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*Lovingly she bore him  
in her  
immaculate womb,  
that the promises  
to the children of Israel  
might come about  
and the hope  
of nations be  
accomplished beyond  
all telling.*

*From the Preface of the  
Solemnity of the Annunciation*

From The Editor's Desk

THE TRUTH AND THE NEWS

These days with the plethora of news, views and analysis...one wonders whether news and truth are one and the same thing. I learned this when a friend confided to me a medical situation that brought home this fact. She said: "It all started with the word from my doctor, that I never expected to hear." She found it difficult to describe properly what happened in that moment. She said everything around her got incredibly quiet and seemed to move very slowly. "I could feel words trying to form in my mouth, but there was no energy to actually talk," she said as she went on. "I knew I should probably cry, but no tears seemed available."

It's scary when doctors shock you with test results, and you don't know what the future holds. That holds true for any situation which seems to crush you at first but, having endured such news like that myself, I realised that God tenderly reminds me of His ever-abiding presence. That time in a sweet email from a friend who sensed that I was 'down but not out.' His note said: "Ian, this is news. This is not truth!" Now, that hit me right between the eyes, you might say. I've always thought of news and truth as one and the same. Wouldn't you have done the same? What I heard was news; honest news, based on test results and medical conclusions.

Having tried to walk with the Lord over these years (not very faithfully, I must admit) I realised that I have access to a Truth that transcends news. The restoration that is impossible because of human limitations, is always possible for a limitless God. Truth always factors God into the equation. That's what we - in our confused and frightened state - never realise.

So, I found myself looking at the word *impossible* a little differently that day. "Impossible," according to my friend's note, could be completely different if I just stuck an apostrophe between the first two letters. Then it becomes *I'm-Possible*. God is the Great I AM and He always walks with me. I realise that becoming aware of this I can hear differently what he told Moses on the shore of the Red Sea...his 'scary moment.' "Have no fear! The LORD will fight for you and all you have to do is to keep still" (Ex. 14:14).

In the early days I would have thought this was just pretty 'pious' stuff but in impossible situations I think we need these impossible solutions that are there for the asking.

Maybe you just got some bad news; an impossible financial situation; an impossible job situation; an impossible kid situation; an impossible friend situation. Whatever news you just got or will get, I pray this advice helps you, too: that is news and *this* is God's Truth. I AM THE WAY AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.

*Fr. Ian Doulton sdb*

## LOVE IS NOT BOASTFUL

by Gianpaolo Dianin

*Falling in love has the capacity to bring out the best in each of us; it is "good boasting" and it's healthy but very different from the attitude of those who think only of themselves while belittling the other.*

Love is patient, wanting the good of the other and love is not envious. After having seen these first qualities of love, St. Paul then contrasts humility with superiority and arrogance; love is not boastful, it does not swell with pride (1 Cor. 13:4). Pope Francis says: Love does not feel superior to impress the other; love does not try to stay at the centre of things and has no need to assert or flaunt a presumed superiority (*Amoris Laetitia*, 97-98).

These traits of charity that take the form of "conjugal charity" are the goal of a journey we have to inevitably affirm as we go through some of the ambivalences of love.

The beginning of every relationship, falling in love, is like an important spring time full of emotions which totally engulfs the young couple, but it is also filled with inevitable ambiguities. Each of them strives to win over the other and there's a bit of vanity in the process to try to show oneself worthy of the other's love. One uses one's best self so to speak, to effectively sell his "product." One is surprised for instance, when a young man known to be cold and silent suddenly becomes very attentive and strangely chatty in the presence of the one he is beginning to love. But it is a kind of "good boast-

ing" and even healthy because falling in love has the ability to bring out the best in a person. However, it is never a kind of superiority which humiliates the other, flaunting oneself and exercising a sense of superiority. But then love should possess the confidence that allows one to drop one's mask so as to introduce oneself for who one is so that love can also understand, excuse and also welcome those aspects that one has tried to hide for so long but which are no less a part of the person.

But this is not what St. Paul intends to speak about. He stresses the vainglory that wants to reveal itself superior to the other and needs to impose itself, to humiliate the other and the arrogance of those who puff themselves up in order to despise the other. Unfortunately, these dynamics are found in many stories of love, especially at the difficult crossroads of life and when crises knock at the door of every couple's relationship.

Pope Francis applies these attitudes to the life of faith of the family members: "At times the opposite occurs: the supposedly mature believers within the family become unbearably arrogant" (AL 98). That subtle superiority and maybe, even saying it out loud will not help the other to grow. "Among you this must not

be so," Says Jesus, "But whoever wants to be great must be your servant" (Mt. 20:26-27). It is really beautiful to think that if one has traversed for some considerable time through some aspect of life then one can, with humility and patience accompany another without demanding or humiliating the individual. To take a banal example: you can rewash a plate that has not been washed well without telling the other that he doesn't even know to wash a plate.

Love has no need to boast. Those who boast are not just content to say "I," they also think it necessary to demean the other in order to emerge better. It often happens like this: to say that I'm sweeter than you I feel I must add that you're like a piece of ice; or to say that I'm good I must add that you're good for nothing.

The image of being boastful paints a picture of a person who thinks s/he's the best and only

concerned with herself. We should remember truthfully that this inclination has been written inside each of us; we are all, deep down, a bit selfish in the sense that we cannot not think of ourselves, our future, our fulfilment and what pleases us. But often this inevitable attention to oneself overflows into what Cardinal Martini called the "cancerous swell of subjectivity." When in a marriage, a healthy self-love reaches a point that one thinks only of oneself, then there's something wrong and if you meet two people who are only focused on themselves and their relationship then that's a failure.

The other side of being boastful is pride which is always lurking beneath the surface. One is too proud to admit: "I was wrong," and s/he isn't humble enough to take the first step after a conflict, being too proud to recognize one's limitations with humility. But there is also the



other extreme: those who love to make themselves into victims, always putting themselves down: this is not humility - this is a problem that needs solving!

"Clothe yourselves in humility towards one another, because God resists the proud but gives his grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). That is charity; not boastful not swollen with pride. □

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#### STAYING TOGETHER

### MISSION POSSIBLE?

by Maria Chiara Bregolin

**I**n our family we sometimes allow ourselves to give vent to our anger and repressed resentment against one another and it's usually not a pretty sight! However it allows to express ourselves strongly and without too much "labelling; letting the other know what they have done to make us suffer. We avoid doing this in front of friends and acquaintances lest they get frightened off.

It happens between me and my husband, between us parents and our children and siblings; those who see us from the outside, or "hear us" more than anything else, can get a very clear picture of what it means to be living in a modern family where everyone, and I stress everyone, is on the verge of a nervous breakdown!

Usually, this colourful verbal outburst among adults or energetic and physical children, comes after a period of tension and it flows cathartically and in different ways into each self-respecting family at the time of the outburst. This means we needed that; and after letting our emotions and words flow, we also need to find the right time to listen to the underlying reasons that led them to employ such

behaviours, and what needs changing.

Now comes the time for apologies; they are easier to accept than to offer, at least for me.

What then is this time for humility; to recognize that I was wrong; to be able to understand that the other is precious; so valuable that it's worth resolving the issue without leaving around any fragments or garbage such as our resentment, uneasiness and anger?

There are many families who daily savour the grace and the joy of being sustained by the Sacrament of Marriage everyday. When just considering one's own union; it is through the expression of God's eternal love that one can fully deeply understand and in a concrete manner that the couple is the temple of the Holy Spirit... together... for eternity...and it's not a joke.



Then...that love can find expression and give meaning to everyday life: you see that manifested in a chat with someone, in a text message sent and received, in preparing dinner or making the beds...

"Love is not jealous or boastful." Humility is fully a part of love.

If someone in the family has progressed ahead of the others in life and on the spiritual path, it must be understood as a grace that needs to be used to help, support, understand and help the others to advance.

Then it is not the desire to dominate or manipulate that influences our actions in the family but an attitude of humility that makes us bring the other into the centre, our partner, our child and we must do that with the eyes of the Creator in the splendour of the uniqueness with which he thinks of each of us.

