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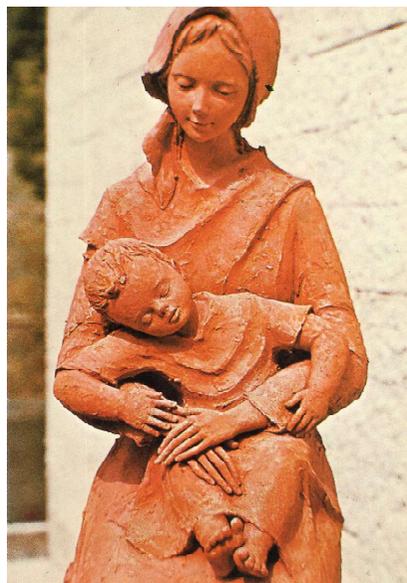
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***Renewed by this
Paschal Season,
we pray, O Lord,
that we, who honour
the memory of the
Mother of your Son,
may show forth
in our mortal flesh
the life of Jesus.
Who lives and reigns
for ever and ever.***

*(From the Common of Our Lady
for Easter)*

From The Editor's Desk

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

You can recognize the poor in spirit easily and quickly. They are approachable, understanding and helpful – and they are people who carry a cross. As you get to know them, you will find that the two are linked: they understand you because they are human themselves; they are compassionate because they are familiar with suffering and that is why they will never try to dominate or patronize you. They wouldn't feel they had the right.

You will also find they are optimistic in outlook, in the sense that something good does turn up when you do everything you can to make it.

The poor in spirit, therefore, are early risers, hard workers and persistent triers. Not even their crosses prevent them from looking for the bright side, searching for it all the more when it's harder to find.

We are not just talking here about personality types. The truly poor cut across all natures. So what's the secret that makes them stand out, the sort that draws admiration? It is their utter dependence on God.

Because the cross they carry is a heavy one, they have to trust in him alone. Day by day they turn to the Father in their poverty of heart, believing he will see them through, he will help them to cope. And day by day they find that their hope is not in vain.

Sometimes their cross may be a recent bereavement, a terrible sense of loneliness, a drink problem, an unhappy marriage, wayward children, severe depression, or just simply 'nerves.'

They have learnt that these things can actually make you a better person – more patient for example, more humble. And so, relying on a strength greater than their own, they redouble their efforts to do the best they can.

The truth is that everyone is impoverished without God. When we recognize this, we inherit the kingdom of heaven. When we deny it we inherit merely the passing kingdoms of the modern world bringing frustration and unhappiness. When we try to go it alone, we fail. When we make use of the helps that God offers, we succeed. Not that problems disappear or that things always turn out the way we would like them, very often they don't. But we're able to manage ourselves, our reactions, our emotions, our decisions. And that really is success.

It is when we can say to God, 'I am nothing. I know nothing. Guide me,' that we attain the spiritual poverty that enriches us. That's when we start acting on his wisdom, not our own; with his power, not ours. After that situations begin to change that we thought never could. And where in the past we have thought of just giving up, we discover a new hopefulness that makes us want to do more for ourselves and for others.

And why not? With God on our side, there is nothing to be lost and everything to be won.

Fr. Ian Doultan, sdb

THERE'S NO PERFECT MARRIAGE MANUAL

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

Young people often have excessively high expectations of married life, as if love should settle all differences and automatically resolve all difficulties.

One could say that one is born again, but this time as a couple, and one finds oneself going through all the steps of a small child: learning to talk together, to walk together, to decide together. Each of the two has a history behind them, a personality, values and sensitivity, particular desires and needs. Putting all this together requires a long apprenticeship, which is

accompanied and supported by the love that binds the two, but which does not take away the fatigue of the journey ahead.

Pope Francis first of all recalls the background to this apprenticeship: "This process occurs in various stages that call for generosity and sacrifice" (AL 220). And so, the sensitive attraction of the beginnings becomes a need for the other, felt as part of one's



own life; the joy of belonging to each other becomes a common life project; up to that maturity which is characterised as a search for the happiness of the other. The background, therefore, is that of the passage from the I to the you and from the you to the we; all this is realised not theoretically, but within that daily life which the wedding inaugurated. An artisanal task, the Pope reminds us, which requires learning to negotiate. Two important words - craftsmanship and negotiation - which deserve to be explored.

Love is artisanal, says Pope Francis (AL 221). There is no manual for a successful marriage, because each couple is unique, just as the people in them are unique. There is no such thing as a serial marriage, only a slow and daily learning process that requires commitment and energy from the couple. The image from Genesis, where we meet God who moulds man (Gen 2:7), expresses this task well: the two mould each other and, as believers, allow themselves to be moulded by God himself. Just as God realises that Adam lacks something because he is alone, so the couple can recognise that something is missing, that there are adjustments to be made, choices to be made and pruning to begin. We learn by living, making mistakes and always starting again, processing mistakes and falls. "Even in difficult moments the other comes back to surprise and new doors open to find each other again, as if for the first time; and in each new stage they return to shape each other" (AL 221). What is needed is the patience of the craftsman, the precious treasure

of experience, the willingness to learn.

The second word that Pope Francis emphasises is negotiation. The term makes one think of the confrontation between those who sell a product and those who want to buy it and negotiate on the price. There is some truth in this image, but it needs some clarification. It is a matter of agreeing on the basic values and choices that underlie marriage itself; on everything else, healthy negotiation is inevitable.

Respect, sincerity, solidarity, love, to give a few examples, are the pillars that are not questioned. Where to go for lunch or on holiday, how to furnish the house or manage parents and friends, all this is an "interplay of give and take, for the good of the family" (AL 220). Healthy negotiation requires each person to express his or her desires and efforts to arrive at a shared choice, which then becomes the couple's choice. It is obvious that those who have put aside their own desires may be sorry, but my little renunciation today will be yours tomorrow, and so on. Here is the passage from I to you to we.

I take a banal example, but also a very real one: if I give up going to the mountains that I love, to go to the sea because you like it so much, I cannot insist on this renunciation every day if the holiday at the sea becomes a little disaster. Saying: "I told you so if you listened to me" is still an immature negotiation because when a decision is made it is fundamental that both take responsibility for the choice made, even if it is not the one that either of them would have preferred. The Pope writes:

“Love makes each wait for the other with patience of a craftsman, a patience which comes from God.” (AL 221).

The work and negotiation that life demands of every couple may suggest that there is something wrong with married life. Young people often cultivate excessively high expectations of married life, as if love should settle every difference and automatically and spontaneously resolve every difficulty. “Once it becomes apparent that the reality is more limited and challenging than one imagined, the solution is not to think quickly and irresponsibly about separation, but to come to the

sober realization that married life is a process of growth, in which each spouse is God’s means of helping the other to mature” (AL 221).

Pope Francis recalls the “history of salvation” which, as we know from the Bible accounts, is a journey full of stumbling blocks, achievements and mistakes, but always inhabited by God’s faithfulness and the readiness of the chosen people to convert. Every marriage is a story of salvation that has the features of an exodus and of a liberation that is also a struggle to conquer the promised land that will always remain in part “promised.” □

THE COTTON THREAD

Bruno Ferrero

Once upon a time there was a cotton thread that felt useless.

“I’m too weak to make a rope,” he complained. “And I’m too short to make a shirt. I’m too ungainly for a kite, and I’m no use for cheap embroidery. I’m discoloured and have split ends....

Ah, if I were a golden thread, I would adorn a stole, I would be on the shoulders of a prelate! Or on the robe of a queen. No, I’m of no use at all. I’m a failure! Nobody needs me. No one likes me, not even myself!”

He curled up in his armchair, listened to sad music and was always alone.

One day a little pile of wax heard him and said: “Don’t let yourself down like this, little cotton wool. I have an idea: let’s do something together! Of course we can’t become an altar or living room candle: you’re too short and I’m too little. We can become a lamp and give a little warmth and a little light. It is better to illuminate and warm up a little than to stand in the dark and grumble.

The cotton thread willingly accepted. Combined with the wax, it became a lamp, shone in the darkness and gave off warmth. And he was truly happy. □



THE MOTHER OF THE LORD COMES TO ME

by Chino Biscontin

The admiring and devoted attention of Jesus’ disciples for his Mother, the Mother of the Messiah and Son of God, is already vigorously expressed in the Gospels, especially in Matthew, Luke and John. The celebrations in honour of Our Lady found their fertile cradle in the Holy Land, and particularly in Jerusalem. These celebrations were anchored in specially built Churches or Basilicas. The sanctuary known as “Katisma” was intended to commemorate the resting place of the pregnant Mary before she reached Bethlehem; a church built near the Sheep Gate, close to the remains of the Pool of Bethesda, dedicated to her birth; another at the foot of the Mount of Olives, in the Cedron Valley, to venerate her Tomb and finally a great Basilica, called St Mary the New, close to the Temple esplanade, to commemorate her presentation and consecration.

