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*May we, your servants,
 rejoice in unfailing
 health of mind and body,
 and, through
 the glorious intercession
 of Blessed Mary
 ever-Virgin,
 be set free
 from present sorrow
 and come to enjoy
 eternal happiness.*

(From the Common of Our Lady)

From The Editor's Desk
THE GIFT OF GOD'S PEACE

You have a lot to be thankful for in your life and peace in the family is no minor blessing. Many people would give their right arm to be in your situation. Peace is a gift of God. 'Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace that the world cannot give, this is my gift to you.' (Jn 14:27). But like all gifts it is not something that can be forced on us. We have to be in a disposition to receive it.

This disposition is what Jesus called 'faith,' which he thought was deserving of the reward of peace and other blessings. He was amazed at the lack of faith among the people in his home town (Mk 6:6) preventing him from working all the miracles he would have wished. However, when he did find faith there was no end to the wonders. Two outstanding examples of this are the cures of the Roman centurion's servant and the Canaanite woman's daughter. The fact that neither of these were Israelites and consequently pagans did not prevent them from having faith in the power of God which they saw manifest in this good Jewish Teacher. Both were told that it was their faith that made the difference, bringing healing and happiness.

Faith is a gift of seeing things in the light of God. You wonder about the overall quality of your life as a person called to follow in the footsteps of Christ. As followers of Christ, we are all called to carry our cross. 'Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me' (Mt 10:38). The cross in a more extended sense and the will of God for Jesus, from his conception to the Cross, were the same thing.

God has a will for me as truly as He had for Jesus. In the humdrum and ordinary routine, I am carrying my cross when I carry out to the best of my ability the duties of my state in life. For most of us this rarely involves anything particularly world-shattering but it always calls for fidelity. Venerable Matt Talbot who was faithful to his Baptismal calling to a heroic degree, used to say 'It's constancy that counts with God.'

In all our lives there are times when it is difficult to keep going. The cross feels like an intolerable burden and we wonder has God really fitted our back for it. When this happens, we can take comfort from the words of the Lord to St Paul when he found himself in a similar situation, and thought that he was being tried beyond his strength: "My grace is sufficient for you: for my power is at full stretch in weakness" (2 Cor 12:19).

To come with flying colours through a situation where we find ourselves severely tried, St. John of the Cross, the great Carmelite mystic of the 16th century, offered challenging but salutary advice: 'adjust your cross to yourself; not yourself to your cross.'

With God's grace we can remain on top of the situation, ensuring that we do not turn it into an unnecessary cross for others around us.

GROWTH: THE GREAT MISSION

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

We seem to notice two opposing attitudes in the lives of many married couples: some fear that marriage will rob them of their indispensable freedom, while others almost want to disappear and merge with their spouse.

Reading the pages (in *Amoris Laetitia*) that Pope Francis dedicates to the pastoral care of young couples, one often encounters precious pearls that ask the reader to pause and focus on those words that open up new vistas on the meaning of married life.

One of these pearls is found in No. 221 of *Amoris Laetitia*, where the Pope writes: "Perhaps the greatest mission of a man and a woman in love is this: to make each other more of a man and a woman. To make each other

grow is to help the other shape his or her own identity."

We seem to notice two opposing attitudes in the lives of many married couples: some fear that marriage will rob them of that freedom which is today considered an inalienable good. So, they try to negotiate spaces of autonomy, to define their own boundaries which their partner should not cross. All this happens concerning very simple and concrete things such as one's own personal bank account, so that one does not have to confront the



other when one wants to buy something; one's own car; time for personal hobbies. Nothing problematic in all this because it is true that marriage does not eliminate one's individuality, but it is problematic if one perceives the other as a possible invader of my life.

Other spouses, on the other hand, imagine marriage as a kind of new chemical compound in which each of the two agree to "fuse" with the other to give birth to the new creature that is the couple. Here too, very concrete things: doing everything together, deciding everything together, having the same hobbies so you can be together like praying together. Nothing problematic, because it is true that marriage gives birth to the couple, but the couple is not a new chemical compound, but the alliance of two persons, each with their own individuality and personality.

If these are the two extremes, most couples fortunately manage to find a good balance between respect for each other's uniqueness and the new alliance born of marriage. However, the individual-couple polarity is often the site of many misunderstandings and conflicts, especially when each has desires and expectations that are different from those of their partner.

Within this framework, the words of Pope Francis are enlightening because they tell us that not only does the couple not steal anything from the individuality of each person, but rather promotes it, makes it grow and mature. How is this possible? Let

us try to enter into this dynamic.

The person I relate to is different from me, and diversity is both a richness and a struggle. I sometimes ask spouses in difficulty what they find hard to accept about their partners. After listening to a long list of faults, I ask them what the beautiful aspects of their partner are. Very often it happens that the person makes the same list without realising it. For example: "He is always messy; I like his freedom and creativity"; "He is tough; I love him because he gives me a lot of security"; "He is not very talkative; I like his concreteness". Difference attracts, but also disturbs; in each case it provokes me, leading to conflict or to liberation and growth.

The other, in fact, awakens in me something of my inner world and my past; it provokes me in my limits and in my desires; it questions my style and my ideas. I can eliminate this difference, I can only leave room for the annoyance it gives me, but I can put myself on the line, confront it and enter into a path of growth.

To a woman, the masculine partner can evoke initiative, movement, planning. To a man, the feminine can awaken sensitivity for the human, caring, compassion for all that is fragile, weak and limited. All this, of course, without rigid schematics that clearly separate male and female. Let's say that the difference in the other often recalls aspects of me to which I am affectively and characteristically very attached. But if I let myself be inspired by the other's difference, I can take steps forward and become a more

complete person.

The relationship as a couple is a privileged educational path which helps one to become a person to the full. You, the woman, awaken in me the attention to the feminine and help me to recognise it and develop it, and so I become more of a person. You, the man, make me, the woman, come into contact with the masculine in me, provoke me to recover it and make it grow, and so I become more of a person. "Making love" also means giving oneself to each other to help each other become persons.

Pope Francis is quite right:

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

Strolling along the seabed one day, a seahorse saw a young oyster. "Good morning!" he said kindly, knocking on the oyster shell. A very sweet voice answered him: "It will certainly be a good morning for me: you've noticed me!"

"You're not from around here, are you?" the seahorse asked curiously. "No, but sometimes the currents have already brought me here," said the oyster kindly. "Then you must know my friends!" exclaimed the seahorse.

"Not really... I have no friends," replied the shy oyster. "Really?" asked the seahorse. "That's impossible." "You see, I'm very shy, I'm not pretty, I can't do many things..." the oyster justified himself.

"What are you saying? Everyone knows how to keep someone company!" the seahorse explained and was happy to stay with her until the evening. The oyster began to relax, so much so that it opened

"Perhaps the greatest mission of a man and a woman in love is this: to make each other more of a man and more of a woman. To make each other grow is to help the other shape his or her own identity." This is also true in faith, when your differences inspire me. God gives me a person to love and to love so that I can grow and so that she can grow through me and become a more beautiful person. The term 'mission' that the Pope uses fits in here; I would also add the term vocation: we get married because we want the happiness and fulfilment of the person we love; on these conditions I can be happy too. □



up a little: it had never realised that it could be so easy to give and receive joy!

When night fell, the oyster murmured, "I have been so happy today, I want to give you a present." And before the admiring eyes of the seahorse, the oyster opened and held out a beautiful pearl with pinkish veins.

"This is my gift to you. Take it!" trilled the oyster.

The seahorse took the pearl gently. It was bright and warm, and the seahorse felt all the oyster's love flowing into him. □

Bruno Ferrero

SEND YOUR SPIRIT TO RENEW US!

by Chino Biscontin

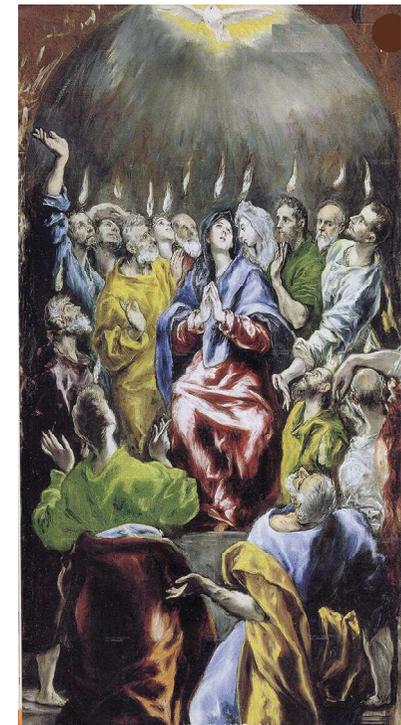
The work of the Father does not end with the resurrection of Christ, but with we being able to live according to his resurrection. this is the miracle of Pentecost

The feast of Pentecost (meaning 'fifty days'; this year it falls on 5 June) has ancient origins. It was a feast of the beginning of the harvest. However, after the Exodus it was linked to the events of Salvation history recounting how God led his people. According to the accounts in Deuteronomy, the giving of the Law to Moses on Sinai took place on the fiftieth day after they came out of slavery in Egypt. This capital event was celebrated on the feast of the Passover, and fifty days later the gift of the Law was celebrated, and this was also the case at the time of Jesus.

