

DON BOSCO'S MADONNA

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May we,
by imitating her,
serve worthily
the mystery of
our redemption.

(From the Concluding Prayer
of the Common of Our Lady)

From The Editor's Desk

KAIROS

When I was a lot younger than I am now, I used to holiday in Lonavla spending time with my grandparents. They had a dog that (in dog years) was a lot older than I. His name was 'Chiko'. Those were awesome days; the loudest sounds were the buzzing of bumble bees interspersed with bulbuls chirping and courting one another with great zest. Time cruised by so serenely as I sat in the guava grove, Chiko lying beside me. Looking back I envied that dog, Chiko definitely lived in the moment. When he was hungry, he ate; when thirsty, he drank. When he was tired oh did he sleep! He had no concept of time or marking of time. He didn't know how long I had been gone. I could take a brief trip into town and when I got back he greeted me as though I had been gone for days. Everything was a new event for him.

Those of us who've had pets realize that they have no sense of the passage of time. We don't expect them to plan or anticipate. I have to admit, there are moments when I find myself still envying my dog. I imagine there is a freedom to be found in not being pressed by time. Not that I can truly conceive of how our pets experience time, because I am always aware of it. I can never escape this perception that time is passing.

In one sense, our pets may be thought to dwell perfectly in God's time. That is, they live outside the parameters of ordinary, clock time - the time that we call *chronos*. *Chronos* gives us our term chronological; it means the marking of time in a linear order. *Kairos* is another term for time, which we often call, God's time, or perhaps our pets' time. It has no beginning or end; it is where God dwells. In prayer, we are meant to enter into *kairos*; linear time, as we understand, is suspended. The church calendar is structured to help us enter into this timelessness of God. We celebrate, perpetually, the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How do I enter into God's time in the midst of *chronos*, in the midst of the business of all of life's franticness? Worship is one important way, especially if we allow ourselves to lose track of clock time. Private prayer/meditation can be another valuable way that we can incorporate *Kairos* into our daily lives.

May is the month in which most of us in the Eastern hemisphere are on holiday but *chronos* marches on. We are invited to enter into God's time every day, to "waste" time in prayer - something which offers no productive value as the world sees it, but which affords us great benefit as we spend time with God. My friend and Spirit guide Henri Nouwen used to say: "You and I are the beloved daughters and sons of God. And one of the enormous spiritual tasks we have is to claim that and to live a life based on that knowledge. That's not easy in fact, most of us fail constantly to claim the truth of who we are." The summer is a good time to get into this *Kairos* and cherish our divine parentage. How wonderful to know this is God's moment, *now*, and always an undeserved, unearned total gift!

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

THE ALTRUISM OF LOVE

by Don Giampaolo Dianin

In marriage I ask you and you ask me to put into the common domain the talents, gifts, time and even the renunciation of goods for the good of, what we call the family.

Love does not seek its own interests, says St. Paul (1 Cor. 13:5) in the hymn to charity that Pope Francis comments on in articles 101-102 of *Amoris Laetitia*. It is very straightforward but it throws up many questions like: what is the relationship between loving oneself and loving the other? In a relationship where do you set boundaries between giving and receiving? In a marriage, what do words like fulfilment and happiness mean?

The term "interest" refers to the world of economics where money is invested to make a profit. Banks, but also individuals give loans but then ask that it be returned with

interest. It is also possible that someone doesn't demand the interest but at least the amount loaned.

Love on the other hand seems to have a different logic: love is gratuitousness; it is freely given exclusively to please the other, to see the other happy. Paul in the letter to the Philippians highlights this aspect: "Do no seek your own interest, but rather that of others" (Phil 2:4). Love for oneself – the Pope recalls – has a psychological priority in the sense that when I am able to want only the good and the freedom of the other am I considered truly mature? Christian *agape* puts love at the forefront



of gifting oneself to the other, a love that could even become the gift of one's life (Jn. 15:13), that is to say, is the height of one's "unselfishness."

But we should recognize that even in loving relationships there are always returns, if only the gratification of seeing each other happy for the gift given. We may say that sometimes that in the gift given there is a prevailing sense of restitution, but even so, some form of reward exists. For example, I give up my longing to go trekking in the hills because you love going to the beach so much, but then seeing you happy gives me greater joy than trekking in the hills.

But then is this selfish or unselfish love? In the case of an act of charity done to a poor person, altruism prevails and in return you at least have the joy of having been able to offer a gift; but marriage is founded on reciprocity; the basis of which is that it is natural and you are even duty bound to wait for a response! Two people have promised to love, respect and be faithful to each other and that is why it is right to offer oneself and to wait for the other.

So let us formulate this characteristic a little better: we might say that in love there is both interest and unselfishness.

My love is unselfish because I don't do things to gain something. I cannot calculate everything on a scale to measure out who does more and who renounces more. Love cannot figure out everything, each one puts what one has into the relationship and what is invested could be little but it has been in-

vested with one's whole heart.

My thoughts turn to the parable of the talents in which the last servant buries his talent for fear of losing it. There are relationships that arise out of a calculated fear, a fear of losing something. There are pacts that are based on love, but which seek protection and guarantees in order to defend themselves against possible negative consequences of the decisions or choices the beloved has made.

Mature love should be unselfish, offering oneself freely to the other without seeking responses. But this is a commitment on the part of both: loving each other competing to gift themselves freely. In the end, there are no calculations because each has given everything freely and has received a thousand fold.

But there is also an interest in love that is not primarily mine or that of the other but for the good of the relationship. We can say that both parties invest their lives in those who then take on the family's traits. The interest is in the love and respect that unite them both as they consciously and freely invest their lives for the sake of the other, but also for the plan of life which continually nourishes and enriches the relationship.

Marriage is not just a pact between two people but a pact for a life project wherein both parties are stakeholders. I ask you and you ask me to invest my talents, gifts, time and even renunciations for the good that 'we' call family which includes both of us but which also surpasses this 'we' when it includes the children too.

To nourish the gratuitousness of the gift and the freedom from calculations brings joy and amazement in the offering of the

life that each of us has given to the other with God's help: "for you have received freely, give freely" (Mt. 10,8).□

STAYING TOGETHER

A QUESTION OF PRIORITY

by Maria Chiara Bregolin

Love gives nothing beyond itself and takes nothing except from itself. Love does not possess nor wants to be possessed because love is enough for love." Gibran, in one of his best-known poems describes love as something that is enough in itself. As a profound feeling that feeds on nothing but itself and finds in itself meaning and fulfillment.

Love in its most varied forms can be found in the family: love for oneself, for one's spouse, one's children, one's dog...

Love that is real is love without any 'ifs.' What we need to experience first of all is ourselves. If what we want from others is a mature love then we must start with ourselves.

I believe that must be a priority: I tell all my new friends and I make no secret of it, that for the wellbeing of the whole family, at the top of my priorities there is me: my well-being, my space, my time to meet my needs as a woman, a person.

Every morning I am grateful for the abundant gifts that surround me. I am grateful for my health, my body, for all the little successes that I have achieved and I look forward to the day that's coming with immeasurable optimism.

For a long time I lived in the

belief that for me the best is yet to come and that the life unfolding before my eyes is more and more lavish with enriching experiences.

Usually this talk generates a certain resistance in my friends: those who have just had a child struggled to understand this. After the first few months of close cohabitation and mutual dependence, infant and mother need to recover their own and exclusive spaces and this distance "looks better" and is good for both.

Then I usually tell them something else...which displeases and sometimes scandalizes them even more: in my priorities, my husband comes before my children.

I say this after much thought. After all, we, he and I, have chosen each other and wanted children even before they came and God willing, we will remain a couple even after our children have left the nest.

The unconditional love of a human being who does not have a strict need to survive (although sometimes I have the impression that my husband, without me would die in a short time from an overdose of junk food) requires a lot of energy and commitment.

Then there is love for the

creatures we have the honour to accompany in this life: our children. How much love is showered on them when they are small! But how much do we truly know of love and how much do they truly understand when our children grow up and become teenagers!

This is truly unconditional love: that feeling of affection for those strange beings, who, till a few years ago depended on us and we thought we knew. They and their strange features and weird smells ... for them we never seem to find the right words, the correct answers and the pants never seem to have the

"right fall"!

And then there are so many loves: for friends, one's work, one's dog...and what else?