From the East, Marian celebrations gradually reached the West. The feast of the Visitation of Mary arrived from Constantinople, where the veil of the Virgin Mary was venerated, via the Franciscans. First Pope Urban VI and then Pope Boniface IX extended it to the whole Church.

With the liturgical reform of the Vatican Council, three celebrations of Our Lady are as follows. Three solemnities: Mary Mother of God, Immaculate Conception, Assumption into Heaven. Two

feasts: Nativity of Mary, Visitation to St Elizabeth. The latter was fixed on 31 May between the Annunciation of the Lord and the Birth of John the Baptist, according to Luke’s account. This is followed by various celebrations (‘memorial’) throughout the liturgical year.

Since 1987, the Italian Church has had the version of “Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary” and the corresponding “Lectionary” consisting of 46 forms of Holy



Mary does not hesitate to humble herself before God because she knows that charity and humility are only perfect if they pass from God to neighbour. It is not possible to love God whom we do not see, if we do not love the people we see.
(St. Francis de Sales)

Masses honouring the Mother of God. It is an invaluable treasure revealing the beauty of the prayers and prefaces, the wise choice of biblical passages, the dense introductions both to the Masses and to the proclaimed readings, all inspired by biblical and liturgical texts.

It says: "The Blessed Virgin Mary, in her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, foreshadows the mystery of salvation in which God 'visited and redeemed his people'; and at the same time she is a "type" of the Church which, "sustained by your sacraments, with the light and strength of your Spirit," visits all humanity so that "they may recognise Christ as their Saviour."

In this Mass the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated as:

- New Daughter of Zion who bears in her womb ("in your midst") the Lord, the King of Israel;

- Ark of the new covenant which, having conceived the

Word, brings "salvation and joy to the house of Elizabeth";

- A new creature moulded by the Holy Spirit, who, "made fertile by heavenly dew," gave the world the fruit that brings salvation, Jesus Christ;

- The Mother of God, recognised as such by Elizabeth, the mother of the Forerunner, "in the prophetic greeting" pronounced by her "enlightened by the Spirit;"

- The Mother of God, who offers herself entirely to the mystery of redemption; that holy woman, who, after the Angel's announcement and totally dedicated to the realisation of the gifts of salvation, praises God in a song of praise overflowing with gratitude;

- That holy woman who excels "in the thoughtful gesture of her charity" and is rightly called blessed "for believing in the promised salvation;"

- A woman "whose humility God has looked upon and whom all generations will exalt."

But those who attend Mass on this feast day and receive Communion become similar to the Holy Virgin of the Visitation: they receive within themselves, in the sign of the consecrated Bread, the Son of God. Since in every man and woman, whether they know it or not, in a thousand and one different ways the thirst for God is present) those we meet in our days are similar to St Elizabeth. We are entrusted with the missionary task (Pope Francis) of making them feel the presence of Jesus! □

PICK UP THE PIECES AND GO ON

by Anastasia Dias

The sky was dark and it had begun to rain. Peter could feel his palms moistening with sweat and his head throbbing. He could feel his soul sinking with every passing second. He placed his wet palms on his sore eyelids and started sobbing bitterly.

He couldn't believe what he had just done. He wished this was all a bad dream. He wished he could go back in time, to a few moments ago and change it. He wished he could undo what he had just done. But, he couldn't. He wept uncontrollably.

Peter still remembered the last time he saw his friend. The way his friend had glanced in his

direction and looked him in the eye. And, guilt that overtook him in that moment. He had denied him after all, said he didn't know who 'the man' was.

Peter had always felt that he was special amongst the lot. Not only was he older and more mature but He always entrusted Peter with responsibility. And took Peter along with Him wherever He went.

In the last three years, apart from his family, Peter had spent most of his time with Him. Several times when Peter had spoken or acted foolishly, He never held anything against him.

But this last time that they had seen each other was the worst ever, considering what Peter had done. He had denied knowing the man who was his best friend, that too on the day of His impending death.

So, there sat Peter sobbing bitterly, not knowing what else to do. He could see Jesus' blood-stained face and he wept even more. He couldn't remember any of the things Jesus had told him before His death, except his last words predicting Peter's denial. Prior to his death, Jesus had spo-



ken about his death and resurrection, about Peter's denial, his subsequent mission and the foundation of the Church. But Peter couldn't remember any of that except how boldly and blatantly he'd denied Jesus.

For three days after Jesus' death, Peter lived with the guilt of his denial. His thoughts kept him up throughout the night and he was exhausted and tired during the day.

On the third morning, Mary came running to him and John. She said she'd seen Him. Peter thought it was impossible at first, maybe she'd seen someone else. But then he wanted to go and see for himself. Since he had nothing left to lose, he ran towards the tomb. John had outrun him. When he reached the tomb, both he and John went in together and saw the cloths that had covered Jesus' body folded and kept in place. Both of them didn't seem to remember what Jesus had said about his rising from the dead, so they went home wondering what could have happened.

However, it was the day Peter went fishing and caught no fish, that he experienced the presence of Jesus and recognised that it was Him. Coincidentally, both their first and last meetings took place while Peter was fishing. It was during that last meeting, that Jesus reinstated Peter's purpose and mission here on earth. Since He and Peter were talking in person for the first

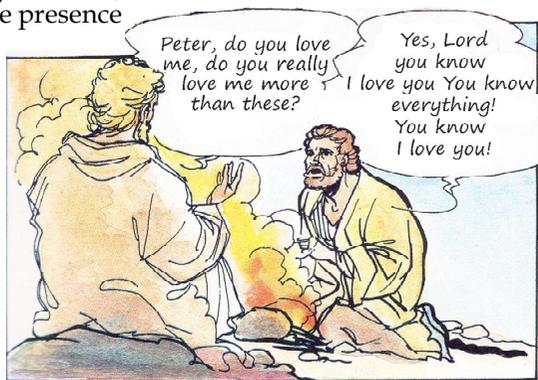
time after His resurrection, Jesus could have easily chosen to mention about Peter's denial.

But, he didn't. He talked instead about his mission.

That's exactly what you and I need to learn from Peter's story. Each of us goes through those times when we can't help wishing we could go back and change things. We have had times when we wished that the horrid experiences we faced, could just have been bad dreams and for those times, we have all cried inconsolably.

However, those moments occupy just a tiny span of our huge lives. It is in our hands to ensure that they don't overflow that tiny span. It is in our hands to let go of what has been and look at the larger picture: to reinstate our mission and purpose on this earth.

So, the next time you encounter that moment which you wish you could undo, breathe in deeply. Understand that you can only change the 'now,' the present moment. Let go. And work toward fulfilling your purpose in this one lifetime of yours. □



SALESIANS IN THE EYE OF THE STORM: SYRIA

When Fr Munir El Rai, Salesian Provincial in the Middle East, reported on the situation in Syria and the tragic situation of displaced persons and refugees, particularly on the Salesian presence in Damascus, Aleppo and Kafroun he mentioned how the Salesians were living, together with the young people entrusted to them, in that land tormented by violence. Today some ten years later the situation hasn't changed. In fact, it has gotten worse.

The situation in the country has worsened, the latest reports are that Aleppo and Damascus and its surroundings are being attacked and bombed. Shortages of fuel, electricity, water, bread, gas and cars, as well as paralysed markets and unemployment, add to the lack of security and chaos. Electronic communication has become difficult. The general economic situation is worsening by the day, with factories and businesses closing and consequent rampant unemployment.

More than 30,000 people were killed, some 200,000 injured, with thousands of families displaced and refugees. Violence has erupted, with murders, kidnappings, vandalism, looting, burning of government buildings and utility facilities. The violence has disrupted and shattered the demographic fa-

bric and ancient coexistence.

We are witnessing an unprecedented phenomenon in Syria, the kidnapping of people. It is really fortunate if one can get away with simple straightforward negotiation otherwise there is a hefty ransom that is demanded. In addition, there are roadblocks that different factions or individuals have put up on almost all Syrian highways. This makes any journey very risky and has created a state of horror, disgust and great uncertainty. Thousands of people have lost their homes, many are in urgent need of medical care and humanitarian aid.