At Pentecost, in the Upper Room, the risen Lord gives the promised Holy Spirit to the small community of his disciples, gathered together with the Mother of Jesus. The Law, which alone cannot lead to salvation, is written in hearts as Love that converts and transfigures. And in the power of the Spirit the tiny "Church" of Jerusalem inaugurates the proclamation of the Gospel of the risen Lord Jesus. And the Word of the Gospel will never stop, it will reach the ends of the earth.

The order of the liturgical year, resulting from the reform of the Vatican Council II, considers the fifty days from Easter to Pente-

cost as a single festive period. The Sundays following Easter are not called "after Easter," but Sundays II, III, IV... VII of Easter. And Pentecost brings Easter to its fulfilment. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus would have remained sterile for us without the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is its indispensable fruit. Participation in the divine life, which Jesus gave us, is



brought about by the coming of the Holy Spirit within us.

Considering the biblical readings proclaimed at the Vigil Mass and on the feast day, the prayers and the preface, recount that the grace of Pentecost have these dimensions.

First of all, the full fulfilment of the prophetic promises concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the gift of a new heart, docile to God. As St Paul clearly states: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Participants in God's goodness, made capable of following the path indicated by Jesus, destined for eternal life.

Secondly, the definitive constitution of the Church, the community of the Lord, is consecrated to be the 'Body of Christ' in the midst of people. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is given to the assembled community, and the flames that rested on each one come from one and the same fire. The Church was established by Jesus during his ministry, with his proclamation of the Gospel and his teaching, with the choice of the twelve, with the primacy given to Peter, with the institution of the Eucharist which contains him giving himself on the cross and him handing himself over to the Father.

But just as a child is formed in the womb and then given birth, so in Pentecost the Church is given birth and given to the

*Heavenly comforter,
Spirit of truth, who is
present in every place
and fills everything,
treasure of good things
and giver of life,
come and dwell in us
and save our souls,
you who are so good"*
Byzantine Liturgy

world.

Thirdly, the breaking down of all barriers and the affirmation that salvation is freely given to all people. Pentecost is the "anti-Babel" that breaks down misunderstanding, closure, estrangement and dispersion.

Finally, Pentecost is the beginning of the missionary thrust of Jesus' disciples. Peter, who during the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas, out of fear, denied knowing him three times, at Pentecost, having received the Holy Spirit, made the first courageous missionary proclamation to the crowd gathered in front of the Upper Room. He was aware that he was risking prison and his life, but he proclaimed aloud: "Let all Israel know that God has made Jesus, whom you killed, Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), and again: "Repent, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). □

THE DAWN WILL SURELY COME

by Anastasia Dias

It was still dark. 'How many days does that make?' Mary nudged her friend, who was fast asleep.

'Three' was the reply she received. Hurriedly, Mary got out of bed and started to dress. 'We need to go', she exclaimed. 'Where?' her friend asked, half-asleep. Mary hadn't slept for three nights. Neither did she all-ow anyone around her to sleep.

'Get dressed, we have to go to the tomb', Mary ordered. 'It's not even dawn. You go. I'll come there later,' Mary's friend replied.

Mary didn't need company. She had been alone for most of her life. She took the spices and made her way to the tomb. It was still very dark. She carried a lamp with her. In the distance, she could see the sun rising.

These dark roads didn't frighten her anymore. She was lost in thought. 'How has it been three days already?' she thought to herself. She still remembered that day. The memories didn't allow her to sleep at night. She wished she could have done something to stop it. But, she couldn't.

By the time she reached the tomb it was already dawn. The sun was gleaming in the distance. She went inside. She couldn't see His

body anywhere. The clothes that had been draped around His body were neatly folded and placed by one side.

She was in a state of shock. 'Where had they taken Him?' she thought to herself. She was bewildered by the idea of His body being stolen. She started weeping; just as she had been doing for the past three days. She cried. He was the only one who had helped her when no one else could. Her entire life people had judged her, including her own family. He had never judged her.

No one had ever stood by her, including her parents. He stood by her, healed her and made her a new person. She was indebted to Him and could never ever forget all that He had done for her. So, she stood there sobbing inconsolably. The only thing that she wanted to do was to embalm His body, as per tradition; as a way of giving back what she had received. And, she was deprived of that, too.

'Maybe, I should go back', she thought to herself. But, a voice within her told her to stay. She breathed in deeply. Then, she thought she heard a familiar voice, 'Who are you looking for?'

She was still crying. She didn't





look back as she wiped her tears. 'They have taken Him and I don't know where they have put Him' she whispered. 'If you know, please, please, tell me,' She pleaded. 'Mary', the voice said. She was taken aback. It was Him!

She couldn't believe her eyes. It was Him.

She reached out to hold her Master and her friend. She had seen Him. In that moment, she felt her sorrows turn into joy.

By now, you would have figured that this is the story of Mary Magdalene; perhaps the first person to see Jesus after his resurrection. If you read between the lines, you can see that hers is a story of not losing hope, not giving up.

Mary was grief-stricken. She had just lost the only person who had ever been there for her. She could have said, 'What's the point in visiting the tomb? It'll bring back the memories back and make things worse' or 'I can go another day, with the others'. Maybe, just like the others, she would have been asleep, at that hour.

But, she did none of these. Bereaved, she plucked up courage and walked in the darkness to His

tomb. She had taken upon herself the responsibility of embalming His body and was determined to do it. Come what may, she would fulfil her duty.

That is what you and I need to learn from her story. You see, if Mary had just sat at home, doing nothing but crying she would never be remembered today. Her story would never have been told thousands of years later. And, most importantly, she would never have been the first to witness the glory of the Risen Lord. But it was her courage and determination in those dark times that allowed her to see the light.

That's what you and I need to do. Life may be hard, with its challenges and struggles. But we cannot lose hope. We cannot sit in a corner, all alone and wallow in self-pity. We must get up, like Mary did, remember our purpose and work towards its fulfilment.

If you and I put our minds to it, just like Mary Magdalene, we shall see the light shining at the end of the tunnel (tomb, if you will). If you and I don't lose hope and keep working, we shall certainly see our purpose in this life unfold. □

RETO WANNER

From Protestant to Salesian missionary

Reto Wanner sdb was born on 10 June 1972. He belonged to the Ulrich Zwingli Evangelical Protestant Church. Eager to serve, he chose to work as a volunteer in Papua New Guinea. He spent just over three years at the Don Bosco Technical Institute in Boroko, Port Moresby, and returned home in 2004. During his time in Papua New Guinea, he was very impressed by the Catholic Church and the work the Salesians do for young people, the poor and abandoned youth. On his return home, he became a Catholic and joined the Salesian Congregation in Germany. He made his first religious profession on 8 September 2006 at Colle Don Bosco in Italy. His Final Profession was made on 7 October 2012 in Chemnitz, Germany. After a year he applied to become a missionary. On 25 September 2016 he was sent by the Rector Major as a missionary to the PGS delegation (Papua New Guinea).

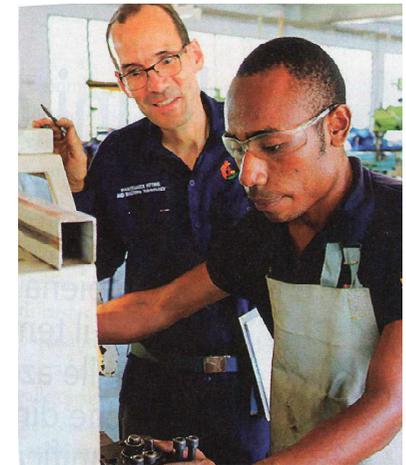
On 17 April 2014 he arrived in the delegation Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, although he belongs to the German Province.

Why did you choose to be a missionary?

I believe it's a call from God. He wants me to share my time, my talents, myself with the people of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

How did this call to the missions come about?

