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*Mary, our model
 and mother,
 by your obedience
 and patience
 you have taught us
 how to be true
 children of God.
 Please help us
 by your powerful
 assistance to
 overcome all our
 weaknesses, and
 to fulfill perfectly
 our tasks in life.*

From The Editor's Desk

AN ODE TO THE CRITICS

Our world has its fair share of critics and they have the great talent to see the dark side of things. And a critic is one who has no taste or style or identity of his or her own but builds their identity by being critical of another's work. Anyone can be such a critic, not just in regard to books but in regard to life itself. Nothing pleases this breed of people more than finding that everything is wrong, imperfect, out of tune or alignment. It may be throw-back to the critic's childhood, a time when that beleaguered little boy or girl wasn't appreciated, applauded or affirmed. Everything was wrong, or just wasn't good enough.

Donagh O'Shea, an author I admire immensely, tells this story: "I knew a bishop years ago who never said *yes*. He always said either *No* or nothing at all. If he made no reply to your letter you knew that you could go ahead with your project - but on your own responsibility; if your project backfired, the bishop could denounce you without being implicated in the failure. 'No' seems like a safe place to operate from - but so is the grave - nothing happens there. To be alive is to say *yes* to the many risks you encounter. If you refuse to take risks you are acting dead and you will be of no service to life. The minimum of *yes*-saying is to be capable of being pleased with just what is, as it is. Below this minimum, to use Jesus image, we are like children who sulk (Lk 7:31-35).

But sometimes you meet a human being who really lifts your spirit. There's a spark in their eye and a spring in their step - and if you looked more closely those who possess this spirit are people who have suffered a lot. I said 'suffered' - and did you know that the word 'suffer' comes from the conjunction of two Latin words which loosely means to sustain from below, to bear up, to *allow*. People who have suffered a lot are people who have *allowed* life to get at them. It is as if they just said to suffering, misfortune or disaster - in one way or another: "come be my guest". However, it is also true that suffering can make some people bitter, hard and pessimistic. But when suffering has had the opposite effect, meeting such people is a great joy.

The person who says *yes*, the person who has suffered, knows that life is not done with him yet. There's always something exciting around the next corner.

An old man sitting outside his ramshackled hovel was smoking his battered pipe when the local pastor walked by and commiserated with him about his plight. The old man simply smiled his toothless grin and said: "If it wasn't for all the bad luck I had, I'd have no luck at all." That's what suffering does to people. They know that God's not finished with them yet...and their joy comes from being able to lean on God who knows all and cares for all...and what's more, God understands...because God too has suffered!

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

FRIENDS FOREVER

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

You cannot say "I love you" without adding "forever" which is not a social formality or a vestige of times gone by, but rather a specific quality and substance of that love.

Continuing our comment on Chapter IV of *Amoris Laetitia* and after speaking of married love and married friendship, we now focus on what distinguishes the bond between two real friends from that of a marital bond. Pope Francis speaks about this in numbers 123-125 of his Apostolic Exhortation.

Marriage, the Pope writes, is the greatest friendship because it contains the characteristics of this relationship, but at the same time supersedes it and transforms it into a new and unique reality. A friend seeks the good of the other and is reciprocated, thus between them there develops a certain similarity of interests and affection that binds them, there is a kind of complicity and mutual respect. Marriage puts all this into a loving relationship that involves the body and the spirit and is based on the bond that has as its object the sharing of their entire lives together in order to achieve a stable life project.

Friends seek the good of the other, spouses choose the good of the other; friends want their sentiments to be reciprocated, spouses promise each other love; friends being

together, develop a strong bond while spouses try day after day to become one flesh; friends share their time and their spaces; spouses live in the same house and share everything; friends experience fraternity and complicity; spouses unite their souls through their bodies.

Marriage is born from a feeling, but it begins with a pact. It grows spontaneously but endures through a choice to be faithful. It is two people who have a certain affinity but do not live like twin souls but as "twin-able" souls.



They relish the feeling, but their love is rooted in their willingness to love in joy and in pain.

Pope Francis enters this theme of the indissolubility of the spousal bond, from the bottom. In the words and gestures of lovers we find a strong yearning for "forever." Statements like: "I will love you forever"; "I will never leave you"; "you are part of me"; "I cannot see my future without you..." are not the naïve statements of those wrapped up in their emotions, but they testify to the profound truth of the man-woman bond that resounds throughout Scripture from the beginning: "For this a man will leave his father and mother, and will be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh."

You cannot say "I love you" without adding "forever" which is not a social formality or a vestige of times gone by, but rather a specific quality and substance of that love.

"Lovers do not see their relationship as merely temporary" writes the Pope. This and other signs show that in the very nature of conjugal love there is an openness to that which is definitive. "Forever" is within the very dynamics of conjugal love.

The one who loves another accepts the other in their entirety comprising of body, spirit, dreams, potential and limits, past and future. The one who loves desires to give all of oneself to the beloved. Those who love desire to rethink their lives with and for the other. The one who loves feels he must go from *me* to *us* and my plans become our plans. Anyone who loves is ready to leave father and mother, because this new

bond is even stronger than that of blood. All this is contained in the word "indissolubility" which is so difficult to accept because it seems like a chain while it is actually the requirement of love itself.

It is the gift of the Spirit and it is the grace of the sacrament that discreetly accompanies the two young people to meet and to get to know each other. Paul writes: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

"Forever" can be frightening in a culture of temporality; in the face of an increasingly uncertain future, surrounded by bonds that are broken.

"Promising love forever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings, a plan which sustains and enables us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love" (AL 124)

Those who marry in the Lord believe and experience the presence of God in their love and when they cultivate a relationship with the Bridegroom *par excellence*, they can verify that their homes are founded on rock, that the wine of joy will never run out because the Lord will change their water into wine.

And this does not mean that there are no weaknesses and frailties. Even the Sacrament ensures that the spouses will encounter the unexpected in their lives. □

**LOVE NEEDS ETERNITY
AND ETERNITY TOO NEEDS LOVE**

by Maria Chiara Bregolin

I must admit that this is a very difficult theme for me. To write about eternal love is dangerous, one must avoid appearing dull, obvious or simply romantic.

That is why I have decided to leave this to a great visionary, a writer who wanted to speak about this love through his many books and letters: John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973). In his work "Simarillion" he tells of his love story and so he decided to carve the names of the two main characters on his tomb Beren and Luthien. The two, she (Luthien) an immortal elf and he (Beren) a man were struck by the most cruel of punishments two lovers could face: being parted for eternity, until Luthien with the help her people will herself become mortal thus sharing forever the same destiny as her beloved.

Tolkien met Edith his future wife when she was sixteen. From the start it was clear to him that he had met his soul mate. It was to her that he dedicated the wonderful story I narrated above; the story of Beren the fighter.

After all, love needs eternity, but even eternity needs love too. What good is it to overcome all obstacles if not "in" and "for" the company of the beloved?

In a letter he wrote to his son Michael in March 1941 Tolkien delves into his own idea of Catholic marriage. I quote his own words: "For a Christian man there is no escape. Marriage may help to sanctify and direct to its proper object his sexual desires; its grace may help him

in the struggle but the struggle remains." "True love," he goes on, "is not a fire that comes from without to an almost divine creature. It is an effort, a suffering to share with one's companion the adversities of life."

"No man can love his spouse in body and soul with the deliberate and conscious exercise of the will, without self-denial."

In *Amoris Laetitia* (125) Pope Francis speaks of conjugal love in the same vein: "A weak or sick love, incapable of accepting marriage as a challenge that requires struggle, being reborn, reinventing oneself and always starting over again until his death, will be unable to sustain a high level of commitment." All life, everything in common; a love that is faithful, free and mutual self-gift, that is a divine affair.

"Beyond this dark life that is so frustrating I propose to you the only great thing to love on earth: the Holy Sacraments. Here you will find adventure, glory, honour, fidelity and the true path to all your love on this earth" (J.R.R. Tolkien, 1941). □



25 MARCH: THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

THE MIRACLE OF NAZARETH

It happened then, but it repeats itself with us even today...

I have knelt several times before what remains of the home of Mary of Nazareth. The ruins of that cave-like house are now enclosed within the great basilica of the Annunciation. There are traces of a long tradition that preserved the memory of that most holy place, including an eighteenth-century altar with the inscription: "Here the Word became flesh." Yet what little remains of the cave-like dwelling is so simple, its candor yet so fascinating!