It is necessary to have the courage to say "I've made a mistake" and the strength to forgive: two little things...but that fact encourages me and we have worked on it all our lives...and we keep working! □

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#### UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

A story is told about a soldier who was finally coming home after having fought in Vietnam. He called his parents from San Francisco. "Mom and Dad, I'm coming home, but I've got a favour to ask. I have a friend I'd like to bring with me." "Sure," they replied, "we'd love to meet him."

"There's something you should know the son continued, "he was hurt pretty badly in the fighting. He stepped on a land mine and lost an arm and a leg. He has nowhere else to go and I want him to come live with us."

"I'm sorry to hear that, son. Maybe we can help him find somewhere to live." "No, Mom and Dad, I want him to live with us."

"Son" said the father, "you don't know what you're asking. Someone with such a handicap would be a terrible burden on us. We have our own lives to live, and we can't let something like this interfere with our lives. I think you should just come home and forget about this guy. He'll find a way to live on his own."

At that point, the son hung up the phone. The parents heard nothing more from him. A few days later, however, they received a call from the San Francisco police. Their son had died after falling from a building, they were told. The police believed he had taken his own life. The grief-stricken parents flew to San Francisco and were taken to the city morgue to identify the body of their son. They recognized him, but to their horror they also discovered something they didn't know, their son had only one arm and one leg.

The parents in this story are like many of us. We find it easy to love those who are good-looking or fun to have around, but we don't like people who inconvenience us or make us feel uncomfortable. We would rather stay away from people who aren't as healthy, beautiful, or smart as we are. Thankfully, there's someone who loves us with an unconditional love, who welcomes us into His family, regardless of how messed up we are. God loves us 'warts and all.' □

## WHO ARE YOU? ARE YOU PERHAPS...

Federica Cammarata

Who are you? I am the desire for life within you; the hope that forces you to rise after every fall and the promise of happiness that you feel imprinted in your heart. Who are you? I am the energy that moves you to always be better; your yearning and never-ending quest for knowledge and the fascination that results from every discovery and innovation... Who are you? I make you feel part of the world; feel useful to the world; to desire to do great things in your little life. I am the tenderness that dissolves every resistance in tears or the pure and generous embrace of a friend. Who are you? I am your aspiration to goodness which doesn't disappear even when you're hurt; the beauty that captivates you when you're struck by the beauty of the sun, sea or sky. I am that sensation of infinity, even before it's over; the oxygen that gives breath to your dreams; the anger that urges you to rebel against what you don't seem to like; what you feel is right; and the wonder that you feel when you meet the gaze of someone you think recognizes you; when you hear my name pronounced and you realize you exist at least for

someone. Who are you? When you're constantly dissatisfied; never feeling totally satisfied with what you have and who you are. This insufficiency urges you to seek and still go on trying to seek...and your quest never ends. Who are you? I am the cry emanating from every disappointment, suffering, failure and defeat. I'm the desperation that opens within you a thousand questions, doubts and prayers.

You're surprised when you realize you're breathing, living, and you're here... it almost takes your breath away when you realize that you exist... But who are you? I'm your desire for eternal love, your insatiable need to love, and be loved. I'm the inner voice that keeps repeating, "This is not everything, there's more." Who are you? I remind you of a full life, one that is fulfilling, committed, filled with goodness and beauty; one that is free, which makes you dislike ambiguity, or a string of compromises, mediocrities or petty expectations, of perfect balance.

Who am I? I'm your intimate and vital bond that helps you feel united to the world, to others, to everything on earth; that intimate



presence in solitude; that welcomes or refuses; that listens or forgets but which doesn't leave you. Who are you? I'm the power that draws your gaze to heaven, on high, opening your heart to friendship, solidarity and forgiveness; the power stronger than your strength; awesome nature that brings down your alleged omnipotence, bringing you back to yourself who thinks you're greater than I. Who are you? The peace that comes to your restless and tangled days, calming your troubles, winning all my battles; the order that puts together the irregular pieces of your life into something meaningful. Who are you? I am the love that knocks on your heart, everyday, without relenting. Who are you? Are you...perhaps, my God?

### Who are you? – Are YOU perhaps...

Dear young friend, we're beginning a new journey together during which we want to be by your side helping you to bring order to your life, to liberate that original and true part of you to be able to choose what God wants, **and then to know that you've chosen BEST.**

"Everyone must be able to carve out his/her own life. If s/he renounces this s/he remains shapeless, if s/he makes a mistake s/he remains deformed. "What kind of sculptor do you choose to be?" (R. Mancini)

Who knows how many times you will feel you've messed up, shapeless or deformed yet full of possibilities but still blocked because you don't know what you really want.

**There are a thousand desires and dreams that palpitate inside**

**you as you try to understand what you should choose and how you should live your life. Questions abound: "What am I?" "What should I do?" "Who am I called to be?"** I suggest you start from here by re-appropriating and listening to the deep and great desires that you carry within you ...your desire for God!

Lift up your eyes, breathe in and feel alive and feel God around you, the Lord of life!

### First steps along the journey

· St. Augustine said: "You have made us for yourself Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you..." (*Confessions 1*)

· When and where did you feel that desire for God? How can you express it, what image would you use?

· Does a line from the article above strike you?

· Read more closely articles 27 to 49 from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. ([w2.vatican.va](http://w2.vatican.va))

· Allow yourself be accompanied by reading "Life of the Beloved" by H. Nouwen and "The Journey of Man" by M. Buber. □



## SALESIAN SAINTS

### BL. PHILIP RINALDI 1856 - 1931 SALESIAN PRIEST, BLESSED

The words that comforted me were – when I told him that someday I might get hungry and run away – he said to me: “I’ll come and get you back.” This was the immediate and affectionate reply of Father Paul Albera, the rector of the Salesian House of Genoa, Sampierdarena, to the young twenty-one-year old Philip Rinaldi. He was discerning his vocation and it bears the real strategy (exactly what Don Bosco would use) in a spiritual situation and it may be described like this: one not having heard the call, while the other continually calling.

Born in Lu Monferrato (Alessandria) on May 28, 1856, the eighth of nine children, Philip met Don Bosco for the first time at the age of five when the Saint was on one of his picnics with his boys. His youthful temperament was not what one might expect from a Saint, but he also saw in Don Bosco a good educator. At the age of ten he was taken to the Salesian school at Mirabello. There he met Don Bosco twice and immediately found in him a friend. Following a misunderstanding he promptly returned home to his family where he remained even though he continued to receive letters from Don Bosco who urged him to return:



The houses of Don Bosco are always open to you,” the latter wrote. He would later admit: “I had no intention of becoming a priest.” But Don Bosco thought otherwise. He went to visit Philip who by now was twenty in 1876. The latter had already received a marriage proposal. Don Bosco finally convinced him. Father Rinaldi would later admit: “My choice fell with Don Bosco...he answered all my objections.” Philip would linger for yet another year with his family because he was worried about his constant headaches and problems with his left eye. “Come!” was Don Bosco’s last patient invitation, “The headaches will pass and you’ll be able to study.” Thinking of his resistance, one day he exclaimed: “Let the Lord and Our Lady take care of me. After having resisted so much grace in the past, I no longer want to abuse that grace in the future.” At the age of twenty-one Philip Rinaldi would make the journey to the

house for adult vocations at Sampierdarena. In 1880, after his novitiate he made his perpetual vows into the hands of Don Bosco. When, on December 23, 1882 the day of his ordination, after a long period of vocational discernment, he would hear Don Bosco ask him: “Now, are you happy?” And Philip would be moved to reply: “Yes, if you keep me with you.”