Two events in my childhood



influenced my decision to become a missionary. One is related to my father who worked as a foreman for four years in Ghana, Africa. His stories and images with the Africans fascinated me greatly. The second fact: as a young adult I had an accident at sea. I entered a current and almost drowned. It was only thanks to God that my life was restored - a second life, you might say; a call from God for a certain mission. That was also the moment when I woke up from a sheltered life in the family, with no clear direction for my future. Not long after the accident, the Salesians in Papua New Guinea needed a mechanical instructor. With a background in mechanical engineering and in the light of those two events, I applied through a Swiss volunteer organisation. For three years I stayed at the Don Bosco Institute of

Technology in Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea, and soon came to realise that sharing my engineering knowledge and professional skills was not enough.

Accompanying young people became increasingly important. I had many role models among the Salesians, the Salesian Sisters (FMA) and the aspirants that I worked with in the institute.

I felt convinced that the integral formation of young people required 'skills, knowledge and religion.' This was the backbone. After three years there, I could clearly say that religion kept me in that sometimes "wild" and strange place. God was calling me, calling me to become a religious, calling me to become a Salesian lay brother, calling me to the missions. It was not I who chose to become a missionary, I was guided by the Holy Spirit of God. I was listening to him.

How do you see your vocation as a Salesian Brother?

I am very happy to be a Salesian lay brother. I am completely immersed with the young people - in the classroom, in the workshop and I spend time with them after school hours too. Through this intense time together, a relationship of trust and love has emerged. Little by little the youngsters are opening up to me. They are interested in my life as a religious. I then have the opportunity to share with them Christian values of life. A holistic formation is underway, which will last well beyond their graduation. Now, after seventeen years, I can see good fruits emerging from my time as a Salesian coadjutor.

What brings you joy, satisfaction and happiness?

Besides being a mechanical instructor, I love to get in touch with the children, youth and adults of the villages around the institute. My source of strength and balance in my work as an instructor is the Sunday Oratory. It is a joy for me to share my life with children and young people from the different villages. The Sunday Oratory is full of games, prayers, catechism, a variety of activities and a first-aid station, which addresses their mind, body and spirit. The experience of being welcomed by the Oratory youngsters gives me deep satisfaction. I also enjoy visiting them in their homes. It is then that I have the opportunity to talk to their parents and understand the family situation.

The daily celebration of the sacraments is an opportunity to grow in my faith. Every Sunday I accompany the children's choir to the 11.00 am mass in the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians. It is much appreciated by the children and the congregation. The daily rosary and an occasional "good night" talk with our residents is also a good opportunity to grow spiritually. Praying, working and living with my community - Fr Clifford Morais, the rector and Fr Joseph Dai, residence manager and spiritual moderator are a great source of inspiration for me. This is my family and here I find joy, comfort, love and strength.

Looking back, I have realised that it is essential to be open and humble. By listening to the Holy Spirit, I became a Salesian missionary coadjutor. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. PAULINUS OF NOLA (JUNE 22)

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned" (Song of Solomon 8:7)

HEIGHTS OF GLORY

Pontius Meropius Anicius Paulinus came from a wealthy Roman family which had settled in Gaul (present day France). His father was a prefect or as we would call it today, Governor of Gaul. This meant that the family was not just wealthy but were also held in high regard by the people.

Since money was never an issue, Paulinus' father wanted his son to have the best of everything. He enrolled him in the best school he could find so that he could study and become a successful and learned man. Accordingly, Paulinus studied poetry and rhetoric under the then-famous poet, Ausonius. He went on to become a lawyer and achieve success.

Paulinus achieved milestone after milestone in pompous fashion as he ascended the ranks of success and prestige. He was quickly turning out to be all that his father dreamed he would be: successful, wealthy and respected. He fell in love with a Spanish



noble lady named Therasia and married her. They shared a wonderful life together and were never in need of any pleasure the world had to offer.

DEPTHS OF PAIN

"I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and was gone. My soul failed me when he

spoke. I sought him, but did not find him; I called him, but he gave no answer" (Song of Solomon 5:6)

Paulinus and Therasia added to their joy when they welcomed a son into the world. A baby has a curious way of bringing people together like never before and inspiring joy in those around it beginning from its own parents. Just when Paulinus and Therasia thought they could never be any happier, they were experiencing happiness like never before when they held their baby.

But their life took a dark turn when their baby became critical just days after its birth. All the wealth and power they possessed could not cure their beloved child and their son ended up dying just a week after he was born. Paulinus and Therasia were shattered. Their whole world had turned upside down. They couldn't care less about their wealth, success, property or status in the face of this devastating loss.

Our world doesn't seem to value life. Abortions happen on an hourly basis. Millions of children are killed before they ever have a chance to experience life, beauty and love. It is appalling that abortion is treated like any other medical intervention and classified under access to healthcare. Aborting a child isn't the same as cutting off a gangrenous limb or a cancerous cyst. It might appear to be a similar intervention from the medical point of view but in actual fact, it is nothing short of a murder. Abortion doesn't remove a cyst from a woman's uterus; it takes away the potential of a life.

While many people might be able to cope with the loss of a child after a full-term pregnancy, many others do not do as well. Paulinus and Therasia were one such couple. They couldn't stomach the death of their son. Paulinus was so shaken by the experience that he gave up his career and became a recluse. He realized in that moment of loss that all the money and fame in the world amounts to nothing. He wasn't yet aware of Jesus' words: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?" (Mt 16:26) But he arrived at the truth of this statement.

As he grappled with the pain of death and the pain of love, he searched for answers. All his years of study did not prepare him for what life threw at him. He knew the Classics of literature and he could speak an eloquent discourse but he couldn't make sense of losing his son and he stood speechless before death. Therasia was a Christian and so her faith might have influenced Paulinus in his search for answers. It was during this time that he came across Bishop Delphinus who is also venerated as a saint today. He was then the Bishop of Bordeaux. He was able to counsel Paulinus and made such an impression on him that Paulinus asked to be baptized.

BREADTH OF LOVE

Having embraced the Catholic faith, Paulinus embarked on a faith journey like the early apostles. He and his wife gave away their wealth, resigned their high status and sold off their properties. Whatever they had,

they gave to the poor and put at the disposal of the Church reminiscent of the early Christian practice recorded in the Book of Acts of the Apostles (4:34).

Having renounced the world, the two of them set out for a life of austerity and mortification. This went on for about two years after which Paulinus was ordained a priest. Some biographies say that he was forcibly ordained by the Bishop. Historians and scholars question the authenticity of Paulinus' ordination because one, it was probably done against his will and two, he had no formal seminary training nor did he receive the minor orders a seminarian receives before becoming a priest. Whether he was forced or not, Paulinus embraced his new form of life and office. Along with his wife who was still his partner in austerity and mortification, he established a community of monks.

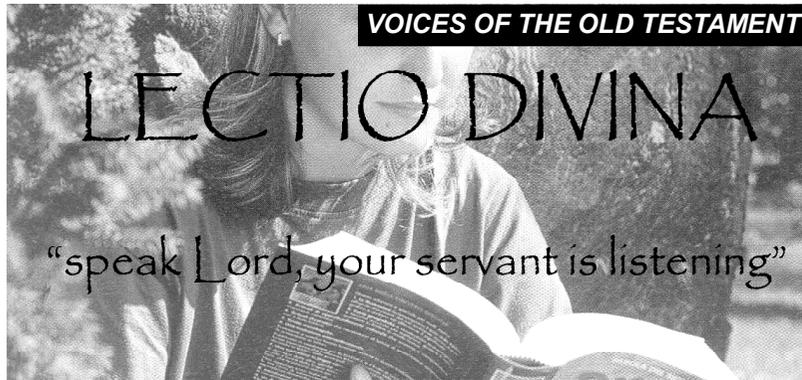
The two of them used part of their wealth to build churches and other institutions like hospitals and water tanks that would prove useful to the needy. Besides, living a simple and austere life, and spending time in prayer, Paulinus and Therasia spread love and did good at every opportunity. It seems as if they wanted to give to others what they couldn't give to their own son: a chance for a good life.

Paulinus went on to become the Bishop of Nola and interacted and befriended nearly all the great personages of his day who we venerate today as saints, such as Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Martin of Tours and Pope Anastasius I.

Paulinus was renowned for being a poet. His corpus of poems seems to be directed toward encouraging Christians to persevere in a life of Christian commitment, and to demonstrate to complacent Christians and to good-natured non-Christians the underlying motivation of that commitment. He has also written a tremendous amount of letters to friends and colleagues including the distinguished persons mentioned earlier. The central theme of his letters is authentic friendship. He probably sourced his material from his own enduring friendship with his wife Therasia and embellished it with quotations of scripture. Such was his efficacy that Augustine would recommend him as a model for friendship.