I knelt and prayed for a long time, re-reading the Gospel story and repeating many times over the prayer to Mary Most Holy, which begins with the words that were uttered by the archangel Gabriel. I was filled with such joy and felt so enlightened. But I always realized that it would be only women who have experienced pregnancy and subsequent motherhood in faith, can really fathom the grandeur of that place. Conversing with some of them was indispensable for me to gradually begin to comprehend this phenomenon.

Through the words of the archangel, Mary received that unexpected and surprising message from God. She was being asked to become a mother, to give birth to a son who would bring to fulfilment a host of divine prom-

ises that God had made to his people. Mary, filled with wonder, replied that she would not be able to do what was required; she explained: "I know not man" (Lk 1:34), that is 'she could not get pregnant.'

Gabriel replied that the Holy Spirit would initiate in her that astonishing miracle that would see the womb of a woman collaborate intimately with the hand of God (the Psalmist says: "You have knit me together in my mother's womb") to generate a new human being. "Therefore the One who is to be born will be holy and will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35).

But what happened then happens to us today in another form, but the same substance.



In the Mass we listen to the Gospel, not as an ancient text that we have got to get our minds around, but as an appointment with the Lord who wants to speak to us. And when we open ourselves in faith to that presence and inner word that he addresses to us, the miracle of Nazareth is repeated for us: the living word, of God, his beloved Son, takes form in our lives. That is why we are expected to listen to the Gospel, to offer the Risen Lord a body; as St. Paul writes: "Now you are the body of Christ and, each according to his own part, his members" (1 Cor 12:27)

And when we stretch out our hands to receive the gift of the Bread that the Holy Spirit has made into the body of the living Lord, the bread we eat is different; not in substance like the Blessed Virgin Mary when she was pregnant, but we too have been given the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord help us to resemble in some small way, His Mother in her docility as she listened to the Word of God and meditated on it and be able to promptly say like her: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord be it done to me according to your word." □

THE PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY

by John M. Cunningham OP

Each year, on 25 March, nine months before Christmas Day, the feast of the Annunciation is celebrated. This great feast reminds us that the Son of God was conceived by the Virgin Mother of God in a unique and miraculous way. After conceiving and giving birth as a virgin, the Mother of God remained forever a virgin. Thus, Mary is described as the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. During Mass, we honour Mary as 'the ever-virgin Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God.'

The New Testament shows very clearly that the Virgin Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of St. Matthew says 'Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit' (1:18) and that St. Joseph was told in a dream that 'that which is conceived in [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit' (1:20). The Gospel of St. Luke tells us that at the Annunciation the Archangel Gabriel declared to Mary, 'The

Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you' (1:35).

From the beginning the Church has declared in the words of the Apostles' Creed that the Son of God was 'conceived by the Holy Spirit' and 'born of the Virgin Mary.' The Church has always believed that Mary conceived her only Son as a virgin. St. Irenaeus (130-200 AD) teaches us that the conception of the Son of God 'took place not by the operation of Joseph, but by the co-operation of Mary alone with the divine plan of redemption.' St. Leo the Great, pope, makes the same point when he says that Mary 'was made fruitful not by human intercourse, but by the Holy Spirit.'

The feast of the Annunciation (March 25th) invites us to honour the mystery of the conception of God the Father's only Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. □

THE PRICE OF REAL LOVE

Anastasia Dias

I decided to take on a job that summer, at the local library, to save up money for college. And that was how I came to know Sarah Moore.

I first met Sarah at the library. She quickly briefed me about the work I needed to do and wished me luck. Sarah was close to my age and at first glance she could come off as an extremely shy person. But, as days that went by she and I quickly forged a friendship. We shared similar interests alongside our self-deprecating humour. By the end of the month, she had become my close confidant.

Sarah and I applied to college together and chose the same major. For the time being, the friendship we shared was enough.

Things began to change when Sarah had stopped coming to work for almost a week. I was worried. She hadn't left a message. I texted her more than once but didn't receive any reply.

Strange as it might sound, I didn't know where she lived. She had never told me much about her family and I had never volunteered to ask. I had done most of the talking; she had been the silent listener. It had never occurred to me that the girl who worked with me, with whom I shared everything, had a life beyond those

dusty library books. I had always thought of Sarah as a friend, nothing else; to me, that was her only identity.

I was mad at Sarah for walking out on me. I felt left out and all alone, even though, they had hired two other people in place of Sarah. I could never enjoy what I did anymore. It had become routine for me. I just wanted my horrendous summer to come to an end and college to start.

When college started, I became involved in many activities and made many new friends. Yet, there was no one to replace Sarah, even though I had never forgiven her for what she had done. She had disappeared, without any explanations.

It was almost a year since Sarah had mysteriously disappeared, when I came across an obituary in the newspapers of an elderly-looking man who had recently passed away. After reading a bit more, I discovered he had been Sarah's father.

The next day, I went to the funeral. I saw Sarah there. I walked up to her and offered my condolences. Despite the sombre occasion, I couldn't stop myself from calling her over for dinner the next day. She agreed.

The following morning I was



GIVE ME SOME WATER

Jesus Meets the Samaritan Woman

Ian Pinto, sdb



The meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is one of the most fascinating incidents in the Bible. It does not seem like much of a story at first: Jesus sitting by a well, tired and parched, asking a Samaritan woman for water; but if you become aware of the context of the meeting and pay close attention to what transpired between the two, you would surely realize that this was no ordinary meeting.

Jesus met a Samaritan

Samaritans were despised and hated by the Jews. Their enmity goes back decades to the time when the Kingdom of Israel was divided following the death of Solomon. The division of the Kingdom into the Northern and Southern portion brought to a head tensions that were brewing among the tribes of Israel. Along with the political division of the people, a religious schism was also affected by the rebel leader, Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:26-33). In order to prevent his subjects from mingling with the Southerners and risking their allegiance, he introduced an alternate religion that involved idol worship. A few years later when the Kingdom was annexed by the Assyrians, the people began to inter-marry and thus moved further away from their original status. What was broken with the division of the Kingdom was now completely shattered. There seemed absolutely nothing but hatred and ill will between the Samaritans who descended from such stock and the

Jews who believed themselves to be the pure race.

When you read the passage with this background, you will be able to understand Jesus tone of voice and why he seemingly speaks derogatorily of the Samaritans. Besides, the context of their encounter will come to life. There is pure hostility and condescension, and yet, Jesus chooses to go there, to a Samaritan town and engage in conversation with a Samaritan!

Jesus spoke to a Woman

If meeting, interacting and seeking the services of a Samaritan were not enough, Jesus chose a woman! Women in Palestine, not unlike most other parts of the world, were considered the subservient sex. In a distinctly patriarchal society, the role of women was restricted to the home. Women were not expected to openly interact with men, especially ones they did not know.

Now, put the two situations together. What do you think emerges? You get scandal! That

waiting in anticipation for Sarah's arrival. I had a long list of questions that remained unanswered. When Sarah came, I began telling her about the library, college, family and friends.

Suddenly, I turned the tables and made her do the talking. I coldly asked her, 'Do you think it was nice to walk out on me just like that? Don't you think I at least deserved to know what happened to you? Where have you been all this while? And couldn't you just let me know that you were alright? You walked out on me Sarah Moore when I needed you the most.'

With tears rolling down she whispered, 'Anne, I'm sorry for everything. I promise I never meant to hurt you or leave you alone. Please calm down and just listen to me, for once, will you?' I kept quiet and nodded.

Sarah said, 'I was 5 when my mother left home. My father was a very cruel man. He hammered mum and drove her out. I was an only child. And, as I grew older, he started thrashing me too. I never walked out like my mother did. I stayed, never uttering a word of complaint. But, after high school, I wanted out. I wanted to go to college. So I started working and living on my own.'

'One day, I received a letter from my mother. I hadn't seen her for 15 years. I wondered why she had bothered after all this time. The letter said that dad had taken seriously ill and she had come back to take care of him. She called me back to see him.'

'I left the library and went home. I saw my mother after 15 years and in her embrace all the anger I had bottled-up for all these years seemed to vanish. She asked me for

forgiveness for leaving me alone at such a young age.

'She had begun taking care of Dad after coming to know that he had been sick after I left. Dad's health kept deteriorating. He no longer looked like his original sadistic self. He had become frail after his illness. He was dying. But mom and I were getting closer than ever. We were making up for the years lost.'

