility, he returned to Germania and began working for better understanding among the Christian Franks and the Pope. Rome wanted more control over the Frankish church, which they felt was too independent and which was slowly giving in to corrupt practices. Frankish Church leaders lived in luxury and enjoyed the best fruits of the kingdom. With every new conquest, more and more land was offered to them to set up religious institutes and monasteries. The catch was that they had to pledge allegiance to the ruler, Charles Martel, support all his activities and galvanize the people. This they did with relish. Boniface was unhappy about the way things were and tried to reform the local church. Through his influence, Charles Martel established four dioceses in Bavaria: Salzburg, Regensburg, Freising and Passau, and recognized Boniface as the Bishop of the entire Germanic territory east of the Rhine.

After the death of Charles Martel, his son, Carloman took over. At that time there was a lot of political turmoil that even spilled into the Church. To quell the situation, Boniface along with Carloman's help organized the *Concilium Germanicum*. At this council, he tried to settle the disputes between the Church leaders and the nobles, among the Church leaders themselves and the political situation. There were many disagreements and conflicts regarding properties with the clergy, who mostly came from noble families expressing unwillingness to give up their land and power. However, the council

didn't prove helpful in preserving Church land from the hands of greedy usurpers. However, Boniface was able to convince the clergy to adopt stricter rules in order to curb worldliness, corruption and scandal. For the remainder of his tenure, he tried his level best to maintain cordial relations with political leaders and ensure the safety and protection of his territory with the support of the Pope and the rulers of Bavaria.

### RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING

Boniface was baptized at Wynfrith in the year of his birth, 675. He was born in Wessex, England to a noble family. He was educated in the Benedictine abbeys of Exeter and Nursling. Having spent most of his time with monks in the monastery, he decided to become a monk himself. He joined the Benedictine order against his father's wishes. He spent his years teaching at the abbey school and writing. He came out with a Latin grammar, the *Ars Grammatica*, a treatise on poetry and some works of riddles.

In 716, his abbot, Wynberth died and he was expected to take over as abbot. He was unwilling to accept the position and was preparing himself to undertake a missionary journey. This was how he reached Frisia and began his memorable life as a missionary. For his contribution to establishing and building up the Church in Germany he is known as the 'Apostle of Germany.'

As a young child, he showed strong character of mind and heart. This allowed him to prevail upon his parents to send him to a monastery for his education. Even when the opportunity to become

abbot and assume authority arose, Boniface was honest enough to reject it in favour of his desire to serve as a missionary. In the missions, he had to be tough as nails considering the socio-political situation. He was able to stand his ground despite pressures from both sides. His love for the Church is quite visible in his open critique of corrupt clergy which did not end there but extended to helping them realize their faults and make amends. This is the mark of a good leader. He wasn't accusative or bitter that his fellow Church leaders were living unbecomingly. He shared the compassion of Jesus the Good Shepherd who was prepared to leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the lost one.

He was a shrewd diplomat who was able to maintain the peace and appeal to the good sense of others. He desired nothing for himself but gave everything for the missions and for Christ. He wasn't fazed by discouragement and failure. His willingness to work in the missions was exemplary and revealing of his intense love for God and neighbour. The people he went to were largely pagan and engaged in various kinds of erroneous practices. Since the majority of the population was engaged in paganism, the small numbers of Christians also found their faith strongly influenced by pagan beliefs and rituals. Boniface catechized them with orthodox Christian doctrine and helped strengthen their faith.

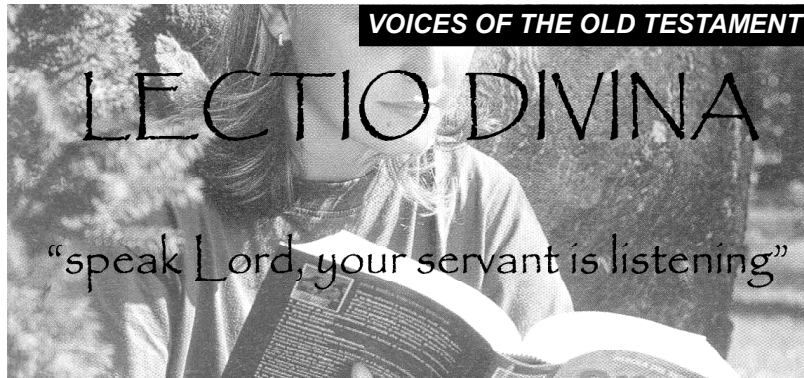
### MARTYRDOM

At the ripe old age of 73, Boniface set out for what would be his last missionary journey. It was a

second attempt at the first mission he had ever been to: Frisia. Ever since that first discouraging attempt with Willibrord, Boniface did not rest content. His heart went out to all the Frisians who lived without the unsurpassable knowledge of Jesus Christ. Most people at 73 might think of relaxing and tending to their aches and pains but Boniface was preparing for struggle.

This time around his mission proved more successful and many were baptized by him. On the fateful day, he had summoned all those whom he had prepared for the sacrament of Confirmation. Instead of the confirmands, a band of brigands appeared and slew Boniface and his aides. Boniface commanded his companions to offer no resistance with the words: "Cease fighting. Lay down your arms, for we are told in Scripture not to render evil for evil but to overcome evil by good."

Boniface's contribution to the missions of Germania and Frisia, as well as to the general life and mission of the Church are praiseworthy. He lived like a true servant commended by Jesus who was prepared to welcome the master when he came and who was surprised by the master who in turn served the slave (Lk 12:36-37). Boniface was ever ready to do God's work so much so that he died carrying out his mission. His timely reforms and diplomacy allowed the Church to survive and subsequently thrive in the uncertain and unhealthy environment that it found itself in. The monasteries he established turned out to be the training ground for future bishops and teachers for generations. □



## THE ALLIANCE THAT MATTERS

by Carlo Broccardo

**I**t was in the fifth year of the deportation of King Jehoiachin, on the fifth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar" (Ez 1:23). This is what we read at the beginning of the book of the prophet Ezekiel, which will accompany us in this month of June. As so often in the prophetic books of the Bible, there are clear chronological and geographical indications at the beginning; at least, they are clear to those who know how to recognise them.