I conclude with an excerpt from a poem by St. Paulinus which could be prayed on a daily basis:

"Almighty Father of creation whose power is supreme, hear me if my prayer is righteous. Let no day of mine be sad, nor any night disturb my tranquil sleep. May other men's possessions have no attraction for me; rather, may mine be of service to those who beg them. May none entertain desires to injure me; or if such desires exist, may they not harm me...May my mind be happy with what it has, and not surrender to base gain; may it prevail over the enticements of the body in virtuous approval of a chaste bed. May my harmful tongue, so popular with malicious ears and ever guilty of the spread of poison, loathe foul jokes and disgusting words." □



THE GOOD SAMARITAN

by Carlo Broccardo

Journeying through the parables with the Gospel according to Luke: both because it is the Gospel that accompanies us on the Sundays of this liturgical year, and because - it must be said - Luke's parables are the most beautiful! The first one we read together is one of the most famous: the Good Samaritan. Let us reread it once more and we will realise that it is not only a beautiful story, but also a way in which Jesus "opens his heart" to his interlocutor, leading him to change his way of looking at people.

It all begins with a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Today we would say: what must you do to go to heaven? Be careful because it is not an innocent question: the doctor of the law (i.e., the expert of the Bible and the catechism) who asks the question wanted to test Jesus; he is not interested in the answer: he only hopes that he has asked a difficult question and that Jesus will make some mistake in answering it, so they can accuse him of being wrong. Jesus does

not fall into the trap and says to the man: the Law contained in the book of Deuteronomy and Leviticus says to love God and neighbour, right? Good: do this and you will live! Love God and your neighbour and you will go to heaven.

But our scribe (the expression "Doctor of the Law" is a synonym) does not give up and returns to the attack with a second question. It is as if he were saying: of course, I too know that we must love our neighbour, but who is my neighbour? In other words, he asks Jesus to make a list, to divide the world into good and bad; those who deserve my love (because they are my neighbour) on the one hand, those others whom it is not necessary to waste time on. This time the question is more insidious and Jesus tells a story in response.

A man was walking along one of the most dangerous roads in ancient Palestine when - as expected - a group of brigands attacked him, robbed him and beat him to a pulp. Imagine a half-dead man



lying there in the middle of the road. What would you do if you met him? A priest and a Levite, who were the people in charge of worship in the temple of Jerusalem, see him, dodge him, and go on their way, indifferent. Why did they not stop? Jesus does not say. He only says that they did nothing for the unfortunate man.

On the other hand, a Samaritan, also passing along that road and also seeing the half-dead man lying there, 'had compassion on him.' In Greek there is a very profound verb, which literally means that "his bowels moved": he did not remain indifferent, he let himself be involved, he felt touched in the depths of his heart (we would say so, the ancient Hebrews said instead: in the depths of his bowels). And then help came; almost in slow motion we are told of all that he did for the stranger he had met by chance on the road: "He came up to him, dressed his wounds, poured oil and wine into them, then put him

on his animal, took him to an inn and looked after him. The next day he took out two coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying: 'Take care of him; whatever you spend extra, I will pay you on my return.'" Admirable. And what is more, he was a Samaritan, an "enemy," someone with whom one should not associate, someone about whom one should spread rumours as much as possible. And he was the only one who took care of him.

"Which of these three do you think was neighbour to the one who fell into the hands of the robbers?" asks Jesus, after telling the story. I would like to answer: of course, the Samaritan! But instead, the scribe says: "He who had compassion on him." It is not an insignificant description, because in the words of the scribe there is no longer any trace of the judgmental manner in which he was now looking at reality. Previously he had looked around and asked: who is my neighbour and who is not, who is it necessary to love and who can I ignore, who is a Jew (one of ours) and who is a Samaritan (worse for him!)? The deep feeling of compassion, which then translates into the actions of caring, removes these superficial distinctions, it goes deeper.

Faced with a person in need, the only thing that counts is not to treat him as a stranger, but to let yourself be intimately involved and care for him. "So, you will be their neighbour," says Jesus.

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"; "Go and do likewise." There was nothing more to add. □

Quiet Spaces

THE RISK OF GIVING MERCY

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Monday, June 30, 2017

In giving safe haven to persecuted Jews during the second World War, Pius XII offered an example of how to perform acts of mercy: through sharing, feelings compassion for another person's suffering, taking personal risks, without fear of derision or misunderstandings. At Mass at Santa Marta on Monday, 5 June, Pope Francis held up his predecessor as a courageous model of mercy for Christians to follow. He also urged the faithful to examine their conscience and to rediscover and to put into practice "the 14 corporal and spiritual works of mercy".

For his reflection, Francis began with the day's first reading, taken from the Book of Tobit (1:3; 2:1-8). It presents "an entire story, but today it speaks to us about what Tobit was like — Tobit, Tobias' father — what his life of faith was like: a man of belief". Perhaps "it may seem at first that he boasts a bit", the Pope noted, "but no, it is not so."

Simply put, "it is a story with some bad moments and at the end there is a message." And "today this passage speaks to us of Tobit's testimony, that merciful witness." Tobit, Francis continued, "performs works of mercy." The text in fact, reads: "I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life, and I performed many acts of charity to my brethren and countrymen who went with me into the land of Assyria, to Nineveh" — because he had been a prisoner, a slave in Nineveh, the Pope noted.

In short, Tobit was "a wealthy man, but he was generous," the Pontiff said. "During the feast of Pentecost he had a good dinner prepared, and before sitting down at the table he told his son to go out and look for a poor Jewish brother and to invite him to dinner; he performed a work of mercy." And then, the Pope continued, "the son came — he was happy; it was a day of celebration — and said that they had killed a Jewish brother." Immediately Tobit "got up, left the dinner intact, then went to the square, removed the man from the square and carried him to a room, waiting for sunset to bury him." And in the end, the passage reads: "When I returned I washed myself", Tobit says, "and ate my food in sorrow."

"A work of mercy," he explained, "means not only sharing what I have." Of course, "this is very important, and Tobit shared his money, because he was rich and gave alms." But "he also shared friendship: he invited the poor to dinner." Therefore, the Pontiff cautioned, it is not enough simply "to share, but to feel compassion, that is: to suffer with those who suffer."

And here, Francis suggested a series of questions for an examination of conscience: "Do I know how to share? Am I generous? When I see a person who is suffering, who is in trouble, do I also suffer? Do I know how to put myself in the shoes of others, in situations of suffering?" The

words of Tobit are eloquent: "I ate with sorrow." They accurately express the idea of "sharing and feeling compassion. This is the first characteristic, the first way, the first consequence of a work of mercy: I share, I feel compassion."

"But then there is another thing," the Pope stressed. In fact, he emphasized that "performing works of mercy sometimes means taking risks." To illustrate his point, the Pope again turned to the day's reading from the Book of Tobit. "My neighbors laughed at me and said, 'He is no longer afraid that he will be put to death for doing this; he once ran away, and here he is burying the dead again!'"

Thus, Francis noted, "one often takes risks" in order to perform a work of mercy. "Let us think about Rome in the midst of war: about those who took risks, beginning with Pius XII, to hide Jews, so that they were not killed, so that they would not be deported. They risked their lives! But it was a work of mercy, to save those people's lives!" That is why one must also "take risks."

But Tobit's story, the Pope affirmed, indicates for us the "three characteristics," the "three features of the works of mercy:" sharing and feeling compassion for others, taking risks and being prepared to face derision. Tobit, continued the Pope, "is not like the rich man clothed in purple whom Jesus speaks about in the Gospel, who feasted and ignored poor Lazarus who was starving at the door of his palace; he knew he was there, but ignored him."

"I would like to add another thing", Francis continued, "that is not explicit but implicit in the passage we have read: works of mercy, performing works of mercy, is inconvenient." One might think, "I have a sick friend, I would like to visit him or her, but I am not in the mood; I prefer to rest, or watch tv, in peace...". Because "performing works of mercy means always being subjected to inconvenience". This sort of work "is discomfoting, but the Lord suffered discomfort for us: he went to the cross, to give us mercy".

