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***Confirm in our minds
 the mysteries of
 the true faith,
 we pray, O Lord,
 so that, confessing that
 he who was conceived
 of the Virgin Mary
 is true God and true man,
 we may, through
 the saving power
 of his Resurrection,
 merit to attain eternal joy.***

*(Post Communion Prayer of the
 Solemnity of the Annunciation)*

From The Editor's Desk
 YOU NEVER WALK ALONE

I love watching children play, especially small children. Their total absorption, exuberance, and sheer joy in the fun of it all is better than any tonic. Recently, at the beach, I observed a young father engaging in a game of hide-and-seek with his two small children. When it was their turn to hide, the children chose obvious spots. The six-year-old girl hid first behind a boulder and then behind a car. Her three-year-old brother crouched down and covered his head with his hands, trying to make himself as small as possible; he must have thought he was making himself invisible.

When it was the father's turn to hide, he decided to take a different approach. Rather than hiding in the obvious places, he blended in with the crowd of beachgoers. At first, the children were excited, expecting to find him in one of the spots where he had found them. However, when they couldn't locate him, their excitement turned into anxiety, and they began to call out, "Daddy! Daddy!"

Suddenly, the young child realized that Daddy was nowhere to be found. Panic set in, and he screamed in terror, "Daddy, please come back!" His father, hearing the scream, rushed across the sand, scooped his son up in his arms, and held him close. Once the child's sobs had eased, his father gently said, "David, I was here all the time."

The incident reminded me of a story I read long ago about courage. During an initiation ceremony, a twelve-year-old American Indian boy faced his final test—a night alone in a dark, supposedly haunted forest.

As he grasped his father's stern hand, fear engulfed him. At the darkest point, his father released his grip. Before leaving, he pointed to a large black rock ahead, where the boy was to spend a solitary night testing his bravery.

That night was pitch black and felt endless to the boy. The sleepless hours dragged on, intensifying his fear with every rustle and movement in the forest. Was that a snake he heard? What kind of wild animal might be lurking nearby? Above all, was he surrounded by the evil spirits that haunted his thoughts? After what felt like an eternity, he finally noticed a faint lightening of the darkness as dawn's fingers began to brush the eastern sky. Gradually, black turned to grey, allowing him to see the trees silhouetted against the sky. To his astonishment, he spotted the tall figure of a man standing still among the trees, only twenty yards away. It was his father, smiling at him with pride. He had been there all along.

This is how I believe God works. He is closer to us than we realize, especially in moments of loneliness, despair, or confusion in the dark chapters of our lives. He is always present, reminding us that we are never truly alone.

Fr. Ian Doultton, sdb

PEACE BEGINS IN THE FAMILY

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

In the covenant of love, which is the identity of a family, each person can look at the other as similar to himself, as a person loved and forgiven by God.

Every New Year begins with the World Day of Peace and it is followed by the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity but peace seems to be missing. It's already the month of March and we've heard of atrocious killings in the US and the continuing torture and suffering in the Middle East. We should have begun with peace however, we continue to witness horrific wars that stain our land, including the land where Jesus lived.

Throughout his life, Jesus faced provocation on various social and political issues, including the rule of the Roman Empire, taxation, and the roots of evil and violence. Each time, he redirected the conversation back to the deep-

seated origins of evil—the troubled hearts of humanity and the forgetfulness of God. This forgetfulness started when Adam blamed Eve and continued with Cain killing Abel.

Above all, instead of simply telling others what was right, Jesus made specific choices. He said to Peter in the Garden of Olives, "Put your sword back in its sheath," demonstrating a commitment to the consequences of a profound choice for love (John 18:11). While Jesus chose a path of nonviolence and self-love, he never hesitated to defend others against injustice and abuse. It's important to remember that justice is the foundation of true love; without it, we will struggle



**Peace is
a profound and
complex fruit, one
that we can only
experience in
fragments. Yet
even those
fragments hold
significant value.**

to soften the hardness of our hearts.

Peace is not merely the absence of war or the rejection of revenge, nor is it just a willingness to forgive. These are byproducts, but the tree that produces them is rooted in enduring covenants—first and foremost, the covenant with God, who in Christ embraces humanity and restores our esteem, trust, love, and friendship.

Peace is a small seed that we are all called to nurture and help grow, beginning with our families. These families are built on the differences between men and women, who must learn to embrace a diversity that often leads to conflicts, causes divisions, breaks bonds, and can even lead to tragic events such as femicide.

In the covenant of love, which defines a family's identity, each person can see the other as similar to themselves, as someone loved and forgiven by God. A believer perceives their neighbour through God's eyes: "You are important to me; I value you, I love you,

and I care about your well-being." When each of us—every man and woman—seeks the good of those around us, we begin to create the peace that the Gospel speaks of—a peace that originates from the heart.

Concrete peace requires us to set aside all intolerance in our thoughts, words, and actions. It calls us to know others with the humility of those who do not presume to understand everything. Too often, we view others solely from our perspective, seeing them as potential enemies rather than individuals who can enrich our humanity.

Peace necessitates dialogue, encounters, mutual trust, respect, and understanding for each person, culture, and religious belief. Engaging in dialogue does not require us to abandon our own identity; only those with fragile identities fear losing them in the exchange. A sincere and authentic Christian recognizes dialogue as an opportunity for personal growth, appreciating the unique gifts that others can offer.

We recognize the scarcity and fragility of our words. In the face of a few loaves and 5,000 people to feed, the twelve asked, "What is this to so many?" (John 6:9). We ponder this question as we witness the dramas unfolding around us every day. This month, we ask God to help us understand that the foundation of peace must begin at home, starting from each of our hearts—a nourishing gift for humanity. □

THE HEART THAT CHANGES THE WORLD

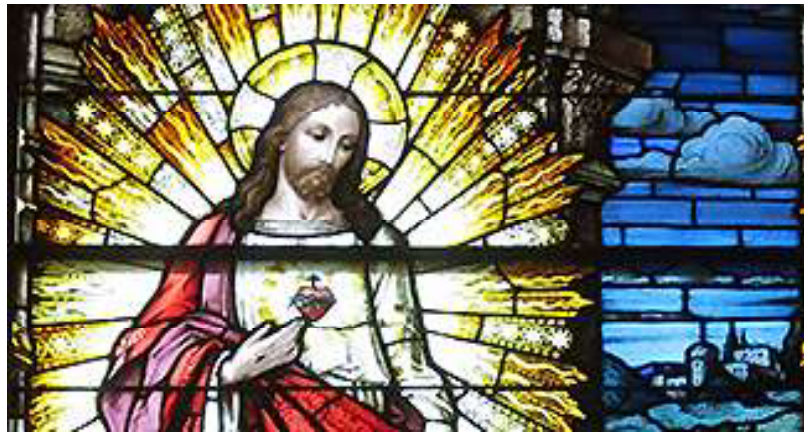
**It is dedicated to the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ!
It is the fourth encyclical!
of Pope Francis**

“He loved us,” says St. Paul, referring to Christ (Rom. 8:37), “so that we might discover that from this love, nothing can ever separate us” (Rom. 8:39). This is how Pope Francis begins his fourth encyclical, titled “Dilexit Nos” (He Loved Us), which focuses on both the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ. The encyclical was presented at the Vatican Press Office on October 24, 2024.

In announcing the document’s preparation at the end of the general audience on June 5, the Pontiff emphasized that it aims to help people meditate on aspects

of the Lord’s love that can illuminate the path of ecclesial renewal, as well as convey meaningful insights to a world that seems to have lost its heart. This announcement coincided with ongoing celebrations for the 350th anniversary of the first manifestation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1673, which will conclude on June 27, 2025.