Of his 49 years of priesthood, his first twenty years would find him successively as rector of Mathi Torinese, a college for adult vocations, then at Turin at the church of St. John the Evangelist and later he was sent to Barcelona, Sarrià in Spain. A few days before Don Bosco’s death Father Rinaldi would make his confession but before absolving him, very feebly Don Bosco said just one word: “Meditation.” In 1889 Father Michael Rua, the first successor of Don Bosco appointed him Rector of Sarrià, near Barcelona in Spain saying: “You will have to attend to some very delicate matters.” In a span of three year with much prayer and meekness and his paternal animating presence among the youngsters in the Salesian Community, he advanced the Salesian presence. He was appointed Provincial of Spain and Portugal contributing, in a surprising way to the development of the Salesian Congregation in the Iberian Peninsula. In just nine years, thanks to the financial support of the venerable Dorothea Chopitea, Father Rinaldi founded sixteen new houses. After a visit and being impressed by his work, Father Rua appointed him Prefect General of the Congregation in 1901.

In his new role, Father Rinaldi continued to work zealously without ever compromising his priestly ministry. He carried out his task of government intelligently with prudence, charity for the next twenty years. After the death of Blessed Father Rua, in 1910 Philip Rinaldi was re-elected Prefect and Vicar of Father Paul Albera, the new Rector Major. In a seemingly bureaucratic role, he left an indelible mark. He became an especially experienced spiritual director, rising early in the morning and after celebrating Mass, from five o’clock he sat in the confessional for the next two or three hours.

His last nine years would see him as the supreme guide of the Congregation. He would succeed Father Paul Albera on April 24, 1922. When he was elected rector for the first time he wrote to Father Julius Barberis: “I, a rector! But do they not know that to entrust the poor youngsters to me is to ruin them? I am shocked even to think of it.” When he was elected Rector Major he said: “I assure you that for me this is a great mortification; pray to the Lord that we may not spoil what Don Bosco and his successors have accomplished.” He adapted the spirit of Don Bosco to the modern times and in his role as Rector Major he emphasized his paternal qualities and introduced a plethora of initiatives: care of vocations, formation centres for the spiritual and social assistance of young workers, guidance and support of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at that particular time in their history. He gave a great impetus to the Association of the Salesian Cooperators; he es-

tablished the world federations of the Past Pupils and he gave them a strong organizational impetus. "The alumni" he said, "Are the fruit of our work. We do not work in our houses so that youngsters remain good while they are with us but so that they turn into good Christians. Therefore the work of the past pupils is a persevering work. We have sacrificed ourselves for them and our sacrifice must not have been in vain." Working among the devotees of Mary Help of Christians he understood that he was walking down a path that would bring to fruition a new form of consecrated life in the world and would later turn into a secular institute: "Volunteers of Don Bosco."

His tenure as Rector Major was very fruitful. The Salesian Congregation grew significantly from 4,788 members in 404 houses to 8,836 in 644 houses in an atmosphere that was filled "more with a father's affection than a superior's authority." The impetus he gave to the Salesian missions was enormous. He founded missionary institutes, published journals and started associations. During his tenure more than 1800 Salesians left Italy's shores for the worldwide missions. Don Bosco's prophecy to him was coming true. When, as a young priest he asked to go to the missions he heard this reply: "You will stay here and you will send others to the missions." However he travelled throughout Italy and Europe and deployed admirable zeal and paternity. He emphasized that the true physiognomy of the Salesian work is not so much in exterior success as it is in a deep, serene and peaceful interior life. A master

of the spiritual life, he revived the idea of the Salesian Interior life always demonstrating absolute trust in God and an unlimited confidence in Mary Help of Christians.

Father Ricaldone, his successor, attests: "It is true that he often suffered ill health but he succeeded in achieving extraordinary things. He took charge of the formation of personnel through meetings and visits and his writings were much appreciated and cherished. He was a tireless worker. In particular, he recommended assistance of migrants without distinction of nationality, emphasizing maximum universalism in charity.

Among the traits of Salesian Saints, what characterizes Fr. Rinaldi is his notable paternity. At the age of 33, as rector, he proposed: "Charity and meekness with all the confreres, enduring whatever may happen to me." As a provincial he would say: "I will be a father, I will avoid harsh ways, and when they come to speak with me I will not let them see that I am tired or in a hurry." Of Father Rinaldi, Father Francesia, a Salesian of the first generation would say: "Except for his voice, he's every bit like Don Bosco." Before dying, an event that filled him with extreme joy was the beatification of Don Bosco which took place on June 2, 1929. He would lead a crowd of 15,000 to Rome. He was about to commence the fiftieth year of his priesthood when he died quietly on December 5, 1931 while reading the life of Father Rua. His remains lie in the crypt of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin. □

## Witnesses in & for Our Times



### ST. CATHERINE OF BOLOGNA (1413 - 1463)

**"All for love of my beautiful Jesus"**

**A**ll over the world March 8 is celebrated as Women's Day with various conferences and other events.

In Bologna this feast is enhanced by the memory of a woman, a mystic and a saint who lived here in the fifteenth century: Catherine. Although she spent most of her life in Ferrara, she is considered "the Saint" par excellence of the Bolognese.

In fact, Catherine was born there on September 8, 1413 to Benvenuta Mammolini and Giovanni Vigrì. Her father, a Patrician and a jurist from Ferrara worked at the court of Este.

When she was just nine years old, Catherine moved with her family to Ferrara which was famous for its artistic splendour thanks to the fact that it was governed by the house of Este until 1597, making it one of the great centres of the Italian Renaissance. Catherine lived there for some years as little Lady Margaret, the daughter of Niccolò III. Here in such a gorgeous setting she became a kind of party animal but she was also refined culturally



and revealed some artistic interests. Catherine was known for her graceful behaviour, her kindness and modesty which were appreciated by everyone.

She was also very intelligent, possessing a lively memory and the ability to understand everything she put her mind to; she had an insatiable thirst for knowledge.

Catherine patiently learned

Latin, Italian, music, painting (she is the patron saint of painters) and calligraphy.

#### **From the Courts of Este to the Monastery**

Two events would greatly affect Catherine's life and would be the cause of a radical and decisive turning point. Pain knocked at her family's door when her father was taken from her and the second marriage of her mother. Just after these events, in 1427 Catherine abandoned the court of Este to stay in retreat with Lucia Mascheroni who, for some years, had a run a kind of religious institute. Catherine stayed there for five years before becoming a religious.

The call to the religious life for a little girl who had lived in a princely court where there was no lack of entertainment and incentives for a worldly life with practically no mention of the *spiritual* came as a surprise.

M. Muccioli writes in a biography of Catherine: "It seems like an anachronism that the child was able to identify the delicate and inviting whisper of God in an environment where worldly and frivolous attractions were free and easy with a fascinating succession of parties and receptions one after the other.

M. Muccioli writes: "She was solicitously attached to prayer and every virtue that she had seen and heard about in others. She took this upon herself not out of envy but more to please God in whom she had placed all her love."

#### **A Strong Faith, Great Humility and a bit of flexibility**

In 1431 Catherine entered the

Monastery of Corpus Domini in Ferrara that had recently embraced the Rule of the Poor Clares founded by Clare of Assisi two centuries earlier. This monastery was also famous because in it resided several women of noble descent who had retired there to live in poverty and penance.

Although she was of noble descent and from a wealthy family she did not disdain but willingly accepted the most humble tasks. One of the significant traits of her spiritual life was that of living in absolute humility and submissive to will of God; obedient in everything, even the most insignificant. Catherine lived and did everything in humility and obedience and "for love of my beautiful Jesus." She was even the porter of the monastery, the baker and the mistress of novices – a great example of religious flexibility. It was especially in this latter role that her holiness revealed itself together with her skills as a spiritual guide "Her teaching inspired and instilled trust in her pupils who were fascinated by the grace that emanated from her behaviour and her words." Catherine never remained idle." (G.D. Gordini). Precisely for her novices she wrote a little book "*The Weapons Necessary to Win Spiritual Combat*" that was widely read in Italy and abroad.

It was not so much her words that drove her students and novices to progress in the spiritual life; it was above all, her example. It was the continued physical and spiritual closeness to her novices that urged them to greater holiness.

One day the sisters asked her: "How happy we would be if we

could love God like you love him!" With a serene and innocent look she said: "And who does this depend on?" "On us," they replied. Then she said, smiling so as not to humiliate them: "Search, search and study to know yourself; that you are God's craftsmanship in order to know your faults and the brevity of time so that you may gain or lose eternal life. My dear sisters, neither the cross nor the nails would have been sufficient to keep the Divine Word on the Cross if not for his love."

