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*O God, who chose  
 the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
 foremost among the poor  
 and humble,  
 to be the Mother  
 of the Saviour,  
 grant we pray, that,  
 following her example,  
 we may offer you the  
 homage of sincere faith  
 and place in you all  
 our hope of Salvation.*

*From the Common  
 of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

**From The Editor's Desk**

*DRY TIMES, GROWING TIMES*

The year is winding down pretty quickly and I am wont to think of my life of prayer especially since we've opened this month with the solemn feasts of All Saints and the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed and somehow I keep asking myself how often do I remember these 'Holy Souls' and does my 'remembering' entail 'praying' for them...and then I get to that point where I ask that very crucial question: 'what does *praying*' mean to me?

I occasionally (actually pretty often) come upon times when everything within me seems flat and I just don't feel like I'm really *praying* effectively. Sincerely, I sometimes feel stuck or tired or just numb. Usually, however, these times make me uncomfortable because I get the impression that being a Christian, I'm a sorry specimen of one; if I am unfaithful to my daily prayers and I have to frantically try to correct this state-of-affairs or dive into self-pity or just for the time being, give up praying altogether and get on with the business of living.

I've realised that one of our main struggles in prayer is the way we measure our effectiveness or our progress, forgetting that the main purpose of prayer is a relationship with God, no matter where we happen to be.

This roller-coasting in prayer happens pretty often...we go through cycles sometimes feeling excited or warm and consoled while at other times feeling dry and chewed up like so much straw in summer. Perhaps it's a little of both.

Sometimes I do feel I have grown, while at other times I lie fallow. Overall, there seems to be forward progress but certainly all of us keep coming upon those same times of dryness seasonally.

The secret of not giving in to discouragement is to accept such times in obedience rather than bucking against them in panic.

Perhaps I'm resting after a spurt or perhaps I am being assigned a Sabbath of sorts where I am called to be still for a while. But perhaps there's a purpose even in the dryness. I'm possibly being asked to consider just what it is I value more: the presence of God or my own perceived growth.

Spiritual growth and spiritual flatness (as I call it) mean simply being disciplined to accepting these phases as they come. This calls me to offer to the Lord each day the person I am and be open to His presence and teachings. I can pray through such times and offer them to God. God asks for faithfulness more than he asks for progress.

Whether we are sick or well, happy or sad, growing or standing still, alive or dead, God is God and you've got to know that..."He's got the whole world in His hands."

So I pray that your sights be lifted higher than your own life and may God be glorified above yourself in all the moments of the life He gives you.

*Fr. Ian Douilton sdb*

## WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES

*Jeanette Brimmer*

**C**oleen was one of our former prayer-group members. She was always full of fun and her well-honed sense of humour kept us laughing while we had refreshments following each meeting. She was in her early seventies and had five grown children who treated her well. In turn she was ready to babysit or help them whenever they asked, even on the spur of a moment. But behind her beaming smile was hidden the grief which scarred her soul. Long ago one of her son's drowned when he was only five and another son died in a car accident when he was a teenager. But she kept her faith!

Barbara de Angelis wrote concerning tragedy and hardship: "We don't develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving different times challenging adversity."

Susan Spencer-Wendel was an award winning journalist with growing children and a thoughtful, sensitive husband. But then tragedy struck when an illness began robbing her of her mobility. She was diagnosed with A.L.S., an illness referred to as Lou Gehrig's Disease after a famous baseball player. He died of the disease several decades ago. A.L.S. is a neuromuscular disorder which causes the nerves within the muscles to atrophy. Then the muscles themselves die as well in a progressive fashion. Research is trying to find out more about this devastating



disease which is thankfully not considered to be inherited.

Susan eventually sought medical help after unusual symptoms of the illness began to occur, but she was determined to accept each symptom as it arrived with dignity. She continued to live with a joyful spirit and grateful attitude. Susan travelled with her family while also writing a legacy titled: "*Until I Say Goodbye, ...My Year of Living with Joy.*" her book is so popular because it is both inspiring and encourages readers to live life with a sense of awe and gratitude for the positive things in their lives. Her book which is laced with humour makes it clear that our attitude, no matter what the circumstances, determines how we handle the crises and tragedies in life. She also teaches us to never take life for granted but to make the most of our gifts and talents while we have the time.

My brother-in-law was struck with an incurable disease when he was in his early forties. In his spare time he tutored prisoners

in writing and did other volunteer work until his symptoms began to interfere with his daily life. Learning about his illness did not stifle his good nature or his witty sense of humour. With his strong faith and trust in God he continued to live his life with hope and a stoic optimism. After showing him some of my writing samples he encouraged me to keep writing which gave me the confidence to send my work to newspapers and magazines who were interested in publishing my articles and poems. Without his encouragement I doubt that I would now be a professional writer.

We never know how we will affect other peoples' lives. His positive attitude, as his illness progressed, had a profound impact on every person he knew. Thank God that he did not believe in euthanasia which is becoming more prevalent today.

Terminal illness of a family member is only one of the tragedies that can happen to a family. One morning when I was feeling particularly chirpy, the phone rang just as I was getting out of bed. Since I don't normally get a call at eight in the morning I felt uneasy as I picked up the phone. It was a friend of ours, Anna who told me that her husband, Jake, had suddenly been killed in a helicopter crash. The news was so devastating that my husband and I were in shock. Anna and Jake were such good friends and we were expecting them to visit that weekend. Jake was a crop duster and had flown thousands of miles without a mishap. At the

small airport where he was stationed, the Company had asked him to travel to California to pick up a brand new helicopter recently purchased.

Jake's brother-in-law asked to go along for the ride. When they reached their destination where the helicopter was waiting, they had no idea that they had only several minutes to live. After admiring the machine they settled down in the cockpit and took off. But after flying for a while the helicopter stalled and plunged into the desert below. Both men were killed.

Anna's strong faith in God eased her through that heart-breaking tragedy. Then several weeks later her sister was killed in a car crash. The next year her daughter Jen who had three small children found out that her husband had been seriously injured when his car skidded on an icy road. Since then Anna has been helping her daughter bring up the children because her son-in-law suffered such severe damage to the brain that he must now stay in an institution. I asked Anna a few weeks ago how she has dealt with so much hardship without becoming bitter "I ask Jesus to give me strength when things become unbearable," she replied. She keeps busy leading



the church choir and participating in other activities.

Grief counseling has also helped her and when my son committed suicide almost two years ago she urged my husband and me to get help from a professional grief counselor to deal with our over whelming grief. My son became seriously depressed several months before he took his own life. Our family tried to help him by listening to him and by urging him to take the antidepressants that his doctor had prescribed. My daughter even accompanied him to a psychiatrist to seek help and he was going to a therapist regularly. But because his marriage was deeply troubled he put an end to his life when we least expected it. At first my husband and I were angry at God because we had been praying so hard for him to get well. We even had him stay with us for a few months to help him with his mood disorder. But we soon learned it was not God's fault, or our family's fault. There was nothing more we could have done to prevent the terrible tragedy. People like Anna and others who have experienced grief, have helped us deal with our agonizing loss and only our faith and trust in God has helped us to handle our mourning. Scott's



siblings as well as his wife and his two girls are all suffering and I pray for all of us that God will keep helping to ease our grief. Several months have passed. But we realize that we will always feel our loss even though the pain, with time, becomes easier to bear.

Estrangement of one family member in a family can cause hardship in the family especially on holidays where their presence is especially missed. A friend of mine was stunned when after several years of marriage she found out that that her husband had a sister she had never met. His parents were angry because their daughter married a man they did not approve of and told her she was no longer welcome to come home ever again. What a tragedy! The grandchildren would never get to know their grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins. If the parents were truly Christian they would never expel their daughter from the family but would accept her and her husband with unconditional love. But I should not be so judgmental. Only God knows their hearts.

Gerard Groote in the classic, "The Imitation of Christ," wrote

"Is there anyone who has everything as he wishes? There is no one, be it the Pope or king who does not suffer trials or anguish. Who is the better off then? Surely it is the man who will suffer something for God..."

Every time we read the newspaper or listen to the news we see families suffering from terrorists' events such as the Lorry plunging through a crowd celebrating Bastille Day in Paris and the terror attack in Mumbai, weather events including floods caused by torrential rain, tornadoes and blizzards and gun massacres in the United states.

Divorce is a tragedy when we consider how it affects the children. My daughter, after attending a Christian weekend, was amazed that most of her friends had broken homes. "It seems as if you and dad and my best friend's parents are the only ones who have a happy marriage" she stated when we were discussing her experiences. Violence in a family, or emotional or sexual abuse is another adversity that can be passed on from one generation to another.