'I started volunteering at a homeless shelter nearby. After a few days that was all I had ever wanted. All my dreams of going to college and starting work were nothing compared to this: the joy I felt in giving was more than anything I had ever felt. I was finally at peace now, with myself and everyone around me.'

By the time, Sarah finished I was sobbing. I asked her to forgive me for all the accusations I had made. Here was a woman, right before my eyes, who had suffered so much at the hands of her father. Nevertheless, she had had the power to love and forgive him. She had been so kind to me throughout the ordeal and hid her pain behind a smile; gently listening to me rant about unimportant things. She had given up on her dreams to serve a bigger purpose which she felt was more important than going to college. She had had the courage to stand up and work for a cause that she truly believed in.

Sarah Moore had been my friend. But, today I see her in a new light. Her identity was that of a woman who had experienced pain and anguish but had never given up on who she truly was and firmly rooted for what she believed in. □

was how anyone who witnessed Jesus and the Samaritan woman talking would perceive the situation. Not only has Jesus broken the unsaid rule of avoiding contact with Samaritans, he has gone a step further and struck up a conversation with a woman. In the eyes of the Jews, there are only a few things he have done worse.

The Woman

Jesus was a maverick. He showed through his words and actions that he did not care much for the rules of man that furthered divisions rather than love and harmony. On more than one occasion he chided the authorities for encouraging differences among people and driving them away from God. But enough about Jesus. Let us now turn our attention to the woman. She is quite an interesting character too. Allow me to point out a few characteristics of the woman that really stand out in the incident:

1. She knew her situation – The woman was well aware of who she was, who Jesus was and how they ought to behave toward each other. In fact, it is she who reminds Jesus of the enmity between Jews and Samaritans: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink?” (Jn 4:9) Notice, that she not only points out the Jew-Samaritan relation but also the man-woman relation. Thus, she comes across to me as a woman who was very self-aware. She was careful not to voluntarily stir up trouble. This observation might seem strange considering that she had five husbands and was currently living with another man, but I stand by my observation. Here’s why...

2. She was ready to admit her

faults – I think this is the result of her self-awareness. She stands out to me as an honest and brave person because she was ready to admit that she had messed things up. When Jesus revealed to her about her marital adventures, she readily accepted what he said. You don’t find her remonstrating, objecting or justifying herself.

3. She believed what Jesus told her – This is another noteworthy quality of hers. She didn’t doubt Jesus’ words. Despite her initial hesitation, she readily trusted in Jesus. She quickly forgot the differences she had pointed out to Jesus at the start of their conversation. She was ready to receive from him the Living Water that he promised (Jn 4:13-15).

4. She testified about what the Lord had done – After her provoking encounter with Jesus, she “ran to the town” and told the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I did! Could he not be the Christ?” (Jn 4:28-29). She was honest with the townspeople. She told them that Jesus had revealed things about her life that nobody knew and that he spoke like the Christ. She bore witness to Lord and shared with others her personal faith in him.

The Samaritan woman stands out as an example of faith and of discipleship. The qualities she displayed are valuable helps for living out the Christian vocation. If we could emulate her qualities and live them out faithfully, it won’t be long before the message of Jesus reaches every part of the world. The question is: are we ready to ask Him for that drink? □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. FRANCES OF ROME (1384 - 1440)

Widow and Foundress of the Collatines

St. Frances was born at Rome in 1384. Her parents, Paul de Buxo and Jacobella Rofredeschi, were both of illustrious families. At eleven years of age she desired to enter a monastery, but, in obedience to her parents, was married to a rich young Roman nobleman, named Laurence Pozani, in 1396. A grievous sickness showed how disagreeable this kind of life was to her inclinations. Above all, her obedience and condescension to her husband was inimitable, which engaged such a return of affection, that for forty years which they lived together, there never happened the least disagreement; and their whole life was a constant strife and emulation to prevent each other in mutual complaisance and respect. While she was at her prayers or other exercises, if called away by her husband, or the meanest person of her family, she laid all aside to obey without delay, saying: “A married woman must, when called upon, quit her devotions to God at the altar, to find him in her household affairs.” God was pleased to show her the merit of this her obedience; for the authors



of her life relate that being called away four times in beginning the same verse of a psalm of our Lady’s office, returning the fifth time, she found that verse written in golden letters. She treated her domestics not as servants but as brothers and sisters and future co-heirs in heaven, and studied by all

means in her power to induce them seriously to labour for their salvation. Her ordinary diet was hard and moldy bread. She would procure secretly, out of the pouches of beggars, their dry crusts in exchange for better bread. When she fared the best, she only added to bread a few unsavory herbs without oil, and drank nothing but water, making use of a human skull as her cup. She ate but once a day, and by long abstinence had lost all relish of what she took. Her garments were of course serge and she never wore linen not even in sickness. Her discipline was armed with rowers and sharp points. She wore continually a hair shirt and a girdle of horse-hair. An iron girdle had so galled her flesh that her confessor obliged her to lay it aside. Her example was of such edification that many Roman ladies having renounced a life of idleness, pomp, and softness joined her in pious exercises and put themselves under the direction of the Benedictine monks of the congregation of Monte-Olivet, without leaving the world, making vows, or wearing any particular habit. St. Frances prayed only for children that they might be citizens of heaven, and when she was blessed with them, it was her whole care to make them saints.

It pleased God, for her sanctification to make trial of her virtue by many afflictions. During the troubles which ensued upon the invasion of Rome by Ladislas, king of Naples, and the great schism under Pope John the XXII at the time of opening of the council of Constance, in 1413, her husband, with his brother-in-law, Paulucci, was banished from Rome, his estate confiscated, his house pulled

down, and his eldest son John Baptist, detained a hostage. Her soul remained calm amidst all those storms: she said with Job *'God hath given, and God hath taken away.* I rejoiced in these losses, because they are God's will. Whatever he sends I shall continually bless and praise his name for." The schism being extinguished by the council of Constance, and tranquility restored at Rome, her husband recovered his dignity and estate. Some time later after, moved by the great favours St. Frances received from heaven and by her own eminent virtue, he gave her full leave to live as she pleased; and he himself chose to serve God in a state of continence. He permitted in his own lifetime to found a monastery of nuns, called Oblates, for the reception of such of her own sex as were disposed to embrace a religious life. The foundation of this house was in 1425. She gave them the rule of St. Benedict, adding some particular constitutions of her own, and put them under the direction of the congregation of the Olivetans. The house being too small for the numbers that fled to this sanctuary from the corruption of the world, she would gladly have removed her community to a larger house; but not finding one suitable, she enlarged it in 1433, from which year the founding of the Order is dated. It was approved by pope Eugenius IV in 1437. They are called Collatines – perhaps from the quarter of Rome in which they were situated – the Oblates, because they call their profession an oblation and use in it the word *offero*, not *profiteor*. St. Frances could not yet join her new family, but as soon as she had settled her domestic affairs, after

the death of her husband, she went barefoot, with a cord around her neck, to the monastery which she had founded, and there, prostrated on the ground, before the religious, her spiritual children, begged to be admitted. She accordingly took the habit on St. Benedict's day in 1437. She always sought the meanest employments in the house, being fully persuaded she was of all the most contemptible before God; and she laboured to appear as mean in the eyes of the world as she was in her own. She continued the same humiliations, and the same universal poverty, though soon after chosen superioress of her congregation. Almighty God bestowed on her humility, extraordinary graces, and supernatural favours, as frequent visions, raptures and the gift of prophecy. At mass, she was so absorbed in God as to seem immovable, especially after Holy Communion: she often fell into ecstasies of love and devotion. She was particularly devout to St. John the Evangelist, and above all to our Lady, under whose singular protection she put her Order. Going out to see her son John Baptist, who was dangerously sick, she fell so ill herself that she could not return to her monastery at night. After having foretold her death, and received the sacraments, she expired on March 9th in the year 1440 and of her age the fifty sixth. God attested her sanctity by miracles: she was honoured among the saints immediately after her death, and solemnly canonized by Paul V in 1608. Her shrine in Rome is the most significant and rich: and her festival is kept as a holy day in the city, with great solemnity. The Oblates make no solemn vows,

only a promise of obedience to the mother-president, enjoy pensions, inherit estates, and go abroad with leave. Their abbey in Rome is filled with ladies of the first rank.