She was always available to the community with humility and love, never murmuring or boasting. She was as simple as a nun as a superior.

#### **Catherine teacher of spirituality**

In 1456, Catherine and her eighteen sisters arrived in Bologna on a pressing invitation from the city authorities to found a monastery similar to that of Ferrara (to this day it is called *Corpus Domini*). She was named abbess and remained there till her death. As superior she continued her radical love of poverty and her exercise of humility and charity toward her sisters.

Catherine is considered a mystic of the fifteenth century: in fact she was visited by many numerous celestial visions. All this did not deter her instead they spurred her on to continue to show her sisters the same love everyday doing the most humble tasks that others did not like to do. "The mysticism of St. Catherine of Bologna was not a static or simply contemplative life in the silence of her cloister completely separate from the world...but hers was an intentionally active

and practical spirituality (M. Muccioli).

To those who think that her spiritual life is a "walk in the park," it is enough to let Catherine enlighten you with her advice: "My dearest daughter, we must make our own the love of God which is not only a gift, a preferential gift, but above all a difficult conquest, a daring climb." Her life of holiness firmly rooted in Jesus Christ, meditating on his life and especially on his passion, always remained the centre of her thoughts and her prayer, the master of her actions whether they were dishwashing or baking.

Sister Illuminata affirms that for Catherine "Everything and her bearing bespoke love" exclaiming: "Pleasure and displeasure are the same for me, provided I can love and please Christ my Beautiful one." Muccioli writes again: "Her Christocentrism is clear, it always surfaces, dominating all her powerful intelligence and the vigorous aspirations of her spirit."

She died on March 9, 1463. Devotion to her immediately spread beyond Bologna due to the many miracles attributed to her.

The spiritual message Catherine leaves behind is valid even today. "Holiness is more than a spirit of prayer, frequent communion and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. To win spiritual battles she recommends distrust of oneself (today we would call that 'a fair assessment of oneself'), trust in God, meditation on the Passion of Christ and his death all this enlightened by the thought of heaven and under the guidance of the Word of God; weapons still valid today for us Christians of the Third Millennium. □



## CURING THE BLIND

by Ian Pinto, sdb

**F**or a long time now, predictions have been made that religion would fade from relevancy as the world modernized and progressed. Recent surveys back up those predictions with facts, figures and reports of dwindling numbers of people who still adhere to religion. About 50 years ago, *Time* asked in a famous headline, “Is God Dead?” They were eager to try and discover whether religion was relevant to modern life in the post-atomic age when science was explaining more about our natural world than ever before. Till date, there are thousands who still have this question on their minds. A billboard somewhere in U.S.A read, “Are You Good without God? Millions are.”

An article in the National Geographic magazine some years ago stated that “religion is rapidly becoming less important than it’s ever been, even to people who live in countries where faith has affected everything from rulers to borders to architecture.” One simply needs to see the state of ‘Christian’ Europe today to know that this is quite true.

A couple of decades ago, no one would have believed if you told them that one day, the mighty Churches and Cathedrals of old, which for centuries have been the centres of worship, education and culture, would stand empty or be turned into museums! And yet, this is the unfortunate reality of our day. More and more people today, particularly those of the younger generations, have grown apathetic to God and religion. More and more, people consider themselves to be atheistic, agnostic or bluntly, irreligious. They have been collectively branded together and called ‘Nones’.

While the name may sound funny, the reality surrounding their existence isn’t. They are the second largest ‘religious’ group in North America and most of Europe, and account for near 16% of the world’s population, according to Pew Research Centre’s 2012 global study. However, the situation isn’t the same all over. There are parts of the world where religion still plays a key role in societal and individual life. Despite the increasing secularization of

both private and public life, religion has managed to find its way into the lives of the majority of the world’s population. This is something to take consolation in but is also a challenge. God isn’t so interested in the numbers, and neither should we be. What he desires is quality of life and faith (Mt 9:13).

“When they came to Bethsaida, Jesus was asked to touch a blind man, who was brought to him” (Mk 8:22). Irreligion is a form of blindness. Like the blind man, one is unable to see the Lord. One’s eyes are closed to the wonders of God. One becomes so comfortable with the comforts the world has to offer and with the progress of science and technology that one doesn’t feel the need of God anymore! Why should one? Everything nowadays can be achieved at the push of a button.

This blindness is not something you are born with or something that afflicts you later in life, rather it is a disease that is willingly chosen and embraced, for various reasons. But let us not point fingers here. Let us pause for a moment and look at our own lives. We profess the Christian faith. We believe wholeheartedly in the Holy Trinity, the Father, His Son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit; we hear and read the Word of God regularly; we receive the Lord himself in Holy Communion on a daily or weekly basis; we say our prayers faithfully and much more. But how much of our faith have we appropriated – made our own? Haven’t we taken God and our faith for granted? How much of Christ have we put on (Rom 13:14)? Are we content with hearing Jesus’ teachings on forgiveness, love and mercy or do we actually make con-

scious efforts to put these teachings into practice? I think without doing these things, our so-called ‘religion’ turns out to be empty and meaningless. We are as blind then, as the Nones. We are as good as the Pharisees of Jesus’ day whom he admonished saying, “Woe to you... hypocrites! You are like white-washed tombs, beautiful in appearance, but inside there are only dead bones and uncleanness...you appear religious to others, but you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness within” (Mt 23:27-28).

Jesus is a tough role-model. Not only does He talk a big game but actually puts His words into action. His words don’t just float around in the air but find their way into the concrete situations of life. He had often preached about forgiveness even to one’s enemies (Mt 5:44) and when the time came as He hung on the Cross, He chose to forgive all those who played a part in His unjust and cruel passion (Lk 23:34). He has called each of us to be a part of His family – to follow Him, learn from Him and ultimately do, as He did.

When the blind man was brought to Him, Jesus took him “by the hand and led him outside the village” (Mk 8:23). There He put spittle on his eyes and laid His hands on him “and the man could see perfectly” (Mk 8:25). The healing took some time but it happened nevertheless. This is exactly what Jesus will do to all those who go to Him asking Him to cure their blindness. Having faith might seem like a silly thing in an age like ours but it takes a lot of trust and reveals the character of a person. It is the one who is able to acknowledge their ‘blindness’ and seek help, who receives their sight. □



## Quiet Spaces

### NEVER SPEAK POORLY OF OTHERS

*The Pope's morning meditation at the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae on March 27, 2013*

Speaking poorly of someone else is equivalent to selling them. Like Judas, who sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. And it was precisely by drawing inspiration from the Gospel passage from Matthew which foretells the betrayal of Judas Iscariot that Pope Francis – in his brief Homily at the Mass he celebrated on Wednesday morning, 27 March, in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae – put people on guard against gossip with an explicit invitation: “Never speak poorly of others”.

Present at the celebration, as has now become a tradition, were several Vatican employees including a group from the Office of Papal Charities and a group from the Vatican Telephone Service, accompanied respectively by Archbishop Guido Pozzo, Almoner of His Holiness, and Fr. Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, Director of Telecommunications, both of whom concelebrated.

The Pope wanted to leave them a thought on the action of Judas, one of Jesus' friends, who did not hesitate to sell him to the chief priests. “Jesus was like a commodity; he was sold. He was sold at



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that moment”, the Pope emphasized, “and has also very frequently been sold in the market of history, in the market of life, in the market of our lives. When we opt for thirty pieces of silver, we set Jesus aside”.

When we visit an acquaintance and the conversation turns into gossip, into

Don Bosco's Madonna



back-stabbing and the person at the centre of our babbling “becomes a commodity. I do not know why”, the Pope said further, “but there is some arcane pleasure in scandal-mongering”. We begin with kind words, “but then comes the gossip. And we begin to tear the other person to pieces”. And it is then that we must remember that every time we behave like this, “we are doing what Judas did”; when he went to the chief priests to sell Jesus, his heart was closed, he had no understanding, no love and no friendship. Thus Pope Francis took up one of his favourite themes, forgiveness. “We think of and ask for forgiveness”, because what we do to the other, to our friend, “we do to Jesus. Because Jesus is in this friend”. And if we realize that our gossiping can hurt someone, “let us pray the Lord, let us speak to the Lord about this, for the good of the other: Lord, help him”. So it must not be me, he therefore concluded, “Who does justice with my own tongue. Let us ask the Lord for this grace”.