The older we become the more we realize that although things may be going well at the time, calamities, trials and problems are inevitable as we pass through life. We can use a tragic event to help ourselves and our families to come closer to God as we lean on Him for strength, endurance and guidance. In my own case my husband and I are happily married so together we were there to comfort the other family members when our son chose to



end his life. By praying for each other, talking about our loss and leaning on each other when our grief becomes too hard to handle, we have grown closer. We had a memorial service on Scott's birthday and let balloons float into the air which travelled towards heaven. Since Scott was very ill when he shot himself, our priest has assured us that God will have mercy on his soul, especially when I have prayed from the time our children were small that they would eventually be with God for eternity.

When my trust begins to ebb and I have a wave of grief that threatens to drown me, I think of verse 4 from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm (*The New Catholic Answer Bible*) which is so comforting:

*"Even when I walk  
through a dark valley,  
I fear no harm,  
for you are at my side;  
Your rod and your staff  
give me courage."* □

## YOUTH AND RELIGION

Ermete Tessore

*As modern science argues that we are born to believe that young people are increasingly moving away from any experience of a lived faith.*

Modern psychology supported by some very recent neuro-scientific discoveries affirms without hesitation that humans are born with an innate natural predisposition to believe. The brain seems to have been shaped by evolution to grapple with problems that go beyond mere biology. Doctors for their part argue that a genuine faith lived coherently and freely, is a great help and support in a variety of therapies, prevention and the cure for various illnesses. Sociologists of religion argue that a plethora of beliefs have always pervasively crowded the history of humanity. These beliefs heavily influence for better or worse, every individual, creating empathic relationships infused either positively or triggering real storms of aggressiveness pregnant with hatred and destructive violence. No human being ever completely loses the influence of some religious belief or other, and that's a fact. But it is equally true to say that in



many Western-evolved or Western-influenced economies belief seems to be fading among modern teenagers.

### GREAT ABSENCES

In fact, young people are conspicuously absent at religious celebrations held in temples, churches, synagogues or mosques in those countries where social pressure is felt less. It is a striking but inescapable fact that religious ceremonies, places of worship and various faith celebrations leave the majority of young people completely indifferent. Described as fragile, disoriented, despondent about the

future, they seem to be determined and united in refusing any approach that smacks of religion. Their world consists of text messages, tweets, instant communication, bulimia, a network of contacts, seething emotions in the shadows of a fleeting moment. The networks distribute information, news but no emotions or values. Young computer surfers have no time to deal with their true selves. They are constantly catapulted into the virtual world where everything is enhanced, enlarged and exaggerated, drawing them to lose touch with the real world. Captivated by a technological consumerism with strong neurotic connotations they are alienated thus becoming victims of their dreams and fantasies. Gradually this nirvana of the web builds a concrete wall around the youngsters unconsciously isolating them from all traditional civic and religious institutions. They do not reject anything *a priori*, they just simply reject everything that smacks of tradition and institutionalism. Religion or politics don't interest them so they don't engage with them.

### OTHER CAUSES

They profess their fascination



with Jesus as the communicator of an overwhelming message but they absolutely reject anything to do with worship, participation, or aggregation. Their faith consists of emotions experienced in a brief moment in time with overwhelming enthusiasm – the various World Youth Days testify to this. Soon, however, everything gets stored in the memory as a beautiful moment of times gone by but has no power to affect the youngster's conduct. It is difficult for young people to create around themselves that indispensable climate of silence that alone can turn superficial emotions into deep sentiments that would lead to a modification in one's behaviour thus opening their lives to new horizons. If we add to this the mediocrity and the counter-witness of so many alleged believers, with the lack of witness of members of the clergy then we can hazard a guess even though we may be hardly willing to admit it, that the reason why our young people are conspicuously absent in our churches, is that their lives are running more and more on tracks parallel to ours, leaving us worried but without answers or solutions to bring them back to us. □



**SALESIAN  
SAINTS**

**MARGARET  
OCCHIENA  
1788 - 1856**

On the charming hills of Asti, more precisely in the little town of Capriglio d'Asti, Margaret Occhiena was born on April 1, 1788, a year after the outbreak of the French Revolution. She was the sixth child that God loved into life and was bestowed to Melchior Occhiena and Domenica Bossone. She was baptized on the same day and given the name Margaret, which means a "precious stone." Margaret was born at a time when young Napoleon Buonaparte had invaded the Piedmontese countryside, waging war and destruction even in the province of Asti. Despite these sad times Margaret lived a happy childhood. She never went to school but the first words that she learned from her mother were *The Hail Mary*. A well-known biographer G. B. Lemoine in a few lines gives us a precise and careful description of the personality of Mamma Margaret: "Nature endowed her with a resolute will which was aided with tremendous common sense and divine grace which enabled her to overcome all those material and spiritual obstacles she would encounter later in life. Because she possessed an upright conscience, both in her affections and her thoughts she was able to prudently assess people and situations. Being self-possessed in her dealings and frank in speech,



she was not known to hesitate, and being poor she could see in the poor the face of God."

A young widower named Francis Bosco aged 27 of the canton of "Becchi" in the hamlet of Morialdo, approached Margaret's father to ask for her hand in marriage. She was 24 years old when she consented. The marriage was celebrated on June 6, 1812 at the parish church of Capriglio. To Francis, her husband, his mother Margaret Zucca, who was paralyzed and to Anthony, Francis' son by his previous marriage, Margaret came as a blessing from the Lord. Like any couple Margaret and Francis had plans and dreams to accomplish. On April 18, 1813, their first son Joseph was born and two years later, August 16, 1815 John entered the world.

1817 was a turning point for Mamma Margaret: her husband

Francis, returning from the fields soaked in perspiration went down into the underground cold cellar. He was attacked by a violent fever which was undoubtedly pneumonia. It was a Friday in May and Francis passed away at the age of 33. Margaret was now a widow at 29. Being a woman of great faith, she rolled up her sleeves and got down to work.

Don Bosco would write in his *Memoirs*: "Her greatest care was given to instructing her sons in their religion making them value obedience, and keeping them busy with tasks suited to their age." Despite being illiterate she taught her sons the catechism that she had learned from her mother and prepared them to receive the sacraments of Confession, Communion and Confirmation.

The year 1824 would be a "prophetic" year. One morning John narrated to his mother, his grandmother and his two brothers a dream that would remain engraved in his mind for the rest of his life. He approached his mother who made this wise remark: "Who knows, perhaps you might become a priest." On the evening of October 30, 1835 John would enter the seminary and Mamma Margaret did not hesitate to give him some invaluable advice. Exactly six years later on June 5, 1841, Don Bosco was ordained a priest in Turin: the great sacrifices of John and his mother Margaret had borne fruit.

1846 was another decisive turning point in Margaret's life. Don Bosco asked his mother to accompany him to the oratory to be the "mother to those poor boys." That was how Mamma Margaret began to realize her

"second vocation," to become the mother of so many poor children, making them her second family.

In the years that followed she saw many boys, among them Michael Rua, the first successor of Don Bosco and John Cagliero, the first Salesian Missionary to Argentina and later the first Salesian bishop and cardinal, but she did not hesitate to intuit the extraordinary sanctity of the young Dominic Savio who came to the Oratory on October 29, 1854. One day she told her son Don Bosco: "You have so many good boys but none possesses a soul as beautiful as that of Dominic Savio."

As the autumn of the year 1856 came around, Mamma Margaret grew unusually tired. She had developed a persistent cough that compelled her to take to her bed. She did not even take up her needle and thread. Don Bosco asked the doctor to visit her and the diagnosis he gave was: pneumonia. The news was a heavy blow to everyone at Valdocco. By the end of her life, as the disease progressed, she was still able to say these words to Don Bosco: "God knows how much I have loved you and I hope I can love you even more from a blessed eternity...my conscience is at peace. I have done my duty as best I could..." After a long pause she continued, "Remember that this life consists of suffering. True happiness will come in eternal life..." God came to take her at 3 am on November 25, 1856. Two hours later Don Bosco went to the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation to celebrate Mass in the crypt and he said to the Madonna: "We are without a mother, you be our mother!" □





## VOCATION PROMOTION

### CL. BOSCO CARVALHO, SDB

*A Salesian Student of Theology at Don Bosco, Koregaon Park, Pune*

I grew up in a family feeling loved and respected. It was at home that I learnt to share, to sacrifice and to pray. Being involved in Church and its activities gave me immense joy.