In a religious life, in which a regular distribution of holy employments and duties takes up the whole day, and leaves no instances of time, for idleness, sloth or the world, hours pass in these exercises with rapidity of moments and moments of fervour or the desires bear the value of years. Even meals, recreation and rest, are sanctified by this intention; and from the religious vows and habitual purpose of the soul of consecrating herself entirely to God in time and eternity, every action, as St. Thomas teaches, renews and contains the fervour and merit of this entire consecration) of which it is a part. In a secular life, a person by regularity in the employment of his time, and fervour in devoting himself to God in all his actions and designs, may in some degree enjoy the same happiness and advantage. This St. Frances perfectly practiced, even before she renounced the world. She lived forty years with her husband without ever giving him the least occasion of offense; and by the fervour with which she conversed with heaven, she seemed already to have quit the earth, and to have made Paradise her ordinary dwelling. □

Abridged from her life by her confessor Canon Mattiotti; and Magdalen Dell'Asgamara, Superioress of the Oblates, or Collatines, Helyot, Hist. des Ordr. Mon.t.6, p.208

LECTIO DIVINA

“speak Lord, your servant is listening”

HOW THE LORD REASONS

by Don Carlo Broccardo

If you agree that according to the Bible the heart is the centre of the person notice this discrepancy: People (including the Prophet) stop at the exterior while God plumbs the depths of the human person.

The first book of Samuel tells us of one of the important stages in the history of Israel when the people felt the need to move from a charismatic leader (a judge, a prophet) to a more considered, stable and solid guide i.e. a king. All the neighbouring peoples had kings; even the people of God felt the need of a king. God then chose for them Saul: son of Kis; “he was a handsome man, in the prime of life. Saul was a head taller than anyone else in Israel and more handsome as well.” (1 Sam 9:2) Handsome, tall and strong: the right person to lead an army, fascinate the crowds, incite soldiers to fight against the enemies. Unfortunately Saul, on paper at least, appeared to be an ideal king but in practice he proved to have an unacceptable deficiency: he did not trust God completely and did not always listen to his promptings. This was why God, at a certain point, turned away

from him and sent the prophet Samuel to anoint another king in his place.

Today’s passage speaks to us of this, **(the reading for the fourth Sunday in Lent on March 22)**: God chooses David as the new king instead of Saul. For this God sends Samuel to Bethlehem where David lived, to anoint him with oil thus consecrating him king. But it was not that simple because God had not told him exactly who he had chosen. He just said that he was a son of Jesse of Bethlehem – what a pity Jesse had as many as eight sons!

So the parade begins: Jesse brings his sons before Samuel, one by one, from the first to the seventh, but they were inexorably discarded one after the other. Interestingly God clearly stated: Do not look at his appearance or his height!” Eliab (the firstborn) had the qualities of Saul but – as we have seen – they were not enough for him to be a good king!

And then the Lord goes on: “I have discarded him because what man sees does not count: in fact man sees appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

If you agree that according to the Bible the heart is the centre of the person notice this discrepancy: People (including the Prophet) stop at the exterior while God plumbs the depths of the human person. The Lord’s eyes go deep down to the pulsating centre of each of us. “Lord, you know me, you see what I do and how I love you” (Jer 12:3); and this was precisely what God needed in choosing his king: a person whose heart is always with God. And none of Jesse’s seven sons has this quality.

There was an eighth son; his father had not really considered him, he had left him in the fields to graze the flock. We see that Jesse still saw “like men.” He did not have the ability to see the heart, like God. David was absolutely the right person. The appearance of the one that was discounted – as the father would say: “he was just a nice, good-looking boy”; those were certainly not the qualities of a military leader. The giant Goliath, when he saw him approaching, would mock him because he was a nice looking boy with blond hair” (1 Sam 17:42). Seen from the outside David had absolutely no kingly qualities.

In our passage there are those who look at appearances, stopping at the externals like Samuel, Jesse and everyone else. And there is one who looks at the heart, entering into the depths of



people: God. Precisely because he does not look at appearances, God chooses as king one who lives in any village and is the son of an ordinary peasant and the youngest of his children, the one whom his father did not even think of calling. God is like that: he chose Abel, the younger brother; he chose Jacob in place of Esau who was the firstborn; Gideon who was the youngest from the smallest family of Manasseh; Jeremiah who was too young to speak authoritatively; he chose women on several occasions to bring salvation to his people: (Deborah, Judith, Esther...); he chose Israel which was the least of all the peoples at that time.

God is like that, says Paul: “God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful” (1 Cor 1, 27-28). He chose to save the world by becoming little, being born in Bethlehem and dying on the cross. □

I DON'T UNDERSTAND BUT I TRUST IN YOU

*The Pope's morning meditation at the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae
on March 14, 2016*

A homeless man who died of exposure in Rome, four sisters of Mother Teresa's congregation killed in Yemen, the rising incidence of illness in "Terra dei Fuochi" — an area in southern Italy plagued with toxic waste — and refugees abandoned in the cold. These recent tragedies echoed in Francis' prayers during Mass at Santa Marta on Monday. "Lord, I don't understand, I don't know why this happens, but I trust in you," he said. It is a beautiful prayer, the only one possible, the Pope explained, and it is also the prayer of parents of disabled children afflicted with rare diseases. Facing the many "dark valleys" of our time, the only possible response is to trust in God who, Scripture reminds us, "never forsakes his people."

In fact, Pope Francis noted, referring to the Book of Daniel, "the Lord tries to make his people understand that they are close to him, that they walk with him" (13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62). He explained it in these terms: "Tell me, have you ever seen a people whose gods are as close to them as I am to you? Listen, I have accompanied you, I have walked beside you from the beginning, I taught you to walk, like a father with his child."

Indeed, the Pope stated, "God's closeness to his people is the message that he, Father, wants to give us; but the people do not manage to really understand him." Thus, "when they do understand him, they have the experience that we heard, the experience of Psalm 23[22]: "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me." Even when we are in a "dark valley", Francis emphasized, "the Lord is with us in these moments."

Thus, he continued, "the message that the liturgy offers us today with the story of Susanna, a righteous woman who is soiled by the wicked desire, the lust of these judges." Indeed, Susanna "has no way out: either she sins by doing what the judges want, or she is subject to the vengeance of these men."

In this situation Susanna prays to the Lord: "O eternal God, who dost discern what is secret, who art aware of all things before they come to be, thou knowest that these men have borne false witness against me." (v. 32) Thus, "even if I go through a dark valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me: this is Susanna's experience" but the Lord was with her, the Lord was close to her, walking with her as he had walked with the people, always, like a father, like a mother."

We too have the same experience today. We see "so many dark valleys, so many disasters, so many people dying of hunger, from wars, so many disabled children, so many." And if "you ask their parents: 'What disease does he have?'" their answer is: "Nobody knows: they say it is a

'rare disease.'" And, Francis affirmed, "that is what we do with our issues: 'let us consider cancer in 'Terra dei Fuochi.'" Indeed, he said, "when you see all of this," the question spontaneously arises: "Where is the Lord? Where are you? Are you walking with me?" This is precisely Susanna's feeling, and today it is ours as well."

As the Pope continued, he recalled the sisters of Mother Teresa's congregation killed recently in Yemen: "You see these four sisters slain: they served out of love, and they ended up slain out of hatred!" Moreover, he said, "when you see that doors are closed to refugees and they are left outside, in the elements, in the cold," the question returns: "Lord, where are you? How can I trust in you, if I see all these things?" Then, when "things happen to me, each of us might say: how can I trust in you?"

The Pontiff explained that "there is only one answer to this question." He emphasized: "It cannot be explained. I am not capable. Why does a child suffer? I don't know; it's a mystery to me. The only thing that gives me some light — not to the mind, to the soul — is Jesus in Gethsemane: 'Father, not this cup. But your will be done.'" Thus, Jesus "entrusts himself to the Father's will; Jesus knows that all does not end with death or with anguish, and his last words on the Cross: 'Father into your hands I entrust myself!' And thus he dies."

It is a true act of faith, "entrusting myself to God who walks with me, who walks with my people, who walks with the Church." So perhaps "I entrust myself" by saying: "I don't know why this happens, but I entrust myself: You will know why." And "this is what Jesus taught: those who entrust themselves to the Lord who is shepherd wants for nothing. Even should they walk through a dark valley, they know that evil is a temporary evil, but there will be no definitive evil because of the Lord: 'for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.'" This, the Pope clarified, "is a grace we have to ask for: 'Lord, teach me to entrust myself to your hands, for you never disappoint, you are faithful.'"