At the end of the celebration the Holy Father lingered at the back of the chapel in prayer. He then waited at the door to greet one by one everyone who had come: for everyone he had a word, a smile, an encouragement and good wishes for Easter, now at hand.

*(by L' Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 14, 3 April 2013)*



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## A ROPE FOR JUNIPER

*From Fr. Ian Douulton's Collection of Stories*

This is a story about Brother Juniper, simple enough to be a saint, and wise enough to enjoy being called a fool. Brother Juniper was a friend of St. Francis of Assisi and certain of their friends wrote a book called *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* in which God, his angels and his saints and also the devil are as real as our next door neighbour. And the heavenly and all the hellish folk would be as real to us if we had the simple and merry faith of Brother Juniper about whose adventure with the devil you're going to meet in this interesting story.

On a certain day the devil, wishing to put Brother Juniper in fear and to torment him with trouble devised a most wicked plot. Disguised as a merchant he went into a city ruled by a tyrant called Nicholas. This same Nicholas was at war with the folk of the neighbouring city of Viterbo. The devil gained audience with the tyrant and then said to him: "Illustrious sovereign of this fair city, I have news for you of grave importance." The sovereign was interested and even more so when the merchant said he had recently come from Viterbo. Hearing this Nicholas was incensed: "My sword carries the only answer I give to friends of Viterbo." Seeing that Nicholas was angered but eager to sow his wild oats he said slyly: "Well then, if you care nothing for my tidings, I shall be off but I think not many hours hence you would have given your very castle to have listened." The tyrant was curious and wanted to know more, so on went the merchant.

"Most noble sir, your life is in danger. The most wicked people of Viterbo who must have taken lessons from the prince of darkness himself are sending here a traitor who has it in mind to kill you." Nicholas was disturbed: "To kill me? Who is this traitor, where is he?"

The merchant now had the ear of the sovereign so he proceeded: "He is on his way, even now in the guise of a beggar with garments all patched and torn. He carries concealed a shoemaker's awl which he will tell you is to mend his sandals but which in truth is the weapon with which he means to take your life. He also carries a tinder box with flint and steel for burning down this castle. He will talk foolishly so that any man would take him for a simpleton without a wit to harm a fly."

Nicholas was angered by those villains of Viterbo. But again he was suspicious about the news he had just heard so he inquired: "Merchant, you swear this news is true?"

Almost cynically the merchant added with a smile: "Could the father of lies invent such a tale and give you ever a sign with which to judge the truth?" But Nicholas wasn't going to be taken for a fool. He ordered his guards to bind this merchant in irons till the truth was revealed. But as they approached him the merchant laughed out loud: "Who do you want to arrest friend Nicholas, ha, ha, ha?" With that the devil disappeared.

The guards were dumbstruck looking at one another and the

space in the centre. Nicholas was furious: "Well, don't stand there with your mouths open you, men, search the palace. Bring here every strange merchant you see, guard the gates, set up a patrol on every road; seize any man in the dress of a beggar with clothes all patched and torn..." Nervous that something was underway he said: "Wait, wait. Ten of you stay here. Don't leave me alone."

Now at this very hour, Brother Juniper was approaching the city of the tyrant Nicholas. His garments were all tattered and torn, for part of his habit he had given to the poor on the way, so, that he looked nothing like a friar. The guards of the tyrant Nicholas seeing that Brother Juniper fitted the description given them, quickly seized him and bound him with cords. But to all this, Brother Juniper made not one complaint, being always eager to suffer persecution and humiliation, the more closely to resemble Christ his Lord and Master. These guards dragged him at once before the tyrant Nicholas.

The guards seized the holy monk: "Search him, see what he's concealing in those sleeves of his." They dragged him to the tyrant Nicholas: "Praise God! Sir Nicholas, I have nothing up my sleeves but my two arms. Oh, your pardon, I do also have in my left sleeve a shoemaker's awl, for the mending of my sandals and in my right sleeve I have a tinderbox for flint and steel for the lighting of a fire when I live in the woods."

Nicholas was angry and suspicious. Everything was just as the merchant had told him:

"You villain, you liar!" Brother Juniper simply smiled and said

softly: "Oh, you have heard of me already?"

Nicholas was fuming and he went on: "So, you are the traitor," to which Juniper added: "Oh, I am the worst of traitors."

"And you'd also kill me with this shoemaker's awl and burn down my castle with this tinderbox?" "Oh yes, I'd do that too."

"Admit your guilt, confess, or I'll have you beaten until you do."

"I'll confess first and then you can have me beaten because I deserve it. I'd do much worse things than those you have named."

"You would?" said Nicholas in surprise.

"Oh yes, I'd burn down twenty castles; I'd set fire to this whole city. I can't tell you how many people I might murder."

"You dare to boast about your wickedness."

"I have to boast..."

"Murderer, assassin..." Nicholas muttered...to which Nicholas only added: "Traitor, liar..."

"You monster, you heartless villain," and the monk went on: "Thief, cut throat, robber..." Nicholas was angrier now: "Keep quiet...I can think of all the bad names I need." "Oh yes, how well you know me, Sir Nicholas" said Juniper with a smile.

"You aren't fit to live." "You're right...I ought to be hanged."

"And hanged you shall be. I'll rid the earth of you straightaway." Now Nicholas was determined. "How much better off the earth would be," said Juniper as he simply bowed his head. The order was given: "Guards, guards, take this traitor, this murderer, out." As he was being led out Juniper added: "You forgot this liar, this...thief, this..."

Nicholas shouted after the guards: "Guards, take him out. Tie him to the tail of a horse; drag him through the city to the North gate and there hang him by the neck..."

"Until he is dead...you do mean, until I am dead, don't you, Sir Nicholas?" smiled Juniper.

"Guards take this monster away and show him what I mean." The guards speedily dragged Brother Juniper outside the castle whereupon the sight and the noise, the people of the city came running. A good man hearing that the accused was so quickly condemned to die ran in great haste to the nearby monastery and cried to the superior of that house: "Father Superior, father superior, for the love of God, I pray you, come quickly." Father Superior was surprised as the visitor impatiently added: "To the castle, where a poor wretch has been sentenced and is being led away to die. He has had no time to confess and he seems to have no care for death nor for the salvation of his soul. Oh, come quickly, I beseech you."

Father Superior who was weighed down by much more than authority added: "I'll come as quickly as my girth will allow me. Oh, why do I fatten with fasting as other men do with eating? For no small reason do they call me the Friar Major of the Friars Minor."

When, at length the father Superior reached the place and made his way through the crowds, he saw a horse approaching, dragging by the legs a man with his face covered by a sack. His garments were all ripped and pulled so that the urchins of the street

made bold to tickle his legs with leafy branches whereon the man cried out full merrily: From inside the sack was heard: "Let me go, you little rogues, you're hurting my legs."

Father Superior couldn't believe his eyes: "Brother Juniper, what are you doing here?" The smile on Brother Juniper's face said it all: "Why, as you can see, Father Superior, these good people are going to hang me."

Father Superior was mortified when he saw the way this holy monk was being treated: "Dragging you through the streets like...I'll take off my own habit and put it..."

"Oh, no Father Superior, I won't have that. It wouldn't look well to see you stripped. You're too fat."

Then turning to the crowd waiting for the spectacle, Father Superior said: "Oh...Good people, wait, This is no criminal, no villain."

"Oh, yes I am," piped in brother Juniper.

Father Superior went on: "Don't argue, brother Juniper. Good people this man is..."

"A traitor, a murderer..." mumbled Brother Juniper.

In exasperation Father Superior said sternly: "Brother Juniper, I command you to be silent until I give you leave to speak. Good people, hold a while, until I go to Nicholas and entreat him for this man."