In conclusion, the Pontiff called for reflection "today on the works of mercy". And above all, he suggested, "let us remember them: there are 14, seven corporal and seven spiritual" works of mercy. And with a smile, he reassured those in the chapel at Santa Marta: "I will not ask here: 'Who knows what the works of mercy are, raise your hand'; I won't ask it, because I'm afraid only a few hands would be raised". But the Pope recommended that the faithful not miss the opportunity to find ways to perform the works of mercy: of course, by remembering "what they are", but also by asking themselves, "Do I do this? Do I know how to share, do I know how to feel compassion? Do I take risks? Do I accept inconvenience in order to perform a work of mercy?" □

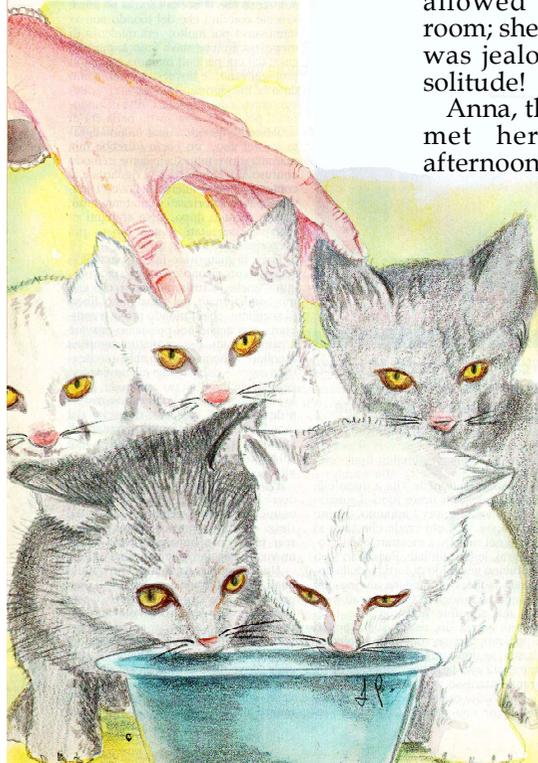
JUST REVENGE

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, *sdb*

She was old, she was British, sill-tempered and manic; tall but somewhat stooped with grey hair combed tightly back; her face dull and expressionless.

It was her custom to spend spring and summer every year at a particular mountain resort. But she made no friends; hardly speaking to anyone. Even at the resort, she dined alone every evening and retired to her room rather early.

One might say, her life was that of a hermit, her only passion was for her cats. She had five of them: two grey and three white, and



every year, when she returned from England at the end of winter, she would drag them along with her in a large cat basket.

She had rented a small room on the upper floor of a rustic house, not far from the hotel where she locked up the five felines for the duration of her stay. During the day, her only diversion was to visit them, bringing them a pail of milk and a few choice morsels that she managed to extract from the hotel chef, slipping into his pocket some generous tips.

Everyone knew about this arrangement but no one was allowed into that barricaded room; she alone had the key. She was jealous of it and her own solitude!

Anna, the manager's daughter met her one hot summer afternoon when she was still a teenager. That day she didn't know what got into her, but she was suddenly drawn compassionately to the old Englishwoman who herself had forgotten her reserve a little and showed her an ounce of sympathy. She even responded to the greetings of Uncle Mario, who was with her, and smiled benevolently at the little girl, as if she had known her for a long time. It was amazing, her face then took on another expression, losing that absent

colour, it brightened with a flicker of serenity that quickly disappeared. It seemed like the opening and closing of a window on the façade of a deserted house.

Anna felt sorry for the poor old lady and did not know whether to pity her for her way of life or demean her.

But Anna's curiosity for the cats was very intense and it was even more keen since the old lady banned anyone even asking to visit them. One day Uncle Mario asked the old Englishwoman to take her along on her usual visit to the animals.

The question was a bold one and he certainly expected a negative reply; on the contrary, what others were not allowed to do was, out of the greatest magnanimity was granted to Anna! So, one morning she followed the old lady, helping her to carry the supplies. Anna walked slowly by her side, making sure that not a drop of milk tipped over the bucket, balanced by her hand to the rhythm of her step, and in the mean time she let her mind wander while she walked.

It was not a long walk. At the end of the avenue that flanked the hotel was the rustic turret-shaped house.

As their footsteps skreached on the gravel, five children, one after the other, appeared on the edge of the ramshackle doorway, the eldest being seven years old.

They were barefoot and filthy, but still adorable because of their uncorrupted naivete that shone through their glistening eyes. The comparison immediately emerged: here: five creatures who were certainly starving; there: beasts who were shamefully

overstuffed!

Anna could not hold back a word of sympathy, but the impassive old Englishwoman went into the entrance hall, up the dark staircase, as if not even noticing the children, and Anna was forced to follow her with a feeling of disgust that grew more better inside her at every step! In front of the door of the menagerie the lady looked around with diffidence, then she put the key in the keyhole; the creaking of the rusty iron was answered by a long meow that rose in all ranges of sound.

"You stay out here," she ordered Anna.

Even if she had not ordered her to, she would certainly not have gone in. The stench was so repulsive that it blew into her face as she opened the door.

But she peeped inside: the five animals, a magnificent specimen of breed, were purring with satisfaction, rubbing their snouts against the skirt of their mistress, who began to caress them one by one with such loving care that Anna would not have believed her capable of. Tender adjectives came out of her; words that the old lady would perhaps never have uttered to the five children who were already there and who had souls that needed nurturing and hearts that needed love!

The maternal instinct that germinates in every woman did not seem to have taken root in her. Obscured and dispersed by a morbid mania for her feline brood was all she seemed capable of. Even the Gospel, that she had heard in her northern country shrouded in mists, was unfortunately a dead letter and could

therefore neither console nor inspire a single sliver of humanness.

When the cats had had their fill, the old lady finally decided to leave with one last caress and a final petting; the door was again carefully locked and the key placed carefully at the bottom of her handbag.

The two of them went back down and there stood the five children still waiting for them; that smallest of the brigade was sucking so her finger so pitifully as if it were a stick of candyfloss. Anna was very upset and disturbed, to say the least. That visit, instead of cheering her up, had weighed heavily on her little heart.

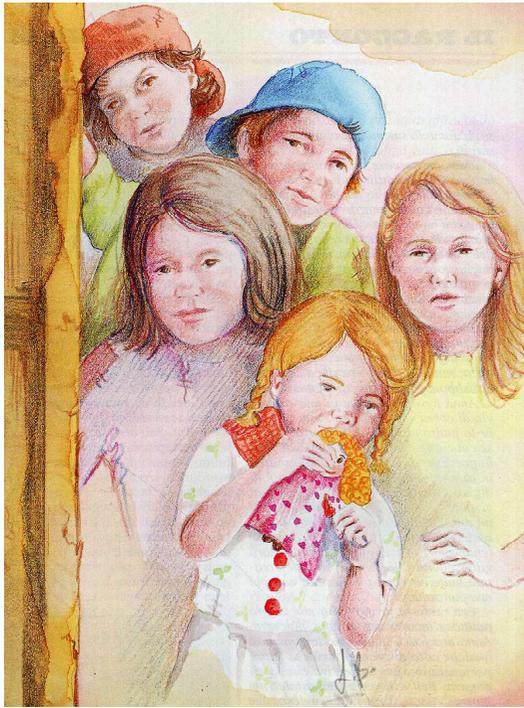
But she came back several times to the country house, though invited by the Englishwoman, she came not for the cats, of course, but for those little children to whom she would slip away, from time to time, to give them a shy caress or a stick of candy. Their mother was away most of the day, working here and there, and their father was far, far away. Those poor children grew up like poor shrubs without any care.

Anna had insistently mentioned their situation to the lady, hoping to win her over to better feelings, but to no avail. For her, the world consisted only of the five mewling beasts!

Until one morning Anna managed to take her revenge, and it was a just revenge that more than vindicated her.

The old lady had taken to her bed due to an illness, so she had entrusted Anna with the task of taking food to the five felines. The key was placed in her hand with several recommendations, which Anna then interpreted in her own way.

On her way out she went into the kitchen to see the cook. The vast room was like a warm nursery of various aromas. The smell of the roast mingled with that of the sauté; the steam of boiled meat spread in wide mingling with the smell of the vegetables cooking in another huge pot; subtle aromas of spices



and vanilla, of cream and beaten eggs hovered around with a provocative grace. She might have been tempted and then satisfied, but the thought of the children put a damper on any ambition in this regard. Instead, she nurtured that charitable idea in her brain. She followed the impulse that animated her and, having the usual bucket of milk, she asked the cook to give her, instead of the usual pieces of meat and liver, for some slices of a very tasty cake, left over from the day before and which she saw stored in a corner of the pantry. The woman looked at her with two astonished eyes:

"But the lady never gave those cats these things!"

"What is it that you don't understand?" she answered with frank indifference "This is the order I received. Moreover, to convince you even more look, here is the key to the menagerie!" And she showed it to the doubtful cook, who, perhaps convinced of her acquired authority, consented to her wish without a murmur, judging in her heart, however, that the little girl wanted to commit a sin of gluttony behind the old woman's back!

She cut for her exactly five slices of cake; the lady was rich as a nawab and paid top dollar!

Anna wrapped the cake in paper and ran back to the rustic house: God help her if the mistress found out! She arrived with her heart in turmoil. She brought the cats only their portion of milk, and left them in the lurch with a quick goodbye; a little fasting for them too would not hurt, don't you think? Then

she came down again to the five children, and putting a finger to her lips to indicate that they keep very silent. They were waiting for her as she handed out the cake before their astonished faces. Never had she seen creatures eat with such gusto and famished appetite!