In conclusion, Francis suggested that we "think today about our life, about the problems we have, and ask for the grace to entrust ourselves to God's hands." Let us also think, he added, "of the many people who do not even have a last caress at the moment of death: three days ago, a homeless man died here on the street, he died of exposure. In the middle of Rome, a city with every possibility to help." And thus the question returned: "Why, Lord? Not even a caress! But I entrust myself to you because you do not disappoint; I do not understand." The words "Lord, I don't understand", the Pope said, are "a beautiful prayer." Thus, even "without understanding, I entrust myself to your hands." □ (by L'OR in English, n.11,2016)

THAT SUITCASE

by Pierluigi Menato (TA by ID)*

As soon as it was three, the director of "Whinehouse & Co" was about to leave his desk as his secretary was bringing him some more papers to sign. He told her: "Go and search for Sam Morten and tell him to sit in for me, I must leave at once."

The secretary hastily gathered the files and registers from the table and reached the door. Shaking her red mop of disheveled hair she shyly wished him: "Happy journey, Sir!" and shut the door behind her.

The director raised his head in a nod of thanks. He spoke little and his employees were in awe of him. The company "Whinehouse & Co" worked very efficiently under his direction. Alex Senghin was clever and had a penchant for business; a mechanical engineer, he was passionate about machines, devices, accounts. He found great satisfaction in the work of his company. A bachelor, rich and rather reserved, at thirty-five he fell in love with his profession; it became the one love of his life.

Alex glanced at his wristwatch once more; gathered the papers on his desk and put them into his top drawer. He rose and walked to the coat tree, took the coat off the rack and said to himself: "I've just got time to pick up a sandwich and dash to the station."

There was a knock just at that moment. Alex was about to protest when the usual face of his secretary reappeared to say that Prof. Ralph Sophren absolutely needed to talk to him. He nodded and stood beside his desk again: "So let's meet the professor."

But this sudden visit was to upset all his plans. He would surely have to take another train, sleep in a hotel and meet his sister the following morning rather than this evening and postpone a little chat he would have liked to have with his brother-in-law.

The professor came in: he was stout, red-faced and he breathed heavily. From his waistcoat pocket dangled a heavy gold chain.

"Dear Alex, just four words and I'll beat it."

As he settled in the armchair across he breathed a loud sigh of relief that made Alex laugh spontaneously. Being pretty refined he too sat down.

"Alex my dear, I've come here at the express wish of my wife and my daughter - and there he paused - to invite you to a lunch we are hosting in honour of Francis who has just come out of hospital after that terrible car accident."

Alex had to laugh as he only laughed rarely. Francis, a nice boy, who had nothing to do with these



schemes; it was the lady of the house, a kind of rich bourgeois who had everything to do with it. She had her eye on him as a prob-

able and desired husband for his only daughter: a thin, blond, gaunt frail girl who was absolutely oblivious of him but on the other hand she had a name he liked very much: Luisa.

"So, we'll certainly be looking forward to seeing you this evening," concluded the professor, as he stroked the gold chain that dangled from his waistcoat pocket.

"I'm so sorry," said Alex though secretly within himself he was so relieved that his plan had worked out so well, "I'm just so sorry, professor, I'm travelling out of town tonight. I've got to meet my sister on an emergency."

The face of the professor registered grave disappointment and uneasiness. Alex thought about his wife's reproaches that would be forthcoming:

"Be careful, if you can't bring Alex to Francis' lunch."

Apparently the lady had a marked preference for him: she would call up everyday and she would be joined by the bland voice of Luisa. Without even wanting to, her voice would draw up the slight figure of the young girl with bony shoulders, a sickly pallor and a weak smile that revealed yellowing teeth. Yes, there was nothing to say. If someone wanted her money, there was a nice nest egg in the bank with adjoining property and houses but he just couldn't imagine that.

So be it, after much fruitless pleading the professor got up. He got Alex to promise that he would visit them to make up for this refusal. He walked with the elderly professor to his luxury sedan, a little damp caused by a slight drizzle and smiled at him almost paternally.

Another glance at his watch: it was ten to four. The train would leave in twenty minutes. There was just enough time to call Marietta to tell her to bring his suitcase to the station because he absolutely wanted to get out of here.

Marietta, all out of breath and disheveled, her cheeks red and bristling from the chill, arrived barely in time to hand Alex his suitcase.

Alex sat in front of a very elegant lady, heavily made up, who was looking desperately for some way to strike up a conversation with Alex but fascinated as he was, he raised his eyes to his suitcase, the one that Marietta had given to him on the station.

His eyes suddenly had a sparkle of bemusement. That case had been hidden in the attic closet for God only know how long. How did she find it? Not that it was old-fashioned or ugly; in fact it looked pretty good with labels of various hotels from around the country and abroad. But he detested it, as one detests something that brings him bad luck.

Memories came flooding back as if having escaped from some prison where they were roosting with his past. Today the suitcase reminded him of the time he was in love with another Louisa, a very different girl from the professor's daughter. They had met in high school: classmates, acquaintances and perhaps a little more. They had some great holidays by the seaside together; they had cherished and loved each other.

At some point peremptorily however, the family forbade them from seeing each other. Alex

Senghin had arrived at Louisa's house as agreed, to spend a weekend her at the end of May. He was received by her father in the living room. He left his waterproof and suitcase at the door. Without any preamble Louisa's father told him that for some time now she was seeing another gentleman, a friend of the family and liked and accepted by everyone they knew, so there was no need for him to insist on pursuing the relationship. The director asked to speak to Louisa but was told that she was abroad. Alex felt his heart ache with rage and pain. He wanted some further explanation but that was futile. The following days were terrible...

Then a long time passed by and the pressures of the firm flooded Alex's mind. But since that terrible day he hadn't seen the suitcase again; it was holed up in the attic with some rags and detritus of the home... probably gnawed by mice!

Instead, looking at it dusted and spruced up like new, the case seemed to grin at him from the luggage rack and this seemed to rekindle the old rage within him.

The train was late and got in well past midnight; it was too late to call his sister. He would do that the following morning. The hotel was a short walk from the station. He would spend the night there.

As he walked in the dark the handle of his suitcase seemed to burn his fingers as if it was wrapped by a thousand devils. In his disappointment and exhaustion he arbitrarily thought that: for using this suitcase he should fire Marietta. The room at the hotel was small and cold: Alex felt his veins freeze. Reluctantly he opened his



case to get undressed for the night. As he looked into the familiar suitcase he realised that Marietta, the poor girl had thought of everything. That thought succeeded in calming Alex; on second thought he wouldn't fire her. What had she done? All she did was that she thought it appropriate to put the case back to use otherwise it would have remained forgotten in the attic.

Inserting his hand into the inside pocket of the case, he found a letter. He took it out: it was a long envelope yellowed with time, intact and it bore his name. He immediately recognized the handwriting. Nervously he tore the rim and took out a sheet of paper with very fine writing, a little discoloured with time. The letter began: "My dearest Alex."

He had the urge to tear it into tiny pieces; he wanted to close his eyes so as to prevent him reading anything so he wouldn't suffer and wouldn't remember. But, goaded by some inner voice he went to the bedside lamp and in one go read

on till he reached the signature at the end. Was it possible? Was it a deception, an unfair joke, his love, their dreams? He seemed to get out of that prison of spells. No, he couldn't forget it! Not even his job had been able to erase Louisa from his heart. He saw her sweet face once more, a little bent because her thick locks of black hair fell over her brow and her beautiful eyes; so beautiful, so honest... they couldn't lie!

He reread the letter: Louisa pleaded with him to forgive her father who wanted to betroth her to someone else. She assured him of her loyalty; she hoped that the letter she had hidden in his suitcase while he talked to her father in the living room that distant day in late May would bring to his aching heart the certainty of her love.

And the letter had remained undetected for all these years now, like the suitcase in the large cupboard in the attic. No one had noticed it. And Louisa, where was she now? What was she doing? Perhaps considering his ingratitude she had acceded to her father's wish.

Suddenly Alex understood that his job was wonderful, but Louisa was worth much more; eight years had passed but it seemed like just a few days. This thought raised his hopes, brushed away his sufferings and increased his love.