The encyclical is released during the tumultuous years of the 21st century, characterized by violent and horrific wars, significant social and economic injustices, rampant consumerism, and



emerging technologies that pose threats to the human spirit. A Vatican note indicates that “through this document, the Pontiff calls for a change in perspective, goals, and a revival of the heart.”

Beginning with a brief introduction and divided into five chapters, the encyclical brings together valuable insights from previous teachings and a long history rooted in the Holy Scriptures. Its purpose is to re-present this worship, filled with spiritual beauty, to the entire Church today.

The essential elements of devotion to the Heart of Christ have been part of the Church’s spirituality throughout its history. From the beginning, the Church has looked to the Heart of Christ, pierced on the cross. However, devotion to the Sacred Heart in its modern sense began with St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) in his work “The Treatise on the Love of God - Theodotion,” which presents the history of the world as a “history of love” reflected in the Heart of Jesus.

Additionally, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque played a significant role in this devotion. On December 27, 1673, Jesus appeared to the 26-year-old French Visitation nun and entrusted her with the mission to spread His love for humanity, especially for sinners. The apparitions at the convent of Paray-le-Monial in Burgundy continued for 17 years. During these manifestations, Sister Margaret described seeing the Heart of Jesus on a throne of flames, surrounded by a crown of

thorns—a symbol of the wounds caused by sin. Jesus requested that the Friday after Corpus Christi be designated as the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In 1856, Pope Pius IX extended the feast of the Sacred Heart to the entire Church. This led to the establishment of male and female congregations, as well as the founding of universities, such as the “Cattolica” in Milan, alongside numerous churches and chapels dedicated to this devotion.

In 1956, Pius XII’s encyclical “*Haurietis Aquas*” aimed to revive the cult of the Sacred Heart, describing it as “a banner of salvation for the modern world.” Pope Francis has consistently demonstrated a profound connection with the Sacred Heart. In 2016, at the conclusion of the “Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy,” he urged priests “to direct their hearts, like the Good Shepherd, toward the lost sheep, toward those who are most distant, moving the epicentre of their hearts outside themselves. The heart of Christ is the center of mercy.”

“Dilexit Nos” follows “Lumen Fidei” (June 29, 2013), “Laudato Si” (May 24, 2015), which addresses the environmental crisis and the need for caring for creation and our common home, and “Fratelli Tutti” (October 3, 2020), which emphasizes the urgency of fraternity and social friendship in a world fragmented by wars and conflicts, often fought in the name of God. □

REASONS TO BELIEVE - 3

by Franco Molinari

God, if you're there, knock!

I don't believe in God because I cannot see Him. However, consider a mother who is expecting a child; she does not see her baby yet, but she feels the life within her. This feeling inspires her to dedicate her entire life to preparing for the child, setting up a cradle, and dreaming about the future.

The absence of sight does not prove that something does not exist; it merely indicates that it is an invisible reality. There are countless invisible entities around us. For example, we cannot see electricity, but the effects of electricity are undeniable.

Writer Roberto Gervaso once asked scientist Antonino Zichichi, "Does science prove the existence of God?" Zichichi provided a balanced response: "Science operates in the immanent, while God belongs to the transcendent. Science can never prove whether God exists or does not exist. However, science is currently our only proof that nature is not simply a book written at random by a madman. Does that seem insignificant to you?"

It is significant that even an anticlerical figure like Giuseppe

Garibaldi, as an observant Mason, subscribed to the idea of the Great Architect of the Universe. He detested the pope due to the excommunicated *Risorgimento* but maintained his love for God. He referred to Pius IX as "a cubic meter of dung," yet he also expressed, "A factory reveals the Architect to me. The harmony of the worlds manifests the great Regulator." The Freemason Garibaldi wholeheartedly agreed with the inspired St. Paul, who stated in the first chapter of the Letter to the Romans: "The wrath of God is manifested from heaven against the impiety and injustice of men who hold the truth captive to iniquity, for what can be known about God is manifest in them; God Himself has made it clear to them."

The universe acts as a visible mirror of the invisible Creator. A poet once said, "Wherever I turn my gaze, immense God, I see You; in Your works, I admire You, and I recognize You in me." I don't believe in God merely because I can't see Him.

Consider a mother expecting a child; she does not see her baby, yet she feels him so vividly that she directs her entire life toward

him, prepares a cradle, and dreams of the future. The fact that something is not seen does not disprove its existence; it only highlights that it is an invisible reality.

There are countless invisible entities around us. For instance, electricity cannot be seen, but its effects are undeniable.

These verses by Metastasio highlight two pathways to faith: the grandeur of the world and humanity's self-awareness ("I recognize you in me"). The innocent gaze of a child, the majesty of the moon, the vastness of the sea, the delicacy of a flower, and countless other phenomena serve as signs pointing toward faith. Great philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, have constructed the map leading to the house of God.

Recently, Domenico Modugno stated, "Just look up at the evening sky; even if there are clouds, who cares? Plato felt the presence of the heavenly spheres when he walked on the beach. I believe there is something immense and mysterious about it. The mere fact that we are here, contemplating it and discussing it, is already a testament to that."

The great discovery only occurs when a person re-enters their consciousness. The silence of reflection is the most direct pathway to the Transcendent. Why do you search for what is already within your heart, seeking goodness, forgiveness, and truth far from you?

God Himself defines His nature by saying, "I am He who scrutinizes the thoughts and affections

of the soul" (Rev. 2:23).

Of course, faith involves risk. Prezzolini's book is aptly titled "God is a Risk." Yet, this risk is akin to love; it is worth taking. It is better to love imperfectly than to never love at all, because God is Love.

They call him the "Soccer Saint" due to his deep religious belief. When asked by a reporter from *Il Giorno* about the ranking of things that matter, Zico sweetly replied, "First of all, family; my faith in God; then soccer, which is very important; friends; good relations with people; affection; and love" (*Il Giorno*, 6/15/1983). Thus, it is untrue that "golden feet" have faith only in the god of football. Zico firmly believes in the Triune-God.

A Threatening God

A Masonic friend once confessed to me, "I am Catholic, but I am secular and tolerant of all religious denominations. I do not like the exclusivity of the Church, although I accept its doctrine."

Dear Masonic friend, I dedicate this note to you on the topic of a threatening God. First and foremost, let me clarify that Jesus of Nazareth was meek and humble of heart, and he never preached exclusivity. On the contrary, he promoted benevolence toward dissenters, forgiveness of sinners, love for enemies, and compassion for executioners as the foundational principles of the Kingdom.

The Honourable Aldo Moro, before he was tragically gunned down, shook hands with his brutal executors. He was one of the twentieth century's embodi-



ment of Christ, praying for his tormentors, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The Gospel serves as a powerful guide for understanding, so much so that Voltaire references the compassionate and humble teacher of Galilee, citing the Sermon on the Mount as a foundation for tolerance.

However, there is another, even more significant passage: Matthew chapter 25, which speaks of the final judgment. It's important to note that Matthew's Gospel is directed toward the Jews, who associated salvation not only with the chosen people but also with a complicated system of practices. These included Circumcision, the sacrifice of certain animals, the strict observance of the Sabbath, and a meticulous distinction between pure and impure foods.

In this context, Jesus teaches that the sole commandment pertaining to the final judgment is love. Heaven will not welcome those who have not made an effort to overcome their selfishness.

The essential key that opens the pearly gates is this: "I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me; I was sick, and you cared for me. I was naked, and you clothed me; I was in prison, and you visited me."

A true citizen of the Kingdom is not merely someone who says, "Lord, Lord," but rather the one who actively does the will of the Father and genuinely loves their neighbour. This message is both simple and profound, so much so

that Jesus could not have drawn it from the traditions of his time. His teachings originated from a higher source.