We have to make an extra effort, because it is not the history and geography we are used to. However, it does not take much to gather the necessary information here and there in books. The Chebar channel is one of the lateral irrigation channels of the Euphrates River, the one that washes the city of Babylon, capital of the Chaldeans. Today it is located in Iraq, in a very difficult political and social situation; at that time, it was one of the richest and most powerful places in the world, the

great empire of Nebuchadnezzar. Turning to chronology, historians tell us that the references given by Ezekiel take us to July 31, 593 BC.

What is Ezekiel the priest doing in Babylon? Why is he not in Jerusalem, officiating in the temple of God? A little more than five years earlier, King Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Jerusalem. Since the city did not willingly submit to his power, after conquering it by force he deported the entire ruling class of the small kingdom of Judah, from the nobility to the wealthy merchants, to his capital. This was the custom at the time: to weaken the subjugated peoples, they deported their most influential people.

Ezekiel finds himself living in this context. He is a priest, but also a prophet, and as such, God asks him to speak to the hearts of his brothers, to help them understand why they have ended up in exile. His thought, in the first chapters of the book, is very similar to that of the second book of Chronicles, which we read in April: exile is not an accident, nor a punishment from God, but the result of our

wrong choices. It is because we have turned away from God that we have been defeated; it is because we have broken the covenant with him, we have despised his friendship.

What is the problem now? That the people, despite their exile, do not want to understand! Those Jews who were deported to Babylon continue to say: it's all right, sooner or later we will find the help we need. And those who remained in Jerusalem not only hoped for help from some other people, but sought it, making a political-military alliance with Egypt. This will be a serious mistake, because a few years later Nebuchadnezzar will return with his army to Jerusalem and this time he will destroy the rebellious city and the temple in it.

The passage we read today is placed right here, between the two wars of Babylon against Jerusalem. Ezekiel is worried because his brothers seek the political alliance of Egypt, but that is not the alliance that counts. It is not military might that will save us, says Ezekiel.

It is always a temptation to reason with the logic of the world: to seek the most powerful means, the most effective weapons, the most reassuring alliances. Ezekiel invites us not to fall into that trap but to listen to God's promise: "I will take a branch from the top of the cedar tree, from the tips of its branches I will pluck it and plant it on a high mountain, a mighty mountain (...). (...) It will put forth branches and bear fruit and become a magnificent cedar tree." It is a somewhat improbable image from a botanical point of view; it does not matter, because the message is clear: it is not power that counts! God will take someone small, weak, fragile,



and with him bring life not only to the people of Israel but to the whole world. For he says that 'within him all birds shall dwell, every fowl shall rest in the shade of his branches.'

When we experience that we are weak, that we are few in number, that we no longer have the "numbers" we once had; when our Christian brothers and sisters are persecuted, our values mocked, our traditions ignored; when vocations are scarce and churches empty, God's promise to us resounds through the prophet Ezekiel (July 4<sup>th</sup>). Which is not dissimilar to the words spoken by Jesus: "To what can we compare the kingdom of God? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds that are on the ground, but when it is sown, it grows and becomes greater than all the plants in the garden and makes such large branches that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade" (Mk 4:30-32). True greatness is faith. And the only covenant that counts is the friendship of God. □



# Quiet Spaces

## LET US CLOSE THE DISTANCE

*is what Pope Francis focused on during the Mass at Santa Marta on Friday, June 26, 2015*

**G**et close to marginalized people, close the distance until touching them without being afraid to get dirty. This is the “Christian closeness” that Jesus showed us concretely when he freed the leper from the impurity of the disease and also from social exclusion. The Pope asked every Christian and the Church as a whole to have this attitude of “closeness.”

“When Jesus came down from the mountain, a great crowd followed him”. Francis thus began his homily, repeating the first words from the day’s Reading from the Gospel according to Matthew (8:1-4). All of those people, the Pope explained, “heard his catechesis: they were astonished because he spoke to them ‘with authority,’ not like the doctors of the law” whom they were used to hearing. The Gospel specifies that “they were astonished”.

Thus, these people begin to follow Jesus, without getting tired of listening to him. The Pope recalled that those people “stayed all day and, in the end, the Apostles” realized that they must have been hungry. But “hearing Jesus was a joy for them”. And thus, “when Jesus finished speaking, he came down from the mountain and the people followed him” and gathered round him. These people, the Holy Father recalled, “went on the roads, on the paths, with Jesus.”

However, “there were other people who didn’t follow him: they watched him from afar, with curiosity,” wondering, “Who is this man?” After all, Francis explained, never “had they heard such astonishing catecheses.” And thus there were “people who were watching from the sidewalk” and “there were other people who couldn’t approach: the law forbade it for they were ‘unclean.’” The leper referred to in Matthew’s Gospel was from this group.

“This leper felt in his heart a longing to draw close to Jesus,” the Pope noted. “He took courage and approached.” “He had faith in that man, took courage and drew near”, turning “simply to his prayer: ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’” He said this “because he was unclean.” Indeed, “leprosy was a life sentence.” And “healing a leper was as difficult as bringing a dead man back to life: this is why they were marginalized.”

There were, however, “also the self-marginalized”, Francis continued. “The doctors of the law who were always watching with that longing to put Jesus to the test, to make him slip up, and then condemn him.” The leper, however, knew he was “unclean, sick, and he approached.” So, the Pope asked, “what did Jesus do?” He didn’t stand still, without touching him, but instead drew even closer, stretched out his hand and healed him.

“Closeness,” the Pontiff explained, is “such an important word: you can’t build a community without closeness; you can’t make peace without closeness; you can’t do good without drawing near.” Jesus could have said to him: “Be healed!” But instead He drew close and touched him. “What’s more: at the moment that Jesus touched the unclean man, He became unclean.” And “this is the mystery of Jesus: He takes upon himself our uncleanness, our impurities.”