Since mid-March 2011, Syria, which is known to the world for its rich history, culture and healthy and exemplary pluralism, is now experiencing unprecedented chaos. At this moment, we cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. We are very sad, concerned and disheartened by what has been happening in Syria over the past year and a half. Although we remain hopeful that a peaceful solution will be found.



Displaced persons and refugees

There are now about 1.5 million displaced persons and refugees. Most of the internally displaced have sought refuge in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, and in the mountainous areas around Homs and Hama, where the fighting began. Displaced people were housed in schools and public facilities. For the thousands of displaced families, the situation is dramatic; many are in urgent need of medical care and food aid, but humanitarian aid is difficult to deliver and is still scarce. More than 300,000 Syrians have already landed in the four refugee camps built in neighbouring countries.

At this stage, it is more important than ever to support religious minorities by providing specific assistance and helping to alleviate the uncertainty caused by the increasing loss of jobs and the escalating clashes currently affecting their neighbourhoods. The flight abroad of indigenous religious minorities would deprive the future Syria of its religious, social and cultural pluralism with the role that this implies in the process of democratisation and the recovery of peaceful coexistence.

The Salesians of Don Bosco in Syria

The Salesians are trying to carry out their activities to support displaced families in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Kafroun, with particular attention to children and young people. They promote recreational and educational activities in schools and other institutes and reception centres that host displaced peo-

ple. Many schools and educational and recreational facilities in Aleppo and Damascus have been used to host IDPs from the countryside and neighbourhoods most affected by the fighting. In these structures, children and young people live a life based on the search for subsistence, with no activities devoted to re-establishing certain elements of normality such as educational activities. Recently, the Salesian premises have been without beneficiaries due to the clashes that have prevented young people from reaching them. The activities carried out by the Salesians and collaborators in these schools and educational facilities would be daily educational and recreational activities, organised according to the needs of the different groups and age groups.

Activities are carried out in support of the Christian minorities, aimed at sustaining them during the emergency phase and aimed at improving the state of insecurity in which the families find themselves and preventing them from fleeing the country. The aim is to support them in their search for accommodation and to provide them with food, clothing, educational materials and medicine. In addition to all these commitments, it should be noted that the Salesian communities present in Syria currently open their centres every evening to welcome all those who wish to do so, exchanging moments of fraternity, mutual support and heartfelt shared prayer. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. MATTHEW PHUONG (May 26)

ASIAN MARTYRS

June 19, 1988 was a red-letter day in the history of Asia, Roman Catholicism, the Catholic Church of Asia and Vietnam. It was the day when Pope John Paul II canonized and added to the Roman calendar of saints 117 devout Vietnamese Catholics who died as heroic martyrs. Thousands of Vietnamese from different parts of the world gathered in St. Peter's square to celebrate this historic event. Monsignor Tran Van Hoai, who was renowned as an activist and was given the responsibility of shepherding the Vietnamese diaspora Catholics was chief organizer of the function.

The Catholic Church was relatively slow to put down roots in Asia as compared to most parts of the world. Asia was also perhaps the most resistant to accept the faith and so, an event like this holds tremendous meaning and value. These martyrs weren't the first Asians to be canonized nor were they the first set of martyrs. They were however, the first group from Vietnam.

The Church collectively remembers these martyrs on November 24. They were beatified



at different times and in different sets. The first group of sixty-four consisted of those who were martyred between 1798 and 1853. They were beatified in 1900 by Pope Leo XIII. In 1906 Pope Pius X beatified another eight and in 1909 he beatified those martyred between 1859 and 1861. Another twenty-five were beatified by Pope Pius XII in 1951. This brought the total to 117.

Pope John Paul II was aware of witness that the Vietnamese martyrs gave and of the tremendous hardships and tortures they had

to endure. The 117 saints are only a representative sample of all those who lost their lives on account of the faith. There are so many martyrs whose names are unknown and so the 117 martyrs named and canonized stand in as their witnesses as well.

Even though they are collectively celebrated on November 24, some of the martyrs have their own feast day due to their being recognized and assigned a feast day prior to their collective canonization. Matthew Phuong is one of those who have their own feast day.

CATHOLICISM IN VIETNAM

The first Catholic missionaries came to Vietnam from Portugal and Spain in the 16th century. Their mission work did not appear fruitful at all. It was the Jesuits who entered Vietnam in the early part of the 17th century who vitalized the missions and brought forth significant results. The Jesuit missionaries came mostly from Italy, Portugal and Japan. Their style of life and mission attracted many locals and they went about baptising people in large numbers.

Catholicism began to flourish under the *NguyAn Anh* dynasty. By 1802, there were three dioceses with populations ranging from 60,000 to 140,000 people. There were also a good number of bishops in Vietnam even though they were all Europeans. The tables began to turn as political power passed on from one set of hands to another. The key reason for the beginning of the persecution was the political stance of the Catholic population. They favoured Catholics and

those converted to the faith as rulers which upset those who did not choose to embrace the Catholic religion.

When power landed in the hands of *Minh Mng*, an enemy of Christianity, things erupted. It started slow with him imposing restrictions on Christians and their missions and later ascended to him ordering the killing of bishops, priests and even lay persons. He issued a manhunt for missionaries and patronized the ravaging Christian villages. It is rumoured that people were killed in thousands. It is estimated that between the years 1857 and 1862 alone, 115 native priests, 100 nuns and more than 5,000 lay people were martyred. Churches and Christian institutions were razed to the ground and more than 40,000 people were made exiles and refugees. The total number of martyrs in Vietnam is estimated to be in the region of 130,000.

BLOOD OF MARTYRS

The first missionary to be martyred was *François Gagelin*. For over forty years, missionaries were hunted and systematically put down. Upto 1836, village headmen were instructed to get their villagers to condemn the foreign religion and revert back to their indigenous faith. They simply had to report to their regional heads called mandarins about how their subjects had rejected Catholicism. But after 1836, procedures were tightened up. Officials could visit any village and command the villagers to line up one by one and trample on a cross to show their derision for the

Catholic faith. If the officials suspected a community of harbouring a missionary, they could order the militia to cordon off the village and conduct a rigorous search. If a missionary was found, the whole community would suffer severe punishment.

Missionaries were killed in gruesome ways. While many were beheaded there were others who had to endure inhuman tortures. A certain, *Fr Ignatius Delgado* was imprisoned in a cage and kept on public display for ridicule and abuse. He ultimately ended up dying of starvation and exposure. Some of them had their limbs hacked off joint by joint, others had their flesh burnt and torn out with flaming tongs. Many of them were branded on the face with the words *ta dao* which translates as 'Sinister religion'.

The governing officials attracted snitches and spies by offering lucrative rewards for those who helped capture missionaries and disband Christians. When Bishop *Dominic Henares* was captured in the *Giao Thuy* district, the villagers and soldiers that helped in finding and arresting him were rewarded with bags of silver. Officials who proved to be hounds at sniffing and capturing missionaries were rewarded with promotions besides monetary incentives.

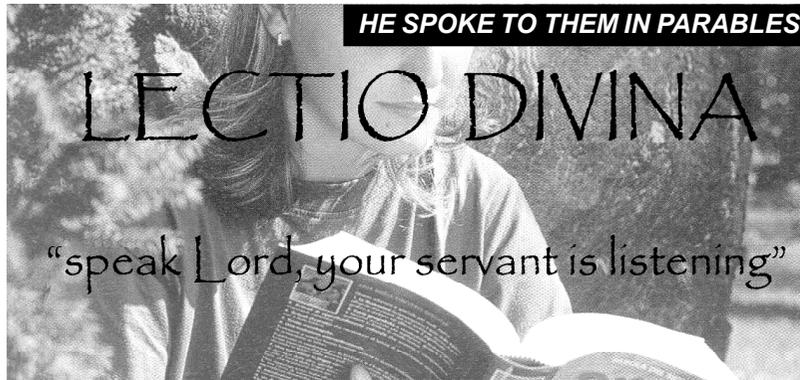
MATTHEW PHUONG

Matthew Nguyen Van Phuong was born in Vietnam in 1801. He lost his parents at a very young age and was subsequently raised by the local priest. He grew up to be a good natured and God-fear-

ing man. Since he was brought up by a priest, he became a close collaborator in the mission and evangelizing work. It was his task to find homes where a priest could say Mass, away from the prying eyes of Government officials. Considering that Vietnam was already in the heat of Catholic persecution, *Matthew* comes across as a man of immense courage and conviction. His job might not seem very hard or significant but it demanded a lot from him. He was in this way instrumental in helping so many Catholics keep the ember of their faith alive and burning through the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Matthew was married and had a family but that did not stop him from collaborating in the work of evangelization. Towards the end of 1860, he began to be hunted. He took his priest-companion and went into hiding. For five months, the officials searched and finally caught up with him. They traced a cross on the ground and commanded that *Matthew* and the priest trample on it. Neither gave in despite the threats, abuses and beatings. Their captors became so enraged by their adamant stance that they beheaded both of them on the spot.