I yield the floor to a renowned priest's follower who shares how he transformed his life from one of sin to one of faith. Francis Carnelutti, a distinguished lawyer and university professor of criminal law, discovered a small gospel left behind in a train compartment. As he opened it at random, his gaze fell upon Matthew chapter 25. He recounts, "My attention was drawn to Jesus' words, 'I was in prison, and you came to see me.' My clients flashed before my eyes: thieves, rapists, murderers, parricides, and all those whose humanity had been reduced to almost a bestial state. God identified with these criminals. Christ did not say He was present only among political prisoners or the innocent, but rather with the simple criminals themselves. Upon reflection, I realized that no human could have invented such a doctrine; no delusional community could have arrived at this level of identification. Only the Creator of this flawed humanity could have expressed such understanding." Following this profound experience, the atheist Carnelutti raised his hands and surrendered to God.

Throughout the centuries, it must be acknowledged that Christians' behaviour has not always aligned with the Gospel of love, as stated in the Vatican II decree on religious freedom. However, Catholicism has now overcome the temptation of intolerance. □

THE FIVE BIGGEST REGRETS

Bronnie Ware worked as a caregiver to the terminally ill. This work led her to write "*The Five Greatest Regrets of Those About to Die*." The book was a worldwide success.

Here is a list of the top 5 regrets that people experience at the point of death:

Regret 1: I wish I had had the courage to live a life true to my principles and not the one that others expected of me

We live in a world focused on appearances and judgments. We often navigate our lives by conforming to what others expect of us or by fearing their evaluations. This approach can lead us to act against our own principles and ignore what our hearts truly desire. One of the most common regrets stems from this behaviour, causing deep pain when we realize our mistakes too late. As time begins to run short, our perspectives shift; what once seemed important becomes trivial, while what we took for granted transforms into something essential. We often find ourselves regretting that we didn't recognize its significance sooner.

Regret 2: I wish I hadn't worked so hard

Living a happy life means finding balance in all things: work, family, passions...

When we spend more time on one thing than another, we disrupt our balance, leading to regrets about not dedicating enough precious time to our family or passions. Now, imagine not having the opportunity to enjoy the presence of your wife, husband, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, or any of your loved ones.



How would you feel knowing you devoted most of your life to work without *being able to appreciate time with your loved ones?*

Regret 3: I wish I had the courage to express my feelings. The inability to communicate our feelings for the people we love is one of the greatest challenges of our time.

We often hesitate to open up and be sincere due to the pain that can come from honesty, even if that pain is just simple embarrassment. Many qualities that characterized us as children, such as sincerity, purity, and transparency, tend to fade away as we grow older. As a result, we may find ourselves feeling isolated and alone.

The fear of pain, rejection, and judgment leads us to build walls that separate us from others. Unfortunately, these walls cause us to miss out on some of the most precious moments of our lives.

Regret 4: I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends

"The thing I miss most of all is my friendships. Some of my friends have passed away, while others are in situations similar to mine. I have also lost contact with some friends who are still around, and I wish that hadn't happened. You think friends will always be there, but life goes on, and suddenly you find yourself without anyone who truly understands you or knows your story."

This widespread regret is no accident. We are social beings, driven by an instinct to develop relationships and seek connection with others, even if it's just to pass the time. Loneliness is a significant issue in our society today. A true

friend is someone who can help and support you through life.

A friend is the one person who can best understand how you feel—or at least come close—because with a friend, you can open up without the fear of being judged. That's what a true friend does: they listen to you, help you, and support you.

Regret 5: I wish I'd allowed myself to be happier

"Every day is a gift, you know. It has always been that way, but only now have I slowed down enough to appreciate the incredible beauty each day offers us. We tend to take so many things for granted."

"We can choose to be happy every day and act as if we are." We can become anything we want if we simply give ourselves the opportunity.

Gratitude, when practiced daily throughout your life, is a powerful force. Often, we find ourselves focusing on our desires—wanting more money, more relationships, more possessions. While this drive can motivate us to pursue our goals, it may also become counterproductive in the long run if we don't balance it with an equal force.

That balancing force is gratitude. By appreciating what we already have, we engage in one of the most important practices for our wellbeing. Embracing each new day on this Earth, living in the present moment (which is the only true moment), and enjoying even the smallest things—like a pen or hot water—helps us to recognize and focus on the abundance that is already present in our lives. □

BL. MARCEL CALLO March 19

Ian Pinto, sdb

The month was December, the year was 1921. The weather was cold in France, not only because it was winter there but also because it had been only about three years since the First World War that had decimated Europe. France was deeply involved in the War and the aftereffects were still enduring. One of the effects of the War was migration. People migrated because they were displaced or they migrated because the economy of their own land was in dire straits. Plenty of Italians moved to the neighbouring countries, particularly France in search of better fortunes.

It was at this time, in Rennes, France, that Marcelo and Felicita, an Italian couple, welcomed their second child, a boy whom they named Marcelo after his father. Marcelo or Marcel as it is pronounced in French, was a lively child who showed a genuine sensitivity to those around him. He was helpful around the house, and diligent in carrying out the chores assigned to him, besides chipping in to look after his younger siblings.

The Callo family had nine children, one of whom went on to become a priest. Since there were many mouths to feed, Marcel went into the workforce early. He was only 13 when he went to work for a printer. He picked up the trade well and would use his free time to wrestle



with his siblings and friends, play football, table tennis and cards. His liveliness and sense of humour endeared him to others. However, he distanced himself from other workers at the print shop on account of their crass behaviour.

YOUNG AND IN LOVE

One of the interesting experiences of youth is falling in love. Young people tend to pair up easily. It is becoming more and



more common to find 'couples' around the schoolyard and in parks and public places. While a lot of it is just puppy love, such experiments sometimes grow into stable relationships. While coupling is natural, the when and what of it is the real cause for concern. Younger and younger children are getting into the game of having a 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend.' More often than not, they are not even fully aware of what this means but due to peer pressure and thirst for status, they seek out a 'partner.'

Marcel, for all his youthfulness and energy, was a very level-headed man. He shared the virility of the youth of his time but he did not endorse or share in their amorous adventures. He is noted as saying, "I am not one to amuse myself with the heart of a lady, since my love is pure and noble. One must master his heart before he can give it to the one that is chosen for him by Christ." What profound words! It is almost hard to believe that a twenty-year-old could have uttered them! But these were indeed the words of Marcel, and they give us insight into his pious and pure heart.

Marcel was deeply in love with a girl by the name of Marguerite Derniaux. In fact, they went on to get engaged after a year or two of dating. All the while Marcel was learning to master his heart and to mould it after the heart of Christ. Such was the nature of their courtship that they would spend their dates not merely going out for entertainment and dinner but attending mass and other spiritual activities together.

How many couples married and unmarried can we find of this kind? How many couples take the spirituality of their marriage seriously?

Marcel gives us an example about growing in love. It is easy to fall in love with someone; growing in love is the challenge. For most people today, love is all about sex and feeling good. If these things are hampered or missing, the divorce card is played. As a result, marriage has lost its sanctity. The words of Marcel offer guidance to all those who wish to learn the art of falling in love—'master your heart before you can give it to someone.'

WORKING FOR GOD

From a young age, Marcel learned to work hard. Not only was he exemplary in work, he was exemplary in character too. He would spend some part of his breaks kneeling in a corner of the print shop praying, especially to the Blessed Mother, to whom he had a great devotion. One of his often repeated prayers was, "Mother, remember I am Thine own. Keep me and guard me as Thy property and possession." While his colleagues mocked him initially, they grew to respect him.