It is a reality, the Pope continued, which St. Paul describes well when he writes that Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself”. Paul goes even further, confirming that “Jesus became sin:” Jesus became sin, Jesus became excluded, took impurity upon himself to draw close to man. Thus “he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,” but instead “he emptied himself, drew near, became sin, became unclean.”

“So often, I think that it may be, I wouldn’t say impossible, but very difficult to do good without getting our hands dirty.” And “Jesus got dirty” with his “closeness.” But then, Matthew recounts, he went even further, saying to the man who was freed from his illness: “Go to the priests, and do what must be done when a leper is healed.”

Essentially, “that man who is excluded from social life, Jesus includes: includes in the Church, includes in society.” He advises: “Go, so that all things shall be as they must be.” Thus, “Jesus never marginalizes anyone, ever!”

How many people followed Jesus in that time and have followed Jesus in history because they are astonished by the way he speaks,” Francis explained. And “how many people are watching from afar and do not understand, are not interested; how many people watch from afar but with a wicked heart, to put Jesus to the test, to criticize him, to condemn him.” And yet, “how many people watch from afar because they don’t have the courage” of that leper, “but have such longing to draw near.” “Closeness” is a “beautiful word, for each of us,” the Pope continued. We should ask ourselves: “Do I know how to draw near? Do I have the strength, do I have the courage to touch those who are marginalized?” And “the Church, parishes, communities, consecrated men and women, bishops, priests, everyone” should also answer this question: “Do I have the courage to draw near or do I always keep my distance? Do I have the courage to close the distance, as Jesus did?”

Pope Francis then emphasized that “now on the altar”, Jesus “will draw near to us: he will close the distance.” Therefore, “let us ask him for this grace: the grace of drawing near.” □

# MY UNCLE, THE GARDENER

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. by Ian Douulton sdb

"You're having fun spinning, while I'm at work, sowing."

"What did you say, uncle?"

"Spinning those tops, children, spinning tops."

Phil and Melanie who were spinning their tops around on the courtyard flagstones looked up



wide-eyed in surprise then squinted with a little mischievous diffidence.

"No kidding, guys.

There's a miracle that also happens in my garden. If you

will deign to

f o l l o w

m e ,

you'll be doing me a big favour".

The two children took the hint, stopped playing and curiously followed Uncle Joe. He was a mature but handsome man with a large straw hat on his head. In winter he wore a red woollen cap, but whatever the season, he always kept three indispensable tools close at hand: a watering can, a spade and a watering can, a spade and a little pipe (this was for his personal use only).

Uncle Joe opened a wooden gate painted green and the three of them entered the vegetable garden, a rich plot of land always full of first fruits, which stretched for about ten square metres in front of their house, well enclosed by a blackberry hedge. This garden was an oasis of coolness and peace: even in summer, on the outskirts of the noisy, red-hot city, it offered the family a pleasant substitute for a holiday, with the cool chatter of its fountain and the shady silence of its pergola.

"The 'spinning top' I sowed in January," explained the uncle, "is the so-called 'Dutch spinning top,' that is to say, an early carrot, which our long-eared Matt is very fond of."

As if to confirm this, a loud braying sound came from the stable, so appropriate that the two children laughed with delight.

"And what do you sow in February, Uncle Joe?"

"Leeks, onions, lettuce, spinach, parsley and watercress. And, further down, peas and

broad beans."

"And in March?"

"Beets, chicory, radish and more peas. And then I have to plant garlic and onions. If I forget, if I don't take care of them in time by consulting my 'gardener's almanac,' which I know by heart, Mum won't be able to prepare those vegetable soups that you two 'drain' with those spoons as big as ladles.

"I like celery and cucumbers," said Phil.

"That's why you were born in April."

"What's that got to do with it!"

"It has a lot. In April I sow celery in your honour, my dear, and also beans, which you like just as much."

"Uncle" dared Mel rather shyly, "may I ask you something? Don't be offended."

"Go ahead, Mel."

"You remember that day in May, when there was the threat of a thunderstorm?"

"Oh yes, I remember! Black clouds looking like brigands."

"That was the day that advocate Scott asked mum if you were out of your mind."

"Well, I wouldn't have expected that."

"And yes, because looking out of the dining-room window (he had come to get mum to sign those papers from the Town Hall for their father's pension) he saw that, ignoring those clouds full of rain and deluge, you were quietly watering the strawberries."

Uncle Joe became indignant.

He said, "Tell that advocate to stick his nose into his 'paperwork' and not into my flowerbeds. Sure enough, I was water-

ing the strawberries because, as a rule, they have to be watered before the storm breaks."

He spoke very seriously, almost as if he were passing sentence. The grandchildren stared at him in surprise, as if understanding him for the first time: this wise orchardist was a good servant of the land, its "minister." He obeyed ancient customary rules dictated by centuries of experience. And they were in awe of him.

Uncle Joe noticed their awe gratefully, and gently caressed Mel's soft curls with his calloused fingers.

"Children, look around. Here, where I work, my father, your grandfather worked before me, and your grandfather inherited this spade from his father. I met your grandfather when I was ten years old and used to help him in July to cover the aubergines with matting to protect them from the hurricane. You water the strawberries but you cover the melons, Mr. Advocate! That's the law."

The 'Law.' He pronounced those words with respect and with great seriousness like a magistrate saying "Law."

"Soon, in August, you'll help me cut the stalks of the pumpkins and cucumbers close to the ground and then in October, we will harvest the peppers together."

"We're going to empty out the pumpkins of their seeds do the usual trick that was done in my day." "What do you mean?"

"Don't you know? We used to do what you do on Halloween. You open up two holes in the "face" of the pumpkin: the holes are for the eyes, then a long slit, the



mouth which is dented to look like teeth, then in empty insides you light three candles. At night, if you look at it under the pergola, you will notice it looks like the mask of a good-natured devil."

Like an old boy, he laughed in delight, hands on his hips.

Mel said quietly, "Dear Uncle!" He was so content with these simple pleasures, he never thought of going out to have a pizza. An old-fashioned man, he lived on the fringe of the city avoiding, as much as possible, all its noise and confusion. Early in the morning he would load his donkey Matt with vegetables and trot off to the nearby farmers market, sell his produce and hurry back to the shelter of his pergola, in the company of his lettuce and cabbages.