Love, one of those very few things in life, is multiplied by dividing it and has a common denominator: as much as you give you get back. Much of it comes back in ways and at times not always immediately understandable. But it sure comes back! It asks nothing more to be given; lived, with passion, love and tenderness. It returns, multiplied.

Someone who was not afraid to give all of himself saved the world!□

Troubled and Troublesome

There are people who seem to be constantly pent up with rage, almost as if they had conflict built into them. Unpredictable in their moods they can flare up for no apparent reason. We feel for them but we are uneasy and uncomfortable in their presence and can't help wondering about their anger. What's wrong with them? Apart from health reasons, perhaps it is that such people are not at peace with themselves.



To relate properly and in a christian manner to other people we have to be at peace with ourselves - this means accepting ourselves for who we are. We are all unique creations of God and there are certain things in our uniqueness which despite our best efforts we cannot change. When we know that and accept our limitations - then we will have a good and right relationship with others.

Jesus' words 'Peace I leave with you.' shows that he knows our problems and wants to help. He wishes us to be at peace with ourselves. The peace he offers us is not the peace of escape from reality like the unconsciousness produced by drugs or alcohol. It is something so deep that no sorrow, danger or threat can rob us of it. If we allow him and make him part of our

lives - develop a strong friendship and a deep love for him - Christ will heal us and help calm our fears and free us from the unrest and the anxieties which can paralyse us. He will lead us to understand and to accept ourselves for who we are. This is his promise.

Lord give us your peace, calm our fears and free us from the anxieties which leave us troubled and troublesome to ourselves and to others. (Courtesy: St. Martin Magazine, Ireland)

A STORY BY FOUR HANDS

by Teresita Cabri

While I was putting my things in order one day, I chanced across an old album of photographs from the first moments of my life. My parents had prepared it and presented it to me. Leafing through it I saw my scrunched up little face on my first day of life; my dad, embarrassed holding me while my mother looked intently into my face for my first smile. The priest pouring water over me on the day of my baptism sealed me as a daughter of God. I don't remember any of it, but they are the proof of the source and everything else came after that. I recognize the people who were alive at that time. I relive the satisfaction I felt taking my first steps alone; the joy of my first birthday parties, the carefree holidays and the amazement of my first day at school; the faces of my companions who gradually grew up... Memories and emotions, all intertwined invited me to continue my journey into my past.

Then I opened my cellphone and continued flipping through my digital album. I recognize myself as a little girl and then as a teenager until I reached yester-

day. New faces appear; like the first time I fell in love and made me discover parts of my heart I had never ventured into. School trips. Passing friends and those who remain always, no matter what happens. How many memories! But...they're not everything. There are many others that could not be captured or shot. They are so important; like the intimate chats with people very dear to me; those tiring hours spent on my books; the everyday classes I was taught; the very painful memories; loved ones that passed away leaving voids; they're gone and they give rise to a swirl of questions; the most secret memories were those of the rage I felt when I was deceived by those I thought I could trust; the most unacceptable, like every fall I cannot forgive myself for; the most comforting, like the first time I caught myself praying to God; the most stressful was finding a college of my choice; the most generous emotion was volunteering at an aged home; the darkest memory was when solitude was my only companion; the most dramatic one was marked by the malice I experienced and the wrongs I suffered.



Already the most important moments were those between the ones that were shot, those others that were stored in the memory of mind and heart.

Where are all these now? What do they have to do with who I am today and who I will be tomorrow? And: where were You while I was going through all this?

You lived your story; it's part of you, it tells you who you've been and who you are now. In the facts and the emotions of the past, much of it was written down and much could have been written down. This is why it is important to browse through the "album," to re-discover the significance and allow some of the mystery not yet understood to be revealed. But it is important to leaf through it with some "attention." First and most important is that your story is written by four hands: your God started it and accompanied you every step of the way.

So, if you want to 'understand' it without 'misunderstanding' it, read it again with Him.

Maybe some memories arouse in you a kind of nostalgia; a desire to go back there, to those moments and those experiences. Go back, but don't stay there, avoid looking away (maybe it's because they were difficult while you were growing up); go back to those moments and say "thank you;"

gather the wealth of those days and bring them into your future. Your story can make you sing a beautiful "Magnificat" it's a story of the great things that God has done for you and with you. There are also facts and situations that you would like to delete because they are tinged with pain, evil and sin. But experience that it is neither possible nor wise to do that. All those experiences have left a mark but nothing nails you hopelessly to what has been. Your God has been there with you, especially in those moments to support you, to take care of you, to forgive you and get you up again and tell you to move forward on your journey, transforming all this into opportunities for growth in the trust that if it is accepted, it becomes a gift to be shared. So: remember that your story had God in it from the beginning. Look at it without running to the present, love it and

incorporate it and weave it into your future.

Another Step on the Journey:

Now, you too should browse through your album (photographic or digital) because it tells your story: write it down or tell it to someone you trust, recall those experiences. Go back, but now listen to yourself today. Prayerfully read Deuteronomy 8, 2-5 and note God telling you His version of your story. □



SALESIAN SAINTS

JOSEPH KOWALSKI 1911 - 1942

Salesian Priest, Martyr, Blessed

Joseph Kowalski was born in Siedliska (Poland), a small peasant village near Rzeszów, on March 13, 1911; the son of Wojciech and Sofia Borowiec, a deeply religious and practicing Catholic family. Because the village did not have a parish church he was baptized on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph in the parish church of Lubenia about four kilometres away. After finishing his elementary school, at the age of 18 his parents sent him to the St. John Bosco School in Oswiecim, where he remained for the next five years. It was there that he distinguished himself by his diligence, cheerfulness, spirit of service and unique spirit of piety. He was very popular among his companions and was considered one of the best boys in the school. In that environment Joseph traversed his personal path of sanctity as an "imitator of Dominic Savio." This was revealed in the pages of his 'private diaries.' "I would rather die than offend you with the smallest sin." "O my good Jesus, give me a firm and persevering will that is strong so that I may fulfil my holy resolutions and reach my highest ideal: the sanctity that I have set out to attain. I can and must be a saint." The same note books document his very personal attachment to Jesus



Christ that was maturing with age, particularly after his religious profession. "Jesus, I want to truly and faithfully serve you [...] and dedicate myself totally to you [...] so that I may never turn away from you until I die and that I may be faithful to you and keep my vow: "Rather die than offend you with the slightest sin [...] I must be a holy Salesian like my father Don Bosco was holy." In 1930, as a young student of philosophy, he wrote with his own blood, on a page of his diary - after having drawn a small cross - "To suffer and be despised for you, Lord [...] with full knowledge and determination I will be ready for any consequences and I will embrace the sweet cross of the call of Christ and carry it to the end, until death." He asked to become a Salesian and entered the novitiate at Czerwinski in 1927. This was followed by years of secular studies and

philosophy in Krakow (1928-1931). His formation culminated in his perpetual profession (1934) and after his theological studies he was ordained in 1938.

He was immediately summoned by the provincial Don Adam Ciéslar as his secretary and he would remain in that role for the next three years. Don Ciéslar describes Joseph as a confrere who had a surprising mastery over himself and an exceptional respect for each of his confreres. He was helpful, kind, always serene and above all very hardworking. His commitments as the secretary of the provincial did not prevent him from involving himself in the pastoral ministry. He was always available to preach and give conferences especially to young people and he was always available to hear Confessions. Blessed with an impressive musical sense and a beautiful voice he took charge of the parish choir which helped to add solemnity to the liturgical celebrations.

It would be his zealous priestly activity especially among the young people that motivated the Nazis to arrest him on May 23, 1941 together with eleven other Salesians. They were temporarily incarcerated in Krakow in Montelupi prison. After a month they were transferred to the concentration camp at Oswiecim. He saw four of his confreres being killed among them was his rector Don Giuseppe Swierc and his confessor Don Ignazio Dobiasz. He became No. 17350 and spent a year of heavy work and ill-treatment in the so-called "Company of Rigour" from which few managed to survive. It was decided that he be transferred to Dachau

but at the last moment he was stopped in circumstances well described by witnesses who deposed at his trial and also reported in the process of the beatification of Father Maximilian Kolbe. His exterior attitude during this entire ordeal is manifested in a letter he wrote to his parents: "Do not worry about me I am in the hands of God... I want to assure you that I feel his presence at every step of the way. Despite the present situation, I am happy and totally serene; I am convinced that wherever I find myself and whatever happens to me, everything comes from the fatherly Providence of God who guides the destiny of all nations and all peoples most justly."