Aware of his exemplary conduct, his parish priest introduced him to the Young Christian Workers Movement (Jeunesse Ouvrierees Chretienne or JOC) which was growing in popularity in France and other parts of the world. Marcel immersed himself wholly into the activities of the group and outdid all the others

with his zeal and goodness. Incidentally, it was here that he met Marguerite. He was elected leader while only 20 years old and used his role to influence the lives of others for the better. One of his companions testified, "Marcel changed me for the better and I am grateful to him. He taught me to pray and to understand the Mass better...He lived his faith, not for an audience but with sincerity."

By this time, the Second World War was underway and France was at war again. When a nearby town was bombed, and volunteers were requested, Marcel and other JOC members offered their help. Marcel's sister was killed in that bombing, and according to biographers, it was he who found her body under a heap of rubble. This experience triggered something in him. He galvanized JOC members to offer their services to the needy. He would take a group and would regularly visit train stations to assist refugees who were fleeing the war.

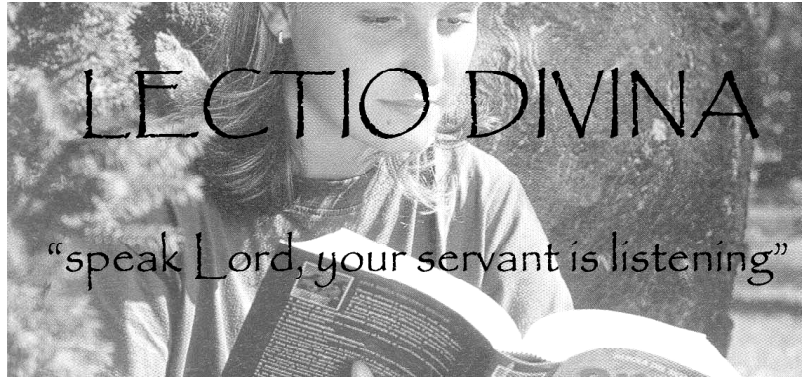
The dreadful call to join the national army came to him. He was thinking of running away but his family was threatened and so he reluctantly went saying, "I'm leaving not as a worker but as a missionary in the service of my companions." While in service, he was captured by the Gestapo who used his membership in JOC to indict him and brand him an enemy of the state. Thus, began his trial in various concentration camps of Germany and Austria.

In opposition to the sullenness

of the concentration camp, Marcel exhibited a joy that could only have come from Christ. In the face of absolute hopelessness and despair, Marcel found a way to be cheerful and hopeful. Instead of giving in to the depression that the camp facilitated, he opened himself to the grace of God that inspired him to be a missionary of hope to his fellow men. He began to organize activities in the camp and even gathered a group around a priest who would offer mass in secret. This proved to be all-to-much for the guards who were irked at him for being 'too much of a Catholic.'

His final days were spent in Mauthausen, Austria where he was subjected to long hours of rigorous labour and physical abuse. The unsanitary conditions coupled with the inhuman treatment destroyed his health and led to his demise on 19 March, 1945. He was buried in a mass grave outside the walls of the camp and his remains remain untraced. One of the officers in the camp, Colonel Tibido testified at his beatification saying, "Marcel had the look of a saint...I have never seen in a dying man a look like his."

Marcel died working for the Lord and became a real missionary of hope. He penned these wonderful words which summarize beautifully his brief yet powerful life: "We are often bad instruments in God's hands, because we have bad habits, bad inclinations. We become good instruments when we centre our lives around Christ...Every day, I must become, little by little, more like Christ."□



THE LORD IS TRIED AND TESTED

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

Reading: Take a few moments to read the Gospel passage slowly and attentively. Allow the words to sink in and listen to what God may be speaking to you through this text: Gospel Passage: Luke 4:1-13

Meditation: let us read the reflection given by Pope Benedict XVI, in the general audience Angelus, 13-03-2011

This Sunday marks the beginning of Lent, a significant forty-day liturgical season inviting us to prepare for Easter. We follow Jesus as He moves toward the Cross, the pinnacle of His mission of salvation. The question arises: Why Lent? Why the Cross? The answer lies in the existence of evil – specifically, sin, identified in Scripture as the root of all evil. While many may reject the notion of sin, it

loses meaning without an understanding of God’s presence.

To grasp the true nature of sin – distinct from mere guilt – we must acknowledge God. This is echoed in the Psalm *Miserere* by King David, who confesses, “Against you, against you alone, have I sinned” (Psalm 51:6).

God stands against sin, extending love to sinners. He does not desire the death of the sinner but seeks their conversion and life. Lent is a journey towards understanding that God desires a transformative relationship with us.

God’s intervention to save humanity is evident throughout



the history of the Jewish people, starting with their liberation from Egypt. The most serious form of slavery is sin, which is why God sent His Son to liberate us from Satan’s dominion. Jesus came as a sacrificial victim, dying for our sins.

The Devil resisted this plan, highlighted in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ temptations in the desert read each year on the First Sunday of Lent. Entering this season means choosing to align ourselves with Christ against sin and engaging in the spiritual battle against evil, both as individuals and as a Church.

Reflection Questions:

1. **The Role of the Holy Spirit:** Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. How does the Holy Spirit guide you in your own life, especially during times of trial or temptation?

2. **Temptations of the Flesh:** The first temptation was to turn stones into bread. Reflect on your own desires and needs. How do you balance physical needs with spiritual nourishment? What are the “stones” in your life that you seek to turn into “bread”?

3. **Power and Authority:** The second temptation involved power and authority. In what ways do you seek power or control in your life? How can you redirect that desire toward serving God and others?

4. **Testing God:** The third temptation was to test God’s protection. How do you respond to challenges in your faith?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as we enter this Lenten season, we ask for the

strength to resist temptation as Your Son did. Help us to rely on Your Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May we grow in our understanding of true nourishment and the importance of serving You alone. Grant us the grace to trust in Your providence and to deepen our relationship with You. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Contemplation:

Spend a few moments in silence, reflecting on the presence of Jesus in the wilderness, facing temptation. Allow yourself to be enveloped in His peace and strength.

Action:

- **Spiritual Nourishment:** Identify one way to deepen your spiritual nourishment this Lent. This could involve daily prayer, scripture reading, or participating in a Lenten retreat.

- **Service to Others:** Find an opportunity to serve others this week, reflecting Jesus’ call to worship and serve God alone.

- **Trust in God:** Write down a challenge or temptation you are currently facing. Pray over it and ask God for the strength to trust Him in this situation. Consider sharing this with a trusted friend or spiritual mentor for support.

The First Sunday of Lent calls us to reflect on the temptations faced by Jesus and to consider our own struggles. Through this Lectio Divina, may we be inspired to rely on the Holy Spirit, deepen our trust in God, and grow in our commitment to spiritual nourishment as we journey through this sacred season. □

Quiet Spaces

FACED WITH MYSTERY

Pope Francis' Homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Wednesday 25 May 2020

Introduction

Today, Feast of the Incarnation of the Lord, the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, who direct, who have served in the Santa Marta Dispensary for 98 years, and are here at Mass, are renewing their vows together with their sisters in every part of the world. I would like to offer the Mass today for them, for their Congregation which always works with the sick, the poorest, as it has been here for 98 years, and for all the Sisters who are working at the moment taking care of the sick and also risking their lives and giving their lives.

Homily

The evangelist Luke (see 1:26-38) was able to know about this [event] only from the account given by Our Lady. Listening to Luke, we have heard Our Lady who tells about this mystery. We are faced with mystery. Perhaps the best thing we can do now is to reread this passage, thinking that it is Our Lady who recounts it.

In that time, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin, betrothed to a man of the house of David, named Joseph. The virgin was called Mary. He came to her and said: "Hail, favoured one! The Lord is with you". But she was greatly troubled by these words and wondered what a greeting like this might mean. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him



the throne of David His father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end". And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word". And the angel departed from her.