Yet, this harmless simple man also had his enemies.

He relentlessly hunted snails, caterpillars and little worms, not out of malice, but to protect the tender leaves, stalks and young roots from these thieves and marauders. He declared war on insects, especially in late spring.

One night, Mel almost fainted out of fright. She could not sleep because of the heat and looked out of the window. What was it? The girl saw a flash of light under the pergola.

She shook all over and cried out loudly:

"Fire, fire!"

The whole house was in an uproar. Phil rushed in with the watering can, Mamma with a bucket and finally, in no hurry, in his slippers, Uncle Joe.

"What are you shouting about?"

"The pergola is burning!"

Uncle laughed.

"Silly girl, I lit a lamp down there."

"Did you forget to put it out, uncle? If you like, I'll go down and blow it out," Phil offered willingly.

"You'd be a fool like your sister. I left it on like a golden magician, specifically to attract those "nocturnal" and "twilight" creatures. Tomorrow morning, if you go under the pergola, you'll see it covered with those stupefied beasts, stunned by the light."

A horticulturist's strategy who knows what's what!

Thinking back on that night, Mel now felt a strange sweetness as she felt her curls being caressed by those calloused hands of her uncle, who was her father's older brother and who had lovingly taken his place. She thought of the advocate, of the pension, and if there hadn't been Uncle Joe's vegetable garden...

Phil must have thought the same, because he said:

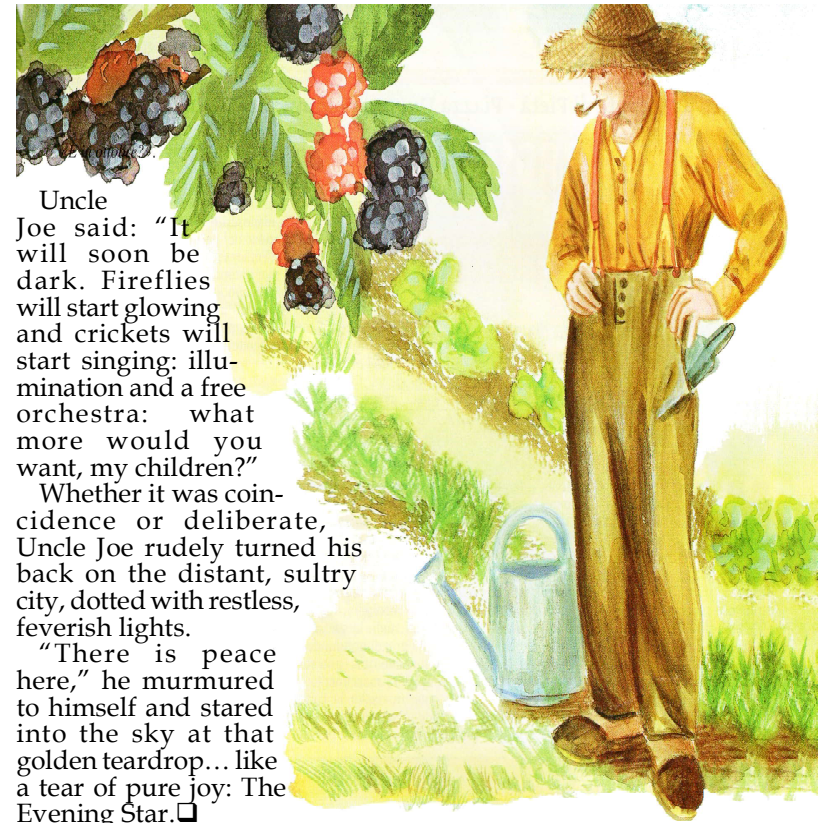
"I'm wasting too much time spinning the top in the yard. From tomorrow, Uncle, if you want, I'll come to help you."

The good farmer's wrinkles smoothed out like those of a calm sea.

"Well, that's an idea. I'll make a horticulturist out of you."

He said, "horticulturist" as if he said "artist."

The light of the setting sun was red and gold, warm with the perfume, promise and mystery. The garden, like a tired worker, was preparing to enjoy the coolness of a delightful breeze and rest beneath the stars.



Uncle Joe said: "It will soon be dark. Fireflies will start glowing and crickets will start singing: illumination and a free orchestra: what more would you want, my children?"

Whether it was coincidence or deliberate, Uncle Joe rudely turned his back on the distant, sultry city, dotted with restless, feverish lights.

"There is peace here," he murmured to himself and stared into the sky at that golden teardrop... like a tear of pure joy: The Evening Star. □

## Are You Blessed?

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness ... you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation... you are ahead of 500 million people in the world. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep... you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace... you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful... you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not. If you prayed yesterday and today... you are in the minority because you believe God does hear and answer prayers. If you can read now, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read at all.

Author Unknown



## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 29

by Michele Molineris

### 95. A successful blackmail (1860)

For some time now, a noble lady from Turin had been crying over the conduct of her son, who was dishonouring her illustrious family. Above all, she complained that she was finding him more insensitive to her affectionate complaints.

She had tried everything, and hardly knew what else to do; when one day, taking him alone, he came up with this bold proposal: "Would you like to go and spend a few days in the Lanzo valleys?"

"What for?"  
"The spiritual exercises at the retreat house of St. Ignatius will soon be held there, and even you could take part in them. Will you go?"

"If you pay my debts."

"How much are they?"

"They aren't much, a few thousand liras."

On hearing talk of thousands of lire, she sighed, but so as not to give in easily, she said, she would be willing pay them.

The good lady, knew that Don Bosco would also be taking part in the spiritual exercises and the thought that her son might be able to meet the man of God, filled her with joy. When the time came for him to go to St. Ignatius, the young lord kept his promise and set out on his journey and happened to be accompanied by Don Bosco himself, who had got into the same coach. During the journey the young man, noticing that the priest was suffering asked him what the problem was. When Don Bosco

replied that he was bothered by two boils, he said: "But, Don Bosco, ask for the grace to be healed, a retreatant should not be ill.