The words of *Monsignor Tran Van Hoai* sum up well both the witness of *Matthew* and the host of other Vietnamese martyrs, as well as the contemporary efforts to live authentic Catholic lives. He says, "What continues to push us, despite all the sacrifices, is the knowledge that our suffering will benefit the Church and our beloved Vietnam." □



THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE

by Carlo Broccardo

It happened to me a few years ago. I had planted three trees in my garden. The cherry tree died during the second summer: it mysteriously dried out from top to bottom; I never understood why. The apricot tree, on the other hand, grew fast and was always full of fruit, but then it caught a disease (I would even tell you the name of it, if only I could remember it...): almost all the apricots fell to the ground before they ripened. I cut it down. Lastly, I also cut down the pear tree, which was healthy and sprouts many leaves every year, but not a single flower. I tried everything, but in the end, I cut that down too. What was I to do? Now there are three new plants in their place; I hope it will be better this time.

Jesus is not complicated at all when he teaches something to the crowds. Of course, he can also give articulate and complex speeches; but when he can, he uses simple images. That's what the parables are like: they draw on experiences that we have all had

in our lives, like planting a tree and not being able to eat its fruit because something goes wrong. If it has happened to us, we are at a loss to understand why the owner of the vineyard tells his vinedresser to cut down that fig tree, which only sprouts leaves, without a second thought. It's not the death of anyone; it's a bit of a letdown. but then he immediately digs another hole and puts in a new plant. Problem solved.

The vinedresser has a little more patience. After all, he is the one who works his master's land: he knows how this fig tree has been cultivated so far and wants to try again. He knows how he has grown this fig tree so far and wants to give it one more try, but it is only a last attempt: "Master, leave it for another year, until I have hoed around it and put in some fertiliser. We will see if it bears fruit in the future; if not, you can cut it down." The owner and the vine-dresser have the same basic opinion: if a tree does not bear fruit, it must be cut down. It is only a question of

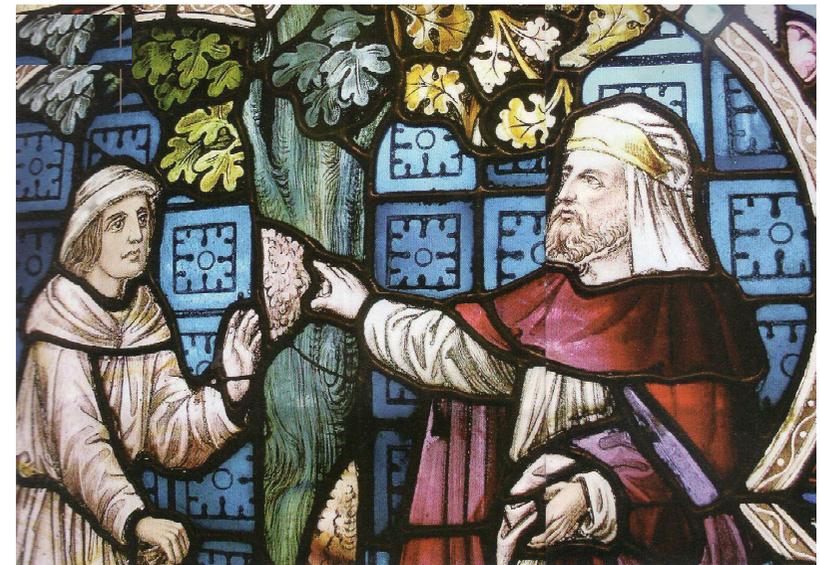
time: one would like to cut it down immediately but the other asks to wait another year. However, it is not good to give up. He also agrees to cut it down but only if it does not bear fruit this time either.

Jesus' parables are often simple. This does not mean that they are obvious, nor that they are always pleasant to listen to. In this case, the parable is very serious: in no uncertain terms he tells us that we need to wake up because we won't have all eternity! There is still some time, but it is not infinite. And this does not mean that God's patience has a limit; it means that some opportunities in life if we miss them, are lost and that's it. God may be patient, but we risk being left out - like the foolish virgins in that other parable in Matthew 25.

This parable is found in chapter 13 of Luke. It has been a while since Jesus turned serious,

precisely since he was starting the long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (cf. Lk 9:51, which literally translates as: "Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem"). Again and again, he says to the crowds: make an effort, strive to enter the Kingdom of God. Just before our parable, he had said: always be ready, with your belts fastened at your waists and your lamps burning; be like those servants who wait up all night for their master, like those who are always on the alert to prevent thieves from robbing their house (cf. Lk 12:35-38). And now he adds: because the tree that does not bear fruit will sooner or later be cut down; the time at your disposal will sooner or later run out.

Let us take up the invitation and ask ourselves whether there is not something in our lives that we should change immediately, without waiting too long. □



Quiet Spaces

“TRANQUILLITY IS NOT PEACE

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, May 16, 2017

Today's world offers a “tranquil, artificial and anaesthetised peace” in which anyone can put up his own “do not disturb” sign to create his own personal version of tranquility, yet this is not the true peace that Jesus offers: this thought lay at the heart of Pope Francis' reflection during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 16 May, 2017. The peace that Jesus offers is “a real peace” because it is rooted in the Cross, and therefore enables one to overcome all of life's many daily tribulations, including suffering and illness, without falling into mere stoicism or playing the martyr. In this regard, Pope Francis offered the wisdom of Saint Augustine who characterized Christian life as “a journey between the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God” (*De Civitate Dei* XVIII, 51).

In his meditation, the Pope drew inspiration from the Gospel of John (14:27-31) proposed by the day's liturgy. Francis observed that “Jesus was at supper with his disciples, the Last Supper, and he said to them: ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.’” The Lord, said the Pope, “gives them peace”, and then told them: “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid because I give you my peace.”

In this way, Pope Francis explained, “the Lord begins to take leave” of his disciples, precisely “with this gift, with the gift of peace.” Furthermore, the Pope continued, “we have also heard the passage from the Acts of the Apostles” (14:19-28) which recounted “the journey which Paul and Barnabas made from Antioch and then their return to Antioch, where we heard about the things that they suffered.” The Pope thus wondered: “is this the peace which Jesus gives us?” (...)

Thus, the Pope asked, “is this the peace which Jesus gives? Or did Paul not receive this peace?” The Acts then recount that Paul, “when the disciples gathered about him, rose up and entered the city”, since he was not dead, and he continued to proclaim the Gospel.” In the saint's unique way, Francis explained, Paul “had cultivated a considerable number of disciples and, before leaving them, he ordained priests, elders, that they might take care of that community.” In effect, Paul then “continued to work.” And faced with this reality, Paul urged them to “continue strong in faith, because through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Therefore, the Holy Father affirmed, “it is a peace amid tribulations.” And for this reason, “when Jesus gave this gift and said to the Apostles: ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you’, he added: ‘not as the world gives, do I give to you’”. In actual fact, the Pope explained, “the peace which the world offers is a peace without tribulations: it offers an artificial peace, a peace which, more than ‘peace’, is better called ‘tranquility.’” That is to say: “Please do not disturb me; I want to be left

in peace.” (...)

“The world teaches us the path of peace with anaesthesia” the Pope reiterated. And the world “anaesthetises us so that we do not see another reality of life: the cross.” For this reason, “Paul says that on the journey, we must enter the kingdom of heaven through many tribulations.” But, the Pope asked, “can there be peace in tribulation?” He responded, “on our part, no,” because “we are not capable of creating a peace which is tranquil, a psychological peace, a self-made peace, simply because there are tribulations,” which “for one person’ may be “pain; for another, disease; for another, death.”

But “the peace that Jesus gives is a gift: it is a gift of the Holy Spirit.” And “this peace undergoes tribulations and [yet] goes forth. It is not” — the Holy Father clarified — “a sort of stoicism, that of ‘playing the martyr.’” It is really “another thing entirely; it is a gift that helps us to keep going.” Thus, “Jesus, after having said this, went up to the Garden of Olives, as he had told them: ‘I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.’” And, having said these words, “he went to suffer, to be tempted: he offered everything to the Father's will and suffered, but God's consolation did not forsake him.” In the Gospel, in fact, we read: “there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.”