He couldn't sleep: in the dim light the darkness scared him. He remembered as a child, how scared he was of the dark. He saw the suitcase; it seemed to be teasing him, mocking him, telling him: "I hid your secret for eight years and if Marietta hadn't been there...!"

Now: he needed to be grateful to Marietta, the poor girl deserved

it! And what if Louisa was no longer single? What if those dark thoughts returned to torment him?

He cast them aside and got up just before dawn; getting himself ready very carefully he went to meet his sister. They spoke of business, of the acquisitions of the company as if nothing had happened. In his nervousness he smoked constantly. He wanted to hear the news of his nephews and nieces. Then he suddenly said:

"Tell me, have you heard anything of Louisa?"

His sister looked at him and smiled:

"Louisa? She's been here for the past three months."

"Is she single?"

The man's heart beat wildly.

"With her mother."

"Can I call her?"

"Go ahead."

In the meantime, his sister hid her satisfied smile.

"Hello?"

He heard that familiar voice and he understood. They spoke for a while and decided to see each other... He put down the receiver and said:

"I'll marry Louisa."

Three days later at the house of the professor, another Luisa shut herself in her room weeping. Her mother sick with a headache gave orders that she was to receive no one. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 14

by Michele Molineris sdb

45. Grigio (1852)

A feeling of gratitude was so rooted in the heart of Don Bosco; it was enough for him to have experienced just one good turn from someone and it turned into an undying memory in return. They say that those who have a good turn done to them are often ungrateful and unhappy. Don Bosco definitely escaped that kind of a mindset. Up to the end of his life he never forgot his benefactors, reserving for them honours that were due to such kind of people; those who, when he was young and done him some simple favour. Among those for whom he bore such undying gratitude were the owners of the Moglia farmstead. He never missed an opportunity to visit them every time he was in that region.

One evening in October 1866 he reached there. It was already dark and because he had tarried longer than expected at the rectory of Buttigliera. Moreover, because it was threatening to rain, the roads would turn muddy and filled with potholes. He ventured anyway, so as not to miss the opportunity, but just after he left Moriondo he lost his way and found himself encountering unfamiliar obstacles.

When he was already drenched in perspiration and rain, there stood before him two mastiffs barring his way. There was an air of seriousness about them. It was then that Don Bosco sighed: "Ah, if only I had my Grigio how much better I would feel!" No sooner had he said this than, as if in a fairy tale,

the dog appeared by his side. It was taller and more massive than the two in front of him and Grigio had a bark that frightened anyone. When the two mastiffs insisted in their hostile attitude, Grigio confronted them one by one and sent them home so battered that they no longer had the strength even to bark.

The beast then took Don Bosco under its protection, leading him in the right direction right up to the door of the Moglia farmstead where, after Don Bosco's narration of the events the dog received impressive compliments. They also offered him dinner but the dog refused. Later when they looked for him to give him a corner where he could sleep the night, they couldn't find him at all. He had left without saying goodbye, but also...without opening the door.

Who was this dog that refused



to eat; that appeared without being called at the right time and disappearing without even opening the door? Even Don Bosco wanted to know. He asked himself this question every time he saw the dog; but was never able to find an answer, except this: it was perhaps an extraordinary means that the Lord used to help resolve certain situations in which, through his zeal, he found himself in.

And it was not just he who saw the dog, except on rare occasions when he encountered some non-existent obstacles or difficult situations inexplicable occasions. Mamma Margaret, who had both her feet firmly on the ground, also saw him and so did his collaborators and his students. They saw him, felt his presence and even heard him. He was beaten by some and caressed by others, accused or commended too; his enemies not only heard him but saw him. But Grigio ignored all that only for the joy of protecting Don Bosco who was so universally loved.

Those who saw it even tried to describe it as did Charles Tomatis who said: "It looked like a wolf, with an elongated snout, straight ears, grey and a meter tall." It was really impressive-looking and according to Mamma Margaret who saw him for the first time exclaimed: Oh, the ugly beast! A brute, more because of its appearance and the respect it commanded, but extremely providential for poor Don Bosco who, in those days, lived outside the city.

In those days there houses only up to the asylum that was built in 1828 on the Contrada of San Maximo; now Corso Regina Margherita. Some ruffians and those who took advantage of that

deserted space which precisely overlooked the hospital, set traps there to teach him (Don Bosco) lessons. Among the most persistent and dangerous were the Protestants who could not forgive him for the "Catholic Readings". They were often armed and out to get him without any warning.

The first time the dog appeared was in 1852. It was evening and he was returning home late unaccompanied and defenceless. When he suddenly saw the dog near him he couldn't hide his fear at seeing a beast of such proportions following him. However that fear did not last very long. He was soon grateful when he realized that rather than attacking him, it growled fiercely and in the end it did not expect any appreciation.

Because it appeared so many times it is worth mentioning what happened in 1854 when he was accosted by two individuals who were determined to do him in at any cost. Don Bosco noticed that those two, shrouded in their long cloaks, as was the custom, intentionally walked ahead of him. He was aware of the fact that he if he slowed down so did they and if he speeded up, so do they. If he stopped they would stop, evidently they did not want to lose sight of him. They wanted him to reach a deserted place.

At a certain point to free himself Don Bosco made as if he were retreating and they were immediately upon him. Their cloaks served to immobilize him and their scarves to close his mouth to prevent him from calling for help. It was at that point that - no one knows from where - 'Grigio' came to re-

store the balance of forces.

The dog flung itself with its paws against one of those assailants and forced him to remove the cloak from Don Bosco's head to defend himself; then it threw itself against the other and in no time he bit the second assailant and knocked him down. The first, seeing how badly things had turned out tried to escape but 'Grigio' threw itself on his shoulders and pinned him to the ground where he lay motionless. The dog continued to bark looking at the two assailants as if warning them: "Woe to you if you try to move."

At this sudden turn of events the two rascals shouted: "Call off this dog!" "I'll call him off," said Don Bosco, "But let me go about my business." "Okay, okay, go ahead but call him off quickly." They shouted again. "Grigio, come here" said Don Bosco.

And the obedient dog came and stood by him, leaving those criminals free to scamper off. Despite this unexpected defence, Don Bosco did not feel like making his way home just yet, instead he briefly entered the nearby Cottolengo institute. There he recovered somewhat from the fright and after being treated to their charity and cordiality he felt refreshed enough to resume his journey to the Oratory accompanied by a reliable and sizable escort.

* * *

Another evening as it was getting dark and he was returning home on the Corso Regina Margherita, an individual who was following him suddenly placed himself behind an elm tree and shot him twice with a pistol. Both shots failed so he rushed over to Don Bosco to finish him another

way; but at that instant Grigio appeared and rushed ferociously at the aggressor, putting him to flight and then the dog accompanied Don Bosco to the Oratory.

* * *

Another time, rather than accompanying him home, Grigio prevented him from leaving the house. Because he had forgotten an errand during the day, he had to go out late that evening. Mamma Margaret tried to dissuade him but he assured her not to be afraid. He would call some young men to keep him company and he walked to the gate where he found Grigio lying down.

Oh Grigio, - he exclaimed, - even better, we're one more. Get up then - he said to the dog and come along. But instead of obeying, the dog emitted a fearful kind of growl but didn't move. Twice Don Bosco tried to pass by him, and twice Grigio refused to let him pass. Some of the youngsters tried to move him along with their feet but he responded with a frightening bark. Good mamma Margaret then told Don Bosco: "If you won't listen to your mother at least listen to the dog; don't go out tonight." Seeing his mother so worried Don Bosco decided to satisfy her wishes and he went back into the house.

A quarter of an hour hadn't passed when a neighbour came to see him and advised him to be careful because he had heard that there were three or four people who were roaming around Valdocco and had decided to deal with him once and for all. □

SALESIAN SAINTS

BL. ALEXANDRINA DA COSTA 1904 - 1955 SALESIAN COOPERATOR, BLESSED

She was born in Balasar in the province of Oporto in the archdiocese of Braga (Portugal) on March 30, 1904 and was baptized on April 2, Holy Saturday. She was educated in the faith by her mother and her sister Deolinda. Alexandrina remained with her family till she was seven and then was sent to live with the family of a carpenter so she might attend a primary school which Balasar did not have. It was there that she received her First Communion in 1911 and the following year her confirmation from the bishop of Oporto.