The events that took place on the last day July 3, 1942, were extremely tragic. Every gesture and every word of those last 24 hours was of particular significance. "Once the work day was over - narrates one text - the comrades led the priest Kowalski to the barrack, where he was abused by the guards. When he came back I spent the last moments with him. We realized that after the murder of our companions from our bunk (of the five, three had already been killed) it was now our turn. In that situation Father Kowalski gathered us in prayer. At a certain moment he turned to me saying: "Kneel and pray with me for all those who will kill us." Late that night we prayed together on the bunk. After a while the guard came to us and called Father Kowalski who came down from the bunk calmly. He was prepared for this call, knowing that death would follow.

He gave me his portion of the

bread that he had received for supper saying: "Eat it I will not have need of it anymore." After these words he went knowingly to his death." Before the epilogue, which would take place on July 4, on the 3rd there was this profoundly touching gesture in which all the heroic dignity of a true witness of the faith was revealed. The leaders were furious in their eagerness to kill and they made a spectacle by showing their cruelty cheerfully. On that day they refused to take a break even for lunch; they continued their sadistic entertainment which had begun in the morning. They went on drowning each in the nearby sewage pit, pushing others from the upper embankment to the bottom of an immense canal that was being dug. Those who were brutally beaten were moaning and not yet dead were pushed down a bottomless barrel that served as a pen to hold the dogs. They were forced to imitate the barking of the dogs after which soup was poured on the ground and those who were dying were forced to lick it up from the ground.

One of the guards screamed in a hoarse voice, 'And where is that Catholic priest? Let him give them his blessing for their journey to eternity.' Meanwhile the other executioners threw Father Kowalski down into the mud to make sport of him. Boldly like a man he allowed them to lead him to the pit. Naked, dragged out of the manure pit with the remains of rags of his trousers on him, all dripping from head to foot of the sticky mixture of mud and sewage they prodded him with sticks to where those who were dying lay. The others were already dead. The executioners struck Father

Kowalski, and mocked him as a priest, ordering him to get up on a barrel and impart to the dying the last blessing "according to the Catholic rite" for the trip to heaven.

Father Kowalski knelt on the barrel and signed himself and began reciting in a loud voice - almost as if inspired - the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* and the Hail Holy Queen. The eternal truths contained in those divine words moved the prisoners, who from day to day, and hour to hour awaited that dreadful death here, similar to that of those who, now in the kennel below had left this valley of tears. They were disfigured to such an extent that they almost lost the semblance of being human. Huddled in the grass, not daring to raise our heads to avoid exposing ourselves to the eyes of the executioners, we relished those penetrating words of Father Kowalski as much as material food or a desire for peace. In that land soaked in the blood of the prisoners, now bedewed with our tears we watched the sublime mystery celebrated by Fr. Kowalski at that macabre scene. Nestled next to me in the grass, a young student of Jaslo (Taddeo Kokosz) whispered in my ear: "The world has never heard a prayer like that....maybe not even in the catacombs was such a prayer prayed."

A careful reconstruction revealed that he was killed on the night between the 3rd and 4th July 1942. He was drowned in septic tank of the camp. His captain Stephen Boratynski who saw his dead body abandoned in front of the barrack informed the "Strafkompanie." □

Witnesses in & for Our Times

ST. GEMMA GALGANI
(1878 - 1903)
May 16



Pain, suffering, death are such universal and inevitable realities which it is no longer possible to avoid. They are universal realities, which sooner or later, young or old we all have to experience.

Though for some, unlike others, pain and suffering seem to be their daily fare. But it is true that before this reality - when it comes knocking at our door - we are called to put our best selves forward, reflecting on the mystery more deeply and questioning ourselves more often.

We pray much more because pain is such an enigmatic reality, causing such anxiety and discomfort. It could lead us to existential loneliness and despair, to revolt against God and even to deny him.

Above all, the presence of innocent pain leaves one perplexed and tempts one to rebel.

How do you explain things that are apparently irreconcilable? like the death of an innocent child (or the 27 innocent children and their teacher who perished when their school collapsed during an earthquake in November 2002 in Molise?) and the presence of a God



of the living, a Father in heaven, who 'clothes the lilies of the field' but seems deaf and dumb to the pain of the innocent? It is the eternal question of Job, and his rightful anger in the grip of pain? And it has been 2000 years since Christianity also gave its answer which is contained in the Gospel.

Acceptance of Christ Crucified
In the short life of Gemma

Galgani there are all these elements: so much grief and illness, so much psychological and physical trauma but also much love and such a participation in the salvific suffering of the Crucified Christ, right up to the stigmata themselves as a visible sign of her loving acceptance of the Passion. Gemma was born on March 12, 1878 in Borgonuovo di Camigliano (Lucca) into a large family. Soon the little girl came to experience pain at the death of her mother Aurelia, a woman of great faith in September 1886.

She received her First Communion at the age of 9 (unusual in those days) and for her it was an overwhelming and determining experience. She understood that her life would be marked by a profound union with Jesus and his crucifixion. After the grief at the death of her dear mother, came the death of her 18-year-old brother Gino a seminarian and she too became seriously ill.

At the age of 16 she began to have her first visions of Jesus and of her guardian angel. She wrote: "I also began to nurture another desire: 'I felt the desire to suffer and to help Jesus crucified. This "helping of Jesus Crucified" caused in the remaining 9 years of her life innumerable physical illnesses, family misunderstandings; she was mocked by those who meant well (but were ignorant), she was distrusted and suspected by many people (including the clergy) and bereaved family members. In 1897 she lost her father, a charitable man, deceived in his profession as a pharmacist and reduced to poverty. He died leaving a large family which was promptly assisted by her aunts.

She had to go to Camaiore to one of these.

She was now 20 years old and did not go unnoticed. In fact, she was a beautiful girl with sweet penetrating eyes (as seen in some well-preserved photographs). There was also a good young man who fell in love with her. This liaison was not pursued because she was thinking of another marriage, a mystical one. Meanwhile she was suffering from severe back and kidney pain. She left her aunt and returned home to Lucca hoping she would improve but in vain, in fact her condition deteriorated. Now she developed meningitis and the curvature of the spine, but as her body grew weaker her spirit grew stronger. Despite these sufferings she continued doing her housework normally, but the illness gave her no respite.

At a certain point, on February 2, 1899 the doctors gave her only a few days of life. Instead, she was miraculously healed through the intercession of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. On June 8th she had a vision of Jesus, Mary and her guardian angel. Mary said: "Jesus, my son loves you very much and wants to ask you a favour." In fact, "from the wounds of Jesus," she said, "there came no more blood just flames of fire that touched my hands, my feet and my heart." It was the grace of the stigmata.

The vision of the suffering Christ and the experience of the stigmata were repeated from Thursdays until Fridays at 3 pm. The pain was severe; her love for her share in the Passion turned to total joy and the perfect peace that followed was unspeakable and indescribable. On July 17, 1900 she received the pain of the

crowning of thorns and on February 7, 1901 also that of the scourging.

Thank you, my friend

Meanwhile, Gemma's relationship with her family became increasingly difficult. They did not believe her at all. Indeed, they even spied on her (presuming that she had inflicted those wounds on herself) and so they mistreated her. A famous psychiatrist was also called in to examine her. The conclusion: Hysteria. (Even the psychologist who examined Padre Pio...finally concluded: hysteria! (And both are saints today). There was a lot of suspicion around poor Gemma. Even the clergy of the city (immediately after her death) never believed her sanctity and the supernatural phenomena. For some of her fellow citizens she was "a girl of grace" and for many other unbelievers (as the psychologists said) just was a poor unfortunate.

The last three years of her life Gemma spent it in the house of Cecilia Giannini.

This extraordinary woman, a mother of a large family who used to host the Passionist Fathers who passed through Lucca, invited Gemma to her house a few times, until both brother and sister suggested that she stay with them permanently. Of them she said: "God has placed me in the hands of this angel you see here."

"Can she not stay with us, we have eleven children at home, what will one more matter?" words that came from great faith and great generosity. And Gemma remained with them, embraced by love and well-liked by everyone. She helped around the house al-

ways radiating an air of joy and serenity.

Signora Cecilia even wanted to sleep in her room so she could witness Gemma's conversations with her guardian angel and experience the sweet fragrance that wafted into the room from the angelic presence (at first Cecilia thought it was some scent that Gemma had bought...)