Behold then, the Pope explained, that “the peace of God is a real peace which is part of the reality of life, which does not negate life.” Since “life is thus: there is suffering, there are sick people, there are many awful things, there are wars; but that peace which comes from within, which is a gift, is never lost,” and helps us “to go forth, bearing the cross and the suffering.” All this with the knowledge that “peace without the cross is not the peace of Christ: it is a peace which can be bought.” Perhaps “we can create it ourselves, but it is not long-lasting;” it eventually comes to an end.

Reflecting then on the daily life of each of us, the Pope explained that “when I get angry and lose my peace, when my heart is unsettled, it is because I am not open to the peace of Jesus: because I am not able to live life as it happens, with the crosses and the sadness that occur: because I am not able to ask: ‘Lord, give me your peace.’” And this, Pope Francis said, “is a beautiful grace to ask for today, listening to this passage about Jesus and those words of Saint Paul: “through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” The Pontiff therefore urged the faithful to pray for “the grace of peace, so as not to lose that interior peace.” Concluding, Francis offered the following prayer as an example: “May the Lord help us to correctly understand this peace which he has given to us through the Holy Spirit.” □

THE OCEAN LINER

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

Mario was twenty and Moretto was twelve, but they were friends, they loved each other, they had the same boss and shared the same shack near the port.

The owner was Santi, he had a fishing boat that, when they pulled it out to paint it, it looked as if it would crush all the others, it was so big; all grey, with its baptismal name written in yellow-gold from stem to stern and on the day of its launch there was a party with fireworks and crackers.

Santi had a copper-coloured beard and a huge moustache and used to walk around the deck all afternoon waiting for the fishing boat. He knew the men he wanted at first glance and appreciated them for their powerful torsos and muscular arms. This was what he said about Mario:

"You're like a dolphin, I like you."

He discovered Moretto one summer afternoon as he was catching crabs in the holes between the cliffs:

"You're really like a little bass. Come here. And he led him aboard, gave him a waxed cloth suit, a deckhand's cap and called him "Squirt."

The boy looked like a small African with very black eyes, frizzy hair and no family. So, every now and then he attached himself to befriending someone.

He began to befriend Mario, as Mario passed by with his arms

full of ropes, Moretto, sitting on the ground, tripped him. Mario, annoyed, kicked him, but Moretto laughed and got up again dusting his pants, as if nothing had happened. From that day on they became friends and the young man took the boy to sleep in his hut, where there was a large bed on two wooden stands and some copper pots.

Mario was alone one evening. The moon was full that evening, like a clear and wide shower of white light over the black basin of the sea. He was sitting on the deck looking at the moonlight. Lorena, round and red passed by, looking like an orange.

"Hi there! Lorena!"

The girl stopped, waved at him and laughed. Mario jumped off the bridge, went up to her thinking that the moment had come to tell her what he had been thinking for so long. He took Lorena by the hand and looked at her intensely.

"Listen, do you want me to come and talk to your mistress? We could get along... I work, I'm strong, soon I'll have my own boat... in a few months we could get married...."

Lorena listened and looked at him a little surprised. She said yes and Mario went to her house; he spoke to the mistress who kept her in service and from that evening on Lorena was seen going to meet Mario at the pier

when he came back from the sea.

But this lasted only a few days. Soon afterwards, Mario didn't see her: he looked for her; he was told that she had left the country. He felt such sadness in his heart. He went back to the beach, lay down by the sea and stayed there until it was dark and the stars had begun to shine brightly in the sky. And the sea, his sea, comforted him as he mourned his vanished dream.

Moretto, on his own part, got attached to a dog and the dog was Lorena's faithful pet. It was a quick, intelligent, a black beast and a stray that went up and down the harbour getting kicked by everyone and rummaging in the rubbish where the fish rotted. A strange attraction drew them together: the dog's story may have resembled that of the boy's; he took him in, gave him half his bread, taught him to greet those on board and christened him, with great effort of imagination, Bobby.

He never tired of calling him:

"Bobby. Bobby."

The men on board mocked him: "What a stylish name you've

given him." Moretto didn't get angry, he just laughed; he laughed at everything.

The keeper of the small lighthouse saw it from the top of the tower one morning before the sun came up and signalled: "An ocean liner."

Then he made a remark of his own, in a low voice: "This one's a cruise liner, not one you see every day. It's American. Strange people, the Americans, they think they own the world because of that bulging wallet they carry over their hearts. But... the hearts of those people, are in their wallets.

"Titan of the Ocean," that proud giant, dropped anchor, seeming to dominate the port with its star-studded flags, its white lifeboats, its round portholes, its superb grey-green colouring. The crew was singular: men of all races, dressed in the strangest of styles. On board, music blared, tennis was played while tea was served in Japanese pots. There were tall, blond, young women as tall as rag dolls, and lanky men with light eyes, white hats and binoculars.



At the end of the second day, a swarm of those blondes came down; they spoke bad Italian and handed out handfuls of sweets and money to the brats scampering about the port.

Moretto watched and one of the ladies saw him, hugged him and put a ten-dollar note into his hand.

Astonished, Moretto turned it over and over; it didn't seem real to him. He put it in his pocket and ran back to his hut:

"Ten dollars! Ten dollars!"

It would have taken him a week to earn ten dollars on Master Santi's boat. What would he do with it? "Candy? Sandwiches? Cream puffs? Popcorn?" He laughed like crazy, then shook his head three times. He hid the banknote in the hope of getting more, and more, until he could buy himself a boat, maybe like Toni's father's, but his own, his own boat, to ply along the harbour proudly and tell everyone: "You see, I have my own boat now, and I sail when I like and land when I like, I go fishing where I like; on my boat I'm in charge: because when you have a boat of your own, you're, how to say it, a king." This thought made him happy.

The next morning, he came out of the hut when the sun was blinding; the motionless ships were splashed with sunlight, and the liner was still there, so he had not been dreaming. And he stopped to look at it, just in case the blond lady from the previous evening appeared once more.

He saw Mario whistling along

the quay while Moretto slipped slowly among the porters rolling barrels and hid there like a mischievous little mouse, and waited.

At around midday the blond lady came ashore. She was dressed in white with a sailor's collar, carrying a wooden box and a beach bag. As soon as he saw her, he went to meet her and greeted her as he had learned from the harbour people: "Goodbye, lady."

The lady recognised him, gave him a little hug and pulled away, without giving him anything. Later, Moretto, not knowing what else to do, started running along the sea.

He shouted and sang, drunk with freedom. But suddenly he stopped: a white dress and a sailor's collar were in front of him. What was the lady doing, sitting on the ground? Was she writing? He crept up, crawling like a moray eel, nimbly behind her shoulders and looking over her shoulder he saw that she was painting a picture. He could not contain his enthusiasm and clapped his hands.

The lady shook herself in shock:

"You restless Italians!"

But when she saw the brown face of the cabin boy, all fire in his eyes, all laughter between his white almond-like teeth:

"Ah, it's you!" she looked at him intently, then commanded:

"Sit there in the sun and laugh!"

Moretto obeyed. He curled up on his knees, cupped his face in

his fists and laughed. The lady sketched him with a few strokes of charcoal against the seascape, then pulled out another ten-dollar note and gave it to him.

"Tomorrow you return."

Moretto ran like the wind to hide it. It seemed to him that he had become a gentleman and he didn't want to know anything about boats and nets and fishing. They would say to him: "Bigwig, vagabond, shirker!" and he would laugh slyly without telling anyone his secret.

One evening Mario took him by the collar: "Will you tell me where you go all day long?"

And he shut up.

"Talk or I'll slap you!"

"So, hit me."

And he let himself be slapped; but he did not cry, he did not speak. In the evening, there he was again! ... Looking for the blonde lady who smiled when she saw him and said to her companions:

"He has a strange liking for me, he looks for me everywhere."

They called him in, made him chat, and Moretto's tongue loosened up and he said all he could say in his Neapolitan dialect; he talked about Mario, Bobby, Santi...

He explained: Mario is the one who lets me sleep in his shack, Santi feeds me and Bobby is the dog. I am Moretto, but they call me Squirt.

The ladies on the liner, who did not understand anything but commented among themselves:

"He's not handsome but he's nice, he's more mulatto than Italian."

Moretto spoke for himself:

"Bobby is black like me. I taught him to salute with his paw up, like this. When he salutes, he looks like a naval officer and Bobby swims. Bobby catches bass in the sea. There are so many bass there in the harbour at night!"

The ladies wanted Moretto on board, just as he was at that moment, with his dirty face, his clothes in tatters. They wanted him like he was genuinely like a son of the port, free and lively.