Eighteen months later she returned to Balasar to stay with her mother and sister at a place called "Calvary" where she remained up to the time of her death. She possessed a happy and communicative temperament and was loved immensely by her companions. At the age of twelve she fell ill and traces of the disease would mark her for the rest of her life.

At the age of fourteen a decisive event occurred in her life; it was Holy Saturday 1918. That day, she, her sister Deolinda and an apprentice were intent on their sewing work when they realized that three men were trying to enter their room



which they managed to break down despite the doors being closed. To save her threatened purity she did not hesitate to throw herself out of the window from a height of four metres. The consequences were terrible though not immediate. Her condition was irreversible and as the paralysis progressed more and more; the pain became excruciating, her joints lost their mobility and she was completely paralyzed. Alexandrina took to her bed on April 14, 1925 and would never get up again for the remaining thirty years of her life.

Till 1928 she constantly asked the Lord, through the intercession of the Madonna for the grace of healing, promising that if she were healed she would become a missionary. But as soon as she understood that suffering was her vocation, she embraced it promptly. She said: "Our Lady gave me an even greater grace: first the resignation, then complete conformity to the will of God and finally, the desire to suffer." The first mys-

tical phenomena date back to when Alexandrina began a life of great union with Jesus in the tabernacles, through Mary Most Holy. From 1934, at the invitation of a Jesuit priest, Mariano Pinho, who was her spiritual director till 1941, Alexandrina wrote down what Jesus said to her from time to time.

In 1936, Jesus ordered her to ask the Holy Father, through her spiritual father Pinho, for the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She renewed this plea several times until 1941, because of which the Holy See interrogated the Archbishop of Braga on Alexandrina thrice. From October 3, 1938 to March 24, 1942 she experienced the Passion every Friday. Overcoming her usual state of paralysis, Alexandrina got out of bed and with movements and gestures, in excruciating pain, reproduced the different moments of the Way of the Cross for three and a half hours. "To love, to suffer, to make reparation" was the programme that the Lord had pointed out to her.

On October 31, 1942, Pope Pius XII consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary with a message sent to Fatima in Portuguese. From March 27, 1942 onwards Alexandrina stopped eating. She lived only on the Eucharist.

In 1944 her new spiritual director, the Salesian Father Umberto Maria Pasquale encouraged Alexandrina to continue writing her diary after having ascertained the spiritual heights to which she had reached; she did this in a spirit of obedience until her death. That same year, 1944 Alexandrina

joined the Union of Salesian Cooperators. She wanted the certificate "to be placed where she could always see it" so that she could collaborate through her pain in the salvation of souls, especially youth. She prayed and suffered for the sanctification of the Cooperators all over the world.

Especially in her last years, many people even from very far away flocked to her attracted by the fame of her sanctity and several attributed their conversion to her advice.

In 1950 Alexandrina celebrated the 25th year of her immobility. On January 7, 1955 Jesus announced to her that that would be the year of her death. On October 12, she asked to receive the Anointing of the Sick. On October 13, the anniversary of Our Lady's last appearance at Fatima, she was heard to exclaim: "I am happy because I'm going to heaven." At 7.30 she died. On the afternoon of October 15, florists all over Oporto ran out of white roses. They were sold out: floral tributes to Alexandrina who had been the white rose of Jesus.

In 1978 her remains were transferred from the cemetery of Balasar to the parish church where it rests in a side chapel. On her tomb we read these words that she wanted inscribed there: "Sinners, if the ashes of my body can in any way be used to save you, come closer, pass over them, trample on them until they disappear. But do not sin anymore; do not offend our Jesus anymore!" That was the summary of her life, a life spent exclusively to save souls. □



DOING GOD'S WILL IS MAKING HIM PRESENT HERE, TODAY (MK 3, 31-35)

by Don Giorgio Chatrian

Jesus enters a house in a terrible crush of people; he can't even eat. The scribes are having a discussion with those who believed that he was possessed by Beelzebub. Just then, his mother and relatives arrive. Only Mark reports that they stood outside the house and "sent for him". Mary's silence after the words of Jesus is stunning: "Who is my mother? Whoever does the will of the Father is my brother, sister and mother" (Mk 3,31-35). Mary must have always listened in silence to the questions people asked themselves after Jesus' intervention in the Synagogue on the Sabbath: "Who is this wise man capable of such prodigies? Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mk 6,3)

Let us, who are Christians today, who bear the name of Jesus, ask ourselves who, in a sense are his relatives? And where are they? Lost and insignificant among atheists, indifferent, traditionalists, 'do-it-yourself' devotees, takers of shortcuts...

In the end, a Christian is one who, in a visible way, has made his own, the way of seeing, thinking, acting and

speaking of Christ so that he feels a son of God, the almighty and merciful Father.

This was always the plan of our God; it was what He has wanted for us. To do His will then means accepting His plan of love and to welcome his Kingdom.

And yet, deep down, those who do not do God's will are those who, having taken Christ out of their lives, find themselves forced to do their own wills or rather the whims of those who believe themselves to be the navel of the world!

But in that there is no miracle that captivates and announces the Kingdom of Jesus; it just sounds hollow and empty.

There is need of silent witnesses, like Mary.

"It's true that in my life I have had so many hints that my son was not just mine but yours, O Father. Already the announcement of his extraordinary birth convinced me to walk in step with you and not with my fiancé waiting to complete my dream by marrying the man I loved.

Again, the star, the stable, the shepherds, the magi, Simeon and Anna in the temple; the prank (or so we thought it) at the age of twelve, remaining in the temple were all signs that he was not just for himself. I realized confusedly at first, but then more and more clearly that He was really your Son, the long awaited Messiah.

But then came those long years when I saw him grow up like all the other boys; he came home with his clothes torn because he had fallen down while he was running around with his friends in the town square of Nazareth. As he grew older he followed in his family's footsteps as happens so often especially in families in the countryside.

Then at a certain point everything changed. I learned from some of my friends that he spoke of a Kingdom of God where all are brothers and sisters and it is the poor and the simple who are blessed not the rich and the powerful.

Some of our relatives pointed these things out to me and, seeing his behaviour and finding it really strange, they concluded that he was a bit out of his mind.

My son, crazy? Father, how is such a thing possible?

I felt as if a sword had pierced my heart: I really had to meet him and tell him to be careful, to look after himself a little. Word was passed on to him, and they told him that his relatives were waiting for him outside.

The words of Jesus, in the form of a question was his reply ('Who is my mother, who are my brothers? The one who does the will of God is for me my brother, sister and mother'). That made me hold

my breath and someone interpreted that pause as embarrassment in the face of this reproach.

In fact, I realized that my union with Jesus goes far beyond biology, seeing how His friends, disciples behaved and how he referred to them as His mother, or brothers and sisters; how they followed him, making their own His plans, His way of reading life and His way of acting in the concrete situations of everyday.

They had become men of peace, humble and lived balanced lives alternating prayer and action. They also knew how to be tough and intransigent with those who didn't listen to Christ, but they were consistent to the fullest in living out what He asked of them. In short, they did Your will, becoming like Him, O Father. To do your will. . .

I felt a great peace descend on my heart because I realized that, in every moment of my life, together with Jesus, I had actually done Your will since the day I said 'Yes' to the angel you sent up to today when I accepted that Jesus left my house and dedicated Himself completely to you in His mission.

This was the real way of being the mother of Jesus, but it was a gift, not a privilege. It is also true for all those who bear the name of Christian. May they say, praying truthfully: "Father, your will be done." I promise you that as I preceded them on this journey, I accompany them everyday even when doing your will means going against the tide; I pray that they welcome this opportunity that is offered to them.

Enlighten them too, O Father, as you enlightened me." □

NEWSBITS

ROME

In March 2019 Pope Francis said at the end of his general audience: "Dear brothers and sisters, today we have the joy of having with us a person who I wish to introduce you. It is Sister Maria Concetta Esu of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Joseph of Genoni. Why do I do this? Sister Maria Concetta is 85 years old and has been a missionary nun in Africa for almost 60 years, where she works as a midwife. I met her in Bangui, when I went to open the Jubilee of Mercy," the Pope said amid the applause of the faithful and while the nun held the sheets of the text to prevent them from flying. There she told me that in her life she helped to give birth to thousands of children. What a wonder! That day, too, she came from Congo by canoe, when she was 85 years old, to do her shopping in Bangui. These days she came to Rome for a meeting with her sisters, and today she came to the audience with her Superior. So I thought I'd take advantage of this opportunity to give her a sign of gratitude and say a big thank you for her testimony! Dear Sister - said Francis who gave the nun a medal of the pontificate and a rosary - in my name and that of the Church, I give you this honour.