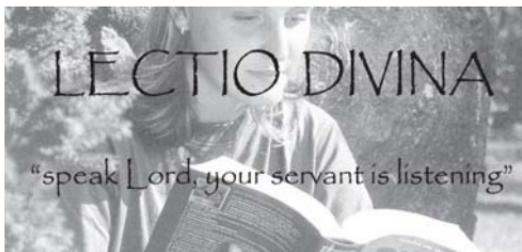
In May 1902 she fell seriously ill again. Meanwhile in that same year her sister Giulia and brother Tonino died on January 20, 1903 on the orders of the doctor (who was afraid of contagion) she was transferred by Aunt Elisa to a rented apartment.

Gemma also experienced a sense of abandonment and the silence of God. She was strongly tempted by the devil but never lost her faith or her peace of mind...nor her patience. She remains always full of love and gratitude towards those who assisted her.

She fell asleep in the Lord on Holy Saturday in the afternoon, when the bells of Lucca were heralding the Resurrection of the Lord whose Passion she had shared in. She was canonized by Pope Pius XII on May 2, 1940

A great writer and philosopher, Soeren Kierkegaard, in his work *The Unrest of the Faith* wrote: "When a witness of truth reaches death, he says to God: "Thank you, thank you for all the sufferings, O Infinite Love." And God in turn replies: "Thank you, my friend, for the use I could make of you."

We can imagine that Jesus must have said this to Gemma as soon as she reached Paradise: "Thank you, my friend for sharing my suffering for the salvation of all." □



THE DARKNESS OF VISION AND THE LIGHT OF FAITH

by Ian Pinto, sdb

The world is a beautiful place, full of sounds, colours and smells. What we all find most attractive usually are the things that appeal to our eyes. We witness the aesthetic shapes of flowers and the bright hues they display. Children are fascinated with fireworks and the wonderful designs they burst into. Even though we are largely a generation that favours the visual, we also take pleasure in the other senses. Sound, for example, is something we take great delight in. Think of a Eucharistic celebration without any hymns; just words recited between periods of silence. It would seem incomplete, wouldn't it? You will hardly find more than a handful of young people today who leave the house without plugging their ears with earphones.

While this is the world for most of us, it is vastly different from that which the sensually challenged experience. Imagine for a moment that you can hear nothing – absolutely nothing – no birds chirping, music playing, people

talking or vehicles honking; or that you open your eyes but all you see is black – a darkness that is completely impenetrable and unchanging. Life is bound to be quite different. Someone who was born with sight but lost it later on will be in the best position to comment on what it's like to lose one's vision having enjoyed the pleasure of vision. At least such a person is able to feel and express what life without sight is like since s/he had sight before losing it. But what of persons who have never seen in their life, persons born congenitally blind; they will never quite know the difference. The world they were born into is pure darkness. They are unable to imagine shapes, colours or concepts and are totally dependent on the descriptions and explanations of others. While a privileged few like Helen Keller are educated to see things without their eyes, the majority are simply groping in the darkness, struggling to find a way to fit in.

In most societies today, the

blind are not abandoned to their own devices nor have they to fend for themselves with the help of their other senses. There are treatments available for blindness. These might not bring about a cure but at least they offer the blind a chance to live fairly independent and autonomous lives.

In the bygone centuries, being blind meant that one is isolated in ones own dark world; whether or not there would have been someone to care for such a person is questionable. Probably, one's parents and perhaps extended family would support such a person, but for how long would that support continue?

Clearly, the man at Jericho had no one (Lk 18:35); he was all alone – blind and therefore handicapped and isolated, without any support or security. He was forced to live at the mercy of others His meals depended entirely on the chance that someone would notice him and offer him a few coins. Probably, the only thing worse than being blind is not knowing where your next meal would come from. I think, not having a sense of security is far worse than any physical affliction, and when the two are clubbed together, the result is a pathetic situation. I am reminded of the words of Psalm 123: *“To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us”* (vv. 1-2). These words aptly capture the helpless situation of the blind man. The psalmist seems to have undergone a similar distress and he realizes that only God could rescue

him from this hopelessness.

The blind man realized this too. He had probably heard about Jesus, the Messiah who went about proclaiming the Good News of God's love, mercy and forgiveness; a prophet who worked marvelous deeds through the power of God that flowed through his veins. The second he heard that Jesus was passing through his town, he raised his voice and called out to him in words that only a devout Jew who knew the identity of the Messiah would use: “Son of David” (Lk 18:38). This was one of the indications of the Messiah's identity and no one had yet seen that in Jesus. It was the blind man who first noticed. Ironic, isn't it?

There is a very important lesson we can learn from this episode: It doesn't take eyes to see the wonder and work of God. We might have sight but be blind to God and His work in our lives. On the other hand, the blind man clearly shows us that it is through the eyes of faith that we can recognize God and the working of His Spirit in the world around us. Life is tough for everyone. For some it is harder than others. The important thing is how much are we ready to trust? We do not have to be sensually challenged or poor in order to learn what dependence really entails. Jesus makes it very clear that what counts is faith. The blind man faced a world of darkness but the light of his faith shone far brighter than the faith of his visually sound brethren. Jesus called attention to this fact when he announced that his faith had made him well. May our faith also shine out and lead us along the path of life especially in moments of darkness. □

Quiet Spaces

GIVE JOY TO THE PEOPLE

Taken from Pope Francis reflection on at Domus Sanctae Marthae on May 18, 2017

To “obey, and give joy to the people” is an essential part of “Christian mission,” which Pope Francis focused on during Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning, 18 May.

During his homily, the Pope recounted the story of a priest who, when he was appointed bishop, “went to his elderly father to give him the news.” The father, a “humble man”, who had “worked his whole life” and was now retired, did not have a university education but the “wisdom of life,” and gave his son this advice: “obey, and give joy to the people.” Pope Francis noted that “this man had understood” the teaching of the day’s liturgy: “be obedient to the Father’s love, not to other loves; be obedient to this gift and then give joy to the people.” Thus, the Pontiff explained, we too, “Christians, lay people, priests, consecrated religious, bishops, must give joy to the people.”

Francis began the day’s reflection, with a particular passage from the Gospel of John (15:9-11). Describing the scene, he noted that “Jesus returns to reflect once again on the commandment of love,” and “says something very powerful: ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.’” Hence “the love with which Jesus loves us is the same as that with which the Father loved him: the same. We are loved with this great love. It is a great gift of love!” For this very reason, Francis continued, Jesus “admonishes us: ‘Please, abide in my love because it is the love of the Father.’ It is a great love.” Recognizing the likely objection: “But, Lord, how can we abide in your love?” the Lord himself offers a concrete response: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” In substance, the Pope clarified, “Jesus abides in the Father’s love and asks us to abide in the love he has for us.”

But “how does one abide” in this love? The response is: “observe the commandments” – those 10 rules which form “the base,” which are “the foundation.” These are the precepts, Jesus clarifies, “that I have taught you,” that is, the “commandments of daily life, the little commandments” which, “more than commandments, are a Christian way of life.” The Pope thus advised that we abide “in this way of living the Christian life.” How do we do so? Examples can be found “in the works of mercy or in the Beatitudes.” In fact, the Pontiff observed, “although the list of Jesus’ commandments may be very, very long,” in reality, there is one core: “the

Father’s love for him and his love for us.”

For this reason, the Lord “asks us to abide in his love,” and also, Francis warned, because in life “there are other loves. The world too proposes other loves to us: love of money, for example, love of vanity, of showing off; love of pride; love of power, and of doing many unjust things in order to have even more power.” However, such cases “are other loves”; they “are not of Jesus and are not of the Father. Christ asks us to abide in his love, which is the Father’s love.”

The Holy Father thus invited his listeners to think about “those other loves which distance us from Jesus’ love,” and also to reflect upon the existence of “other measures of loving”: such as “half-hearted loving”, which, however, “is not loving. It is one thing to wish someone well, and another thing entirely to love someone. Loving is more than wishing someone well.” At this point we must ask ourselves what the measure of love is. Paradoxically, the response is that “the measure of love is to love without measure.” Only thus, suggested the Pope, with “these commandments that Jesus has given us, will we abide in Jesus’ love, which is the Father’s love. Without measure.” Thus, this love of Christ is not like every other type of love, which can often be “lukewarm or self-absorbed.”