I trace the beginnings of my vocation journey to a tick-mark that I put next to the option 'priest' in my school aptitude test. Fr. Ronnie Menezes, sdb, then Rector of Don Bosco, Matunga, singled me out, visited my family and encouraged them to allow me to attend the Don Bosco summer camps. At the Gujarat Mission camp and Lonavla Vocation camp, I was at home with the people, and I felt I could be a part of the mission that the dynamic Salesian priests and brothers were into. My family respected my decision to enter into Salesian life and they have actively supported me till date.

I completed my junior college at Don Bosco, Lonavla where I discovered my talents and a passion for the Salesian life. At the pre-novitiate at Kudal, I tasted the sweetness of prayer, the ups and downs of staying together, loads of creative activities and I discovered my inner self. I had to make a decision. I believe I heard the voice of Jesus in my heart calling me to the Salesian mission while working in the field one Saturday. On that day I had decided to be a Salesian priest and live for Jesus and for youth,



*jab tak he jaan.* I continued my religious formation: one year at the novitiate, followed by my first religious profession, five years of study at the philosophate, three years of regency at Lonavla and Nasik after which I made my final profession to the Lord. At present I am pursuing my Bachelor's Degree in theology at Pune.

In all these years of Salesian life, the prayers of my family, the support and inspiration of my community and friends, my personal relationship with Jesus and my devotion to Mary have strengthened me in the high and low moments of my life. For me, to live is to live as a Salesian, being with the youth and offering them all I am and all I have. I pray that youth remain close to the Church and its activities, because God wants to use them to bring His Kingdom on earth. □

# Witnesses in & for Our Times

## ST. LEONARD OF PORT MAURICE (NOVEMBER 27)



If we are convinced and have come to experience that without Christ life lacks something, that something real - indeed, the most real thing of all - is missing, we must also be convinced that we do no injustice to anyone if we present Christ to them and thus grant them the opportunity of finding their truest and most authentic selves, the joy of finding life. Indeed, we must do this. It is our duty to offer everyone this possibility of attaining eternal life" (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, March 21, 2009). Saint Leonard of Port Maurice stands out among the preachers who have taken seriously this duty of preaching salvation to all.



On December 20, 1676, in Porto Maurizio, on the Ligurian coast in northern Italy, a little boy was born who, at his baptism, was placed under the patronage of Saints Paul and Jerome. He would later say that he had the grace of having very good parents. His was an exemplary youth - he easily led his companions to pray and do good works. One of his favourite spiritual authors was Saint Francis de Sales, whose book *Introduction to the Devout Life* was always with him. On holidays, he roamed the

streets and squares of Rome and, braving scorn and insults, exhorted all who would listen to go to the sermons in the churches.

### Words that go straight to the heart

Paul Jerome felt called to the religious state. His confessor encouraged him to intensify his life of prayer and penitence to obtain the grace to know God's will. One day, as he saw two monks shabbily dressed and of modest manner, Reformed Friars Minor of the Retreat of Saint Bonaventure, he

suddenly felt in him the desire to embrace their way of life. Entering the monastery church just as the Brothers had begun to chant Compline, he heard these words: "Convert us, O God, Our Saviour!" These words went straight to his heart, and he decided to ask to join. Admitted into the novitiate, he received the habit and the name of Brother Leonard on October 2, 1697. He loved to say, "If, while we are young, we set little store by small matters and pay them little heed, when we are older and have more freedom, we will allow ourselves liberties on the most important points."

Zealous for religious studies, he insisted that it was necessary to continue to learn in order to obtain the glory of God and the salvation of souls. After his ordination, he was appointed as a professor of philosophy. But he fell gravely ill. The young priest then begged the Virgin Mary to obtain from Her divine Son robust health, which he would dedicate to gaining souls for Heaven. His prayer was heard – the illness he had been suffering from completely disappeared.

In 1708, not far from Porto Maurizio, Father Leonard preached his first "popular mission," and traditionally, the preacher took as his theme the necessity of conversion to the Lord so that one might lead a truly Christian life and ultimately obtain salvation of one's soul.

### True happiness

Consideration of the final ends was at the heart of Father Leonard's teaching. "Consider," he wrote, "how important it is for you to achieve your final end. That

is everything for you: for if you achieve it, you are saved, you are eternally happy, showered with all the benefits for your soul and body. If, on the contrary, you fail to achieve it, you are lost, body and soul, you lose God and heaven, you are eternally miserable, damned forever" (*Meditation on the end of man*).

### The obstacle to get rid of

"Before beginning a task, we must get rid of the obstacles that stand in the way of its completion. Here is how Father Leonard used to address his listeners on this topic: "Oh! How Saint Augustine had good reason to complain about the strange blindness that calls evil good, and good evil, according to the words of Isaiah (5:20): Woe to those who call evil good and good evil! "In this lies the origin of so many falls, and the reason so many souls trip up, and hurl themselves into an abyss of iniquity. They do not consider the evil they do when they commit a mortal sin" (*Sermon on the evil of mortal sin*). So prepare for a good general confession, to put an end to this life full of disorders that you are in." (*Invitation to penance*).

### The cure

But Father Leonard did not content himself with castigating evil. He also gave the cure for it – to let oneself be won over by the Lord, who offers His mercy to all: "Consider that if God's justice is infinite with respect to obstinate sinners, His mercy is no less infinite for penitent sinners. The greater your sins, the greater still the triumph of the goodness, charity, and clemency of this God Who is infinitely rich in mercy" (*Meditation on*

*God's mercy*).

Having become a master in the art of guiding souls, Father Leonard often had experience of the value of certain devotions in helping souls to convert and retain the state of grace they had re-found. First, there was the practice of saying three *Ave Marias* (Hail Mary's). This practice originated with the German Benedictine, Saint Mechtilde. Saint Leonard propagated the devotion, advising the recitation of these three *Aves* in honour of Mary's privileges: "Every morning upon waking and every evening before going to bed, the soul devoted to Mary will ask for its holy Mother's blessing; and will not fail to recite three *Ave Marias*, in honour of Her stainless purity, offering Her its senses and all its powers of soul, so that she might guard them as things that belong to Her and that are devoted to Her honour, and the soul will ask Her for the grace not to fall into sin that day (or that night)".

### The trumpet of the last day

The saint also promoted this short invocation: "My Jesus, mercy!" He related a missionary's words: "When I return somewhere I have already given a mission, it often happens that penitents come to me and begin their confession with these words: 'My Father, I am a libertine who, a few years ago, came to unload at your feet a sack of iniquities. I do not know if you remember me, but, thanks to God, since the mission, I have no longer committed a sin of impurity or any mortal sin.' 'How did you do it?' the missionary asks. 'Ah, my Father, I have put into practice the great resolution you so strongly instilled in us,

to commend ourselves often to God with this pious invocation: 'My Jesus, mercy!' I have done it every day, morning and night, and especially during temptations, I have frequently implored God's help by saying, 'My Jesus, mercy!'"

The practice of the Stations of the Cross – which consist in following Jesus through the principal events of His Passion – already existed at the time, but were little used outside the Franciscan order. Single-handedly Father Leonard would erect 572 Stations of the Cross.

### The sun of Christianity

Having left after the Jubilee of 1750 for a new round of missions, the Father was soon called back to Rome by the Pope. In a spirit of obedience to the Vicar of Christ, he set out on his way but he fell ill as he left Tolentino.

Father Leonard was reciting the *Te Deum* and was helped down from the carriage with difficulty – he was so weak that his pulse could no longer be felt. Scarcely having arrived at the infirmary, he confessed and received the last sacraments, after having said with surprising force the acts of faith, hope, and charity. He was offered a drink, which he accepted, and then said, "I have no words to thank God for the grace He has granted me in allowing me to die in the midst of my confreres." Shortly after receiving Extreme Unction, he passed away peacefully. It was Friday, November 26, 1751. He was canonized by Blessed Pius IX, and Pope Pius XI declared him "The heavenly patron of priests devoted to the preaching of missions to the people. ☐"



## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

by Ian Pinto, *sib*

**T**he parable of the talents (Mt 25: 14-30) paints a picture of the afterlife. It is inclined towards judgment. The Church incorporates in its catechism knowledge of the last four things. These are: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. Most people have absolutely no trouble believing with the first, death. But what of judgment, hell and heaven? Do they really exist? Does a good and loving God judge people scrupulously? Aren't heaven and hell made-up myths to instill fear in gullible people? Obviously Jesus doesn't think so. He emphasizes judgment, hell and heaven in chapter 25 of Matthew.

A cursory reading of the chapter will reveal the connections Jesus makes with Judgment, Hell and Heaven.