It is a sign of our affection and our "thank you" for all the work you have done among the African sisters and brothers, in the service of life, of children, of mothers, of families. With this gesture, I intend to express my gratitude also to all the missionaries, priests, religious and laity, who sow the seeds of the Kingdom of God in every part of the world. Your work is great. You "consumed" your life by sowing the word of God with your witness... And in this world you do not make news, you are not news in the newspapers. Cardinal Hummes often goes to visit the villages of the Amazon and every time he goes to the cemetery and visits the tombs of the missionaries, many young people who have died of diseases, and he told me: all of them deserve to be canonized because they have "consumed" their lives. Dear brothers and sisters - concluded the Pope - Sister Maria Concetta, after this commitment, will return to Africa. Let us accompany her with prayer. And may her example help us all to live the Gospel wherever we are. Thank you, Sister! May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you! □ *La Stampa - Jacopo Scaramuzzi*





TO SUCH AS THESE HE GIVES HIS PEACE

By John M. Cunningham, OP

Tertullian, an African theologian born about 155 AD, converted to Christianity about 193 AD. Except for St. Augustine, he is the most important and original ecclesiastical author in Latin. In 206 AD before abandoning the Church for a misguided sect he wrote the best of his three works on marriage, *To His Wife*. In this work he urges his wife to choose a Christian and not a pagan husband should she choose to marry again after his death. To encourage her to choose a Christian husband he describes the happiness to be found when two people united in one faith are made one in the Sacrament of Matrimony: "How shall we ever be able ad-

equately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the Sacrifice strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, at which angels are present as witnesses, and to which the Father gives His consent?

How beautiful, then, the marriage of two Christians, two who are one in hope, one in desire, one in the religion they practice. They are as brother and sister, both servants of the same Master. Nothing divides them, either in flesh or in spirit. They are, in very truth, two in one flesh; and where there is but one flesh there is also but one spirit. They pray together, they worship together, they fast together: instructing one another, encouraging one another, strengthening one another. Side by side they visit God's church and partake of God's banquet; side by side they face difficulties and persecution, share their consolations. They have no secrets from one another; they never shun each other's company; they never bring sorrow to each other's hearts.

Psalms and hymns they sing to one another, striving to see which one of them will chant more beautifully the praises of their Lord. Hearing and seeing this, Christ rejoices. To such as these He gives His peace. Where there are two together, there also He is present, and where He is, there evil is not." □

POLLUTION

Pollution affects the air, the ground, the water, the fish, animals, fruit, vegetables. Acid rain, depletion of the ozone layer, global warming - is nature going mad? But it is we who have changed everything. It is we who are destroying nature, and it is destroying us in return. Until we protect every little thing on earth, nature cannot protect us.

Sr. Stan Kennedy in *Gardening the Soul*

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

The Tip of the Tongue

Two students were just going into the classroom for an examination in English literature.

"Great Scott!" said one, "I've forgotten who wrote Ivanhoe!"

"That's easy," replied the other, "I'll tell you that if you tell me who the Dickens wrote 'A Tale of Two Cities.'"

For the Long Haul

Scotsman (at a riding academy): "I wish to rent a horse."

Groom: "How long?"

Scotsman: "The longest you've got laddie. There are five of us going."

Flying Maths

"If there were four flies on the desk, Eleanor, and I killed one, how many would there be left?"

"One," promptly replied Eleanor. "The dead one."

Perfect Tact

A customer sat down at a table in a smart restaurant and tied a napkin around his neck. The scandalized manager called a waiter and instructed him. "Try and make him understand as tactfully as possible that that's not done."

Said the thoughtful waiter to the customer: "Pardon me, sir. Shave or haircut, sir?" □

Form IV

Statement of ownership and other particulars about the newspaper:

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Dated: March 1, 2020

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.

I profusely thank Jesus Christ and Mother Mary for having granted me and my family many favours during the last year through the prayerful recitation of the Three Hail Marys. I will be ever grateful for their blessings. I firmly believe and hope that Jesus Christ and Mother Mary will guide and help my daughters and my grandchildren in the difficulties they might face in the years ahead. Your continuous blessings is our strength.
Meenakshi

I am sincerely grateful to my dear Mother Mary, through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys I was blessed with a baby girl.



Rodrigues **THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO**

Our grateful thanks to Jesus Christ, our Almighty King, Mother Mary, our Queen and St. Dominic Savio for blessing my daughter and son-in-law in Canada and making them proud parents for the first time with a cute and healthy baby after nine years of marriage. My great desire was to be with my daughter for her delivery at least a month ahead so I could assist her, but somehow my work in Goa could not be completed; also from day one of the news of her pregnancy we prayed fervently for Divine Protection and to our amazement my daughter had a safe delivery; she came home and the next day her office granted her a year's maternity leave. Blessed Mother Mary's gentle hands took over when I could not make it for her delivery. In gratitude the baby is named 'Valencielle - Maria.'

Fatima Vaz, Mumbai

My grateful thanks to the Holy Trinity, Holy Family, Don Bosco, Dominic Savio and all the Angels and Saints, for the gift of a baby girl to my grand-daughter Amanda

Bertha Pereira,

Mumbai 2020

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Don Bosco's Madonna

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

We are very thankful to the Holy Family, Our Lady of Velankanni and St. Jude for hearing our prayers.
Theresa (Chennai)

Mary was there

On 30th November 2018, my son with his wife and daughter, were travelling by taxi from Mumbai International Airport to Pune at about 4 am. My son was in front with safety belt on and his wife Julia, six months pregnant, was sitting at the back with her daughter Olivia. An hour from Mumbai, near Vashi, they met with an accident. The car hit a parked truck. The impact was so severe, the bonnet was severely damaged. My son suffered some some minor bruises. His daughter who slept on her mother's lap at the back, was thrown up front. My daughter-in-law sustained some bruises and blood clots on her body. It was about 5 am when I received the message from the travel agency about the accident. I phoned up to my son to confirm it. We immediately, started reciting Rosary to our Divine Mother. While they were in great shock, anguish and worried on the road, Mother Mary sent someone to help them, a Good Samaritan came by car, picked up all of them and took them to the nearest Fortis Hospital. He arranged the first aid and medical check-up of my daughter-in-law a she felt that her baby was motionless. My son and his daughter both miraculously escaped with minor injuries. On reaching the hospital the duty Medical Officer examined my daughter-in-law with various tests and found the baby in the womb safe. Everyone was astonished by the miraculous escape. I firmly believe that our children's lives were spared through the timely protection of our Heavenly Mother.

Francis Xavier and

Philomena Francis, Pune My sincere and grateful thanks to our Mother Mary, St. Anthony and St. Jude for a suitable life partner for my daughter and for the many favours obtained by their powerful intercession.
J.M. Mumbai

I wholeheartedly and sincerely thank Mother Mary for the gift of a job after a long struggle and for all the blessings received.

Robert D'Costa, Mumbai

Our sincere thanks to Our Heavenly Mother for favours received.

Violet Pereira and Family, Mumbai

My heartfelt thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary and my three patron saints for finding my sister's mobile
A Devotee

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER MARCH 2019

Catholics in China

We pray that the Church in China may persevere in its faithfulness to the Gospel and grow in unity.

March 2020

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MARY WAS THERE

My son Sasi George lost his job and for three years he was unable to find any other employment. He has a speech defect. We were praying to the Divine Mercy and Mother Mary. After four years he found a job of his choice. Every day I used to pray a Rosary for this special intention. I knew Our Blessed Mother would certainly listen to my prayers because I am a widow. My sincere thanks for this and for all the other graces received.

Santhamma George,

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.

To help a poor lad to reach the priesthood, is a privilege

You can help by establishing a Perpetual Burse with:

Rs 5000/-, 10,000/-, 15,000/- for a boy studying for the priesthood;

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Please address all correspondence to:

**Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, sdb.,
SHRINE OF DON BOSCO'S MADONNA,
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Phone/Fax: 91-22- 2414 6320, email: dbmshrine@gmail.com