"I wouldn't even say a *Hail Mary* to be relieved."

"So, you like it that way, do you?"

Don Bosco smiled in reply, but that smile made the young man wonder and caused him to reflect. During the journey, a strong storm added fuel to the fire, reducing him to a pitiful state. However, determined not to miss any of the sermons, as soon as he arrived at St. Ignatius, he went with the others to church, where his strength failed him and he fainted.

Our young lord, who was next to him, took him gently in his arms and carried him to his room, where the care that he lavished on him did not take him long to come back to consciousness. As he regained his senses, Don Bosco found himself served by an infirmarian whom he had not expected, by the young lord who smiled and seemed pleased.

The young man came closer and Don Bosco took him by the beard and gently pulled him to his chest, while in an affectionate tone he said to him: "Now, it's in my hands. What am I to do with it?"

The young man was at first, amazed and then moved and began to weep. It is easy to imagine that, after this movement of grace, he made his confession and changed his life.

When the spiritual retreat was over, the young gentleman wanted to stay with Don Bosco to study his vocation, while being of valuable service to him. From there he went on to join the Society of Jesus, to the great delight of his mother who never ceased to thank the Lord

(D'Espiney, *Don Bosco*, 189).

### 96. Count forty thousand lire (1860)

Don Bosco, comforted by the words of Fr. Cottolengo's successor, who had told him to expand the walls of the house, because the Lord would have sent him so many youngsters that he no longer knew where to put them, in 1860 he bought the Filippi house, which was next to the Oratory to the east and to the south, which gave him the possibility of bringing his youngsters up to five hundred.

But how could Don Bosco find the money to pay for it? An old pupil, Fr. Francesco Vaschetti, the parish priest of Volpiano told this story:

"It was the feast of St. Augustine, the titular of the dormitory of which I was the head. I must have been very happy, because I had been able to get Don Bosco to lead us by saying a few words and then giving us the blessing with a little sign of the cross. In the meantime, a gentleman arrived, rather old, but quick and easy-going. In the absence of chairs, Don Bosco was sitting on a trunk. That's what the gentleman did and I didn't know him yet.

The latter turned to Don Bosco: "I feel," he said, "that he has bought the house next door! I am happy about this. It was necessary, but how is he going to pay for it?"

"Well," Don Bosco replied, "this is still a secret of Providence. We need eighty thousand lire."

"From now on, the secret will be cut by half. Count out forty thousand lire. Come to my home tomorrow and you'll have it."

I watched as he counted the thousands of lire as we do with pennies, and I thanked the Lord

who was so visibly comforting Don Bosco. And all this had been agreed and decided upon while sitting on a trunk.

"I later learned that this gentleman was the Commendatore Cotta, also our benefactor" (*Francesia, Vita di Don Bosco*, 250).

### 97. Even Don Bosco was irritated by tobacco smoke (1860)

One day Don Bosco left the Oratory in the company of Joseph Reano and went to Strambino. As soon as he was seated in the carriage, a man who looked like a rich shopkeeper entered. He quickly started smoking, although it was forbidden in the compartment. Before lighting his cigar, he had asked Don Bosco's permission, asking him if he suffered from the smoke. Don Bosco replied that if he smoked for a short time, he would not suffer.

The shopkeeper smoked a cigar and, as soon as he had finished, he was about to light a second one. Then, Don Bosco in his usual jovial manner, said to him: "Excuse me, Sir, I have done penance for you by consuming your smoke: now would you do a little penance for me by abstaining from it?"

"You're right," he replied. So saying he put his cigar away.

The shopkeeper then began a conversation about the pious works, the priests' charity and finally about the Valdocco Oratory and Don Bosco himself. He affirmed that this good priest kept 300 or more boys in his house and that there they had a activities suitable for their age: and, what was more important, that the teaching in that institute was good and the education good, since science and morals were taught there.



“One day or other,” he exclaimed, “I would like to go and visit that house and those youngsters.”

Don Bosco listened, smiled but kept silent. The coach arrived at Montanaro and the shopkeeper got off. From that very simple incident one doesn't know whether to admire more Don Bosco's politeness in warning his interlocutor or his modesty in the eyes of the shopkeeper. How lovable and good our dear Saint seems to us! (*M.B., VI, 710*).

### 98. An advance (1861)

In the year 1861 the baker Sig. Magra, to whom Don Bosco owed twelve thousand lire for providing bread, refused to send him anymore. Even then as always, Don Bosco always used tell his creditors that divine providence was never bankrupt. Therefore, he should continue to provide bread for his youngsters and that the Lord would think about sending him the money.

Magra sent the bread and came to collect his dues or at least an advance payment; but there was no money in the house. It was a festive morning and Don Bosco was hearing the confessions of a large number of youngsters in the sacristy, when the creditor came and told the sacristan that he wanted to speak to Don Bosco at all costs. The sacristan tried to avert this disturbance, but the baker made his way through the youngsters and went straight to Don Bosco and began to insist, saying that he needed the money he was owed.

Don Bosco looked at him calmly and said: “Wait a few minutes while I finish hearing confessions.”

But the other retorted: “I can't wait. I need you to pay me now.”

Don Bosco continued to hear confessions and the baker, seeing that could not understand, withdrew, looking at Don Bosco, almost with amazement.

He then went out for a walk beneath the porticos, waiting for him to come out.

When Don Bosco had finished, he prayed and asked the Lord to help him in this distressing situation. At that moment, a gentleman, unknown to him entered the sacristy. He handed him a sealed envelope, greeted him courteously and left without further ado. Don Bosco put the letter into his breviary and, after celebrating holy Mass, he went to the refectory accompanied by Fr. Angelo Savio and a few guests from around the area.

Savio then reminded him of the urgent debt. Don Bosco, without getting upset, was about to tell him that it would have to wait for another moment because he had nothing at that time. When the mail having been brought, he remembered the letter he had received in the sacristy. On opening it, he found a considerable sum of money, which he quickly gave to Fr. Savio to satisfy the baker. Meeting Sig. Magra a little later, he said to him: “You see, Providence is great and has come to our aid! Now he's sending you a down-payment, and soon he'll give you the balance. Thanks to Our Lady” (*M.B., VI, 179*).