It was certainly the first time that their palates had met such sweetness. Anna was happy; it was as if she had accomplished something great, and laughed to herself at this vindictive prank which repaid her for the abstinence imposed on her in the past few days. She returned to the English lady who, to her good fortune was still in bed and was likely to remain there for the foreseeable future. She gave her back the key and reassured her that everything had been done as she had instructed.

That was the last time Anna saw her. That afternoon she left to go home with Uncle Mario. Did the old lady discover the deception immediately? Who knows! She was unable to find out anything about it. It was only the following year, at the same time, when Anna had not returned to the cool refuge of the mountains, that she received a picture-postcard: it showed the entrance to a country house, in front of which five children were lined up in new clothes, holding hands and smiling. Behind the postcard, with in an angular script, was a greeting and a signature: it was the old English woman!

She then realised that her small and healing revenge had borne fruit and that the voice of goodness had been heard! □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 29

by Michele Molineris

152. An incomplete fracture (1866)

"Eugene was celebrating his cousin's birthday at his parents' house, and with him his brother Carlo was jumping over a ditch for pleasure, when his foot slipped, he fell and broke his leg. It was not a serious break, but it confined him to bed for several weeks. When he heard this, the enthusiastic young man was very agitated and wept bitterly, which was a very rare thing in that masculine soul, which used to tame every emotion with force. He was also deeply annoyed by his continual idleness (which should have made him feel so tired of doing nothing).

When the saintly Don Bosco, well known in Italy and abroad for his great works of charity, heard of Eugene's unlucky accident, he came to see him, for he truly liked this pious youth, and that love was reciprocated. His fatherly concern for the young man, the warm welcome that the ailing youth gave him, and his happiness defy description, for God's minister was most eager to aid this soul so beloved of Jesus, and he wished to endear him to Our lord by increasing his love and trust in Our Lady, since She alone of all creatures can help us to please Him, the Infinite Good. He drew close to Eugene's bedside, his gentle, humble and revered aspect delighting and winning all hearts, and said with a smile, "Dear son, how happy I would

have been if you had broken the other leg too!"

"What are you saying, Father!" exclaimed Eugene.

"Yes," the man of God calmly continued. "If you had broken both legs you would appreciate Our Lady's power in healing you even more. Cheer up and trust in the Holy Virgin Mary. At the end of this month, you will be able to set out on your journey." And indeed he did. (P. Ruffo, *Vita di Eugenio Ricci* SJ., 13: v. anche EBM., X, 516).

153. The grumpy benefactor (1866)

The Turin Oratory owed thirty thousand lire to a businessman, who, tired of waiting, went to the Oratory one fine morning in a huff, ready to make a big scene. He went straight to the prefect and declared that he would not leave until he had received the money he was owed. At this request, the poor prefect was obliged to show him the box, the misery of which made the businessman fly into a rage, and decided to speak to Don Bosco. Forced to sit down in Don Bosco's antechamber to wait his turn, he began to grumble even more indignantly.

In the meantime, a gentleman entered with a resolute step and, speaking sharply and vibrantly, saying: "I want to speak to Don Bosco, now!" And to those said: "Please sit down for a moment, you'll get your chance." "I don't have time to waste," he replied impatiently; indeed, without any other formality he knocked on Don Bosco's door.

Don Bosco opened the door saying: "What do you want, my good sir?"

"I want a word with you."

"When your time comes; have a little patience; I cannot receive you before all these others who have been waiting for a long time: you can see that I cannot."

"I am in a hurry; a big hurry."

Don Bosco then excused himself before all those who were waiting to get an audience. In the meantime, the angry man had already gone into his room. This fact and the imperious manner of the gentleman did not please Don Bosco very much, so, as soon as he was inside, he begged the stranger to sit down; but stranger replied:

"I have other things to do."

"What can I do for you?"

"Oh, we'll be done in a minute; hold on to this, will you?" and he placed a package on the table; then he said: "I'm honoured to meet you, please pray for me."

Saying that he was already at the door when Countess V*** entered all bewildered and asked if anything unfortunate had happened.

"Nothing serious," Don Bosco went on. "Look at what he left me." And unwrapping the package he found thirty thousand lire notes which were placed one over the other in the presence of the businessman who was a little disappointed that he had spoken so resentfully, and apologizing, he said: "they told me that you could not pay me; but I can see that they were quite wrong to speak like that.... (D'Espiney, *Don Bosco*, 170).

154. Foreclosure avoided (1866)

At one point of time the Ora-

tory was in danger of having the bailiff in its house because of a seizure. An instalment for the payment of taxes had already fallen due, and at noon that same day the time limit had expired, that is to say, the last time limit granted.

It was a matter of paying three hundred and twenty-five lire, and Don Rua, the administrator of the house, had nothing. He went to the porter's lodge to see if any benefactor had come by that morning, and found nothing; he rummaged around and found not a single penny in the whole house. So, he ran to Don Bosco to tell him about the problem and to ask what he should do.

"I don't have any money; let's pray to Our Lady," said Don Bosco. And he quietly went back to work.

A few minutes later there was a knock at his door, and the man who came in, after a brief conversation, told him: "Look, I'm not rich, but what I've been able to put aside for your boys, is all here. Will you accept this small offering?"

"It's always providence," Don Bosco replied.

The gentleman handed him an envelope containing three hundred and twenty-five lire, which he sent to the prefect. Don Rua immediately arranged to pay the debt to the tax office. The latter, however, having arrived after midday, found that legal proceedings against the Oratory had already been instituted. Fortunately, the tax collector's messenger, who had lingered in the street, was met by the Oratory's messenger, and

the payment made prevented any harassment. The one who had been the instrument of providence later became a Salesian priest. (D'Espiney, *Don Bosco*, 205).

155. Providence doesn't like protestations (1866)

In 1866 Don Rua received the usual notice of payment for a bill of exchange that was due the next day: it is true that it was not a large sum, but the problem was that there was not a penny in the till. He ran to Don Bosco, who he used to keep informed with special diligence in such situations; but as he was very busy that day and had no money, he was told in reply: "Get busy."

Accustomed to this kind of an answer, he went round the whole Oratory wherever there was a box; he visited the bookshop, the printing press, the sacristy; but he could not put together the painful sum that he needed. He returned again to Don Bosco to ask him for a little more than thirty lire, which was just what was missing for the balance; and this time he got the same answer.

"But Don Bosco," he said, "you're leaving tomorrow, and you want to leave me with a bill of exchange in protest?"

"Don Bosco," replied the saint, "can do nothing about it. I must leave: try to be resourceful."

The next morning the poor priest occasionally went to look into the boxes; but those thirty lire did not appear. Then at

about eleven o'clock he returned to Don Bosco, telling him of the embarrassment in which he found himself because of the bill of exchange in protest. While he was still talking, Carlo Occhetto arrived and told Don Bosco that he wanted to have a word with him.

"I am sorry, but I cannot; I must leave."

"It is a question of money."

"Then give it to Don Rua; give it to him at once and come with me; we'll talk on the way."

Cav. Occhetto was a distinguished benefactor of the Oratory and came every Saturday to make his donation. Accompanying Don Bosco to the station, he told him that he had come that day to visit him and pay him some money of the lottery tickets, just to get rid of a thought that had been on his mind since he got up, and that, according to him, had been bothering him all morning, although he had tried to get it out of his mind, thinking that his day was Saturday, not Wednesday.

"And how much have you brought me?" asked Don Bosco.

"Not much; about thirty lire and a few cents."

Don Bosco smiled and said: "And for this he wanted to make me miss my train?" Then, taking him lovingly by the hand, he said: "Let Don Rua tell you how good his inspiration was. You see, if it wasn't you, at midday we would have had a bill of exchange in protest. (D'Espiney, *Don Bosco*, 208).

156. You're A... a wolf... (1867)

Sometimes, after having tried every means, when Don Bosco saw that some pupils were incorrigible, he used such corrections that remained in his mind, like what happened on 16 September 1867. Calmly he climbed up onto the small desk under the porticoes, after the evening prayers in the midst of the very impressive assembly of priests, clerics, coadjutors, students, artisans and relatives. He began to narrate what the divine Saviour had done and suffered for the salvation of souls and his threats against those who scandalised the children. He spoke of what he himself had done and was doing, fulfilling the mission entrusted to him by divine mercy, and recalled the sweat, hardship, humiliation, vigils and privations he had suffered for the eternal salvation of the youngsters.