On the liner, the poor boy was speechless! Wow, how marvellous! Mirrors, white enamel furniture glinting with the reflections of the sea and the sun, vermilion cooks standing out in the whiteness of their jackets, painted ceilings, trays full of goodies and bottles filled with a mysterious emerald liquid.

He was craving to touch and taste. They filled his hands with biscuits, gave him the green liquid to drink and he felt it flow down his throat and into his stomach like a tongue of fire, which gave him a sudden thrust and, raising his arms towards the blond lady, he cried out:

"Now I'm going to sing."

"So, sing."

He let his voice be heard as a sailor who had unlocked the charm in his heart.

That fiery hunk of a tall frizzy-haired boy attracted everyone's sympathy. They showed him the

picture painted by the lady and he didn't recognise himself because he had never seen himself in a mirror, and when they said: "That's you!" "No, that monkey there is not me, that's Lina, Master Santi's servant."

Later, in the kitchen, he sat down to a plate of pasta and thought: This is paradise.

Moretto seemed enchanted, but when they told him: "Do you want to come with us, to America, far away, over there? We're leaving tomorrow," it was then that he felt sad, he remained thoughtful, something moved inside his naughty heart, perhaps, who knows, the love of his land, the love of his sea... He did not want to hear any more, and so he fled.

He went to see Bobby, who had become very lonely, alone, on the doorstep of the hut and when he saw him, he jumped on him as if to reproach him: "Don't you leave me, we loved each other so much; at night when it was cold you slept close to my neck and I warmed you with my breath. Don't leave me. Please don't leave."

Moretto was seized by a fury of sobs, he took Bobby in his arms and hid all day and all night among the barrels, for fear that



those ladies on the liner would look for him.

Dawn came. The sea was silver like a motionless slab of glass. He heard the shriek of the liner's siren: once, twice, three times. He remained still with his heart in his throat. *The Titan of the Ocean* (that was its name) lifted its anchors, moved away leaving a dense plume of smoke in the sky.

It was only then that the boy stood up. His heart felt light, as free as before, more than before.

And he went back to his harbour, to sing his maritime songs, to laugh, to swim, to sail away with the wind, between sea and sky, but under *his* sky, over *his* sea. His sea, endless blue, immersed and joyful. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 28

by Michele Molineris

150. His name is Boggero John (1866)

John Boggero was a twenty-six-year-old priest who had come from Cambiano. Handsome, intelligent and warm-hearted, he was very much liked at the Oratory. After spending his boyhood with Don Bosco, giving him the brightest hopes for the future, he joined the Salesian Society on January 23, 1861, but around the middle of 1866 he grew somewhat lax. Influenced by his parents and ill-advised by injudicious persons, he made up his mind to leave. One day he approached Don Bosco and asked to be allowed to return home to provide for his two sisters who needed assistance. Don Bosco felt quite hurt and endeavoured to persuade him to stay because undoubtedly this was his vocation and surely God would provide for his sisters. Seeing that he stubbornly clung to his plan, Don Bosco finally said, "So you want to go! Have it your own way then. You think you will help your sisters, who I know do not need you, but I tell you that you will not be able to help them!"

"So, you leave the Oratory with that sword of Damocles over your head."

Incardinated in the archdiocese of Turin, he was assigned as assistant parish priest to the parish of Santo Stefano in Villafranca Piemonte. According to what he wrote immediately afterwards to Cav. Oreglia, also a Salesian and unfortunately also

going against Don Bosco's explicit advice, in Villafranca he seemed to touch heaven with his finger. There was a lot of work, but the people were respectful, the priest was understanding, the table was excellent, the bed was good and the kitchen had a good fire at its disposal. He "lacked nothing," Boggero wrote on 10 December. Four days later he was found dead by his maid at the table where he had been sitting, waiting to resume his pastoral duties. Now it would seem that he had suffered a heart attack, at which time it was said that he had died of pulmonary apoplexy.

The excellent parish priest of Villafranca, Don Giuseppe Osella, kindly transcribed the death certificate from the parish registers on 12 January 1866: "In the year of our Lord 1866, on the 14th of December, at two o'clock in the afternoon, in the parish house of Santo Stefano in Villafranca Piemonte, provided with the sacraments penance and holy oil (sic) (this italic inscription has been cancelled in the register, sign therefore that he was already found dead), Boggero priest Don Giovanni died, vicar of Santo Stefano, 26 years old, native of Cambiano, domiciled in this municipality, son of the late Michele and Teresa Mosso. The body was buried on the 16th. Signed: Elia Provost".

Don Bosco had foreseen this death since the previous October. One of the first times he had contacted the young people after their return from their holidays, he had warned them, as he often did, that before Christmas one of the Oratory boys would have to

present himself at God's tribunal. The elderly, who were already accustomed to these predictions, even though they received a salutary shock each time, did not give them much thought. The newcomers, on the other hand, considered themselves to be in the antechamber of the cemetery and even wrote home to be freed from this nightmare in good time.

Relatives came to Turin in droves, and not content with making their complaints at the school, they also went to the police station to blurt out the matter, calling for measures to protect their children. In fact, at the police station, they took the matter in hand and sent qualified people to investigate it. Among them was the king's procurator who, arriving incognito, strolled for a long time through the courtyards, testing the situation with cautious questions, thrown in at random in the middle of conversations. The thing was unfortunately true: Don Bosco had indeed said that before Christmas one of those present would have to die. A few days later another gentleman came, who was no longer content to hear from the young people what Don Bosco had said, but wanted to hear it from him, so that he could tell him to put an end to those speeches, if he did not want to provoke measures from the authorities.

It was easy for Don Bosco to exonerate himself, invoking in his defence some considerations of a moral nature that made his interlocutor wince. After all, his predictions had come true up to that point; who could accuse him of cheating? he was no charlatan.

Well?

"But then," said the gentleman at last, "warn us at least without so much fanfare."

"How am I to do that? Do you want me to take the person concerned and say: "Get ready to die in a month's time"?"

"Oh, not that."

"What then?"

"So, Don Bosco, if that's the case, do me a favour."

"Go ahead."

"Couldn't you tell me the name of the person who, according to your predictions, is going to die soon?"

"I have no difficulty with that, as long as you keep it secret; if you were to speak, your imprudence would be much greater than that of which I am accused." Then, gathering himself for a moment, he said: "His name is Giovanni Boggero."

The officer jotted it down, excused himself and left.

The officer too had remained watchful. After the Christmas holidays he again showed up in the Oratory playground. "Hello boys," he greeted some youngsters. "Having fun?"

"You bet! That's what games are for."

"Anybody sick in the house?"

"No, sir."

"Has anybody died recently?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! I had heard that someone living here had passed away."

"Not among us boys."

"An older person perhaps?"

"No, because we would know it, if anybody died."

"Did anybody who lived here die outside the Oratory?"

"Oh, yes, a priest, but that was

over a week ago!"

"What was his name?"

"Father John Boggero."

The officer paled. He took out his notebook. The names matched.

"Was he sick a long time?"

"Oh no. He died of a stroke."

"Where did he die?"

"At home. One morning he returned to the rectory after Mass and sat down for his breakfast. And he died."

"Had he been sick before?"

"Never! He was always in top condition!"

The detective stood pensive a moment and then asked: "Where can I find Don Bosco?"

"In his room."

"Thanks!" Up he went at once.

The tone of the speech that followed this second meeting, it is obvious to say, was quite different from that which had characterised the first one; and it ended like this: "Dear Don Bosco, from now on you can say whatever you like to the young people; from this moment I am giving you all the licences imaginable and I will know what to say to those who complain about your predictions." (From *EMB.*, VIII, 244-247).

Ten years later, in 1876, another commissioner of public safety, Angelo Piccone, aged 38, when Don Bosco's death predictions came true and were scrupulously verified by him, not only became his friend but also a Salesian. He died in Caserta in 1913 at the age of 65 (*EBM.*, XII, 442ss).

151. At this moment, close to the pump, there are two young men who need to be watched

(1866)

At the end of the Christmas festivities in 1866, Don Bosco went to visit the college at Lanzo, where many new young men had entered who were not yet known to him. When the servant of God went down to the refectory, half way through the meal he became serious and, turning to the director, he said in a low voice: "At this moment, near the water fountain, at the entrance of the second playground, there are two youngsters who need to be watched over. Send someone immediately to take them back to the recreation room with the other boys!"

The director gave that task to an assistant, who returned and told him: "There was no one at the well, but I saw two of them (and he named them), who were going away at that moment. I asked them where they came from, and they answered: "From the pump."

After the prayers, the director called the two young men to him: "What were you two fellows talking about this evening?"