The parable of the talents is an interesting parable. It tells us the story of a master who was going away to a far off country and who gave a part of his wealth to three of his servants for security. Each received according to his ability. After he had settled his affairs he departed. The first servant, "went

at once to do business with the money, and gained another five. The one who received two talents did the same, and gained another two. But the one who received one talent dug a hole, and hid his master's money" (v. 16-17).

All three servants knew their master very well. Yet, the first two responded in a similar manner while the third did so very differently. The first two knew that their master was a wealthy man and he prided himself on his ability to amass wealth so, he was willing to entrust a part of that vast wealth to them despite their capacities. He promoted them from mere servants to stewards. Thus far they had done the work assigned to them but now, they were their own bosses. When the moment arose the first two stewards stepped into the shoes of their master and busied themselves with making profits. The third steward, on the other hand, was afraid. He knew all too well that his master was "a hard man", who reaped what he did not sow and gathered what he did not scatter

(v. 24). Evidently, he only saw a part of the master's character and was overwhelmed. He missed the bigger picture. How often are we like this third steward? We are content with knowing little about our Heavenly Master. We have constructed an image about Him by the experience we have had of Him. We haven't really made much effort to get to know Him better.

Hugh Welchel, in an article points out five lessons we can take away from this parable:

**1. This parable teaches us that success is a product of our work.**

In the book of Genesis Adam is placed in the garden to work and take care of it. We were made to work. Every human being has the right and duty to work. We are to work, using our talents to glorify God, serve the common good, and further God's kingdom.

**2. The Parable of the Talents teaches that God always gives us everything we need to do what he has called us to do.**

A talent was a measure of money that was either of gold or of silver. Some authorities say that the talent typically weighed about 33 kg varying from 20 to 40 kg. In February, 2016, the international price of gold was about US\$1190 per troy ounce. One gram costs about \$38. At this price, a talent (33 kg) would be worth about \$1.25 million.

We are tempted to feel sorry for the servant who received only one talent, but in reality he received as much as a million dollars from the master and buried it in his back yard.

Just so, God expects us to do the same with the gifts God has given us.

**3. The Parable of the Talents teaches**

**es that we are not all created equal.**

The master gives to each servant talents, "...each according to his ability." The master understood that the one-talent servant was not capable of producing as much as the five-talent servant. We want to protest this as unfair. Yet we know this is true from our own experience. There is equality found in the Parable of the Talents. It comes from the fact that it takes just as much work for the five-talent servant to produce five more talents as it does the two-talent servant to produce two more talents. This is why the reward given by the master is the same. The master measures success by degrees of effort.

**4. The Parable of the Talents teaches that we work for the Master, not our own selfish purposes.** It is the quality of their stewardship that the master seeks to measure.

We should maximize the use of our talents to honour God and we should feel satisfaction and joy from doing our best with what God has given us in the place where his providence puts us, seeking to succeed in order to honor him.

**5. The Parable of the Talents shows that we will be held accountable.**

The Parable of the Talents is not about salvation or works of righteousness, but about how we use our work to fulfill our earthly callings. It is about whole-life stewardship. The unfaithful steward in this parable didn't so much waste the master's money - he wasted an opportunity. As a result, he was judged wicked and lazy. We are responsible for what we do for God with what we have been given, and one day we will be held responsible. □



# Quiet Spaces

## ON THE DAY OF JUSTICE

*On the morning of November 22, 2016, the Holy Father celebrated Mass Casa Santa Marthae. The following is the edited English text of the Pope's homily which was delivered in Italian.*

The world “does not like to think” about the ultimate reality, but this is part of human existence. And if we live “in fidelity to the Lord”, after our bodily death, “we will not be afraid” to present ourselves before Jesus for His judgment. Following the path of the “last week of the liturgical year”, Pope Francis dedicated his homily at the morning Mass he celebrated in Casa Santa Marta on Tuesday, 22 November, to a reflection on the end times: “On the end of the world, on the end of history; on the end of each one of us, because everyone will have his end”.

It is a topic which might “sadden someone’s day”, the Pope said, because “he does not like to think about these things” or to take account of the fact that “when one of us is gone, the years will pass by and after a long time hardly anyone will remember us”. However, he added, “it is the truth. This is what the Church tells us: we will all have an end”. It is a truth which we are called to confront. In this regard, the Pope revealed: “I have a list, a diary which I write in when someone dies – a friend, a relative – I write their name there, and every day I see, on that day, the anniversary of their death: ‘He has been dead for twenty years! Time passes so quickly! And this other person, thirty years; how quickly time has passed!’”. This reality is common to everyone, Francis said, and it “obliges us to think about what we leave behind, about the mark our lives leave behind”.

The first reading of the day, taken from the Book of Revelation (14:14-19), focuses on this theme. We read of “reaping, the harvest, the crop”, but also of “testing the quality of grain, of the grapes”. Namely, the Pope explained, “after the end there will be judgment. We will all be judged, each one of us will be judged”. Therefore, “it is good for us to think: ‘What will that day be like when I am before Jesus, when the Lord will ask me for an account of ‘talents that he gave me’, or ‘how my heart was when the seed fell?’”. Recalling the “parables of the Kingdom of God”, the Pontiff proposed some questions to ask ourselves: “How do I receive the Word? With an open heart? Do I let it grow for the good of others or keep it hidden?”. This examination of conscience is good and useful, because “we will all be judged” and everyone will find himself “in front

of Jesus”. We do not know the date, but “it will happen”.

Even in the Gospel, taken from a passage of Luke (21:5-11), we find advice in this regard from Jesus himself, who exhorts: “Do not be deceived!”. What deception is he referring to? It is the “deception of alienation”, the Pope explained, “and that of estrangement”: the deception for which “I am distracted, I do not think, and I live as if I were never going to die”. However, he asked, “when the Lord comes, who will come like lightning, how will he find me? Waiting or in the midst of so many disposals of life, deceived by things that are superficial, which have no transcendence?”.

We are therefore faced with a real and true “Call from the Lord to think seriously about the end: about my end, the judgment, about my judgment”. In this regard, the Pope recalled how when we are children we go “to catechism” class, and are taught “four things: death, judgment, hell or glory”.

Of course, some might say: “Father, this frightens us”. However, Francis replied: “It is the truth. Because if you do not take care of your heart”, and “you always live far away from the Lord, perhaps there is the danger, the danger of continuing in this way, far away from the Lord for eternity. This is very bad!”.

This is why, the Pope concluded, “today it will be good for us to think about this: what will my end be like? How will it be when I find myself before the Lord?”. And to come to meet those who may be frightened or saddened by this reflection, the Pope recalled the passage in the Gospel acclamation taken from the Book of Revelation (2:10): “Be thou faithful unto death”, says the Lord, “and I will give you the crown of life”. Here is the solution to our fears: “fidelity to the Lord: this does not disappoint”. Indeed, “if each one of us is faithful to the Lord, when our death comes, as shall we say what St. Francis said: ‘sister death, come’. It will not frighten us”. And even on the day of judgment, “I will look to the Lord” and we can say: “Lord I have many sins, but I tried to be faithful”. And since “the Lord is good”, the Pope assured, “we will not be afraid”. □



## THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

*From Fr. Ian Doulton's collection of stories*

**O**ur story begins in St Elizabeth's Home for Unwed Mothers. Sister Pauline, the director of the home is walking to the door with Mrs. Louise Baker.

"It was certainly kind of you to bring us all those lovely things, Mrs. Baker."

"But don't thank me, sister. I had nothing to do this afternoon, so it was no trouble."

"Since this is your first visit to the home, and you're not in a hurry, let me show you around."

"Oh, no, no thank you sister, I'll tell you the honest truth. I'd rather not; places like this depress me. I don't even like to think they exist." "Nobody does, but they are necessary and we have to face the facts."

"I just can't imagine what kind of a girl would deliberately do something like this and day after day. New ones coming all the time, it's just so...sordid and ugly."

"Yes, in itself it is. But when it comes to the girls, there are so many things behind it. Sometimes it's hard for me to understand but at those times, - there's a picture of one particular girl that always comes to my mind. Her name was Margaret."

Walking to the parlour the two ladies sat down and Sister Pauline went on: "I'd like to tell you about her. I think you'd understand more about the home and what we're trying to do."

Sister Pauline began telling Ms. Baker about Margaret who was one such girl, exceptionally pretty and the girl knew it. Besides she was willful and impetuous. She lived on a farm outside the city

with her parents. Being very feisty she longed to go to the city and enjoy the company of the youngsters her age. She was very warm-hearted and had a great capacity for affection. She couldn't get along with her stepmother. And so, at seventeen, things came to a head one morning:

"Father, why can't we move into town? It would be so wonderful living in town. There's so much to see."