Continuing with the Gospel passage, Francis then asked why the Lord feels the need to remind us of these things. The response is found in the text: “that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” In fact, “if the Father’s love comes from Jesus, Jesus teaches us the way of love: an open heart, to love without measure, to love by leaving aside all other types of love. The great love for him is to abide in this love, and there one finds joy, great joy, which is a gift.” Indeed, both “love and joy are a gift.”

A reference to this sense can also be found “in the opening prayer of the Mass,” the Pope reminded us, when “we asked: ‘Lord, take care of this gift which you have given us,’ the gift of love, the gift of joy.” It was in this regard that the Pope shared the advice of the father of the newly appointed bishop: “give joy to the people.” Francis urged all Christians to do so “by way of love, without ulterior motives, only by way of love. Our Christian mission is to give joy to the people.” Thus, the Pope concluded his homily with a prayer that “the Lord protect this gift,” that we may “abide in Jesus’ love so as to give joy to the people.” □

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WHAT'S SO WONDERFUL ABOUT A BABY?

From Fr. Ian Douilton's collection of stories

Down at the parish church the smell of wax polish and flowers fill the air as a small group of people move with the venerable old pastor making their way down to the baptistery. Robert the father is proudly holding the baby as his sister-in-law is struggling to wrest the baby from him. "Why Louise, I'm holding him alright? He's my baby, and I'm going to hold him until this thing starts." That's when Robert gave his wife's sister a look that meant, 'hands off.' His own brother Phil just turned towards the confusion and gave the two of them a look that said: 'Stop arguing in church.' Robert held the baby tighter. He was asleep but he kept making little faces. The proud father just couldn't keep his eyes off him. The proud father couldn't imagine there being fellows like Charlie Woodrow who would say: "What's so wonderful about a baby?" But why did Robert think of Charlie Woodrow? This was what Robert said as he recalled those days: "There was just Aileen and me for almost two years. All Aileen wanted was me, my socks to wash and cook my food. Just me coming home on the five-fifteen bus... coming home. Then one night he walked right in while Aileen was busy in the kitchen boiling potatoes. This meant that supper wouldn't be ready just yet. From the kitchen she said: "Sit down. Bob, I have something to tell you. I went downtown today." With a kind of sly smile on her face she told Robert that she had been

to see Dr. Robertson. Robert almost came to his feet. "Aileen, what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, I just thought I'd have a checkup. He says I'm fine."

Robert's stomach was rumbling and he was hungry but Aileen went on: "Bob, we're going to have a visitor." Robert's face turned to a frown: "Not your sister Louise again." And Aileen quipped: "And no, not your brother Phil again. It's going to be a surprise." Robert was curious now: "Well, when is this character arriving?" "Oh, several months from now Dr. Robertson says."

"Dr. Robertson?"
"Oh what's the use of trying to be diplomatic I should have hit you over the head with a baby bottle."

"Baby! Baby!" He looked shocked. "Well, aren't you glad?"

"Honey, I'm crazy with joy. I'm delirious I just can't get my breath."

"This is what I've been praying for." Then Robert shook his head, not knowing what he was mumbling: "Oh, haven't you been happy with little old me?" Of course Aileen was over the moon with her husband but she wanted him to have someone besides her to come home to. She went on: "If we had to go on and on just the two of us we'd get bored to death."

The following morning Robert came to the office with a spring in his step and a bright smile on his face: "Charlie old boy, guess what's going to happen to me. I got the best news in the world yesterday."

"You're getting that raise?"
"Nope."

"You found a two room apartment?" "Nope."

"No, you bought a car?" "You're not even warm."

Then pulling himself up tall he said: "Charlie, you're looking at a father-to-be. We're going to have a baby."

That's when Charlie shook his head as if to shake off a fog: "A baby! Is that all? What's so wonderful about a baby?"

Robert was beside himself: "What's so wonderful about a baby?"

Then Charlie proceeded to explain himself: "Well, don't get me wrong. I think they're OK but at the right time." "Well, isn't the right time whenever they come?"

Charlie admitted that he and his wife were surely going to have a family but they were going to wait till they had their own home for the kids and enough money in the bank to send them through college." Then he added: "You're going to have a baby when you're still having to ride the bus to work." Robert didn't think that there was anything wrong with that.

According to Charlie statistics showed that most upper middle class couples bought a car in the first year of their marriage and then had a baby. Robert just put his hands up as if in surrender and said: "I guess my wife and I are old fashioned and I'm glad of it. We didn't get married to have an automobile."

When you're having a baby nine months seems a long time waiting but the day came around almost so suddenly, Aileen was all glowing as she held her child and

Robert looked on: "Say something, this is our baby." Anyone could see that Robert was at a loss for words. "He's awfully small Aileen. Doesn't he look like a kind of table top model?" Aileen told him his baby was 2 1/2 kg which was just a nice size. She looked over at her husband: "Bob your eyes are positively hanging out." Robert couldn't stop looking at him. One day there was nobody and the next day he had a son. Once again he said out loud: "What's so wonderful about a baby? Wait till I tell Charlie."

Back at the office Robert was telling his colleagues all about the baby when Charlie piped in: "Bob only 2 1/2 kg? You ought to be passing out cigarettes instead of cigars." But nothing could put Robert off he just thought his baby was wonderful. Then he added: "Oh I wish you could see him." Charlie gave up arguing with Robert: "I know, I know, well, congratulations and all that sort of thing." Robert offered him another cigar.

Now here was Charlie's version of a surprise: "You know, I ought to be celebrating too." He called Robert to the window: "Come on, take a look out of this window. See that car parked right smack in front of the building?" He pointed out to a car parked right in the main courtyard. Robert was impressed and clarified: "You mean that red one? Boy, it's great!" Charlie corrected him: "It's not red it's maroon and it's mine all mine!" "That's your new car?" Robert went on as Charlie added proudly: "Every piston, cylinder and gasket. Now the wife and I can start looking for a spot to build our own home. With both of us working we'll be on

Easy Street in no time."

Robert walked back to his desk and sat down: "I'm still glad Aileen gave up her job when we got married." That was when Charlie came out with his 'words of wisdom,' "Aw Bob, that's where you make a big mistake. You don't understand women. You let them stay home they get lonesome. Then they're really dangerous. If they're flighty, they start stepping out on you. If they're steady, they start thinking about babies. Yeah, look at that maroon honey down there. That's the baby for me."

Back home and as the days passed the day of the little baby's christening was around the corner. Little Butch was getting baptized in two days. Robert came up to Aileen as she put the baby into the bassinet: "Now you've got to tell me what name you've picked for him. I promised to let you do the naming if it was a boy but why the deep dark secret." Again Aileen, all mysterious said: "I'm going to name our son after the most wonderful man I know." Immediately Robert's face turned into a scowl: "The most wonderful? Oh, where have I heard that before? Aileen, you can't darling, I have the deepest respect and admiration for your father but over my dead body will you call any son of mine Alonzo." Aileen almost burst out laughing, but the baby was asleep: "Hush! I wasn't thinking of Alonzo, I was thinking of Robert. Bob?" Robert was truly touched and his eyes moistened. She came to him and put her arms around his waist: "Besides Robert's such a wonderful name. I like St. Robert down in the church. He was a brilliant man and he had courage too."

Robert added: "Sounds like a first rate patron and protector for our little Robert." Then Aileen was a little more practical: "And a fine model for him to imitate too. Now all we have to do is to select the godfather and the godmother." Without batting an eyelid Robert went. It was all settled for him: "It's settled just like that. We'll ask Mr. Griswald and your great aunt Sarah they'll be tickled pink. And they bury Robert in presents every birthday and Christmas." That was not what Aileen had in mind she knew Mr. Griswald hadn't been inside a church in thirty years and even though Sarah is Aileen's great aunt she definitely has a hole in her head. She made up a new religion of her own every year. She suggested: "We need somebody who'll set Robert a good example; bringing him up in the faith if anything happens to us." Robert nodded eagerly: "I stand corrected." Robert went on solemnly: "On those grounds - take a deep breath - it's going to knock you over - on those grounds for godmother I nominate your sister Louise. I have kidded you a lot about her but she's really solid." Aileen, not outdone in trying to add to the surprise added: "I will return the compliment: It will come as a shock for you - but the only I would trust to be godfather is your brother Phil." So it was settled and word was sent around. Then the great day arrived.