"Nothing," they answered with embarrassment.

"All right, but come with me. Don Bosco wants to see you. He has something to tell you."

Don Bosco eyed them carefully for a moment and then whispered a word to each in his ear. They blushed and admitting their fault, promised to do better. They were new pupils who had just come from their homes. The next evening, after hearing confessions for most of the day, he recounted the dream of the floating raft (*EBM.*, VIII, 151). □



THE HOLY ROSARY IN POPULAR PIETY

(Historical Aspects)

Luigi Guiducci

Franciscans in the Holy Land

One of the most famous Catholic archaeologists who worked in Palestine was a friar minor of Tuscan origin, Father Bellarmino Bagatti (1905-1990). At Mount Nebo, as well as in the area near the Lake of Galilee, or at Ain Karim, Emmaus-Qubeibeh and Naza-reth, he learned and then taught how one follows an excavation with historical criteria. He did this by linking the testimonies of pilgrims and archaeological findings that make a venerated place in Palestine a testimony to the events of this land and the Christian faith. In this context, it should be remembered that the excavations at the "*Dominus Fle-vit*" (on the slope of the Mount of Olives), with the discovery of ossuaries in the Jewish tombs of the 2nd century, had also brought the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* into the debate on Christian origins, triggered or revived by the discovery of manuscripts found in the caves of Qumran.

The hypothesis of the Judeo-Christian origin of some names

and signs engraved on the stone walls reopened the inevitable problem of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and Palestine in the first three centuries. Rediscovering the primitive Christian community of the Holy Land meant finding a link between the shrines built from the 4th century onwards and the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles. It was not an easy task that Father Bagatti was able to tackle with great enthusiasm.

The Grotto of Nazareth

His greatest satisfaction was in Nazareth, in the period 1955-1960. Here, where a Grotto is all that is left of the Holy House (the masonry part is in Loreto), a doubt that was in no way insignificant had been weighing on him for some time: the room could have been used, with other adjoining cavities, for burials. If so, the place of the Annunciation was not authentic. It was not possible for a Jew, according to Jewish customs, to live in a cemetery. But the discovery of domestic silos, used by families of the time to store

food, the discovery of water cisterns, many small oil lamps (which illuminated the rooms of the dwellings), the discovery of kitchen ceramics and hearths built at the foot of the walls, could get one to reach the deduction that the tombs were outside the village (where the newly built dwellings now stand) shed some light on the authenticity of the House of the Virgin Mary.

Other evidence in favour followed. For example, rooms were dug into the rocky ground, perhaps once used for domestic purposes. These would later be used for Christian worship. A baptistery and graffiti attest to this. Over time, five places of worship were built on top of these rooms. It began with a church in the style of a synagogue, with a façade facing Jerusalem, built between the 2nd and 3rd centuries by Christians of Jewish stock, including the 'relatives of the Lord' who headed the Church. A Byzantine church was built in the 5th century, then a Crusader temple, and in 1730 a Franciscan

church.

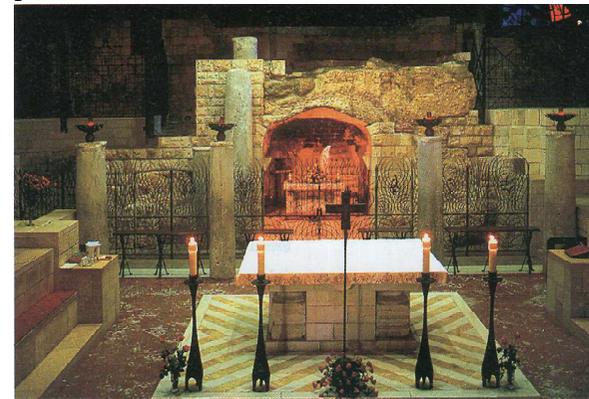
The discovery of the Ave Maria in Greek

In the course of archaeological research, a remarkable discovery was made: on a column base of the synagogue church, a graffito with the Greek inscription "Ave Maria" (XE MAPIA) was found, dating back to the 13th century and now in the nearby museum (the first two letters are surmounted by a bar). Another engraving was also found in Nazareth: 'On the holy place of Mary I wrote.' This is the testimony of a pilgrim writing for a blessing after arriving to pray at the place of the House of the Virgin. While a second doubt was overcome (some thought that the reference to Mary might indicate a pagan female divinity), it was realised that the expression used by the angel Gabriel (Ave Maria, in the sense of Rejoice) was by then strongly rooted in the hearts of the faithful to the point of marking the first prayer to Our Lady, the first invocation, as the first act of trust.

This propensity of Christians to trust in her who was the first to receive the Redeemer was also confirmed by another discovery.

The story of the 'Sub tuum praesidium'

At the beginning of the 20th century, a 3rd century papyrus with the oldest hymn (troparion) to the



The house of Mary could probably be something like this grotto that was found in the church of the Annunciation at Nazareth

Blessed Virgin Mary was found in Alexandria, Egypt. A translation could be: "Under your protection (or "In the shadow of your wings") /we find refuge,/Holy Mother of God:/do not despise the pleas/of us who are in trial,/and deliver us from every danger,/O glorious and blessed Virgin." Throughout the text we find the same spiritual sentiments manifested in the psalms, where the praying person invokes the immediate help of the Lord, refuge and deliverer of the believer who turns to God to escape the dangers that threaten him.

The archaeological find was acquired in 1917 by the John Rylands Library in Manchester, but it was not published until 1938. How come? It is usual for researchers to publish the results of their discoveries quickly, especially when the find is sensational. This time, however, it will take several years. One explanation is that the content of the document, studied by the Oxford Anglican papyrologist Colin H. Roberts, disproves the thesis of the Protestant Reformation theologians that the cult of Mary was only a late phenomenon and an "encrustation" placed on the true faith in Jesus Christ (Karl Barth himself called Mariology "the tumour of Catholicism"). *Sub tuum praesidium*, on the contrary, shows that the faithful have venerated Our Lady since the first centuries; that the prayer was probably written during the persecutions of Valerian and Decius; and that the invocation "Mother of God" was already present in Christian communities before the Council of Ephesus in 431, where the dogma of Mary's divine maternity (Theotokos) was proclaimed.



The act of entrustment

Professor Colin H. Roberts tried to be cautious, saying that he was sure that the papyrus was dated after the Council of Ephesus. In reality, his own colleagues proved him wrong, and today there is unanimity in recognising that the text cannot date back beyond the third century: the most probable date is around the year 250. Both invocations, in fact, express an act of entrustment to Our Lady. This observation is not marginal because it also helps to understand the orientation of some apocryphal texts in which Mary is presented as Mother of the Church. Thus, in the *Dormitio Mariae* (Ethiopian text and Greek Vatican Codex 1982, 16) the author has St John the Evangelist say: "Mary, my sister, you who have become the mother of the twelve branches (Apostles), what do you want me to do for you?" A prayer that is effective for us too. □



MY MISSION TOOK ME ACROSS THE ARABIAN SEA

Fr. Babu Augustine, sdb

From the Salesian Bulletin May 2021

Even in this little-known corner of Africa, four Salesians passionately run a technical school that, despite constant difficulties, gives hope and a future to thousands of young people.

TANZANIA

Tanzania is an East African country known for its vast wilderness areas, including the grasslands of the Serengeti National Park, a popular safari destination. Dar es Salaam is Tanzania's largest city, main economic hub and the country's first port.

Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Babu Augustine (Mundamattam Anthony). I was born in Kerala, India, in 1964. I had an uncle who was a Salesian priest and he inspired me to join the Salesian Society. It was my parents and brothers encouraged me. I did my novitiate in Kotagiri under D.J. Joseph in 1982-83.

Philosophy was in Yercaud from 1983 to 1985.

Then the desire for missions arose and I asked Fr. Thomas Thayil, the then Provincial, to send me to Andhra Pradesh to get used to another culture. I applied for the African missions in 1988 and Fr Joseph accepted my request to go to Africa and I arrived in East Africa in October 1988.

I did my practical training in Dodoma, Tanzania where the lan-



guage was very difficult and the culture very different. The number of students was less than 30. In 1989 I went to Don Bosco Uttume for theology and was ordained a priest on 14 August 1993.

Your first experiences?

While I was in Uttume, I worked with street children in Nairobi, for 3 years. I expected to be with them after ordination. But I was sent to Dodoma as head of the oratory. I liked the apostolate very much, but I was asked to go and do two years of spirituality at Tangaza college in Nairobi and after that I was sent to Italy, for a formation course and a community experience in Pinerolo. Back in Nairobi, I was in charge of the project for needy children (Bosco Boys) from 1999 to 2007 and of Don Bosco Boys' Town from 2007 to 2010. Then obedience took me to Don Bosco Secondary school from 2010 to 2016 and now to Don

Bosco Oysterbay from 2016 to date.