Her mother Laura was very upset and accused her of wanting to flaunt herself before the boys.

Margaret's father a serene and serious country gentleman simply added: "Now Laura, Margaret's young and she's entitled to some good times."

Laura was very upset. She seemed to think that her husband was taking Margaret's side.

Margaret was determined to find a way to get round her father and go to the city. Her mother wouldn't think of it. She turned to Margaret and screamed: "You want to go into town so you can be with that Orsini boy! Oh, don't try to look innocent. I know you've been sneaking off to see him."

Margaret wasn't aware that her mother even suspected her but she was brave and she boldly went on: "And what of it? He comes from the best family around here."

They screamed at each other and suddenly Laura slapped Margaret across the face. This had never happened before. She turned hot with rage and through her clenched teeth she said: "You'll never touch me again! You hate me. You've always hated me. I'm

leaving this house and I'm never coming back." As she left the room she heard her mother scream: "Go on, get out, see how far you'll get. Someday you'll come crawling back."

She found her way to town and met Robert Orsini, the boy of her dreams and told him she wasn't going back at all and she wanted Robert to marry her immediately. He couldn't be seen with Margaret and yet Margaret could not go home. As they stood among the secluded trees on the edge of town he seemed to be thinking of something.

Margaret was insistent that Robert marry her but he smiled had said: "There's nothing I'd like better, if only my parents weren't so difficult. They'll come round before long to the idea of marrying somebody I choose but just now, we can't let them know."

Then suddenly he had an idea. One of their maids had left and there was a vacancy in the household. Margaret could fill that vacancy as the new maid. It would be the perfect solution, so Robert thought: "So, then, trust me, sweetheart. With you as a maid, we'll be in the same house; we'll see each other every day. Think of all the times we can be together."

A year and a couple of months went by and Margaret suddenly realized that she was carrying Robert's child. She was getting nervous. It would soon begin to show. She kept insisting that Robert think of something: "Now, Margaret... I told you, I have to have time to think." She was worried: "But with the baby coming I can't stay here any longer."

Robert also realized that it would not be advisable. The family had a hunting lodge in the mountains which was rarely used. It had staff all its own and it was secluded. No one ever went there. Robert smiled and cupping her cheek in his hand, he looked into her eyes and whispered: "You can go there... you'll live like a queen. You won't be a maid any longer, you'll have servants of your own... everything you want."

She was so happy with Robert's decision; she hurriedly packed. Robert, having made the excuses, took her to the hills. On the way she told Robert that the only thing she really wanted now was to be married to Robert. She didn't want to walk around town as an 'unwed' mother. She turned to him, took his hand and said: "Don't you love me anymore, Robert?" He drew her close and whispered: "Come here, kiss me... now can you ask me that?"

Then she ruminated aloud: "Why do I love you so much? I prayed not to." Robert seemed puzzled. Margaret went on: "I know it's wrong... it's wrong. When I'm alone, I pray God to save me. When I was young I prayed for love. I thought that was the only happiness. I never dreamed that it could be such a torment."

Robert's brow wrinkled and he said: "Is there torment in this?"

Margaret exclaimed: "I'll go anywhere, do anything you say. Alright, Robert, I'll go and stay at the lodge."

About three years went by and everything at the hunting lodge was serene and perfect. There could now be heard the shrill voice of a child on the property

amidst the chirping of the birds ...everything was just as it should be...or so it seemed till one morning. The elderly valet Theodore came in asking if Robert hadn't taken their hound Hector and gone out into the hills behind the lodge... "Yes, of course," Margaret said: "For three years we've been at the lodge he never goes hunting without that dog."

Suddenly Paul – her little son came in: "Mummy, Hector just came back and daddy's not with him."

Theodore noticed that Hector was whining outside the door. When he was let in he ran to Margaret and whined to her, taking her skirt in his teeth and pulling her out of the house as if asking her to follow him. She came outside and asked Theodore to come with her while she told Paul to stay in the house. As they walked through the brush and the bushes they watched Hector make his way to a copse of trees. Theodore kept shouting: "Master Robert... Master Robert..." Then all of a sudden there was silence and Theodore turned facing Margaret and he said in a whisper: "Master Robert... dead, stabbed in the back." She let out a wail which resounded in the hills and all was silent again.

Margaret and Paul had to leave the lodge. They couldn't stay there any longer. Paul was finding it difficult to walk. He yearned for his bed at the lodge and all Margaret could say was: "We couldn't stay, Paul. We couldn't stay. This is home here...this is our little house."

They walked out of the town, mother and son...no one looked at them. Margaret was a known

face by now...and the town gossip had caught up with the latest tragedy. She now decided to make her way to her father's house. Perhaps she could find some sympathy from him.

She came to her house in the country and knocked on the door and waited. Her father opened the door. He was shocked to see Margaret. He looked down and saw the little boy behind her. She could only whisper that Robert was dead – which he already knew and so she had to come home. Her stepmother came to the door and she screamed: "You had your fling and now that it's over, you come crawling home. I always said you would."

Margaret looked down – tears streaming down her cheeks and she went on: "I knew it was wrong, I used to cry over it. I wanted to leave but I couldn't. I loved Robert too much. I loved him more than God. I knew I was to blame as much as he. So I'm going to spend the rest of my life making up for what I've done."

She pleaded with her father to take her in but Laura, her stepmother screamed: "If that girl sets foot in this house, I leave."

Margaret begged for forgiveness but her stepmother wouldn't be moved: "Go back to where you came from. You made your bed... now lie in it." With those harsh words ringing in her ears Margaret turned around and taking her son's hand, they moved away... into the darkness.

They eventually reached a town, not familiar but they were tired. They couldn't go any further. It was Cortona. Both she and the little boy were thirsty and tired.

"I'm tired...where are we going?" He whined. "Just a little way..." Margaret tried to console him then she prayed in a soft voice: "God, where are we going? What can I do? God, help me!"

It was getting dark and the lamps in the houses were lit and people moved along the streets like shadows. Suddenly someone caught her elbow: "What's the hurry madam? Say, I like your looks." She soon realized that it was someone easy and ready for a good time. She said her husband was dead: "Oh, that's too bad... you know the minute I laid eyes on you I said to myself: Now here's a lady that needs cheering up, she's lonesome. I'm lonesome too. So how about having dinner with me...so we can talk..."

Margaret pulled away and hurried along with the man calling after her. She pulled her boy along and they suddenly heard the church bells ringing. It was time for Vespers and people were going in. Paul noticed it: "All the people are going in. Is that where we're going? Why don't we go in? It's pretty inside."

Margaret thought she couldn't dare to go inside. She stood by the steps sobbing. Paul tugged at her skirt: "Why are you crying mother? Where are we going now?"

Suddenly she heard a voice near her: "Can I help?" A lady she did not know approached her with a kind smile: "You seem to be troubled. Is there something I can do?" Paul piped in: "I'm hungry. I want a drink of water."

She invited the two of them to her home. Margaret was surprised anyone would do such a thing: "No, I couldn't. You don't know me." A very confident reply came:

"Yes, I know you. You're Margaret from the Orsini place."

Margaret was shocked: "You'll still let me into your house?"

Of course they would be welcome. As she gently led the mother and child in the direction of her home she added: "Because, whatever you've done, you belong to God and you're in need. You were going into church when I saw you. I realised you haven't forgotten God."

"Oh, I never! I want to come back."

"And you want to make up for the past?" "What can I ever do for him?"

The good lady continued: "Don't worry, he'll tell you in his own time. He may even have great things for you to do."

So, Mrs. Baker, that's how it started. The rest of the story you'll find in the history books. Margaret, like the kind woman who helped her, spent her life taking care of the sick and the poor. She lived more than 800 years ago but she is still remembered. She is St. Margaret of Cortona. In fact, her body is enshrined incorrupt at the altar of the church she once feared to enter.

"Well, I know of St. Margaret of Cortona, but I just thought of her as a saint."

"It was that one act of kindness that saved Margaret and produced all the good she did later. Just because one woman couldn't turn her away... When I am working here with the girls at St. Elizabeth's Maternity Home we always try to remember that.