### 99. The Story of a Photograph (1861)

On the 1st May 1861 Don Bosco dreamt that he had left his house and was on his way to a farm, a good distance away, to the east under the Barusca, in Valcappelle. There he found his brother Joseph busy with a farm wagon; but be-

fore that he had already met a mysterious person, who had revealed to him the state of the consciences of his 400 youngsters, who had just completed their spiritual retreat, and foretelling exactly 50 years of his congregation's history.

Don Bosco was overjoyed by the fruits he was expecting from such a direct intervention from heaven; but he also found a way to regret the outcome of the exercises, which had not succeeded, despite his best efforts, in settling all the consciences and overcoming all the evil that lurked within the walls of the Oratory. Out of 400, at least 14 had not responded to the call of grace and were still stagnating in the swamp of sin, despite the fact that so much grace had shone like the sun on them all.

For Don Bosco this disappointment was more than a blow to the back of his head and it was not enough to let him recover. He immediately set out to take his revenge, but he had to wait until the end of February to get rid of all that obstinacy. It was on that occasion that the mysterious personage advised him never to speak in public without saying a word about confession and Don Bosco gave in easily, having observed personally that “the number of those who damn themselves by confessing is greater than the number of those who damn themselves by not confessing, because even the most wicked confess sometimes, but many do not confess well.”

Perhaps it was under the impression of that dream that on 19<sup>th</sup> May, the feast of Pentecost, he decided to have himself photographed hearing the confessions of youngsters. That photograph, which has come down to us in a

pencil copy by Bellisio, remains as a testament to the particular mission that the Lord had entrusted to him in the tribunal of penance, for the salvation of youth.

It was Francesco Serra who had persuaded him to pose in front of his camera and he became the protagonist of an episode that I do not want to deprive you of.

When everything was ready for the shot, Don Bosco said to him:

“You should know that on the insistence of some families in Turin I have allowed myself to be induced to have a portrait taken three or four times already, but so far no one has succeeded. Recently I went with some young people to the best photographer in Turin, but no matter how hard I tried, nothing came of it. They were all beside themselves and confessed that they had never been victims of such bad luck. I told them that if they wanted to photograph me, they should first make a good confession; but they laughed as if it were a joke, and after trying in vain for more than an hour, they had to give up without any result. So now I say: “Don Bosco concluded, turning to Serra, “if you are in the grace of God, go ahead, but if you are not, say so clearly, so that we don't even try.”

Serra also tried his best for this, and after just two attempts he succeeded splendidly, so much so that all the young people started shouting: “Serra is in the grace of God!” The lesson was not only for him, but for all those present, and it is still valid for us, since the admonition to maintain good relations with the Lord is always valid for everyone, in order to ensure success even in material matters. (*from M.B., VI, 892*). □



## INTO THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

by Giuseppe Pelizza

**W**ith the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, St. John Paul II introduced five new Mysteries into the recitation of the Rosary, and in so doing, urged us to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the term Mystery. For us, today, the word indicates something unknown, secret, perhaps even terrible and threatening. But, Mystery, in Christian terminology indicates something quite different, so we must not let the contemporary sense of the term pollute its authentic meaning.

When St. Paul speaks of Mystery (*mysterion*) he means the whole divine plan of salvation and its fulfilment in the life of Jesus. It follows that the term Mystery comes to indicate, on the one hand, God's will to save the world and, on the other, the fulfilment of this will in every moment of Jesus of Nazareth's life. In this way, the whole of Jesus' life, his every gesture, choice and emotion, are the fulfilment of the Father's will to save the world, and therefore, Mystery. St. Paul, referring to the religious language of the Greek

culture of his time, uses the term Mystery to indicate the greatest reality of love that the world can know. Only, exactly as the term mystery indicated in his time, the world does not know this reality of salvation. Only the few who have been initiated into the knowledge of God's love understand and possess it through insertion, through Baptism and the Eucharist, into the very life of Christ who, in his flesh, became death and resurrection for us.

In the theology of the first centuries, this conviction was already evident, taken up and developed by many Fathers of the Church, among whom Ambrose and Augustine stand out; further maturation and clarification can be found in the great cantor of the Mysteries of Christ's life, that is, in St. Thomas Aquinas. The third part of the *Summa theologiae* is entirely dedicated to scrutinising the mysteries of the Saviour's life.

St. John Paul II emphasised the importance of such a theology which leads from the Mysteries of Christ to the Mystery of the Word made flesh, in whom "the fullness



of the divinity dwells corporately" (cf. Col 2:9). In this regard, he recalls a remark of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Everything in the life of Jesus is a sign of his Mystery."

The Pope also underlined that the way of the Mysteries of Christ's life is Mary's way, that is, the way in which she personally knew and recognised her Son: "The Mysteries of Christ are also, in a certain sense, the Mysteries of the Mother, even when she is not directly involved in them, because she lives in him and for him" (RVM, 24).

With the Rosary, we look at the Mysteries of Jesus, that is, at his life, and we make the Rosary a prayer for life. From the very beginning of his pontificate, St. John Paul II observed that "our heart can enclose in these decades of the Rosary all the facts that

make up the life of the individual, the family, the nation, the Church and humanity. Personal affairs and the affairs of our neighbour and, in a special way, of those who are closest to us, who are closest to our hearts. Thus, the simple prayer of the Rosary beats with the rhythm of human life."

In the wake of the teaching of the Council and the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, St. John Paul II recalled that it is in the Mystery of Christ that we grasp the mystery of man himself, of his fundamental truth. Indeed, it is only in the Son of God, "who in a certain way united himself with every man," that the human person can be understood.