This is the mystery. And now the sisters will renew their vows.

Prayer for spiritual communion

Those who cannot participate in Communion will make a spiritual communion: At Your feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer You repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in Your holy presence. I adore You in the Sacrament of Your love, the ineffable Eucharist. I desire to receive You into the poor dwelling that my heart offers You. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental communion, I wish to possess You in spirit. Come to me, O my Jesus, since I, for my part, am coming to You! May Your love embrace my whole being in life and in death. I believe in You, I hope in You, I love You. Amen. □

THE BROACH OF GOLD

By Pierluigi Menato, TA/ID

When she opened her eyes most mornings, a longing to sing filled her heart which yearned to take flight like larks. She felt truly happy with her life and her love.

In that large house, which welcomed the sunny street, came the distant breath of the sea, the gentle puff of breeze, the scent of wisteria from the nun's garden just behind the wall, and the sound of countless footsteps. Running boys dashed by, women strolled with shopping bags in their arms, and a few shadows turned past the corner of the church into the small, sleepy stone square.

This was in the morning, just after dawn, when Suzette would rise cheerfully to set the house in order. She would go outside barefoot, slip into her felt slippers, and raising her mind and heart to God, she offered silent prayers through the burning passion of her soul, through which she sought to realise her infinitely passionate dream.

The awakened world responded to her: green branches beyond the little wall began to stir, birds in their nests were flying high in the morning light, stones along the road, and grasses growing among the rocks all seemed to sigh in acknowledgement. It was unclear whether this sigh was the scent of incense, the harmony of an organ, or the rhythms of the nuns' prayers.

As she returned, there were many tasks to complete: cleaning the house, watering the flowers, touching her trinkets with gentle

fingers, and dreaming happily while she worked.

Suzette was very happy. Growing up in that big house with so many siblings, she possessed a wonderful gift: she loved everyone generously and openly, and in return, her family loved her deeply. Her brothers cherished her immensely. She had a way of touching their hearts, and every moment of her life resonated like a harp string, filling the house with profound music.

Those who knew her instantly fell in love with her. She had a slender figure, two gentle white hands, a thoughtful brow, and large, clear, sweet eyes.

When she passed by, it felt as if spring were in the air, bringing the fragrance of fields, the scent of the woods, the sound of flowing streams, and the warmth of sunshine carried by the wind over the water.

Vittorio realized this when he met her. A few years older than Suzette, he had fought hard and struggled for both life and his work. Finding Suzette as he walked aimlessly toward the future was like rediscovering himself as a child, embracing a love for simple and pure things, along with a deep faith and a striving for a love that strove to be eternal.

They got engaged, and their love affair was bright, though brief. Suzette dreamed of a family and a home of her own, a place she could love and care for as if it were a shrine. Each night, she vowed to light the lamp of her fidelity there.

The trousseau was being pre-

pared, and every moment felt right to add a stitch to the fabric, a leaf to the embroidery, or a delicate tear to the lace. She couldn't find the right time to step outside in the morning, to listen to the sounds of the street, and raise her joined hands towards the sun. Everything was ready, even her heart. Like the dawn, Suzette was poised to embrace her new life.

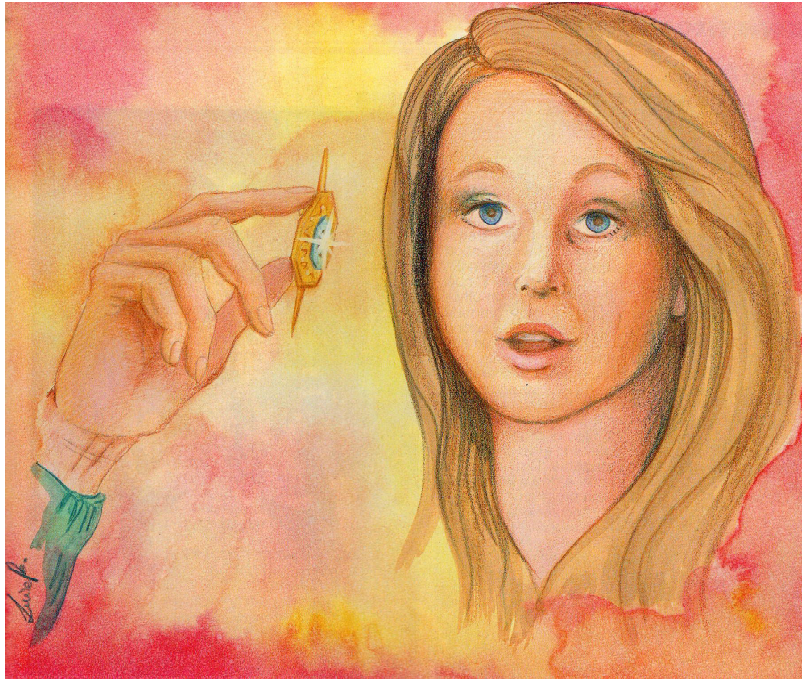
But then, unexpectedly one day Vittorio fell ill and left, departing for Paradise; a saintly lad that he was, that had always been his dream.

Suzette was engulfed in grief. The pain was so overwhelming that at times she felt crushed; at

other times, she thought she might collapse on the road, mingling with the grass among the stones. Yet still, she often imagined meeting Vittorio again in a sunny glade beyond the little wall, amid the greenery of the nuns' garden.

She had placed a large photograph of her deceased love on one corner of the coffee table and placed a vase of blooming daisies in front of it. Sometimes, when she felt overwhelmed, she would sit beside the coffee table, cross her arms, and weep silently, with great tenderness. Amidst a mist of tears, she would look at her little gold ring, a bead of sunlight that connected her life to the





eternal. She would kiss it and find comfort.

Then her mother appeared, radiantly beautiful with her silver hair, and spoke softly to Suzette. She told her that deep suffering was necessary to become pious and good, but it was also essential to live, hope, and love. Her mother wrapped her arm around Suzette, and the gentle gesture immediately soothed her sadness.

From that point on, she began her inner journey: living generously, putting others before herself, always giving and never asking for anything in return. She reached out to Vittorio through the innocence of the underprivileged kids. She graduated as a teacher, despite never having taught in a school, and helped

them with their homework. In their still bright eyes, she found a glimpse of heaven.

Thus, the years passed.

The engagement ring continued to circle her finger like a ray of sunshine. Suzette believed she should part with it, sell it, and use the money to do an act of charity in honour of her beloved as well.

She shared her thoughts with her mother.

Her mother, suppressing her emotions and stroking her daughter's hair, said, "What you do is worthy of you. Give me your ring. In turn, I will turn it into an act of charity, just as you wish." The ring that fell into her mother's hand, looked like a flame in a white amphora. Time passed, and Suzette was unable to forget that moment when she

surrendered the ring. Each day, she renewed the flowers on the coffee table before the photograph of her beloved, who was not there. She prayed, worked in his name, and waited to reach him, purifying herself and trying to forget.

One morning, on Easter Sunday, her mother pinned a gold brooch to her breast. After selling the ring and buying clothes and books for her Suzette's poor boys, she had purchased a brooch with the leftover money. It sparkled like a flame, radiating warmth

like a ray of sunshine. Suzette cried, and with tear-filled eyes, she gazed into her mother's eyes which were bright and smarting with tears too. Her quiet voice said, "Oh, mamma, you have truly transformed my ring into an act of charity. You didn't want it to be a sorrowful reminder; you renewed it so that, pinned over my heart, he would never leave me again."