There Fr. Nelson made his way into the main aisle of the church. Louise the godmother asked Robert for the baby and so he surrendered that little bundle of life to her. His brother Phil, Louise and he follow old Fr. Nelson into the

baptistery. They gathered around the font and Robert found himself in a corner looking on. And just when he was beginning to feel unnecessary and unwanted, Fr. Nelson came over and handed him a book so that he could follow the ceremony. He felt better. He had been at baptisms before but this is different. This time it was his baby for whom the godfather and godmother are speaking.

Dear parents and godparents: You have come to present this child for baptism. By water and the Holy Spirit he is to receive the gift of new life from God who is love. On your part, you must make it your constant care to bring him up in the practice of the faith. See that the divine life which God gives him is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in his heart...

Robert was having a busy time, what with trying to follow his book, watch Fr. Nelson and keep one eye on his son. Robert slept peacefully on even when Fr. Nelson made the sign of the cross on his forehead and his breast and when Father put salt in his mouth he screwed up his little face and licked his lips. Then Father placed a hand on his head, he takes it as a cue, Robert opened his big blue eyes as if he knew that this part is especially important. Fr. Nelson handed a lighted candle to a member of the family saying: *Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to keep burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He is to walk always as a child of the light. May he keep the flame of faith alive in his heart. When the Lord comes, may he go out to meet him*

with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

Right there Robert's book fell from his hand and by the time he found the place again, Fr. Nelson was already giving the little assembly the final blessing: *Go in peace, and may almighty God, the Father and the Son + and the Holy Spirit bless you. Amen*

Robert opens his mouth, he smiles and now we're all smiling. What's so wonderful about a baby?

Robert came up quickly to take his son from Louise and then he walked up to Fr. Nelson: Oh, thanks Father!" Fr. Nelson looked up and smiled saying: "Congratulations Bob, you've got a great little youngster there."

"I bet you say that to all the fathers." Robert smiled and said:

And Fr. Nelson nodded vigorously and said: "Yes I do, because I mean it. After you've been baptizing for thirty years? Well, I think all babies would look pretty much alike. Bob, somehow I always get the same thrill I felt the first time. Somebody brings in a little bundle of baby. I pour the waters of baptism and the poorest little creature from the most tumbled down shack is changed into the most glorious and fortunate being in this world: a child of God, an heir of heaven. When I think of how God gives every baby the privilege of everlasting life, well, I think they're wonderful because God thinks so."

When Robert told us this he said: "I have to thank Fr. Nelson all over again for that remark. I can't wait to tell Charlie Woodrow that God thinks babies are wonderful. □"

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 3

by Michele Molineris

One Day I'll Hear Your Confession (1828)

It Anna Moglia, George's daughter, who married a Joseph Zucca from Bausone, a hamlet close to Moriondo Torinese, often spoke about John to her neighbours, relatives and children. She would tell with delight how John had spent two years in her father's house, living the life of an angel and an apostle. He would often withdraw to some quiet spot in order to read, study and pray. He would teach catechism and tell edifying stories not only to the neighbourhood boys, but also to the members of her family. He was so good that everybody listened with eagerness and leisure. She also stated that several times, while they were working together in the fields, he had said to her in all seriousness and in a grave prophetic tone: "I'll be a priest and then I'll really preach and hear confessions."

Anna did not take his words seriously and would deride him, saying that with those ideas of his and his never-ending reading he would get nowhere. But one day John replied: "You don't believe what I say and you make fun of me, but one day you'll come to me for confession."

And so it happened, for when John became a priest and founded the Oratory, Anna, for reasons she could never have foreseen, lived in Bausone [near Turin], and she would often

travel there and go to the Oratory to visit Don Bosco, make her confession to him in the little church of St. Francis [de Sales], and perform her devotions. Don Bosco always welcomed her as his own sister. (EBM 1, 154-155)

The Angelus (1828)

One summer day, old Joseph Moglia, a hoe over his shoulder, had just come in from the fields, dripping with perspiration. It was noon and a bell in the distance was ringing the Angelus. Too tired to pay attention to it, he threw himself on the ground to rest. But then he noticed John, who had come home a little while before, saying the Angelus kneeling at the top of the outdoor stairway. Joseph laughingly remarked: "Look at him! We, the owners have to wear ourselves out working from morning till night, while he peacefully prays up there. That's an easy way to gain merits for Heaven!"

John finished his prayer, then went down the stairs and said to the old man: "Look, you know very well that I have not been loafing. You may be sure of this, that I have earned more by praying than you by working. If you pray, you will gather four ears of corn for every two grains you sow; if you do not pray, you will gather only two ears for every four grains you sow. You, too, should pray if you want to gather four ears instead of two. What would it have cost you to stop your work a moment, put down your hoe and say the *Angelus*? Then you would have acquired as much merit as I."

The good old man was really

surprised! "Well now!" he exclaimed, "I never thought I'd be getting a lesson from a boy! Yet I still don't feel right if I sit down at table without first saying the *Angelus*!"

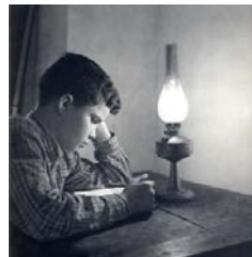
From that day on, Joseph Moglia never left out the prayer. The Moglias, whom John regarded as taking his mother's place, always accepted his observations in good grace because of the respect, love and friendliness he showed for them. (EBM 1, 147-148)

Accused of Copying (1831)

One day in 1831 while the teacher was giving a test to determine class rank, John requested permission to do the one assigned to the third year students. Father Moglia burst out laughing: "I must say that for a Becchi boy you are a bit pretentious. What good is anyone from Becchi? Why don't you quit Latin? You'll never understand a word of it. Use your time looking for mushrooms or birds' nests. That's one thing you should be good for. There's where your talent lies. I think you'll be a great success at that. Why you are studying Latin at all is really odd to me."

But John insisted, and gave no sign of having been stung by those words. But the teacher's reply was even more caustic. However, seeing that John was determined in his request, he finally told him to take whatever test he wanted. He for one was not going to read the nonsense that John would most certainly write.

The third year students had



been given a Latin passage to translate. Within the hour John turned in his translation. Without even looking at it, the teacher took it, placed it on his desk and gave John a pitiful smile. But John remained there facing him. "Please, Father, would you look at it and correct my mistakes?"

"Didn't I tell you that Becchi boys know nothing?" the teacher replied irritably. "I told you that these things are simply beyond you."

At this, several of the pupils jumped up and pleaded with their teacher.

"Yes, read Bosco's paper, please. Let's hear all the nonsense he has written."

Father Moglia, who by now had become quite pliable in the hands of his pupils, met their demand. He took up the paper and read it. The translation was correct. As he put it down he exclaimed: "Just as I said. ..Bosco is a good-for-nothing. He has copied this whole translation from someone else. He must have copied it. This is certainly not his work."

John's schoolmate who shared

the same desk with him and who had seen John at work without recourse to books or help from anyone spoke up in his defense.

"Father, you say that Bosco copied from someone else. If he did, there would be a composition that would match his. Why don't you look at our work and see if there is any translation that looks like his?"

This sounded like a reasonable request. And it should certainly have put an end to the matter. But the teacher refused to budge. He quickly reproved the lad who had spoken up.

"What do you know about it haven't you heard me say that anyone from Becchi is good for nothing?"

There was no way to persuade him of the truth. In his blind prejudice he cared little about learning the real facts. But the boy who had seen John work on his translation completely on his own told his friends exactly what had happened. As a result, John's classmates not only admired his talent, but very highly regarded his humility and dignity in the face of those abusive words. This incident greatly heightened their esteem and admiration for John and increased his influence among them. (*EBM 1, 171-173*)

A Patron during Exams (1832)

When lessons are winding down and the exams are on the horizon then there are some who start getting nervous, especially those who had been skipping their books for more enjoyable pastimes. They preferred playing and lazing around. Now they begin to wonder how they will

manage to get through their exams.

Should they just give in to despair? Should they jump out of windows? Not really appropriate solutions. They should seriously get back to their books and also pray. But pray to whom? The Lord, the Father of Lights and the Blessed Mother, she is the Seat of Wisdom. But if these are too high up then you might talk to the saints. This was what John Bosco did during his time. Just read it and draw your own conclusions.

During those high school years John, in addition to his intelligence and memory, had Jet another secret talent, extraordinary and very valuable. Such was the opinion of his former classmates who told us the following incidents.