For the Christian, every day is a part of salvation history. After the Incarnation of Jesus, every day carries within itself its own Mystery. This has been understood by many saints, among whom one can remember St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. In everything she saw the will of the Father: whether something happened during a feast of Our Lady, or on the feast of a patron saint, it was never accidental for her. An event in daily life thus acquired a certain spiritual "colour." For centuries, the Rosary too has marked the days of the week with the colours of joy, passion and glory, and now too with the colours of light, the source of every colour, which help us to look at the Mystery of Christ and to live in expectation of the day when we shall be transfigured by him into his own light and with him we shall be light in his light. □





**MY VOCATION STORY**

**GOD CALLED...AND I SAID 'YES'**

*Fr. Renold Lemos, sdb*

I had a fairy tale entry into the Salesian congregation. When I told my parents I wanted to become a priest, my parents were happy. I had become quite naughty then, so in a way, they wanted to get me out of the way. They had the consolation that they had two other sons to look after them.

My vocation began within my family. I was blessed to be born to parents who loved God, loved each other, and loved me. I was youngest in my family with two brothers elder to me. Being the youngest in the family, I was pampered and loved by all. I was born to farmers in Vasai and grew up with sound religious instructions. We did not have a TV in our family. So we would go to our neighbour's house to watch TV. When we wouldn't come home for the family Rosary, my dad would chase us home. My parents worked hard. My mother would get up early and go to the market to sell vegetables. My father would get us ready for Holy Mass and school. My mother, with all the baskets, would come directly for Mass and meet us there. Then we would go to school, and daddy went to work. All my ten years in school, I was a daily Mass-goer and an altar server. My parents lived by example. So when I faced



storms in my vocation, I knew the tide would change. My practical training (Internship/regency) was tough, yet a very enjoyable learning experience. We are placed with youth who are poor and marginalized, whom we Salesians serve. We have to be with them 24x7, as their companion. There were times when it was very exhausting, and I wanted to give up. But then there were also good moments, when the kids would do something wonderful for me, and suddenly it was all worthwhile.

God's grace sustained me when my father passed away while I was still in formation. I was in

Jabhua, Madhya Pradesh, looking after boarders, when my dad succumbed to a snake bite. My family was in shock. It shook my vocation too. But the power of the sacraments, spiritual direction and time spend with God in personal prayer strengthened me along the way. I was ordained a priest on 29 December 2017. My brother postponed his marriage, so that I could bless his wedding after my ordination. The first Mass that I celebrated was the wedding Mass of my brother.

While I cannot say I always knew I wanted to be a priest, I certainly look back now and see how God was planting seeds in me regarding priesthood from the time I was little. I remember as a small child playing Mass

with my siblings and friends in the living room and imitating the role of the priest. One of the highlights of my young life that I still remember very well was receiving my first communion.

The most challenging part of being a priest for me has been getting used to the attention that a lot of people give me. I am a reserved person so making myself more open has been challenging.

My desire is to remain a faithful and holy priest who is able to give his life for others as Jesus did. □

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**SHARING**

Jesus taught us by word and his example. His life was a life of service, giving of Himself. He calls us, his followers, to do as he did and to share what we are and what we have with those in need; to serve others. God has showered us human beings with a vast variety of gifts, to be used for the good of others. Many gifts are common to all. We are given the gift of compassion because someone is hurting. We are given the gift of speech because someone, somewhere is dying for lack of a kind word. We are given the gift of forgiveness because someone or many will injure or hurt us in some way. Some people have very special talents, others have been given the riches of this world. Talents and riches should be used for the benefit of all. They were given to us freely - they are to be given freely - handed on freely. Indeed, it is only in loving and using our gifts for others that we will find fulfilment as followers of Jesus Christ. □



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**MAURITIUS**

Since October 2018 Fr. Maurizio Rossi has been on a mission in the centre of the Indian Ocean; previously he had been in Madagascar for 28 years. In the Salesian community in Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius, there are four religious: with him are Marcellin, Heriberto and Patrick.

Fr Rossi is director and bursar of the Salesians and director of the vocational centre, the *College Technique Saint Gabriel*. This is the only Catholic vocational school: it has 200 students. Courses range from mechanics to cooking. "The aim is to form honest and competent citizens and through work training people nourished by human and religious values: to train, qualify and educate." Most of the teachers and students are Creoles; Creole and French are the languages of instruction. Those who complete their studies are immediately hired. Not bad in a country where the gap between rich and poor is getting wider and wider.

Here, where 'buildings rise at night, children still grow up in rusty tin houses with no electricity or drinking water.' The St. Gabriel Technical College currently has 200 students. The dream of the Salesians and the bishop is to build a large Vocational High School (up to 1200 students) with multiple courses to receive 14-16-year-olds who would otherwise find themselves on the street. In many neighbourhoods there is a deplorable infrastructure, unem-



ployment and delinquency.

Not everyone can work in the public sector. And the unemployment rate is higher among young people who have no technical training. The paradox is that the country has to import technicians from other countries. In poor families, parents make their children leave school at the age of 13, even though education is compulsory until 16.

Mauritius is home to the descendants of settlers (Dutch, French and English), slaves, workers and traders.

The Church has already equipped two centres for the rehabilitation of drug addicts, but they are insufficient. Faced with suffering, the missionaries do not give up their commitment. "There's always hope," says Fr. Rossi. "It is time to sound the alarm and awaken consciences; it is more necessary than ever to consolidate family values. Children and young people are the greatest wealth. We must help them to build themselves up through listening, dialogue and solidarity. They must rediscover their roots and be strengthened; they must know their history and understand reality so that they can then assume their responsibilities." □

**IN A CHEERFUL MOOD**

**Anesthesiologist's Bill**

Margie received a bill from the hospital for her recent surgery, and was astonished to see a \$900 fee for the anesthesiologist.

She called his office to demand an explanation: "Is this some kind of mistake?" Margie asked when she got the doctor on the phone.

"No, not at all," the doctor said calmly. "Well," said Margie, "that's awfully costly for knocking someone out."

"Not at all," replied the doctor. "I knocked you out for free. The 900 dollars is for bringing you back around."

**Coffee Vending Machine**

A man put his fifty cents in a vending machine and watched helplessly while the cup failed to appear and a nozzle sent coffee down the drain while another poured cream after it.