With her head resting on her mother's breast, Suzette felt that amidst her suffering, she now possessed a little bit of heaven. □

Form IV

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I, Fr. Ian Doulton, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated: March 1, 2025

Sd/-
Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 62

by Michele Molineris

277. Forgive him and bless me (1881)

In June 1881, Fr Lasagna accompanied Don Bosco to Liguria and witnessed an act that only a saint could perform. Monsignor Boraggini, the bishop of Savona, had a disagreement with Fr Monateri, the director of Varazze. This conflict arose because Fr Monateri did not send a priest from the college to a church in the mountains behind the city, as the bishop had requested for a customary religious service. Additionally, there was a dispute regarding parish rights. However, Fr Monateri was in the right.

Don Bosco, who had accompanied Fr Lasagna to visit the bishop, knelt on the ground with both knees and folded hands. In a pleading tone, he said to the bishop, "Monsignor, I ask your pardon for the displeasure that Fr Monateri, the director of the Varazze boarding school, has caused you."

The bishop quickly responded, "But get up, Don Bosco! What are you doing? What are you doing?"

"I won't get up unless you first tell me that you forgive him," Don Bosco insisted.

"Yes, yes, I forgive him, I forgive him! But you should get up," the bishop replied.

At that point, Don Bosco rose, and they embraced each other warmly. (*M.B.*, XV, 35).

278. He had never done that! (1881)

On the morning of March 15, 1881, as expected, an invasion took place in Marseille. At least sixty people were loudly demanding to see him. One person claimed he was not well and could not receive visitors, but that did not deter anyone. Tired of waiting and sensing a moment of opportunity when the guards were distracted, the boldest among the group surged up to the second floor and began banging on the door.

He, having locked himself in and unaware of who was outside, decided to open it. He had never done that before! The crowd burst into the room, causing the startled man, who had been writing with his pen in his notebook. He had to flee into the adjacent room belonging to Fr Durando. However, they pursued him. Eventually, the Rector and other members of the household came to his aid, and after a considerable struggle, they managed to clear the apartment.

Weak, suffering, and breathless, he saw no escape except to take shelter with the curate of St. Joseph's. There, he rested until five o'clock in the evening, regaining some strength for the two demanding days ahead. (*M.B.*, XV, 48).

279. The fault is all and only mine(1881)

The text appears to be from Don Bosco's residence in Marseilles in 1881. It recounts a complaint made to him by the deserving Mrs. Prat, who had two married sons and a daughter

whose behaviour caused her great displeasure. In the past, she had asked Don Bosco to pray for her children, hoping they would find conversion.

Don Bosco, confident in the power of prayer, assured her that he would pray for them. However, when Mrs. Prat saw no improvement in her children's behaviour, she voiced her concerns to him.

With great humility, Don Bosco replied, "Yes, the fault is mine because I have not prayed enough" (*M.B.*, XV, 57).

280. God bless you (1881)

In Toulon in 1881, after the conference had concluded, Don Bosco, carrying a silver plate, walked around the church seeking contributions.

During this time, a noteworthy incident occurred. As Don Bosco presented the plate to a worker, the man turned his face away and shrugged his shoulders dismissively. Passing by, Don Bosco lovingly said, "God bless you."

In response, the worker reached into his pocket and dropped a penny into the plate. Don Bosco, gazing at him, replied, "God reward you."

The worker, encouraged, repeated the gesture and offered two pennies. Don Bosco responded, "Oh my dear, God rewards you more and more."

Hearing this, the man took out his purse and contributed one franc. Don Bosco looked at him with deep emotion and began to leave. However, the man, almost as if drawn by an invisible force, followed him through the church, into the

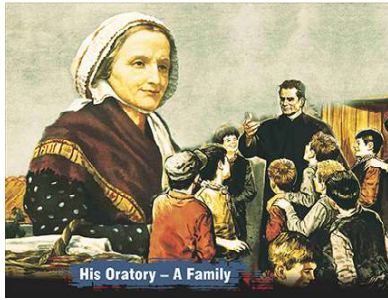


sacristy, and then out into the town. He continued to trail behind Don Bosco until he watched him disappear from sight. (*M.B.*, XV, 63).

281. They get into debt and they want me to bail them out (1881)

In 1881, a conference for cooperators was scheduled to take place in Nice on Friday, March 12. Poor Fr Ronchail, burdened by debts, had organized the event with great care. He owed thirty-six thousand francs to suppliers of the workshops, and because of this, the coadjutor Moro, who was a bookseller and administrator, no longer dared to order provisions for the house.

One evening, while walking with Moro in the courtyard, Don Bosco remarked, "They incur debts and expect Don Bosco to bail them out. But I



have no money." He then clasped his hands together in a gesture almost resembling prayer, and after a brief moment, he added, "Enough. I will pray to Our Lady to do what she can."

The rector took home over fourteen thousand francs from the conference. Even two Protestant ladies from England, went around the church collecting donations. A few days later, a French gentleman approached Don Bosco and mentioned that he wanted to contribute to his work, offering sixteen thousand francs.

Assuming the gentleman was proposing a loan, Don Bosco replied that he was so deeply in debt that he couldn't refuse such a sum, but he didn't know when or how he could repay it. The gentleman clarified that he wasn't offering a loan, but rather donating the sum to support the work of the Patronage.

Grateful, Don Bosco responded, "Don't give it to me; instead, arrange with Fr Ronchail to partially settle the debts." The gentleman followed through with this arrangement. Soon after, additional contributions arrived, which, combined with the previous ones, totalled forty-two thousand francs, as noted by the accounts manager. However,

he lacked all the necessary information to determine the final amount. (*M.B., XV, 65*).

282. Woman, harm (1881)

With his ever-present good-naturedness, Don Bosco provided a valuable lesson while dining at the home of Canon Fabris in Porto Maurizio in 1881. On the final day of his stay, two young ladies, the nieces of the canon, dined with him. One of them, rather flirtatious, allowed a young man at the table to address her with remarks that were not exactly inappropriate, but neither entirely respectful.

To put an end to these trivial jests, Don Bosco cheerfully mentioned that he recalled a sonnet he had memorized in his youth, in which the words "woman" and "harm" were cleverly played upon. He began reciting the first quatrain at a slow pace.

The young lady immediately understood the allusion and, feeling insulted, snapped back, "How could you, a guest in our house and at our table, dare to mock us?"

Seemingly unfazed by her insolence, Don Bosco continued to recite the rest of the poem with calm composure. The young lady became increasingly agitated, but he neither interrupted her nor acknowledged her further. The young gentleman also refrained from making any more advances.

When evening arrived, the niece, feeling as if a miracle had been performed by Don Bosco earlier that day, fell at his feet, asking for forgiveness for what had transpired during lunch. (*M.B., XV, 140*). □



MARY IN THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH

by Franco Careglio

The last two Marian documents of Pius XII hold significant places in the history of Mariology and the Catholic Church. The apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* is a magisterial document that addresses specific aspects of faith and has universal significance for the entire Catholic community. It is the second papal writing, following Pius IX's *Ineffabilis Deus*, in which the Pope, exercising his infallible authority on matters of faith, defines as truth a devotion that has been believed and honoured for centuries by all the faithful. This recognition underscores the cautious discernment of the Church.

However, it is important to note that while a devotion may be good and fruitful, leading to true conversions and inspiring love among many souls, this alone does not qualify it to be the foundation of faith. For a belief to be universally accepted as divine truth and elevated to the status of dogma, it must meet

certain criteria beyond its positive effects.

The ecumenical councils of the early centuries established key truths about the Blessed Virgin Mary. The councils of Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451), along with many other synods, clarified and confirmed her role as the Mother of God, her status as a virgin before, during, and after childbirth, her symbolism as the Church, and her unique role as a model for believers.