One night John dreamed that his teacher had given a monthly test to determine class rank and that he was doing it. The moment he awoke, he jumped out of bed, wrote out the test, a Latin passage, and began translating it, with the assistance of a priest, a friend of his. Believe it or not, that very morning, the teacher did give a test, and it was the same Latin passage John had dreamed about! Thus quite quickly and without needing a dictionary, the result was excellent. When the teacher questioned him, he candidly told him what had happened, to the teacher's great amazement.

On another occasion John handed in his test so quickly that the teacher seriously doubted that the boy could have managed

all its grammatical problems in such a short a time. So he went over the test very carefully. He was amazed to find it totally correct and asked to see his first draft. John gave it to him and again the teacher was speechless. He had prepared that test only the night before. It had turned out rather lengthy and therefore the teacher had dictated only half of it: yet in John's composition book the test was written out in its entirety, to the last word! How could it be explained? John could not have copied it overnight nor could he possibly have broken into the teacher's house, which was a considerable distance from where John lived. What then? He confessed: "I dreamed it." It was for this reason that his schoolmates nicknamed him "the Dreamer" (*EBM 1, 190*).

Reading Cornelius under the Grammar

John was in that class for about two months when a minor episode caused much talk about him. One day the teacher was discussing the life of Agesilaus by Cornelius Nepos. Bosco did not have the book with him, because he had forgotten it at home. To cover up his forgetfulness, he kept Donatus' grammar open in front of him.



Not knowing what to do while listening to the teacher, Bosco turned the pages now this way, now that. Some companions noticed it. There was some giggling and then laughter. This was a breach of discipline. 'What's the matter?' asked the teacher. 'What's wrong? Tell me!' Since all eyes were turned on Bosco, he ordered him to read over the passage and put the words in proper sequence for translation, and then repeat the explanation he had given.

He stood up, still holding his grammar, and after repeating the passage from memory he recited the words in their logical sequence with all the comments the teacher had made shortly before. When he was through, his companions almost instinctively cried out in admiration, and loudly applauded. The teacher was fuming, because this was the first time in his experience that he had been unable to control his class. He tried to rap Bosco on the head, but he dodged the blow. Then, resting his hand on Bosco's book, he asked those sitting near him the reason for such an outburst. Bosco was about to tell him everything respectfully but the others broke in: "Bosco had Donatus' grammar in front of him all the time, but he recited and explained the passage as if he were reading from Cornelius." The teacher took Donatus' grammar from Bosco and made him continue for a couple of paragraphs. Then suddenly switching from anger to amazement and admiration, he said: 'I shall forgive your negligence because of your amazing memory. You are lucky. Make good use of such a talent' (*EBM 1, 188-189*). □



PRAYER TO MARY (MEDITATIONS ON THE HAIL MARY)

by Roberta Fora

Blessed Is the Fruit of Your Womb Jesus

The sublime mystery of Mary's greatness is that she is the womb for God who came to earth.

Who of us can fathom the emotions and feelings that went through the Mother of the Saviour during the nine months that she waited for his birth?

For every mother, the time before childbirth is always filled



May 2019

with trepidation; several thoughts go through the mind of the woman; sometimes even doubts and fears surface and it is easy to get carried away, letting the mind dream about the little creature which is on the verge of being born. She imagines its little face, the colour of its eyes or its hair.

It must surely have been so for Mary. She would have lived the wait intensely and profoundly; in perfect harmony with the Lord; watching and praying and listening for his voice, carefully wrapped in silence.

Blessed is Jesus, the marvellous fruit of Mary's womb. God sent him to earth to fulfill his saving mission among humankind.

Jesus, born of Mary, grew in wisdom and grace in the family of Nazareth, under the precious guidance of his Mother's spouse, Joseph. When he reached adulthood, he left his loved ones to dedicate himself to fulfill God's plan of Salvation.

It is interesting at this point, to reflect on some of the important

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Don Bosco's Madonna

aspects of his life. The Lord was born in a stable, not in a sumptuous palace, fit for a king. His first visitors were not nobles, but the simple and humble shepherds of Bethlehem.

Now as an adult, to fulfill his mission, he sought out friends. Who were the first two? James and John, poor fishermen on the Lake of Galilee.

A few days before the Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to go back to the Father, so he decided to treat his friends to a very special dinner, but before consecrating the Bread and Wine, he gave his disciples a disconcerting lesson in humility: He wrapped a towel around his waist and began washing their feet. Then began the most tragic moments of his passion; he was whipped and crowned with thorns, insulted and mocked by the soldiers. He reacted to none of them. He suffered everything without saying a word to his enemies.

The culmination however was undoubtedly his death on the cross.

Christ was a man who felt totally abandoned by everyone, even by God, but just before his last breath, he entrusted himself intensely and totally to his Father and then - as he promised - he rose from the dead three days later.

The Lord, born of Mary, be praised, the beginning and the end of our existence. The path of a Christian is strewn with obstacles and crosses which are a must, but we need have no fear. He entrusted himself to God and through his resurrection he overcame death.

Therefore, for us, there is a light

May 2019



that pierces the darkness of suffering and death; the certainty that God calls us to eternal life and joy without end.

O Mary, intercede with God for us that we may follow the example of Your Son, that we may live in humility and walk courageous along the path of life, in the hope that one day we may reach the Kingdom of Heaven, Paradise for all eternity.

Holy Mary

You, O Holy Mary are the perfect model of total adherence to the will of God and for every creature who seriously wants to follow the Lord Jesus.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. O God, do with me what you will." What profound words of this extraordinary and humble young woman! Who would not remain open-mouthed gazing at Mary, letting us glimpse a journey that would lead her to sanctity.

I can think of so many things regarding sanctity, including the words of St. Dominic Savio: "Here we make sanctity consist in being cheerful." This statement is so very gratifying and encouraging; it lets us become aware that the goal of holiness is not just for a chosen few but is the desired target for every Christian who wishes to take the Gospel seri-

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Don Bosco's Madonna

ously. That's how they will become holy day by day, living their vocation through the "thick-and-thin" of married life, the joys and difficulties of religious life and in an original and the unique way in which each one tries always to strive towards inner perfection in order to live close to the Lord and so attain true happiness.

"Teach me to do your will for you are my God." That is how we pray when we recite the words of Psalm 142.

Perhaps, the main ingredient for the success of this "recipe for holiness" is precisely the ability to ask God daily to help you discover his will; to find joy not in the superficial and ephemeral things but in the lasting joys of the interior life which lasts forever.

At this moment it means making room within oneself, giving

up external gratification or anything that is futile so that his Word takes deep root in us.

The Word of God is the seed that we must absolutely nurture within ourselves in order to be faithful and true witnesses.

"And who better to be our "model" and "guide" if not Mary most holy?"

That is why we will entrust ourselves to her maternal intercession so that she may help us to live our days always longing to do God's will, not ours.

Help us O Mary, to know how to sense, in the daily events of life, the important suggestions that He whispers into our hearts. And even when everything seems inexplicable and mysterious to us, help us to say with faith: "Father, may your will be done."

That is how, day after we will plant a seed of holiness that will grow into a tree. □



NEWSBITS

ROME

Albino Badinelli was born on the morning of 6 March 1920 in Allegrezze, a hamlet of the Municipality of Santo Stefano d'Aveto. The seventh of eleven sons of Vittorio Badinelli and Caterina Ginocchio.

In 1939 he entered the Military Academy of Turin, and on March 1, 1940 was incorporated into the Carabinieri Ausiliario, at the Alonzevi Carabinieri Legion of Rome. On June 10th 1940, he was transferred to the Legion of Messina the following 14th of June, to serve in the town of Scicli.

In August 1944, Albino returned from the village of La Villa, where he suddenly witnessed a flame on the ground in front of the gate of the parish cemetery. Fear of that vision made him run home, to ask his father for help. The following days were the most terrible and filled with great suffering. Many people lost their lives in the clashes between Nazi-Fascists and men belonging to the resistance.

Albino, although not actively part of the resistance, moved by a spirit of responsibility towards his friends, and relatives, presented himself spontaneously to the Fascist Command. He affirmed: "I must present myself before someone is killed, because otherwise I would have no peace. I must be the first!"

After an interrogation with the Commander called Caramella, with which Albino emphasized his wishes and resolutions of peace, the same official without hesitation, accused him of being a deserter, and declared that he would be executed.

Around noon on September 2nd,



1944, Albino asked to be able to confess, but permission was not granted. Mons. Giuseppe Monteverde gave him a crucifix and his blessing; while placing him in the maternal care of Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe.