So, off went the Father Superior to the tyrant as fast as his feet would take him. He was shocked that this holy monk had been arrested and manhandled so brutally so he said:

"It seems to me that in this land

is committed the greatest sin and the greatest wrong that has ever been done since the days of our forefathers. I believe it has been done through ignorance."

Then the good friar went on to tell Nicholas what a grave mistake had been made, which was that Brother Juniper, the good and holy brother Juniper was taken for a criminal and was on the verge of being hanged.

The tyrant was shocked: "Heaven forbid, not Brother Juniper, that holy man. Why, the one I sent to the gallows confessed he was verily a villain..."

Nicholas was beside himself with shame and cried out: "What have I done?"

"Make haste or it will be done," shouted Father Superior.

All stricken with horror, the tyrant Nicholas came to brother Juniper and set him free.

Then the tyrant Nicholas said: "Brother Juniper, why didn't you tell me who you were? Good Brother Juniper, why didn't you tell me I was mistaken." Brother Juniper stood in silence and Nicholas urged him to say something: "Good and worthy Brother Juniper, speak to me, say you forgive me, why didn't you defend yourself? Why don't you speak now?" After much coaxing Brother Juniper said softly: "Well, Sir Nicholas, Father Superior has commanded me to keep silence and until he gives me leave to speak I can say nothing." Father Superior was embarrassed no end and added: "Oh Brother Juniper, speak as much as you like."

"Father Superior, would you keep these good people standing out here all the day? Sir Nicholas, you told me who I was, I couldn't

say you were mistaken because you knew me better even better than Father Superior and I couldn't defend myself against the truth."

When they had unbound brother Juniper, Nicholas said: "But you wouldn't murder me or burn down my castle..." "Oh yes I would!" said Brother Juniper.

Father Superior was reaching the end of his tether: "Oh Brother Juniper, stop talking like a fool!"

Brother Juniper went on quietly: "Well then Father Superior, I shall have to stop talking all together and cease repeating your own words and those of our father Francis. For, hasn't he told us often that the only difference between us and the worst of sinners is the grace of God? It is not for us to think that we are better than any man, for, if God did not prevent us by his grace we would commit every sin. Therefore whenever we see anyone taken off to be punished or hear of any great crime committed we ought to say with all humility: 'There, but for the grace of God, go I.'"

"Sir Nicholas I think it is we who are the fools," concluded Father Superior.

"It is I who am the villain, for I have committed every crime. I ought to be sentenced to death. What will become of me, since God sees me for what I am?" In regret even Sir Nicholas agreed.

To comfort both Father Superior and Sir Nicholas, Juniper said: "Oh do not despair, Sir Nicholas, look at me, the grace of God, made poor Juniper a friar minor. If a fool like me can become a friar, even the greatest sinner can become a saint." □

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 1

by Michele Molineris sdb

### Editor's Note:

The title of this set of episodes from the life of Don Bosco might not be familiar. In fact, it is the name of a book by the same name compiled and collected by Fr. Michele Molineris. They make interesting reading of the life of a saint who has been appropriately described as: Fully Human, Fully Holy.

Another point to note is that you may find at the end of each episode a reference like this EBM which refers to the English Translation of the Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco which comprise of 19 Volumes and the numbers are the page numbers (ID).

### 1. Tantrums (1819)

One day, when John was only four, he came home from a walk with his brother Joseph. It was summer and both were very thirsty. Margaret went to draw water and gave it first to Joseph, who was older. John was a bit piqued at this act of preference and when it was his turn he refused to drink. Margaret put the water away without a word. John just stood there for a moment and then timidly said: "Mom!"

"Yes..."  
"Aren't you going to give me some water too?"  
"I thought you weren't thirsty!"  
"I'm sorry, Mom!"  
"Now! That's a good boy!" She went back for the water and gave it to him, smiling.

On another occasion, because



of his age and his impetuous nature, John had gotten into a temper of impatience. Margaret called him to her side, and John immediately ran over to her.

"John, do you see that cane?" she said, pointing to the cane in the corner.

"Yes, I see it," answered John, timidly drawing back.

"Bring it to me."

"What do you want it for?"

"Bring it here and you'll find out."

John fetched it and handed it to her.

"Are you going to beat me with it?"

"Why not? You asked for it."

"I won't do it again, Mamma!"

And the child would be glad at his mother's smile. That was enough of a lesson for him to exercise more self-control in the future. (EBM I, 44-45)

### Much ado about nothing (1820)

One autumn John went for a brief vacation to the home of his mother's family in Capriglio, where Margaret customarily spent several days to help with

the vintage. His grandfather, uncles and aunts gave him a hearty welcome.

As night drew on and they were waiting for supper, someone began to spin a tale about how, in times gone by, they used to hear different weird sounds coming from the attic. The sounds were either of long or brief duration, but they always had a hair-raising effect on those who heard them. Everyone maintained that only the devil himself would have been able to upset people in such a manner. John refused to believe such idle tales, and insisted that it was all due to some natural cause, such as the wind, a polecat or something like that. Since it was already dark, someone lit the lamps. The room in which they were talking had a ceiling with many rafters. This formed the floor of a large attic used as a barn and storehouse for other crops. Suddenly they heard the noise of a falling object, like a big basket of bowls, followed by a slow, dull sound that traversed the space above their heads from one corner to another. Everyone stopped talking and a sombre silence fell on the group. When the sinister sound was repeated their faces grew pale.

"What can it be?" they whispered to one another.

"Let's go outside," Margaret said to her son. "Come on, a sudden fright might do you harm."

"No," John said, "I want to see what it is."

The noise continued at intervals, and given the hour it was so inexplicable as to be terrifying indeed. They all stared at each other quizzically.

"Did anybody leave the door open?" someone asked.

"No, it's locked," answered another.

"What then?"

John stood up resolutely, lit a lamp and said: "Let's go and take a look."

"Listen, let's wait for tomorrow-it's prudent..."

"What! Are you afraid?"

So saying, he climbed the wooden staircase leading to the attic. The others, each holding a lantern and a stick, followed behind him, trembling and muttering to themselves. John pushed open the door. He entered the attic, held the lantern up and looked about him. He could see nothing. All was still. Some of his relatives peeped in from the door, only one or two having dared to enter after him.

Then they all gave a startled cry, and some fled. Something very strange was going on: a wheat-sieve in a corner was moving of its own accord and advancing toward them, coming to a sudden halt in response to their terror-stricken shrieks. But



after the shouts died down, it resumed its movements and did not halt until it had reached John's feet. The boy stepped back. Then he handed his lantern to the person nearest him who, terrified it fell, plunging the room in darkness. He called for another lantern and stood it on top of an old chair. Then, bending down, he touched the sieve.

"Don't touch it! Don't touch it!" someone yelled from the doorway. John paid no heed and lifted it off the ground. A great roar of laughter filled the room. Underneath the sieve stood a big hen!

This is what had happened. Some grains of wheat had become lodged in the grill of the sieve that was tilted against the wall. Lured by the grains, a hen had begun to peck at these tempting morsels of food. The sieve had unexpectedly toppled over and had imprisoned the hen. Captive and hungry, the hen had tried to escape, and because it was unable to rid itself of the great weight, it had battered itself against the sides. Thus, the hen had pushed its not too heavy prison from one end of the attic to the other. The silence of the night, the floor made of rafters and the general fear had given the noise a particularly eerie quality.

Gaiety succeeded their panic for which the hen paid dearly. Grabbing the bird, Margaret said: "You won't frighten us like that anymore!" So saying, she wrung its neck and then plucked and cooked it.