How have you experienced these changes?

God has given me the strength to work with young people all these years, my policy has been to work as if I were not to leave that place and once I leave continue my work in the new place as if I had never worked in the previous place. This attitude helped me to settle quickly into the new place.

What is your day like?

I have made it my daily habit to be in church much earlier than everyone else for morning prayers and whenever possible very early before evening prayers. Even though I am not very concentrated in prayer, I leave everything to the Lord. Before retiring to bed, I spend a few minutes in the chapel. I have a great devotion to St Joseph and he is my favourite saint. These moments of prayer and devotion have helped me a lot and still help me a lot.

How is the relationship with young Tanzanians?

It usually takes a while for young people to understand my ways. But when I leave a place, I feel that the young people really love me and they too have understood my love and concern for them.

What is your objective?

Like all Salesians around the world, we prepare young people for life by helping them acquire technical skills in the departments we have and by forming in them human values and skills for a dignified life. In this way, they ac-

quire high self-esteem and become good citizens growing in Faith, respect, love, justice, freedom and work ethics.

How is the school organised?

The school is divided into sub-units called 'houses' and each student is assigned to a house upon enrolment. Houses compete with each other in sports and other activities, thus providing a focal point for group loyalty. The house system offers students the opportunity to develop all aspects of their growth and learning: personality, morality, creativity, knowledge and skills. The system promotes the values of fair play, teamwork, civic-mindedness, mutual responsibility, self-discipline and initiative, perseverance and resilience.

What are the young Tanzanians like?

We currently have 410 students in the various departments. Forty-one per cent are girls. Most of the students come from Dar es Salaam. Some of them come from other parts of Tanzania and stay with their relatives or in rented rooms in Dar es Salaam. Many of them have a very challenging background as single parents, some are young mothers. Some wake up very early and start the journey before 4 am to get to school on time and arrive home at 10 pm. But they are happy and most of them do well. □



SERVANT OF GOD: CATHERINE De Hueck Doherty

By John Murray, PP

She was one of the great women of the twentieth century and yet when she died in an obscure log cabin and most people would never have heard of her.

Prophetic Voice

Catherine Doherty was one of the prophetic voices of her age, one of those people God uses. She herself would simply have said, 'I am a woman in love with God and the poor'.

Her life spanned most of the last century and she survived two world wars, the Russian revolution, the depression of the '30s, a broken marriage, the scandal of an all-too-human Church, the Second Vatican Council and founding a new community within that Church to name but a few of the challenges.

Two Strands of Faith

Catherine was born in Ninji-Novgorod in Russia on 15 August 1896. It was an era when Christianity was strong in Russia. Work, pilgrimages, culture everything was saturated with the gospel.

But she also had an exposure to the Catholic Church in the form of her schooling in Alexandria (Egypt) where her father, an aristocrat. In time it would lead to her being received as a Catholic in 1919 in England.

Love of the Poor

Her parents had communicated to the young Catherine an extraordinary love for the poor. Her moth-



er for instance had insisted that she get married in a poor village among poor people whom she served to express her great love for them. No family members attended. Often, she accompanied her mother on her visits to the local poor and frequently she saw her father get up from the table and wait on beggars who came to the door for food. 'A love that is not incarnate is not real love,' she would say.

She was married at an early age to Boris de Hueck but by then, the Russian Christian culture was collapsing, a culture where the people had known the gospel in their own language for a thousand years and the very word for Sunday meant 'resurrection'. The couple got out with their lives and made their way to Canada.

Friendship House

Once in Canada she was joined in her vision by other young men and women and soon she opened Friendship House in the slums of Toronto and later one in Harlem. Her approach was simple: *to live the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth*

among the poor, serving meals and handing out clothes and support.

In the 1930s and '40s several more Friendship Houses followed and members of the black community too, were received with dignity.

Yet Catherine never saw her actions as 'social work'. Rather she was moved by the gospel truth, 'What you did to the least of my brethren you did for me.' 'When I hear a knock on the door, I see a hand with a wound in it literally.'

Journey into God

Why did she go to hide herself then in the backwoods of Canada for the last thirty years of her life? The answer brings us to another aspect of the intriguing life of this amazing woman. In 1943 she met Eddie Doherty a journalist and married him; her first marriage to Boris had received an ecclesiastical annulment.

With Eddie she went to Combermere in the rural area of Ontario.

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Prenatal Visit

A couple was making their first visit to Dr. Mike Wilson prior to the birth of their first child.

After the exam, the doctor took a small stamp and stamped the wife's stomach with indelible ink.

The man and his wife were curious about what the stamp was for, so when they got home, the man took out his magnifying glass to try to see what it was. In very small letters, the stamp said, "When you can read this, come back and see me."

Yellow Canaries

A lady went to a pet shop.

Here she was taken by the Lord on a journey into God, into herself, into the spiritual disease of the world.

Gradually the community which grew around her applied her energies and wisdom to liturgical customs, family life, mission outreach and many more areas. The Madonna House community became a public association under the local bishop.

This was the period when she was most fertile in terms of writing, and her produce amounted to over twenty-five books and she began to introduce Christians in the West to the richness of the Orthodox traditions.

A Beacon

She taught people how to live the gospel right where they were in their homes and offices and schools. Catherine died on 14 December 1985, leaving behind a spiritual family. In 2000 and she has already been given the title 'servant of God'. □

"I'd like to buy two yellow canaries," she told the owner.

"We don't have any canaries, but we have these," the owner said, as he showed the lady some pale green parakeets.

"That's not what I'm looking for," the lady stated.

But the pet store owner refused to give up. He said, "Just think of them as yellow canaries that aren't quite ripe yet."

Tax Reform

At an open conference in Vermont, the state tax commissioner asked the audience which sort of taxation they thought was the

most fair and equitable.

There was a pause, and then a white-haired man in the back raised his hand. "The poll tax," he said. "But the poll tax was repealed some time ago," replied the commissioner.

"Ay-yuh," declared the old man, "that's what I like about it."

Lunch and Learn

The company I work for sometimes holds "Lunch and Learn" seminars for employees during lunchtime. These deal with a variety of physical and mental issues. If the seminar lasts beyond the normal lunch hour, we're supposed to get managerial approval to attend.

So, last week, this flyer came around: LUNCH AND LEARN SEMINAR: WHO'S CONTROL-

LING YOUR LIFE? (Get your manager's permission before attending).

Looks like that question's been answered...

Zookeeper's Dilemma

A zookeeper wanted to get some extra animals for his zoo, so he decided to compose a letter. The only problem was that he didn't know the plural of "mongoose."

He started the letter. "To whom it may concern, I need two monegeese." No, that wouldn't work, so he tried again: "To whom it may concern, I need to monegooses." Is that right?

Finally, he got an idea: "To whom it may concern, I need a mongoose and while you're at it, send me another one." □

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My sincere and heart felt thanks to the Divine Mercy, Infant Jesus of Prague, Abba Father, Jesus and Mother Mary and to all the saints for blessing me with a normal healthy baby girl, a safe delivery and for other favours granted too. A Devotee
As I resigned from my job on July 26th 2019 due to my Mother's illness and lost her on the 13th August 2019. I had no source of any income for the next two years but my second sister (we are 6 children: 4 brothers and 2 sisters). My second sister supported me paying my rent and food bills. After storming heaven for two years and asking Our Mother Mary Help Of Christians, I was called back to the department I had been employed in but on a very meagre salary for which I am still grateful to God and Our Lady, His Blessed Mother. *Melville Smythe*

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

MAY 2022

For faith-filled young people

We pray for all young people, called to live life to the fullest; may they see in Mary's life the way to listen, the depth of discernment, the courage that faith generates, and the dedication to service.

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MARY WAS THERE

I was travelling to Mumbai from Toronto and had booked my ticket. Because of Covid restrictions there were a lot of documents to be uploaded. I am not very computer savvy. My ticket was for 1st December by which time Omicron appeared. But 9 days before my travel date I prayed to Mother Mary asking her to help me to get my documents uploaded correctly, for a safe flight to Mumbai for my friend and me. Mary our mother NEVER fails us. I was able to upload all the documents and I reached Mumbai safely. Several citizens of many countries had to redo the RTPCR but Canada was not on the list so I just walked out, praising Jesus for this and thanking Mother Mary too for this favour.

Sarita Fernandes

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay. The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

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

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