He then went on to say that in the Oratory there were wolves, thieves, murderers and demons who had come to steal the souls entrusted to him, and he added: "What have I done to these people that they treat me like this? Have I not kept them as my brothers? Have I not given them all that I could? Have I not taken them into my confidence because of my friendship with them? What in the world could they receive in the way of instruction, sustenance, education, and what hopes could they have for the future, if they had not come to the Oratory?"

And after having described the concessions they had received

he went on: "These people think they are not known, but I know who they are, and I could name them in public. Perhaps it is not fitting that I should name them; it would be too dishonourable for them; it would make their companions notice and point fingers at them, and inflict upon them a fearful chastisement. But if I don't mention them, don't think that Don Bosco doesn't do it because he is not fully informed of everything, or because he has only a vague suspicion, or has to guess... Oh! not this one!...

Because if I wanted to name them, I could say: are you or A... (and pronounced his name and surname) a wolf who prowls among his companions and drives them away from their superiors, ridiculing their warnings. It is you or B... a thief who with your conversations tarnishes the candour of innocence. It is you or C... a murderer who, with certain notes, certain books, certain hiding places, tears her children from Mary's side. Are you or D... a demon who spoils his companions, and prevents them with your schemes from attending the sacraments?

Six were pointed out. His voice was calm and distinct. Every time he pronounced a name, there was a muffled cry.... It sounded like the Last Judgment.

When he had finished speaking, the six approached him, and some took his hands to kiss them and some clung to his robe. And he looked at them, while a tear ran down his cheek (*Vita*, II, 255). □



FOUR BLOOMS ONE SCENT

E.R.

Having become other Christs in baptism, we Christians must live more intensely and fervently "the mystery of Christ." It also implies living a moral life according to the Gospel and continuously striving to exercise Christian virtues among which, like pearls of Christological timbre are, humility, poverty, simplicity and charity.

Having become of others Jesus Christ in baptism, we Christians must live, ever more and ever better, "the mystery of Christ." It also implies the moral life according to the Gospel and the continuous and increasing exercise of Christian virtues, among which stand out like pearls bearing a Christological timbre are humility, poverty, simplicity and charity stand out.

Four blooms and one perfume, four virtues and one spirit: the spirit of the Gospel and the spirit of Jesus. This splendid evangelical bouquet is the unmistakable characteristic of the holiness of Jesus.

By manifesting to us these virtues alive and lovable in herself, Mary, the first and best imitator of



Christ, wishes to revive them in us in their fascinating freshness and inebriating fragrance, so that we too, like her, may become a living Gospel. Indeed, in her maternal concern, she works in us this transference of her spirit with constant and increasing effectiveness,

satiating and increasing our hunger and thirst.

Humility

Our fall came from pride; our redemption came through humility. Pride is the sign of perdition; humility is the sign of predestination.

Mary pleased God through her virginity, but she conceived Jesus through humility. God loved her for her virginity, because she asked the angel Gabriel: "**How is this possible? I know no man**" (Lk 1:34). She conceived, that is, she became a mother, because of her humility, for she said, "**Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word**" (Lk 1:38). She was called mother and she called herself handmaid, because she did not become proud of the extraordinary announcement, but plunged into humility with greater conviction.

In the Magnificat she says that God "**looked on the humility of his handmaid**" (Lk 1:48), "**scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts**" and he "**lifted up the humble**" (Lk 1:51 and 52).

St Ambrose says of her: "**She was humble of heart, thoughtful, prudent, not talkative, a lover of reading.... When she saw herself chosen by God, she became even more humble and soon went up into the mountains to her relative**" (The Virgins, book II, chapter 2, nos. 7 and 12), where she truly became a servant.

Mary's whole life is one of obscurity, silence and humility, in the daily monotonous humdrum of housework. She wanted to appear as an ordinary woman in fulfilling the law of purification after

childbirth; but she always lived an ordinary and common life, like all other women in her condition.

She was discreet in rebuking the lost Jesus in the temple, saying: "**Son, why have you done this to us? Behold, your father and I were looking for you in anguish**" (Lk 2:48) and in informing Jesus at the wedding in Cana: "**They have no more wine**" (Jn 2:3). She did not raise her voice or force his hand; she spoke humble words, ready to receive any answer from Jesus, without having any claim on him as a mother.

She accepted being side-lined in the public ministry of Jesus; and twice, she accepted serenely certain words of Jesus that seemed to publicly disavow her: "**Behold my mother and my brothers**" (Mk 3:34). (Mk 3:34); "**Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it**" (Lk 11:28), words which, however, in their profound truth concealed great praise of Mary, which that superficial crowd not understand.

She accepted all the humiliations and sufferings of the cross and death of Christ, drinking that bitter cup of contempt and condemnation, which she shared with her crucified Son. She also died spiritually with the dead Christ and was buried with him in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Mary had humility of mind, heart and deeds and realised what Jesus tells us in the Imitation of Christ: "**Son, leave yourself and you will find me**" (Book III, Ch. 37, no. 1), "**Man's true progress is self-denial**" (Book III, Ch. 39, no. 3).

Poverty

The little ones and the poor, are Jesus' favourites. In poverty is

contained the most perfect norm of biblical sanctity. It is poverty not only in the sociological sense, but above all in the religious sense.

More than a state of material destitution, biblical poverty is a confession of distrust in one's own natural strengths and abilities, a recognised need for God's help, an unconditional submissiveness to the divine will, even if it is irreconcilable with one's own aspirations. Accepting the logic of failure, concealment and confusion; bowing with the love of a child before God who has humbled us; surrendering with submissiveness and silence to the dispositions of Providence, even if they upset our plans: these are the characteristics of poverty of spirit according to the Bible.

Acquiescence in one's possessions and knowledge; satiety that cancels out hunger and thirst for justice; a spirit of ownership of the use of time, money, gifts and plans: this is in clear opposition to evangelical poverty. God fills the hungry with goods, but sends the rich back empty-handed (cf. Lk 1:53).

Bethlehem was also a school of poverty: not a house but a cave, not a cradle but a manger. Nazareth is also a school of poverty for Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

But even more than material poverty, the spirit of the poverty of the Gospel stands out in Mary: dependence on God, trust in him alone, abandonment to the provisions of his providence in the most painful circumstances of her life, acceptance of failure, contempt and the condemnation to death.

"Keep this brief and concentrated word: leave everything and you will find everything, leave



covetousness and you will find rest" (*Imitation of Christ*, Book III, Ch. 32, no. 1).

Mary lived by her work and the sweat of her brow, just as the poor do: she had poor food, a poor house and poor clothing. Deprived of everything at the time of Jesus' death, she was entrusted to the evangelist John, so that she might have the means to live.

Simplicity

The Martha of the Gospel was lacking in simplicity, solicitous, troubled and concerned about several things: she had solicitude in her mind, restlessness in her heart, fragmentation in her actions.

Duplicity and division are the opposite of simplicity: a mind

divided and a heart divided.

The decision of one who lives the simplicity of the Gospel is clear and strong: he goes straight to God. He ignores cunning, diplomacy, human calculations, compromises and yielding: he looks to God alone, to his judgements, to his will, and he acts before God alone with the greatest purity of intention. The beatitude of the pure of heart befit the simple ones: **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"** (Mt 5:8). To them the *Imitation of Christ* says: **"If there is any joy in the world, it is possessed by the pure in heart. And if there is any tribulation or distress anywhere, no one feels it more than a bad conscience"** (*Book II*, Chapter 4, no. 2).

Sacred Scripture praises the simplicity of Job, "a simple and upright man who fears God and keeps away from evil" (Job 1:1). Jesus praised Nathanael's simplicity: "Behold a true Israelite, in whom there is no falsehood" (John 1:47). A clear eye that sees God alone, an undivided heart that seeks God alone, a righteous mind that has absolute abhorrence of all deceit and duplicity: these are the characteristics of simplicity.

Mary's straightforward conduct throughout her earthly life is a genuine reflection of her wonderful evangelical simplicity, which is so seductive that it attracts us to the same path. Simplicity is a marvelous straight line, which shortens our journey towards God.

Charity

Her visit to Elizabeth and her solicitude at the wedding feast of Cana reveal to us the key points of Mary's "fraternal charity," which certainly also had other and more

numerous revealing episodes, which, moreover, her title of "handmaid of the Lord" explains and binds together with a unifying bond.

Her love for God was continuous and growing, in the daily school of Jesus the Master, the ocean of divine love.

Charity is her favourite virtue, Mary's fixed point, the backbone of her spirituality. Mary shows us God's infinite charity, which prompted him to become man for us, and invites us to preserve the unity of spirit in the bond of peace between all people who have become brothers and sisters to each other and to God.

Myriads of egocentrics make this earth a vale of tears; myriads of people devoted to love will make this earth the vestibule of paradise.