"The goblin's in the cookpot!" they all shouted in unison as they prepared to sit down, quite unexpectedly, to a magnificent supper. No one felt like going to bed,

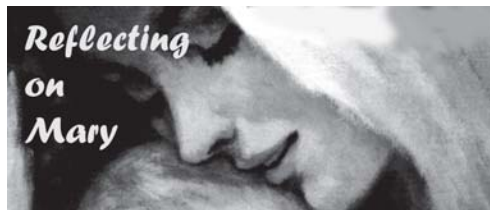
so after having been freed of their fear they spent the night in a frolicsome mood as they watched their vats and barrels. (EBM I, 64-66)

### 3. The Exchange (1821)

A boy named Secundus Matta was another of John's cow-herding companions in the pasture. John's own age, he was a young farmhand on one of the surrounding estates. Matta would come down the hill every morning with his master's cow; he carried along his breakfast, a piece of coarse bread. John would be munching on a piece of tasty white bread that Mamma Margaret always took great pains to keep in the house. One day John asked Matta: "Want to do me a favour?" "Sure," Matta replied. "How about swapping bread with me?"

"Why?" "Because your bread must taste better than mine, and I like it better."

In his simplicity Matta really believed that John preferred coarse bread. Since he liked his friend's white bread better, he eagerly agreed to the exchange. From that day onward, for two successive spring seasons, they exchanged bread every morning in the meadow. Later on, a grown man, Matta often thought about this. He would often discuss it with his nephew, Fr. Secundus Marchisio, a Salesian, observing that John's motive for the exchange could only have been to practice self-denial. The coarse bread of those days was certainly not a choice tidbit. EBM I, 67-68)□



## PRAYER TO MARY (MEDITATION ON THE HAIL MARY)

by Roberta Fora

### Hail Mary

This was the greeting of the angel Gabriel sent by God to a town Galilee, Nazareth, to Mary, a simple girl with a pure heart.

At that moment, who knows what thoughts and anxieties must have gone through the mind of that young girl who couldn't understand the profound meaning of that mysterious greeting.

Yet, God's plan was being gradually fulfilled as Mary became aware that those words addressed to her actually came from the Lord.

I would like to picture Mary kneeling in the corner of a poorly furnished room absorbed in contemplative prayer; attentively listening to what God might whisper to her heart.

I believe we Catholics can consider ourselves fortunate because if it is true that we believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is equally certain that we have in heaven, "a special mother" ready to support, help, protect and intercede for us with the Father.

I believe we Catholics can consider ourselves fortunate because

if it is true that we believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is equally true that we have in heaven a "special Mother," Mary, ready to support, help, protect and intercede for us with the Father.

Mary is an exceptional woman, but remarkably close to us, perhaps because she is a "person" in the truest sense of the term; filled with her own doubts, anxieties, fears and sufferings.

We may be able to imagine Mary arriving in Bethlehem with Joseph, tired and exhausted because it was about time for her to give birth to the Son of God or perhaps the time when she was worried looking for Jesus, before she found him in the Temple. Then we should not forget the time Mary, torn with grief and suffering stands at the foot of the cross on Calvary.

If Mary is humanly so close to each of us, who knows, if with the thousands of sorrows that crowd our day we can find the time to turn to her with even just a simple greeting: a "Hail Mary?"

After all, it is a simple reflection

but incredibly useful on the spiritual journey of our interior life.

We should never forget that the saints left us examples of devotion to the Virgin Mary on several occasions. Don Bosco, for instance, among other things advised his boys (and us) to recite three "Hail Marys" just before going to bed at night.

This could be a concrete resolution to end our day in a dignified and Christian manner.

Help us, O Lord, always to follow the sweet Virgin Mary as our guide. May we follow her example of humility, that we may know how to live in simplicity and through her intercession.

This could be a concrete resolution to end our day in a dignified and Christian manner.

Help us O Lord, to always follow the sweet Virgin Mary as our guide. May we follow her example of humility, that we may know how to live in simplicity and through her intercession may we journey towards the endless joy where you await us.

#### Full of Grace

Mary, "full of grace," is filled with this mysterious and inexplicable power, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

"God has filled you with grace," these were the words that the angel said to Mary. She was troubled but the angel was ready to reassure her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God."

It is God who is the source of this inexhaustible and eternal source of grace, refreshing and reassuring Mary on her journey as this same grace reassures us, Christian pilgrims travelling towards our goal, Heaven.

Of course, it is not always easy to enjoy the benefits of divine grace. It is necessary to discover this grace in the daily events of life, letting this awareness penetrate the depths of our hearts. Above all, we must know and trust Divine Providence.

"Nothing is impossible with God," but it is obvious that the main ingredient at this point is a blind and unlimited trust in the Lord which comes as a natural consequence of a faith which is a result of loving him, and consequently our neighbour.

We read in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear, for you are with me, O Lord." That means he is always with us, even when our life is steeped in unpleasant and incomprehensible situations.

It sometimes happens that everything around us is dark and sad, but we should be afraid. If we really believe in God, we should be praying: "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." And if this filial trust in God is really a fundamental part of our human existence, we may refer precisely to the concluding verse of Psalm 23: "Surely, goodness and kindness shall follow me, all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever."

Happiness is not possible if there isn't grace. We will not be able to enjoy the fullness of joy in the depths of our hearts when there is an absence of the grace of God, and of course that can come only when we ask for his precious help. O Mary, following your example, may we learn to live our daily lives in the grace of God, enjoying the happiness that the Lord can bring to our hearts. □

#### CHINA

With the agreement signed between China and the Holy See on 22 September 2018, there will be less "of the many problems on how to give birth to new bishops in the Church in China." It will take time to heal the division that has afflicted the Chinese Catholic community for a long time, but an element that fed the disunity among the brothers is no longer there. And only those who don't know what the Catholic Church is, can attack the Pope accusing him of having "surrendered to the Chinese government". Joseph Wei Jingyi, bishop of Qiqihar, in the north-eastern province of Heilongjiang, speaks clearly and freely.

Sixty years old, a native of the diocese of Baoding, Joseph Wei was secretly consecrated bishop by Paolo Guo Wenzhi, bishop of Qiqihar on 22 June 1995. In the past Wei lived through three periods of detention and restriction of personal freedoms, the longest of which lasted more than two years, from September 1990 to December 1992. With the interview granted to Vatican Insider, Wei is the first "underground" bishop to comment extensively on the recent agreement between the Holy See and the government of Beijing on the modalities of appointment of future Chinese Catholic bishops. Also for this reason, his words deserve attention.

"I learned it through social

media. But an article published in the Global Times last week made me suspect that the agreement was close".

"There had been many attempts to reach an agreement, and it was not easy. I'm not worried now. My confidence grows with time. Also President Xi Jinping reiterates that when the people have confidence, then the nation grows well and the people have hope. My trust is placed in the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church. And in the Church men and women can be made saints, as all the saints of



the Lord have shown us for two thousand years".

"With the signing of the agreement, there will no longer be so many concerns and problems about how to appoint bishops in the Church in China. The disunity of the Church can be overcome and become a fact of the past. The operations to put the Church in difficulty and in a bad light will be less insidious. Of course it will take time for the wounds of disunity to heal. But there is no longer a factor that provoked and fed disunity.

"The faithful and priests I



know all hoped for an improvement in the relationship between China and the Vatican. Not only that, they prayed with perseverance for it. The signing of the agreement represents a substantial improvement. That is why everyone welcomes it with great joy".

"If someone who doesn't have faith in Christ, and criticizes the Pope for surrendering to the Chinese government on the nomination of the Chinese bishops, can do this only because he doesn't have faith and therefore can't know what the Church really is. And I would let such a person say what he wants, he can say whatever he wants, for he just doesn't know what he is talking about. But if I belong to the Catholic Church, I can't dare to stand there and make judgments on the Pope and attack every decision of the Holy Father. I am not the Pope and I do not have the state of grace that God has granted him - and grants him - to be Pope. I am called to keep to what the Pope indicates by his magisterium. I pray for the Pope in every mass, together with priests from all over the world".