When he arrived in front of the cemetery of Santo Stefano, Albino was placed with his back to the wall, ready to be executed. At that moment the young carabinieri, kissed the crucifix with reverence and looking at the Christ while clasp him, repeated, with deep faith and humility, the same words of Jesus on the cross: "Forgive them, Father, because they do not know what they do!"

At that point, three shots of gunfire rang out- two entered his heart and one his head, separating forever Albino from this earthly life. His sister Agnese recounted that three of the soldiers had refused to shoot him.

On that wall today stands a plaque that says: "Under the firing squad, on 2nd September 1944 an innocent victim fell serenely, while forgiving: the carabinieri Albino Badinelli, son of Allegrezze. Oh you who pass by, keep his memory and pray for him and for world peace."

Eugenio Arcidiacono, *La Stampa* □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Seeing is Believing

Two old maids were discussing men. Asked one: "Which would you desire most in a husband - brains, wealth or appearance?"

"Appearance," replied the other "and the sooner the better."

Matter of Time

"I refused to marry Bob three months ago and he's been drinking ever since."

"That's what I'd call carrying a celebration too far."

Silence is Golden

Little Johnny was six years old and never had he said one word. His parents tried every possible way to make him talk. Even a doctor brought in had no way to get him to say a word. One morning Johnny's mother put out his pancakes and to her surprise Johnny said: "There should be more butter on the pancakes, mother." The mother was delighted and said, "Oh Johnny, why have you never said a word before?" "Oh," said Johnny "up to this time everything has been fine."

Step by Step

Two men met on the street and one asked the other for a cigarette commenting, "I thought you had quit smoking."

"I'm just at the first stage," replied the other, "I've quit buying."

Till Love Do Us Part

A father said to his daughter, "Your young man approached me and asked for your hand and I consented."

"But father," cried the daughter, "I don't wish to leave mother."

"I quite understand, child," the father said. "But don't let me stand in the way of your happiness, take your mother with you."

The Dress Circle

Jill had been naughty nearly all day, and as punishment was sent upstairs before the evening's TV programmes started.

"And when you say your prayers, Jill," said her mother, "ask God to make you a good girl tomorrow." "Why," inquired the child, "What's on tomorrow?"

In A Day's Work

The problem pupil was becoming too well-acquainted with the principal's office.

One day the principal showed her annoyance.

"This makes the fifth time I have punished you this week. what do you say for yourself?"

"I'm glad it's Friday."

The Sound of Silence

During the interval of a play, a mother telephoned her home to make sure that everything was all right. A small voice piped up at the other end of the line, "Shush, mummy! The baby sitter's asleep."

Structural Problem

"What's the trouble, Doc?" asked the patient.

"I'm not sure exactly what's wrong with you," replied the doctor, "but if you were a building you'd be condemned." □

THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



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

Thank you Jesus, thank you Mother Mary for interceding for us, for helping me get a temporary job after being jobless for 4 months, Praise the Lord!

J. D'couto
Many thanks for favours received through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Marys.

Euphrasia Rebello
Our sincere thanks to Our Lord Jesus and his most Blessed Mother Mary for blessing my son and daughter-in-law with a good job and for the innumerable favours received through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys. Dear Lord Jesus and our Most Blessed Mother please keep us under your protection always.

Mabel D'Cunha, Mumbai

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary for all the favours received.

Elizabeth Mahalhasa
Thank you dearest Mother Mary for the help in times of financial difficulties and granting me the necessary aid. Bless us always.

Candida Pereira, Mumbai
Our sincere thanks to Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary for having helped me bring up my daughter all by myself. My daughter will graduate next March 2019.

A Devotee
The Lord Jesus and Mother Mary have been kind to me: Bestowing on my family good health; my children have secured fellowships and internships and job opportunities; for enabling me to travel with my children; for clear and good results on my tests; for Mya's band victory; for protecting us from calamity while on road travels; for obtaining the papers that we were hopefully waiting for; for my mother's good health and peace of mind; the peace and good health of Aunty Amini; for blessing us with Viyana; for Rohan's wedding; and especially for clearing my ear.

Mrs. Pushpa Samagond, Australia

JUST A BUNCH OF FLOWERS?

by Anne Marie Lee

A group of women, away for a quiet weekend break, were sitting around a low table on which was spread a colourful cloth, some candles and a scent burner. The atmosphere was intimate and as the light faded outside the conversation turned to spiritual matters.

We began to talk about God and religion and what it all means. The women were in their thirties and forties. This break away was a first for some and a big event for all. To be away from household chores and the demands of family was a great treat. A number of us were a bit shy about admitting that we had lost the habit of going to Church regularly. We still talked to God in our own way, mostly asking for favours and sometimes remembering to thank Him. We talked about our experience of the Church of our youth and how strongly religion influenced everything then. There was a sadness that Church had somehow let us down.

I don't go to Church any more

One said I don't go to Church anymore but when I do go, to weddings or baptisms I find myself weeping. I just weep, even though I'm not sad. In fact I feel very peaceful but it's embarrassing the way I weep. Even as she was talking about it she became emotional. Then someone said, "Did you ever think that it might be God reaching down and giving you a hug, saying "You are very precious to Me, I love you very much" and that is why you weep and at the same time feel peaceful?" She

thought this was a beautiful idea... Then someone else said, "Wouldn't it be great if Church was like this, like us here talking and sharing our hopes and worries and discussing things?" And so, the discussion went on and we felt the presence of Jesus very strongly among us as we talked late into the night. We were church.

Danced around the kitchen Floor

Some weeks later the same group met up again and one of the women said she had a story to tell us. "It happened to me on Mothers Day" she said. "I went to the supermarket to do my weekly shopping and before I went in I said to myself, I'd have time to go to Mass. As I went into the Church a young girl handed a ticket to me. I asked her what it was for. She said, "It's Mothers Day and the priest is going to give someone a gift". "But I don't belong to this Parish." "That doesn't matter so long as you are a mother?" "I am," I said "and I'm also a grandmother." So the girl insisted I take the ticket. After Mass the priest pulled a ticket out of a box beside the altar and called out my number. I nearly died.

Up I got and wobbled up the aisle on my high heels, my legs like jelly, while the priest, who was a bit of a comedian, made funny comments. I was mortified. He presented me with a huge bouquet of beautiful flowers and wished me a Happy Mothers Day. Everybody clapped. My face was scarlet as

I walked back to my seat, all eyes looking at me.

I went home and danced around the kitchen floor, hugging the flowers, tears running down my face. All I could think of was what was said in the room that night. "Think of it as God leaning down, putting His

arms around you, telling you of His great love for you." I knew then that God definitely loves me. Of all the people in the Church that morning He picked me to give the flowers to. It was fantastic! □

Courtesy St. Martin Magazine, Ireland

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Thanks to the Eternal Father, Mother Mary and all the saints for all the favours received.
A Devotee



THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO

My belated heartfelt thanks to Our Lady and St. Dominic Savio for making my two kidney surgeries successful in 2015. Sorry for being late. I also pray and request you to get me a permanent job and also for my good health. Please continue to shower your abundant blessings on my family

Anil D'Souza, Thane

Our sincere thanks to Our Lord Jesus, dear Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for giving our daughter Sareena a safe delivery and the gift of a normal healthy baby girl and for many other favours received.

Margaret and Joseph, Mumbai

I am grateful to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for blessing us with a baby boy, Jeremiah Vaz.

Mervin and Manisha Vaz

Sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for many favours received. Sorry for the delay.

A Devotee

Our grateful thanks to Our Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of our daughter Charmaine and the gift of a healthy baby boy and for many other favours received by us.

Ronnie and Mabel D'Cunha, Mumbai

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

MAY 2019

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MARY WAS THERE

“Marian devotion begins most naturally in the home. Parents can confer a priceless favour on their children If from earliest years they teach them to take a childlike attitude to God our Father and Mary our Mother. A child’s very notion of the meaning of the words father and mother depends largely on what sort of persons its parents are. If the parents are all that they should be, children easily learn to look upon God as the best of Fathers, and to love Mary as their Mother. An outstanding example of this kind can be seen in the life of St Therese of Lisieux. On the other hand, the poor example of parents, or the lack of good example, is a spiritual hindrance to the children. Such children are handicapped in forming a correct idea of the Fatherhood of God and the Motherhood of Mary.”

(from: *Mary in Our Life*,
by William G. Most)

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