Charity, a citizen of heaven, is found on this earth as a foreigner, an exotic flower that easily withers and dies. We must take care to ensure that it thrives, since it is the truest and most moving expression of God's presence among us: **"where there is charity and love, there is God."** And where there is God, there is paradise.

The Church is **"the community of love."** If it is truly what it is meant to be, the Church will bring salvation to the whole world.

God wants to save people with love: he uses it as bait and as a prize. As a lure, because nothing attracts like love; as a reward, because nothing makes one happy like love.

Humility, poverty, simplicity and charity: four virtues in which the spirit of Jesus and Mary live; four medicines for all our ills; four vehicles to ascend to heaven. □



MY VOCATION STORY

THE 81 YEAR-OLD BISHOP LEAVES FOR PERU

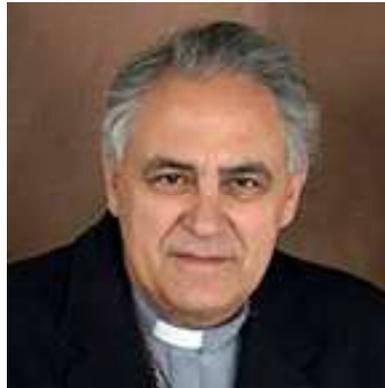
Mgr. Marcelo Angiolo Melani, sdb

The Bishop Emeritus of Neuquén, Monsignor Marcelo Angiolo Melani, SDB, at 81, embarked on a new journey: he left for Peru as an *ad vitam* missionary, as part of the 150th Salesian Missionary Expedition, and was sent to Amazonia, on the eve of the Extraordinary Synod convened by Pope Francis. Speaking about his expectations he said: "I believe that the Lord keeps telling me: 'Don't be afraid.... I am at your side'".

Following his episcopal motto, "Not to be served, but to serve," Monsignor Melani took on this new mission "amazed" to think that God has a new plan for him at this time in his life.

Interviewed about his expectations in this new destination, he said: "The only expectation I have is to be able to serve men and God." For this reason, he explained: "I am not worried about knowing what activity I will have. I will certainly be able to hear confessions, to listen and to advise," he anticipated. "For 48 years I have been a missionary in Patagonia. Now I feel that this appeal has been renewed in me: 'Leave your land,' because Patagonia is my land," said the prelate, born in Florence in 1938.

Regarding the call, he ack-



nounced: "The charism of the Salesians," he went on, "is in itself missionary. Don Bosco looked for missionaries where they were, he did not wait for them to come. When the Congregation had few members, he sent the best ones to America."

Monsignor Melani added that "you cannot be a missionary if you are not totally in love with Christ." Today Christ is calling him once again, at the age of 81, with a clear message, to leave everything to follow Him. With a long testimony of a life given to Christ behind him, and under the protection of St John Bosco, Blessed Ceferino Namuncurá, the saint "Cura Brochero" and many Salesians "who gave their lives to proclaim the love of the Lord," Monsignor Melani left Patagonia and embarked on a new missionary adventure. □

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IS INVISIBLE TO THE EYE

On Sunday 15 September, I was at Colle Don Bosco. The Upper Basilica was full of young people for the Mass in which three young Salesians made their perpetual profession: "In complete freedom I offer myself totally to you, committing myself to give all my strength to those to whom you send me, especially the poorest young people... Therefore, in the presence of my brothers, I vow *forever* to live obedient, poor and chaste, according to the Gospel way of life outlined in the Salesian Constitutions." But I must tell you something about Matteo, who said the same *Amen* with Daniel and Michael. I met Matteo a few years ago at Valdocco. He was then in charge of hospitality. Even though he was blind, he was able to make the beds, arrange the rooms... do everything. What I saw that day was another '*forever*' that I will never forget. At the end, as is customary, there was a thought of thanks from one of the newly professed perpetuals. Matteo with his right hand on Michael's shoulder went up to the ambo. Here is his magnificent testimony:

"During these years, looking into the darkness and beyond the darkness of my lost sight, I have seen with my own inner eyes that the Light really exists and can conquer every dark night, and all kinds of blindness. I used to see and I want to say that sight is a wonderful and priceless gift. To contemplate a sunset, to look into the eyes of someone who loves you... all this is a great gift. But today I know that I can see the world if I choose to trust and rely on others, asking for another gift, which is to let myself

be guided. Without trusting others, I could not live, I would just be a blind person. Today, my desire is not to see, but to be seen, recognised and loved. In fact, my main concern, I would even say the strongest fear, which hurts, is that of being transparent, forgotten, abandoned, left alone, in a word: not seen! I know that some of those who look at me do not really see me. They give me glances of curiosity or compassion; they do not see Matteo. They only see my blind eyes. But I have also seen that the gaze of God's love really exists and manifests itself in various forms: it is the gaze of a mother who loves you as you are, it is the gaze of a father who sees in you a hidden beauty. It is the gaze of the young who take my hand every day and help me to overcome difficulties. It is the gaze of the Salesians who have helped me to discover that I can become a gift for others. And the gaze of God himself, who gave me the gift of becoming a Salesian. I have seen with my own eyes and I wouldn't want to exchange them, not because they are beautiful, but because without these eyes I would not simply be myself, I would not be Matteo!

Now, God makes me discover what really matters; I also discover that I can trust others and, again through my eyes, God helps me to discover the only true joy: to be seen by his gaze of Love." □

Silvio Roggia, sdb



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

School Days

Early one morning, a mother went in to wake up her son. "Wake up, son, it's time to go to school!"

"But why, Mom? I don't want to go."

"Give me two reasons why you don't want to go."

"Well, the kids hate me for one, and the teachers hate me, too!"

"Oh, that's no reason not to go to school. Come on now and get ready." "Give me two reasons why I should go to school."

"Well, for one, you're 52 years old. And for another, you're the principal!"

Conductor Problem

The symphony musicians had little confidence in the person brought in to be their new conductor. Their fears were realized at the very first rehearsal. The cymbalist, realizing that the conductor did not know what he was doing, angrily clashed his instruments together during a delicate, soft passage.

The music stopped. The conductor, highly agitated, looked angrily around the orchestra, demanding, "Who did that? Who did that?"

Never Be Late

A local priest was being honoured at his retirement dinner after 25 years in the parish.

A leading local politician and member of the congregation was chosen to make the presentation and to give a little speech at the dinner. However, he was delayed so the priest decided to say his own few words while they waited:

"I got my first impression of the parish from the first confession I

heard here. I thought I had been assigned to a terrible place. The very first person who entered my confessional told me he had stolen a television set and, when questioned by the police, was able to lie his way out of it. He had also stolen money from his parents, embezzled from his employer, had an affair with his best friend's wife, and taken illicit drugs. I was appalled.

"But as the days went on, I learned that my people were not all like that and I had, indeed, come to a fine parish full of good and loving people."

Just as the priest finished his talk, the politician arrived full of apologies for being late. He immediately began to make the presentation and said: "I'll never forget the first day our parish priest arrived. In fact, I had the honour of being the first person to go to him for confession."

Moral: Never, never, NEVER, EVER be late.

Allergy Medicine

During a revival, the visiting evangelist arrived without his allergy medicine.

Our pastor put him in touch with a doctor in our church for an emergency prescription to get him through the week. The evangelist was so appreciative of the doctor that during the last service, he recommended the doctor to the entire crowd. The ensuing laughter was a mystery to him until after the service.

That was when the host pastor informed him that he had just recommended the local OB-GYN.

ONE LAST THOUGHT

THE MEXICAN FISHERMAN

A lesson in living

An American investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large tuna fish. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them. The Mexican replied, "Only a little while." The American then asked, "Why didn't you stay out longer and catch more fish?"

The Mexican said, "With this I have more than enough to support my family's needs." The American then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?" The Mexican fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta. Stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my *amigos*, I have a full and busy life." The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard

MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing; and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat: With the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats. Eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the processor; eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City or perhaps New York where you will run your ever-expanding business."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But, how long will this all take?" To which the American replied, "15 to 20 years." "But what then?" asked the Mexican.

The American laughed and said that's the best part. "When the time is right you would sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions."

"Millions? . . . Then what?" The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your *amigos*." □



POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

JUNE 2022

For families

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MARY WAS THERE

I want to acknowledge a miracle through my devotion to the 3 Hail Marys. My marriage was failing and I was separated from my husband and things go really very bitter. A Catholic friend introduced me to this Devotion and I started praying this prayer to Mother Mary without fail. I am glad to say that I have got back to my husband and we are now again living together. Thanks to Mother Mary for her blessing and favours.

Satinder Kaur Shah

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

The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail)). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

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

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