"On a personal level, for me it doesn't matter much whether the government recognizes me or not as bishop. Jesus was not rec-

ognized by the government at the time. And even the apostles were not "recognized" as apostles by the government of the time. But on the social level, if the government doesn't recognize me as a bishop, the lack of that recognition doesn't help harmony and tranquility. The underground communities expect that the forgiveness and reception of bishops elected and ordained in an illegitimate manner will happen in parallel with the governmental recognition of bishops not yet recognized as such by the government. If the Chinese government were to postpone such recognition could provoke some negative reaction among some of the members of the underground community. And that too could be used against the Pope. I hope that after the agreement, dialogue will proceed more quickly, for example to resolve the issue of the bishops Giacomo Su Zhimin and Cosma Shi Enxiang (two elderly bishops of whom there has been no news for many years. *Ed*). I think it's appropriate for the Chinese government to say something about them. And it is good that the government should also speed up the process of recognizing "underground" bishops". (*La Stampa, Gianni Valente*)



## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### No Strings Attached

"Pull over, mister," said the traffic officer. "You haven't any tail-light." The motorist stopped, got out of his car for a look and was speechless with dismay. "Well, it's bad, but not that bad," said the policeman. Recovering his voice, the motorist quavered. "It's not the tail-light that bothers me, but what's become of my trailer."

### Change of Heart

Collecting fares, the bus conductor stopped beside a small boy, who felt in all his pockets and looked under the seat while the conductor waited. "What's the trouble sonny?" "I had a 50 cent piece and I've lost it." The little fellow looked so upset that the conductor's heart was touched and gave him a ticket free. The boy looked up and on the point of tears whimpered: "And what about my change?"

### Open Holes

Two men were discussing their status in life. "I started out on the theory that the world had an opening for me," said one. "And you found it?" asked the other. "Well, rather," replied the first. "I'm in the hole now."

### Time Management

"I'm really not late boss," said the tardy secretary, hanging up her coat. "I just took my coffee

break before coming in."

### In the Bind

A clever lady asked to a brilliant public function, was assigned a place between a noted bishop and an equally famous rabbi. It was her chance to break into high company, and she meant to make use of it. "I feel as if I were a leaf between the Old and the New Testament," she said during a lull in the conversation. "That page, madam," replied the rabbi, "is usually blank."

### Hot Spot

Two birds were sailing lazily over the desert when a jet plane whizzed by them, its exhaust spouting flames and smoke. As it sped out of sight, one of the buzzards said: "That bird was in a real hurry." "You'd be in a hurry too," the other one said, "If your tail was on fire."

### Speed Reading

Two ants were running at great speed across a page in a magazine. "Why do you have to run so fast?" panted the one behind. "Can't you read?" asked the one in front. "It says tear along the dotted line."

### Quite a Quandry

Daughter: "Mama, why did you marry daddy?"  
Mama: "You've begun to wonder too?" ☐

## Form IV

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Sd/-  
Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

## THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



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

Thank you dear Heavenly Mother for the many favours granted through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys. Dear loving Mother please continue to bless, guide and protect us always. P. D'Souza Goa

### LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I am grateful to Mary Help of Christians for the many favours received by me and my family. Mother Mary please keep us under your mantle of blue always. She never fails to reach out if you go to her. *Sarita Fernandes*

After a wait of three years I had a normal delivery and gave birth to a baby boy; my family is now reunited and at peace; my daughter had a successful surgery and came first in the State. I am grateful that my family is now in good health and I have a good job. *M. C. Miranda, Mumbai*

For 21 years I prayed that my daughter be freed from a property dispute. This September the Mighty Trinity and Mary our Mother finally settled everything finally and peacefully. My heartfelt gratitude now and forever. *A Devotee*

Our sincere thanks to the Almighty, Mother Mary and Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of our baby girl.

*Archie D'Souza, Mumbai*

## APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

MARCH 2019

Evangelization

That Christian communities, especially those who are persecuted, feel that they are close to Christ and have their rights respected.



## MAN'S FRAGILE PLIGHT

Don Chino Biscontin

**W**ith the rite of the imposition of ashes (March 6), the Lenten season begins. Once upon a time it was the final period of preparation for Catechumens getting ready for Baptism at the Easter Vigil and also completion of the period of penance performed by public sinners who would receive absolution at the Easter Vigil. For everyone, Lent still preserves this baptismal and penitential characteristic which aims to help us reach the great Easter festivities so as to worthily celebrate the love of the Lord Jesus who, through his death and resurrection has won for us forgiveness and a rebirth into communion with God.

But let us pause to try to fathom the rich meaning of this symbolic gesture. As always when such gestures are packed with history, they become a kind of fountain that never ceases to generate new significance and new meanings; founts of light.

**First of all ashes remind us of the frailty of human life:** "You are dust and to dust you shall return" (Gn. 3, 19), said God to Adam to remind him that he had tried to become like God even though he was just a creature. And the Psalm reechoes: "You turn men back into dust and say: go back sons of men" (Ps 90, 3). This is an invitation to real humility and a wisdom that takes into account that our lives have an end: "So teach us to number our days that we may gain wisdom of heart" (Ps. 90, 12).

**Ashes were also used at a time of mourning.** A woman who had witnessed her husband's demise tore her garments left her hair disheveled and sprinkled herself and her face with ashes. It was as if she was saying: "My beauty was meant for the man I loved and not for anyone else." And since this agonizing pain leaves her breathless she naturally beats her breast. Both these symbols, ashes on her head and the beating of her breast became part of the penitential rite. Through these gestures people expressed their repentance and their agony at having wounded the love of God. That was how they asked God for forgiveness and help. They also did this when they were beset with misfortune. The book of Esther tells us that faced with death because of an edict, the Jews reacted thus: "there was great mourning among the Jews: fasting and weeping with lamentation, and they all slept in sackcloth and ashes" (Est. 4, 3).

**Ash, mixed with boiling water, was also used to wash clothes stained with dirt.** It therefore lent itself to express a sense of purification of those spiritual defects that we contract every time we freely and consciously choose the path of evil. It is this significance that the Letter to the Hebrews alludes, to when it says: "for if the sprinkling of people defiled by sin with the blood of goats and bulls or with the ashes of a heifer provides them with exterior cleanness and holiness, how much more will it be with the blood of Christ? He, moved by the eternal Spirit, offered himself as an unblemished victim to God and his blood cleanses us from dead works so that we may serve the

living God?" (Heb 9, 13-14)

There is also another significance, less easy to grasp, but present in the Scriptures. When something passes through fire it is not totally consumed, ashes are left behind. It may be seen as the essence, the concentrate of that reality which contains its core identity. In the Book of Numbers there is this prescription: "For the unclean, you shall take some of the ashes of the cow that was offered as a sin offering in a vessel and pour running water over them. A ritually clean man shall dip a twig of hyssop in the water and sprinkle it on the tent and everything in it, and on the persons as well who were there..." (Nm 19, 17-18). **The ashes contain the full force of the reconciling power of the victim sacrificed to God.**



This last explanation can help to understand the recent document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Aud resurgendum con Christo* which contains considerations and directives on the practice of cremation and conservation of the ashes of the dead so that it conforms to the sense of faith. After stating that the burial of the body remains the preferred choice, it states: "When, for legitimate motives, cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area, which has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority."

From the earliest times, Christians have desired that the faithful departed become the objects of the Christian Community's prayers and remembrance. Their tombs have been places of prayer, remembrance and reflection...

The reservation of the ashes of the departed in a sacred place ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community... For the reasons given above, the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted. Nonetheless, the ashes may not be divided among various family members and due respect must be maintained regarding the circumstances of such a conservation.

In order that every appearance of pantheism, naturalism or nihilism be avoided, it is not permitted to scatter the ashes of the faithful departed in the air, on land, at sea or in any other way..."

The document albeit with disciplinary language, there is a sense of great respect and even tenderness, in a text as it considers ashes as a real symbol, even if reduced to the corporeal essence of a person who has passed through death, and lives in the eternal light of God. □

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#### **MARY WAS THERE**

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017, at about 5am, my husband and I along with our two kids aged 3 and 1 were travelling from Goa to Mumbai. There was a sudden turn on the highway when our car suddenly skid into a large pothole. There was continuous oncoming traffic. The impact was such that our tyre burst and the front part of our car was damaged to an extent that it had to be towed back to Goa. However, we, including our sons who were strapped in their car seats behind escaped without a scratch. We always pray the Memorare before travelling. We thank Mama Mary for being with us always.

*Abigail and Viltroy Gracias Mumbai*

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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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