"Oh, thank you Sister, and I'll remember too." □

## DON BOSCO AND THE "GANGS"

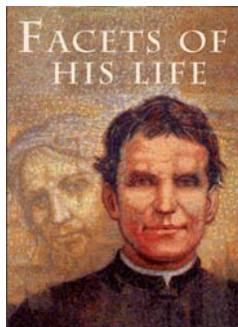
by Natale Cerrato

### The "gangs" of Turin

In Turin, during the first twenty years of Don Bosco's ministry, that is from 1840-1860, gangs of youngsters and delinquents just out of the prisons were called "cacca." The term, which has nothing to do with cocaine, is not really easy to translate. In some places it was a slang that came to be used spontaneously for those associated with a particular "gang" or clique. It was also derived from a term that meant 'fun-loving' but in the conventional sense it meant a gang of clowns. For the people of Turin however, it was associated with criminality.

The reader should distinguish between two very different types of "cacca" (ruffians) of Turin of those days: there were bands of insolent ruffians, ready to pick a fight under any pretext and there were the really secretive gangs headed by a 'boss' who had indisputable powers. These gangs were prepared for any crime, from armed robbery to premeditated murder. Sadly it was to the latter category that the "Coca dei Gamber" gang belonged. Then there was "Coca del Balan" of Borgo Dora and "Coca del Moschin" of Borgo Vanchiglia. To get a better idea of these gangs, reading the historical novel 'Coca Gamber' by Luigi Pietracqua would be advisable (Ed. Viglongo, Torino).

The most notorious "cocche" which for many years had terrorized the people of Turin were suppressed by then, if not completely obliterated thanks to some famous



arrests, trials and even some death sentences.

Two of the trials were unforgettable: one against il Gercio called "Menichin" and his companions; they were hung on April 18, 1850. The other was the trial of Cibolla and his gang which ended on September 11, 1861 with the death sentence pronounced on Luigi Gervasio and heavy sentences on his accomplices. The bubble burst when after twenty years of forced labour they revealed the names of the accomplices which included even three officials from the Police Department!

We will rather dwell on the first kind of "crooks," who probably changed and who are mentioned in the Biographical Memoirs.

### The 'crooks' of Valdocco

At the beginning of his ministry in Valdocco, Don Bosco found himself in the unlikely position of having to traverse between two rival gangs. He tried to get them to suspend their activities remin-

ding them of their earlier days in incarceration, having seen some of them in prison. Naturally he ran these risks, tolerating their insults and vulgar jokes but was never discouraged:

- How are you? What are you doing? Are you crazy?

- What do you want with us? Get out of the way, be off!

- Oh look! I believe I've made some friends!

- We? Friends with priests? - Just shut your chatter or someone will take your hat off.

Others who knew Don Bosco would defend him in their own way by getting knives out of their pockets and brandishing them, shouting: "Hideous rascals, don't you know that he is Don Bosco? If you say anything more to him, I'll cut your throats." (cf EBM 17, 140)

At another time the gang of Porta Susa attacked the gang of Borgo Dora. Don Bosco ran out of the house and saw the gruesome scene...two of them at each other knife in hand. Then one of them shouted: "This will finish you" and he saw the other fall to the ground with a wound in his abdomen, bleeding profusely. The murderer disappeared while the unfortunate victim was carried to the nearby hospital screaming: "When I'm well, you'll pay for this." Don Bosco tried to calm him down. Then, grasping the seriousness of the situation he urged the youngster to forgive his murderer. When he calmed down Don Bosco convinced him to make his confession. Sadly the unfortunate youngster passed away the following day (cf EMB 3, 233-234).

On another occasion a large number of boys got the mad idea of fighting a pitched battle near

the Oratory. Seeing that his words were useless he plunged into the thick of the barrage clouting right and left. They were throwing rocks large enough to kill anyone. He was fortunate nothing really happened to him except that he was once struck in the face with a wooden clog, and bore a scar for several months (cf EBM 3, 234).

Scenes like this were repeated on the playgrounds of Valdocco, at the market of Porto Palazzo and on the banks of the Dora. Little by little he came to be known by everyone in the suburbs:

- "It's Don Bosco! It's Don Bosco," they shouted on seeing him, "Get out of here." But not everyone made off. There were those who hung around knife in hand or stones which they dropped. Then Don Bosco always found the right words, careful not to offend them, or just his facial expression would melt them and he would take them to the Oratory.

Very quickly the various gangs vanished. People began to breathe easy. The police simply shook their heads and said: "What kind of man is this priest?" The Vicar of the city was cautious and watched all this from a distance.

### The Gangs of Vanchiglia

In 1840, Fr. John Cocchi, famous in Turin for his social apostolate started a festive oratory at Borgo Vanchiglia which today would be on the left bank of the river Po bounded on one side by St. Maurice Road, and the other by Queen Margaret Road.

It was called the Oratory of the Guardian Angels and it was the first Oratory in Turin similar to those which Don Bosco would start a few years later at Valdocco

and Porta Nuova. Sometime later, in the autumn of 1849, Fr. Cocchi's oratory came into the care of Don Bosco and would remain so till 1866 when the new church of Saint Julia opened its parish oratory with the same name.

A small house with a couple of little rooms came into Don Bosco's possession after paying a rent of 900 lire a year. He asked his friend and collaborator Giacinto Carpano and later Fr. Peter Ponte, the theologian John Vola and others who would later find the company rather unbearable.

The old Borgo Vanchiglia, with its infamous reputation of the Moschini was a cluster of shacks, dens of dirt, vice and crime and there this gang reigned supreme.

In this locality one could hardly imagine the youngsters being as malleable as wafer-flour: they were unruly, rude and boisterous. It was only the patience of the collaborators of Don Bosco that was able to subdue these lively youngsters and bring them to catechism and prayer.

Don Bosco sent to them the best boys he had at his disposal: the young Michael Rua, the 'comandante' Joseph Brosio and others.

"The first troubles came from the youngsters for whom the Oratory was opened. They were unappreciative, disobedient, going so far as even to insult and threaten the priest in charge. They were no better than their parents. They were wild and rough at their games. The few who had been coaxed into church clowned around during the sermon and catechism classes and scoffed at the good advice given them. Yet, Christian love was to triumph in the end. By ignoring their insolence, by dint of

unwavering kindness, by occasional gifts and new games, by celebrations, free meals, and refreshments, and by cultivating the more receptive boys, the oratory workers managed to control the youngsters.

One Sunday, about forty of them armed with stones, sticks, and knives showed up to force their way into the Oratory. Joseph Brosio decided to meet them head-on because they would have been done, for if they (the ruffians) had sensed the fear of the boys. He got the bigger boys together, divided them into squads, handed out wooden drill rifles and instructed them that, if the "cocca" members should break in, he would give the signal and they should attack from all sides and pound them without mercy. After herding all the little boys into the church, he stood guard at the main gate to see whether it would hold out against the vigorous pushing.

Meanwhile the doorkeeper and other people in the street, who overheard the "cocca" members boasting of what they were going to do to the boys, had run to call the cavalry troops from the nearby barracks. A squad came with drawn swords, along with four carabinieri; the "cocca" members immediately scattered.

The incident served to change the minds of several of the scoundrels and even to steer some of them to the Oratory. But things didn't end there.

One Sunday, a catechist who had foolishly forgotten Don Bosco's many warnings to the contrary, punched a member of the gang. In a matter of moments the whole gang, en masse, stormed

into the playground in search of the catechist who, luckily, had been able to hide. To forestall reprisals, new catechists and assistants came the following Sunday.

They were celebrating the feast of St. Aloysius. During the services the boys were raising a racket inside the chapel and nothing could be heard. Shortly after the services, a crowd of toughs came along and began to saunter about the playground provokingly kicking the games around; several women in the nearby houses leaned out over their windowsills and exchanged obscenities with the invaders.

The rector decided to confront them in person. They were itching for a fight but he decided to trick them. They had questioned him in Piedmontese. He replied to them in Italian to make them think he did not understand their dialect. After a vulgar outburst of laughter they finally gave up.

So the trick ended in jest and the priest who made the best of a bad situation invited everyone to play a game of *barra roita* that the arsonists accepted while the more stubborn left the premises without further damage.

After the game when practically all had left, four of the leaders accompanied the priest into the doorkeeper's quarters and shared a glass of wine with him. They were impressed with his cordiality and the meeting ended with a kind of flourish (cf EBM 3, 394-397).

### The Scoundrels and the "Barabitt"

What Don Bosco managed to do with the gangs of Turin, transforming them from wolves in his dream to lambs, served as an

example to the Salesians.