"Now that's automation!" he exclaimed. "It even drinks it for you!"

**Doctor in the House**

A strained voice called out through the darkened theatre, "Please, is there a doctor in the house?"

Several men stood up as the lights came on.

An older lady pulled her daughter to stand next to her, "Good, are any of you doctors single and interested in a date with a nice girl?"

**The Front Pew**

An elderly woman walked into the local country church. The friendly usher greeted her at the door and helped her up the flight of steps.

"Where would you like to sit?" he asked politely.

"The front row please," she answered.

"You really don't want to do that," the usher said. "The pastor is really boring."

"Do you happen to know who I am?" the woman inquired.

"No," he said.

"I'm the pastor's mother," she replied indignantly.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"Good," he answered, "let me show you the front pew."

**Record Store**

A woman meant to call a record store, but dialed the wrong number and got a private home instead.

"Do you have 'Eyes of Blue' and 'A Love Supreme'?" she asked.

"Well, no," answered the puzzled homeowner. "But I have a wife and eleven children."

"Is that a record?" she inquired, puzzled in her turn.

"I don't think so," replied the man, "but it's as close as I want to get."

**Diagnosis**

The psychology instructor had just finished a lecture on mental health and was giving an oral test.

Speaking specifically about manic depression she asked, "How would you diagnose a patient who walks back and forth screaming at the top of his lungs one minute, then sits in a chair weeping uncontrollably the next?" A young man in the rear raised his hand and answered, "A basketball coach." □



## ONE LAST THOUGHT

### A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Vincent Travers, OP

He was known in the village where he lived as 'the veggie man.' Each day he would push his cart, full of fresh fruits and vegetables, through the narrow streets that made up his daily rounds. On the cart, next to the cash box, he had a notebook. One day, while serving a customer, the notebook fell to the ground, unnoticed, by the veggie man. Later, two children on their way home from school found the notebook. Thinking they had found something valuable, they opened it and started reading. It was not what they expected. Page after page contained little memos: "Don't forget the poor family on the hill." "Ask Mary Jo about her ailing mother." "Check the orphanage. Make sure it is well supplied." "Say hello to old Mike," and so on. But written on the front page in bold letters were the words: "We do what we have to do, because God has called us." These simple words contain one of the secrets of Christian living. These words were the driving force behind everything the veggie man said and did. These words helped form the man he became. The vision behind these words explain why there are people, young and old, who are prepared to do, whatever it takes, to be men and women of the gospel.

God gives each of us one small piece of this earth, which we alone can make our own, during our span of life. We are called by God to make it blossom and bloom. If we opt out, there is no question

that God's work will go on. God will somehow make up for my failure. The garden, my little patch, will bloom in God's time and way. But it will happen without my touch of originality, grace, magic, charm, laughter and humour, intelligence, without the unique stamp of my personality; and to that extent the world around me will be a poorer, sadder and colder place.

#### Missed opportunities

An artist watched children sailing a boat at the water's edge, as the sun was setting at the end of a perfect day. There was something about the scene that touched his artistic soul, and he wanted to capture the moment on canvas for posterity. But he had promised to meet a friend, and the last bus was about to leave the seaside resort, and he didn't want to be late for his appointment. He met his friend, but the haunting beauty of the boat scene stayed with him. He returned the following evening, but the sunset wasn't so colourful, and no children were playing with their boat. The tragedy of life is so often the tragedy of the missed opportunity. In one of the most poignant passages of Anna Karenina, the learned forty-year-old, Kolnyshev, goes mushroom-picking with the delicate orphan, Varenka, meaning to propose to her. Both are feeling deep love, but instead of expressing it, they walk in fear and shyness, talking about mushrooms instead of one another, and the moment passes forever.

John Donne, four centuries ago, wrote the poem with the line: "For whom the bell tolls." We are called, in our allotted time, to make our bell toll, to make our presence felt in our little corner of the world. Once we take up the invitation we will be asked, like the veggie man, in countless little ways rather than big ways, to go beyond where we are now. That should come as no surprise. The Lord, the giver of all good things, asks more, not less. The bell tolls in sadness when we fail to make our unique contribution in God's lovely garden. We are given one shot at life. "I pass this say once, any good that I can do, let me do it," says the poet. "because I will not pass this way again." When Cardinal John Henry Newman left the Anglican

Church at the height of his influence, he was subjected to scorn and ridicule. He lost old friends and was thrown in with strangers who suspected his motives. In this dark period of his life he wrote a message to himself that I find comforting: "God has created me to do some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have a mission — I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nothing. I shall do well. I shall do his work. Therefore, I will trust him. Whatever, wherever I am, I cannot be thrown away." □ (From St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland)

#### BETTER TO LIGHT ONE CANDLE

Too often, people are overwhelmed by the pain and poverty and evil and misery in the world. But they are wrong in feeling they can do nothing. They ask the question; *what can one person do?* Rather than cursing the darkness each one of us can light a candle. That can mean many things. Smile at a stranger. Wish a person a blessed day. Visit a sick person in hospital or a person without friends, living alone. Buy food for a person who is hungry, perhaps just one meal for one person if that is all we can afford. Make time for those who need some-



one to listen to them. Say a prayer for all those in any kind of need. These are some of the many ways in which we can show our love of God and our neighbour. This is how we light a candle in the darkness of pain and suffering in the world. □

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### MARY WAS THERE

“Mary is the highest witness to what the Spirit of God can do in man, when He renews her from within and makes her a living stone in a new world. Precipitated by the Redeemer's Grace, she responded with faithful obedience to God's every request, to every prompting of the Holy Spirit: as a humble servant, she gave herself totally to the Lord; as a caring sister, she was attentive to the needs of others; as a mother, she consecrated herself entirely to the person and mission of her Redeemer Son, becoming his perfect disciple and generously associating herself with him in his one sacrifice (...) The Holy Spirit enlightened her every step on the obscure path of faith, supported her in the pain of Calvary and in the supreme offering. Then, after the Cross, he configured her to Him in glory.”

*(Pope Saint John Paul II)*

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