However, two major doctrines still needed to be defined: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, both of which had always been held in belief by the faithful. The first, the Immaculate Conception, was the subject of intense debate but was ultimately affirmed largely due to the efforts of the Franciscans and was defined as a dogma of faith by Blessed Pius IX. In contrast, the Assumption did not provoke controversy and had always been accepted with peace by both the

Eastern and Western Churches.

This understanding culminated in the 20th century when Pope Pius XII addressed these long-standing beliefs. On November 1, 1950, he issued a constitution with a solemn title that contained even more solemn content. The Pope, responding to the pleas of the Catholic community, first sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit to assist him in this significant undertaking.

The Assumption of Mary is deeply rooted in Sacred Scripture as interpreted by the Church Fathers and theologians throughout history. A careful examination of these studies reveals that the profound union between Mary and Jesus is twofold:

1. "Physical": Mary received the divine Word into her womb and clothed Him in our flesh, making her the Ark of the New Covenant and the dwelling place of the Incarnate Presence of God among us. Therefore, it is essential to reject the notion that Mary's body, so intimately united with Christ's humanity, could then be separated from Him and subjected to the corruption of the tomb.

2. "Moral": Mary, as the new Eve, played an integral role in the redemptive work of her Son, participating in the struggle against the devil, sin, and death. Just as the Resurrection represents the climax of the salvation achieved by Christ, it is fitting that Mary's unique and irreplaceable participation in this salvation be crowned by the glorification of her virginal body.

In essence, the Church recognizes that the Assumption is a direct consequence of the unique

bonds that connect Mary to Jesus, both physically and spiritually. Sacred Scripture powerfully conveys the special relationship between Mother and Son. Through a thorough reflection on the mystery of Mary, the Holy Spirit has also illuminated aspects of this truth that are not explicitly stated in the text.

Through the extensive prayers of the faithful, particularly those of consecrated souls, the sacrifices of missionaries, the pastoral efforts of priests, and the diligent study of theologians, the truth emerged in all its splendour. Pius XII recognized and endorsed this truth, affirming it as something to be believed and cherished even more deeply.

It is important to acknowledge the Eastern origins of the feast of the Assumption. Notably, St. Ephrem, an esteemed Doctor of the Church from Syria, noted that Mary's body did not experience corruption after her death. This idea is reflected in the tradition of the Eastern Church, which has celebrated the Transit or Dormition of Mary since mid-August.

Due to its extensive history, it is challenging to provide even a brief overview of the living and continuous veneration of the Assumption. Unlike the Immaculate Conception, which faced significant opposition, the Assumption had relatively few adversaries. There were some theologians with uncertain views, but the belief in the Assumption consistently aligned with the course of Church history. Pius XII meticulously detailed all the scriptural and patristic sources, declaring that Mary, the Mother of God — Immaculate and ever-virgin —

was assumed into heavenly glory, body and soul, after completing her earthly life.

The focus of the Assumption is not solely on Mary's body or soul but on her entire person. Thus, the question of whether Mary experienced death — a topic that has intrigued theologians and sparked various debates — can be set aside.

The Holy Father teaches that the fundamental principle underlying this belief is rooted in the decree of predestination. This decree indicates that from eternity, Mary is deeply united with Christ through her mission: "In other words, the similarity between the divine Mother and her divine Son suggests that Mary should be present wherever Christ is."

While "*Munificentissimus Deus*" holds significant theological importance, it does somewhat overlook the ecclesiological aspects of the Assumption, even though some hints regarding this dimension can be found within the text. For instance, it expresses hope that the mystery of the Assumption will inspire Christians to cultivate a greater desire to participate in the unity of the mystical body of Christ.

This limitation highlights the



The dogma of Mary's Assumption has found no particular theological obstacles and has always been widely believed by all God's people in both the West and the East.

state of Mariological and theological studies in the 1950s, a time when reflection on ecclesiology and the integration of each mystery of faith into the daily lives of believers had yet to be adequately developed. In other words, dogmas would hold little meaning if they remained merely printed in liturgical texts, rather than being actively lived out to enrich the lives and culture of believers with hope and deep understanding. The Second Vatican Council addressed this crucial aspect, which began more than forty years ago on October

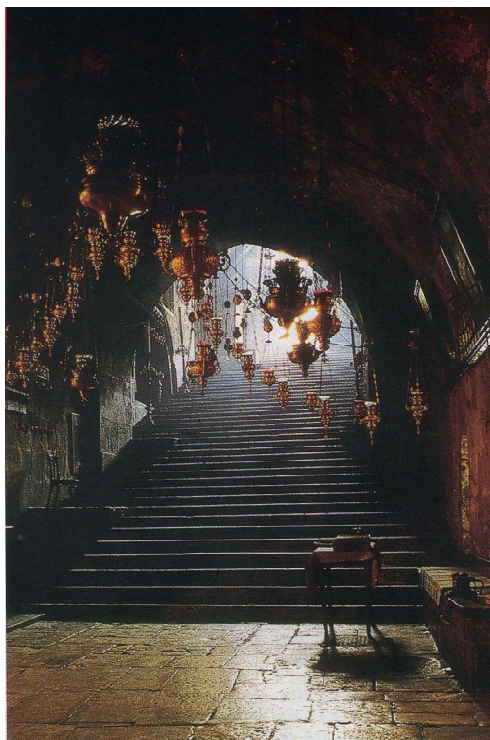
11, 1962.

Lumen Gentium teaches us that Mary's Assumption serves as both the image and the beginning of the Church of the future. For the People of God navigating the complex and challenging paths of history, she represents a sign of hope and consolation, showing that sacrifices can gradually lead to truth and salvation.

Pope Pius XII's last document related to Mary is the "*Sacro Vergente Anno*," dated July 7, 1952. This document is not an encyclical but a pontifical declaration. In this writing, the Pope consecrates the peoples of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

It is widely recognized that during those years, the situation for Christians in that nation was complicated, with no sign of peace on the horizon. Pope Pius XII, despite his illness and isolation, deeply immersed in his spiritual role and filled with love for God, realized that the only way to combat the pervasive hatred was to turn to the Mother of Mercy, the compassionate figure who alone could effectively intercede for the establishment of a "kingdom of justice and peace." Reading these reflections gives the impression of going back centuries, even though only fifty years have elapsed.

Today, history moves at an alarming pace, making it increasingly urgent for Christians to embrace the present moment.



Staircase of St. Mary's Church in the valley of Josaphat (Jerusalem). Known as the Tomb of Our Lady, it was part of a first-century funerary complex consisting of three rooms carved into the rock. This arrangement corresponds to the earliest indications in the second-century "Dormitio Verginis."

May the distant words of Pius XII inspire Christians of the Third Millennium to become vigilant sentinels of dawn, serving as proactive advocates for a fragile light of peace. Thus, may the presence of Mary, who contemplates and cherishes the past, be a source of hope for humanity, in spite of the shame brought on by hatred. May she act as the hidden heaven within this troubled world, assuring us that we are destined for life, not death. □



MY VOCATION STORY

FR. DUYA DONNIE DUCHIN

Director of the Philippine Salesian Bulletin

By Sarah Laporta

How did your vocation come about?

As a child, I participated in weekend activities organized by the catechists at my parish. I enjoyed learning about Bible stories and the lives of the saints. During that time, I had a deep desire to become a priest, although I wasn't sure how to pursue that path.

I did not attend a Don Bosco school until I entered the house of formation, but my encounter with a Salesian of Don Bosco occurred when I was 12 years old. His presence brought joy to me and my companions, and his inspiration nurtured my vocation to the priesthood.

Who first told you the story of Jesus?