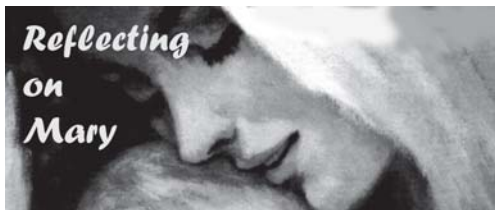
In Seville, Spain, towards the end of the 1800's, in the neighbourhood called Trinidad, the streets were infested with gangs of ruffians armed with slingshots ready for any kind of mischief, even targeting street-lighting and lamp posts. They created a nuisance to pedestrians and launched into street scuffles with rival gangs which became their daily fare.

But behold, here come the Salesians to Seville to found an Oratory! Among them was a distinguished young cleric "don Pedro" who, not for nothing bore the name of Ricaldone. Armed with zeal and courage he confronted the young scoundrels and stole their hearts as he led them to the Oratory and there, little by little turned them into smart and generous young lads. One beautiful day, all the slings were placed at the feet of the Madonna and the ex-scoundrels of that area lit them up in a bonfire to the great applause of the crowd.

And not so many years ago the "barabitt," Milanese for toughs: misfits living in families among an affluent society, but now reduced to poverty, vagrancy, theft and drugs, found a friendly voice that they could trust at the Salesian centre of Arese. They defined that "house" with no bars on the windows, in a respectable neighbourhood, with elder brothers with the heart of Don Bosco: "House of Hope."

The heart of young people can unleash immense possibilities for good and Don Bosco knew that! The birchin of Turin, the ruffians of Seville, and the barabitt of Milan bear witness to that. □





## THE MYSTERY OF MARY'S HOUSE AT EPHEBUS

by Roberto Spataro

*Catherine was a German mystic who lived two centuries ago (1774-1824). She was declared blessed by Pope Saint John Paul II in 2004. In her visions she contemplated on Mary at the death of Joseph, the wedding at Cana and the Passion, after Jesus was taken down from the cross.*

**T**he city of Ephesus, in modern Turkey has a small community of Christians and is surrounded by a sea of Moslems. The latter however, who also venerate the "Mother of Jesus," go there to ask for favours and often receive them. According to tradition, this small shrine contains the remains of the house where Mary lived with John the apostle whom the Son had entrusted to her before his death on the Cross.

It was discovered by archaeologists in the late nineteenth century on the basis of the description of a German mystic, an Augustinian nun, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich who lived between 1774 and 1824 and who spent most of her life confined to her bed. She fasted totally and for long periods of time she was nourished only on the Eucharist. She received the stigmata to relive the Passion of Jesus in the flesh.

### MARY AND THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

Her secretary, Clemens Brentano, recorded all Blessed Emmerich's visions, noting in particular detail various episodes of the earthly life of Jesus and the Madonna. So books came to be published that have helped several souls to relive the Passion of Christ intensely and with love.

Therefore, reading the pages of these texts nourishes one's faith intensely and from the sincere fervour of this woman who loved to say: "All of us also carry the sufferings of others" - we learn some details of the life of Our Lady, of which we might not historically be certain. For example, in her visions, Catherine sensed the tenderness with which Mary assisted her husband Joseph: "When Joseph was dying, Mary sat at the head of his bed, holding him in her arms. Jesus stood just below her near Joseph's breast." It was a mo-

ment of extraordinary grace. In fact, she reports: "The whole room was brilliant with light and full of angels."

### MARY AT THE WEDDING OF CANA

There is no lack of theological insights pertaining to Catherine's Marian visions such as her description of the miracle of Cana in Galilee. In fact, she explains that Jesus called Mary "woman" - attributing to her a title that is deeply biblical which recognizes her divine maternity. We all wondered why at Cana, Jesus used an apparently harsh expression when addressing the Madonna: "Woman, be not solicitous! Trouble not thyself and Me! My hour is not yet come." These words were not uttered in harshness to the Blessed Virgin. Jesus addressed her as "Woman," and not as "Mother," because, at this moment as the Messiah, as the Son of God, He was present in divine power" Catherine explains. Exegetes have written rivers of words to explain the reason. But Blessed Catherine, who also had the sensory perception of that dialogue, reports that the tone of Jesus was sweet and agreeable and that, in those words there was only veneration and love for the Mother.

### JESUS IN MARY'S ARMS AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

The vision which represents the scene when the battered body of Jesus is taken down from the cross is undoubtedly touching. It is very probable, our mystic contends that Our Lady performed those gestures: "I saw the Holy Virgin wash the head and face and soaked the dried blood from his hair with sponges. As the washing

proceeded, the awful cruelties to which Jesus had been subjected became more apparent and roused emotions of compassion, sorrow and tenderness as she went from wound to wound. With a sponge and a little linen over the fingers of her right hand, she washed the blood from the wounds of the head, from the broken eyes, the nostrils, and the ears. With a little piece of linen on the forefinger, she purified the half-opened mouth, the tongue, the teeth and the lips. She divided into three parts the little that remained of His hair. One part fell on either side of the head, and the third over the back. The front hair, after disengaging and cleansing it, she smoothed behind His ears. When the sacred head had been thoroughly cleansed, the Blessed Virgin kissed the cheeks and covered it." These visions also inspired the famous director Mel Gibson when he was producing the film that has touched millions of viewers: *The Passion of the Christ*.

Ephesus, Loreto, Nazareth and Jerusalem: these are very significant places of Marian piety. They are places where, with reasonable certainty, we know that Mary was historically present before she assumed into Heaven and reigns gloriously caring for her pilgrim children on earth. At Ephesus, in particular, according to Catherine there was a scene we may have never thought of, in which we are invited to meditate: "John rose and took out of a metal box a little white folder that contained the Holy Eucharist. Then he solemnly uttered a few words and gave Mary Holy Communion." □

**LUBUMBASHI**

If he hadn't had the gift of patience, Father Eric Meert would never have been a missionary priest. Because taking kids off the street and reintegrating them into a family can be a long and tedious process that involves the weaker person (the child) and a constant dialogue with the parents. Every day at Lubumbashi, there are many children and young people who ask for help to the *Oeuvres Maman Marguerite*, a network dedicated to Don Bosco's mother and, since 2001 coordinated by Father Eric. It was created in 1994 and counts 13 foster homes. On the one hand, there is a family-oriented pedagogy while schooling is provided for the young along with artisan and professional training for the older kids (shoe repair, welding ...).

"Every year we welcome between 500 and 600 children of which about 250 are brought back to family life. One hundred are fostered in our facilities, which provide hospitality and schooling. We are just trying to convey humanity starting with respecting every single story. It just starts with a simple "helló". Our



goal is that little by little and with the help of educators and support of the social worker, every child builds a positive image of themselves." A change of heart is always possible. A situation is never irreversible; everyone can change. With favourable conditions, both the child and the family can change the way they see each other." However, relapses are around the corner.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo "the opposition is angry and people are tired. There is a biting social crisis and numerous families live in misery as they struggle to get to end of the month." The illegal market is flourishing as well as corruption and violence". In the region of Kivu, decades-long clashes continue among armed groups as people are forced to flee.

Fr. Meert is responsible for the Bakanja-villas, a home for children and young people. Alongside patience, there is another typically "missionary" virtue that cannot be forgotten: hope, i.e. the ability to never despair. In our mission, this virtue is indispensable. "You must also know how to forgive. "Pope Francis is asking us to

go beyond the boundaries and limits of our society. We want to get close to our brothers and show mercy. Through simple acts of affection, we are creating a new future in which they can hope to have a new life." □



walking  
with  
the Church

**Coming back, Capital Punishment & The Second Coming**

*From St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland*

**Q.** *I am away from Mass and the Sacraments for years. I hardly ever pray. Is there any point in starting again?*

**A.** The rest of your life starts today. The mere fact that you wrote this letter means you are searching for God. The moment we start to search for Him we have found Him. If you are still uncertain and need help - any priest will be willing to help you.

**Q.** *I spent some years in the United States during which time a number of convicted criminals were executed. I don't believe in Capital Punishment. I think it is barbaric and should never be considered as a punishment for crime. What is the position of the Catholic Church on the death penalty?*

**A.** In recent years the Church has moved to a position of near-total opposition to the death penalty. Pope St. John Paul II speaking about it in an encyclical letter (the Gospel of Life) wrote: "There is a growing tendency, both the Church and in civil society, to demand that Capital Punishment be applied in a very limited way or even that it be abolished completely." The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that the purpose of punishment is to preserve public order and rendering

the aggressor unable to inflict harm. It is not a question of 'getting even' or 'being revenged.' If that purpose can be served by "bloodless" means, "then public authority should limit itself to such means." (Nos 2266, 2267)/ Hopefully the day will arrive when the death penalty will no longer be used as a means of punishing crime in any part of the world. Life is sacred from the womb to the grave.

**Q.** *How sure are we that there will be a Second Coming of Christ to the world?*

**A.** Our belief in the Second Coming of Christ is founded on the many places in the Bible which tell us that Jesus will come again. Jesus speaks about the certainty of His coming when He says, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and when he does he will reward each one according to his behaviour." (Mt 16:27) □

## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### Example

Two friends were discussing their motor car troubles. "What model is your car?" asked one. "It isn't a model" retorted the other. "It's a horrible example."

### Too Risky

A man went to an insurance office to apply for life insurance. The insurance agent inquired: "Do you drive a car?" "No," replied the applicant. "Do you fly?" "No." "Sorry," said the agent curtly, "but we don't insure pedestrians anymore."

### What's in a name

When the defendant's name was called in court, to everyone's amazement, he stood up in the jury box. "What are you doing there," barked the clerk. "I was called to serve on the jury" came the meek reply. "But you must have known," the clerk snapped, "that you could not sit on a jury and judge your own case." "Well, I suppose not," the defendant admitted. "I did think it was a bit of luck."

### Perfect Timing

His car was in the garage for repairs, so Jim Brown told his wife to take a taxi to work. Mrs. Brown, nearly late for work, phoned for a cab and when the car turned up into her driveway, she

rushed out, got in, and told the driver hurriedly where she wanted to go. On arrival, she asked how much she owed for the ride. "Lady, you don't owe me a thing," said the driver. "I was just turning around in your driveway."

### Prompt Service

As the train pulled into the station, the porter knocked on the compartment door. "Chicago," he announced. "Shall I brush you off, madam?" "Certainly no," said the lady icily. "I'll descend in the normal way."

### Tragedy

Did you hear the sad story of the two red corpuscles who loved - in vein?

### Vain Economics

In a supermarket the other day, I heard a wife remark philosophically to her husband, "Look at it this way, dear - the more it costs the more discount stamps we get."

### Simple Intelligence

Small boy scowling over his report card said to his dad: "Naturally I seem stupid to my teacher; she's a college graduate."

### Street Smart

Beggar: "Will you give me a rupee for a cup of coffee?" Pedestrian: "No, I don't give money to people on the street." Beggar: "What should I do, open an office?" □

## 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.*

Due to Stress I was getting severe cramps and pain in my head. I prayed to Jesus and Mother Mary to give me the right doctor (Neurologist). I was healed, I pray the three Hail Marys everyday.

As my husband was shifting the bed he lost control and fell to the floor. I was scared he had suffered a fracture because he couldn't get up. I prayed the Three Hail Marys and told Jesus to pour his precious blood on him, after five minutes he could get up and walk. My Heartfelt Thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary. *Monica Fernandes* Our sincere gratitude to Our Lady, through our devotion to the Three Hail Marys my son secured a good percentage in his board exams and we are also grateful for numerous other favours. *I Pacheco, Goa* My sincere thanks to Our Blessed Mother, Don Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for healing my niece in Dubai from a serious stomach ailment. I started reciting the three Hail Marys as she was taken for a test and the reports came out normal and a surgery was averted.

*Liguetta D'Costa, USA* My sincere thanks to the Holy Trinity and Mother Mary for saving us from a mishap which occurred while travelling by car from Mapusa to Madgaon and we were totally safe and without any injury.

*Mr. & Mrs. Chougale, Mumbai* My sincere thanks to Mother Mary for the grand success of my grand nephew, Leron Patel, Hyde Park, in his SSC Exams and for many other favours granted through her intercession. *Gomal Kolge, Thane* My son who is an engineer in Canada had to pass an exam to continue in his current job. He failed in his first attempt. I fervently prayed the Three Hail Marys several times for his success. In the month of August he gave his second attempt and was successful. I am immensely grateful to Mother Mary for granting my request. *Jessymal, Kerala* Our heartfelt thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for granting our wish of a full-fledged Catholic wedding and no other ritual of our son Melroy who married a non-Christian. Thank you Jesus and Mother Mary for this favour for which we prayed earnestly for such a long time.

*Mr. & Mrs. Edward and Alphonsa O'Connor, Hubli*

**LOVING CHILDREN TO  
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Our grateful thanks to Jesus and Mary for helping my sons secure jobs. My younger son got his job after a month, but my elder son was without a job for more than a year. We were all so worried and prayed everyday. At last our prayers were heard. Thank you Jesus and Mother Mary for hearing our prayers and for all the favours received.

*Mrs. H. Pope, Pune*

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Jesus and Mother Mary for the gift of my second child after having many complications during my pregnancy. Please continue to protect and bless my two girls.

*Mrs. Amanda Fleming,*

*Pune*

My heartfelt thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary for granting Mira and Maya admissions; for restoring my failing health; for my children's academic success; for keeping my mother safe; for helping me secure a job close to home; for my husband's safe travels; for helping me financially; for helping me be a blessing to all.

*Mrs. Pushpalata Samagond*

A million thanks to the Divine Mercy and Mary Help of Christians, for blessing my daughter and helping her to get her admission to a B.Ed course.

*Edna Paes, Goa*

My fervent thanks and heartfelt gratitude to Jesus and Mary Help of Christians for a successful total knee cap replacement.

**THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO  
OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO**

Thank you Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for protecting me from a serious accident after I was thrown down by a reckless scooterist on a busy road.

*Rose Martins, Mumbai*

I am grateful to Our Lady and Don Bosco for healing my broken bones as I prayed at the casket of Don Bosco when it came to Margao.

*Savia Furtado, Goa*

My sincere thanks to Don Bosco and St. Rita of Cascia for the many gifts bestowed, visible and invisible.

*A Devotee*

My grateful thanks to Mother Mary and Don Bosco for healing my son George, my grand daughter Meghna who passed her exams and healing my grand daughter Abigail.

*E. Santoshi*

I am very grateful to Our Lady and Don Bosco for my son's successful career.

*H. Lewis, Secunderabad*

Our sincere thanks to Jesus, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco for my successful operation, the doctor's normal fees and many other favours received.

*Dora D'Souza*

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit and Our Lady, Mary Help of Christians for hearing my prayers and granting my husband clear medical tests.

*Veronica Mascarenhas, Goa*

**THANKS TO DEAR  
ST. DOMINIC SAVIO**



Thank you Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for the gift of twins after 13 years.

*Regina and Daniel Pereira*

Our grateful thanks to Mother Mary, Don Bosco and Dominic Savio for a safe and normal healthy child through a normal delivery.

*Mr. & Mrs. Chougale, Mumbai*

Thank you dear Dominic Savio for a safe delivery of a child and for keeping her safe from all illness.

*Jeney George*

Thanks to Jesus, his most beloved Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio and all the saints for the favours granted to me and my family.

*Mrs. C. D'Souza, Mumbai*

A sincere thanks to Our Dear Mother Mary, St. Anthony and St. Dominic Savio for all the graces bestowed on us and for protecting our precious daughters Cabrini and Atira; for success in their exams; for the good health and well-being of our parents, siblings and their families through the faithful recitation of the Three Hail Marys.

*Mrs. Rowena & Mr. Jude Fugle, Mangalore*

**APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER**

**NOVEMBER 2017**

*Christians in Asia*

*That Christians in Asia, bearing witness to the Gospel in word and deed, may promote dialogue, peace, and mutual understanding, especially with those of other religions.*

**Turn to Nature**

I knew a woman who was widowed at a young age. She was left with three small children and a farm to run. I asked her what she did when she heard the news of her husband's immanent death. She said, "I put on my coat and walked through the fields. It was spring and in those fields I found a new courage, a new hope, and I was able to pray."

If you find when things are very bad and you are full of fear that you are too angry with God to pray, sometimes it helps to turn, as this woman did, to nature; for in nature we can often find the release that renews hope.

Sr. Stan Kennedy in *Gardening the Soul*



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#### **MARY WAS THERE**

Everytime we undertake a journey we start with the Rosary. On 1/2/2017 as we were returning to Mumbai by car, after my son's wedding in Goa, the tire of our vehicle burst and the car rolled over thrice. I was thrown out of the car about 5 metres away, my daughter-in-law sustained cuts on her forehead and face, my son and my husband were trapped inside. My son came out safe but my husband suffered a collar bone fracture. We thank Mother Mary for protecting us from a fatal accident.

*Maria C. D'Cruz, Navi Mumbai*

**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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Please address all correspondence to:

**Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, sdb.,  
SHRINE OF DON BOSCO'S MADONNA,  
Matunga - MUMBAI - 400 019 - INDIA**

**Phone/Fax: 91-22- 2414 6320, email: dbmshrine@gmail.com**