I grew up with my father working overseas, so I learned most of the basics of my faith from my mother. She is a devotee of the Black Nazarene and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which are both very popular in the Philippines. Her regular attendance at Sunday Mass and her concrete expressions of faith made me aware of God's existence.

On weekends, I attended catechism classes at our parish. Interacting with children my own age helped me develop a sense of community.

During elementary school, I attended a public school where a



professional catechist visited on Wednesdays to prepare us for our first communion. These classes helped me understand the essentials of my faith in a more systematic way.

The story of my vocation

To begin with, I consider myself a "veteran" of life's many paths. I left the seminary just before entering the novitiate. After that, I took up a position as a teacher in a school in Manila, believing that I would find fulfillment in this role.

During my time as a teacher, I also worked for a publishing company that produced English textbooks marketed exclusively in Korea. In addition to that, I contributed articles and edited teaching materials for a Japanese company. With plenty of free time on my hands, I even took on the role of

an English tutor at a language school. Reflecting on that period, it amazes me to think that I was able to juggle three jobs at once! Despite earning a good salary, being drawn to the idea of working as a professor at a respected academic institution in the country, and enjoying what I did, I still felt unfulfilled. I believed there were so many possibilities ahead of me—at least, that's what I thought.

One late afternoon, after finishing work, I walked past a shopping mall. Feeling hungry, I decided to treat myself to a meal at a fancy restaurant. This decision reminded me of my time in the seminary as I contemplated where to eat.

I remembered the times we had unstructured activities at the seminary, ordered local delicacies from a nearby store, and shared stories that we could happily talk about repeatedly. Those moments felt like a piece of heaven! At that time, I longed for something deeper, something that physical food alone could not satisfy. Inside, I felt empty.

It was during this period that God reached out to me once again, and I opened the door to Him. A year after I left, I contacted my spiritual director and shared my situation with him. We discussed the readmission process, and he encouraged me to volunteer once a week at the street children's centre run by St. John Bosco Parish. We continued to talk about my experiences.

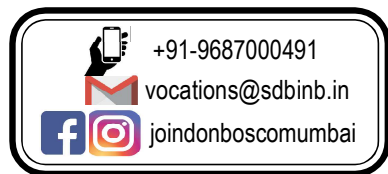
Ironically, it was on Good Friday when I made the decision to return. As the universal Church commemorated Jesus' passion that day, I felt a profound sense of peace in my decision.

Today marks my 15th year as a Salesian of Don Bosco and my 7th year as a priest. Some may consider me too young for these roles, but this relatively short period has been filled with moments of joy and faithfulness, alongside experiences of sorrow and challenges to my commitment. There have been specific instances when I felt truly called to be by God's side, yet there were also times when lingering questions became my only motivation for serving.

What are young people in the Philippines like?

Filipino youth, like many young people around the world, are often engrossed in their gadgets and social media. They have high aspirations for themselves and their families. The young people I accompany are determined in their pursuit of goals, whether that involves choosing their dream course or school, seeking romantic relationships, or passionately engaging in hobbies.

Recent research on Filipino youth and faith shows that young Catholics are in search of a deeper understanding of their beliefs and are actively working to reinterpret their faith in ways that resonate with their lived experiences. Filipino youth do not view religiosity and spirituality as separate. They seek to be heard and want to engage in discussions about their lives, beliefs, and future. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Timely Help

"But who would want to steal a Pullman ladder?" exclaimed the conductor.

"Don't know, but she is gone," answered the porter.

The passenger who was sleeping on the upper berth for the first time in his life, parted the curtain and offered:

"Porter, you can take mine. I won't need it till tomorrow morning."

Substitutes

"How do you get along without a speedometer?"

"Well, when I get to driving 15 miles an hour, my fenders start to rattle; at 25 the windows rattle; at 30 the motor starts knocking - and that's as fast as she'll go."

The need shows

A university professor, invited to address a cultural club meeting, chose the subject: "The Need of Education."

The following day a newspaper headline reported, "Professor's Speech Shows Need of Education."

Children!

When the little boy came home from Sunday School, he asked his father, "Why does the Bible talk so much about the Children of Israel? Didn't the grown ups ever do anything?"

Source of Success

Millionaire telling students about his financial rise in life: "All my success and wealth could be summed up in one word: Pluck, pluck, pluck..."

Last Try

The lady had tried all the dresses and still nothing pleased her. "I would look well in something more flowing."

The tired shop assistant prompted: "Try the river, madam!"

Don't know

Landlady: "How do so many empty bottles happen to be in your room?"

Lodger: "Don't know, madam. I only bring in full ones."

What for?

Willie: "Teacher says we are here to help others."

Father: "That's a right."

Willie: "And what are the others here for?"

Forgetfulness

"Mr Kelly has left his umbrella again. I do believe he would leave his head behind if it were loose."

"I dare say you are right. Only yesterday he was telling me he was going to Switzerland for his lungs." □

THE ORPHAN'S ORANGE

An elderly and wealthy Englishman recounted his childhood experience: "I lost my parents when I was a boy, and at the age of nine, I was sent to an orphanage near London. It felt like a prison. We had to work for 14 hours a day in the garden, kitchen, stables, and fields, day in and day out. The only holiday we had was Christmas Day, when each boy received a present: an orange. There were no sweets and no toys. Additionally, the orange was given only to those who had done nothing wrong throughout the year and had always obeyed the rules. This orange represented the hopes and wishes of the entire year.

I remember my first Christmas at the orphanage. I felt so sad. While the other boys walked past the orphanage director and received their oranges, I had to stand in the corner of the dormitory. This was my punishment for attempting to run away from the orphanage one summer day. After the gifts were distributed, the other

boys went outside to play in the yard.

"I had to stay in the dormitory all day, feeling both tearful and ashamed. I had put a blanket over my head and huddled underneath it.

"After a while, I heard footsteps in the room. A hand pulled the blanket away, and when I



looked up, I saw a little boy named William standing in front of my bed. He was holding an orange in his right hand and smiling as he offered it to me. I was confused; the oranges had been counted, so where could this extra orange have come from?

"As I examined William and the fruit more closely, I suddenly realized that the orange had already been peeled. It then hit me: I had to squeeze that

orange tightly to keep it from falling apart. What had happened? Ten boys had gathered in the yard and decided that I, too, should have my own orange for Christmas. They each removed a clove from their oranges, and together, they had carefully combined those ten cloves to create a new, round, delicate orange.

That orange was the best Christmas present of my life. It taught me how comforting true friendship can be. □

FRIENDS, WHO ARE THEY?

"I used to think that friends were the people that you could laugh with and talk to. Now I know that friends aren't that, they're the people that touch your heart. They're the people you can share our secrets with, cry with, laugh with, and just have fun with. They don't judge you or make you change. They accept you exactly as you are."

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My grateful thanks to Jesus, Mama Mary, St. Joseph and all the saints for the many blessings bestowed on our family. Through the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys, we thank Mama Mary for the safe delivery of our daughter and daughter-in-law and for blessing us with 3 beautiful grant children. *Mrs Mabel D'Cunha, Mumbai*

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK MARCH 2025

For families in crisis

Let us pray that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts, even in their differences.

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THE FULLEST EXPRESSION OF FIDELITY TO THE SPIRIT

I wish and pray that “young people will draw near to Her and trust Her.” I hope they will entrust their lives to Her and love Her with a simple and warm love from their hearts. She alone can respond to this love in the best way. Mary embodies total and complete dedication to God, Christ, and His saving action, which must be adequately expressed in every priestly and religious vocation.

Mary represents the fullest expression of perfect fidelity to the Holy Spirit and His action within the soul. This fidelity involves a persevering cooperation with the grace of one’s vocation.

Pope St. John Paul II

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

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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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