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*Turn then
 those eyes
 of mercy
 towards us,
 O clement,
 O loving,
 O sweet
 virgin Mary.*

From The Editor's Desk

AT ANOTHER PORT

When I was young, and going to spend Christmas with my grandparents, one of the most eagerly awaited events in our family was the annual visit of one of my mother's brothers, each December. He had spent most of his time abroad and finally came to retire close to London. As soon as the school holidays started, we brothers and sisters would begin the build-up for his arrival. He was a professor but someone who loved life. He brought great cheer to our Christmas preparations. Grandma had prepared a room exclusively for him. Finally, as soon as he arrived, he and his bags, (huge ones bursting at the seams), were whisked off to his secret lair. He had a special way of making an entrance every time he came to the dining table; there was always something amusing each time: an ornate clock for grandma, or a golf-cap for grandpa. It would start us off laughing and joking and there was already Christmas cheer in the air. Each time he decided to saunter down to the local market, all of us vied with one another to accompany him, just to see what he would buy and what he wanted to do with whatever he bought. The evenings were spent sitting around chatting and joking about old times and reminiscing about friends now long deceased or people who had moved away. They were days of magic.

But then, all too quickly, the end of his holiday would come. Gloom would begin to descend on us a day or two before he was to return, and it was with heavy hearts that we would make our way to the train station to bid him farewell. I can still recall the pain of those partings: the desperate efforts at cheerfulness, the tearful embraces, the desolate sound of the engine tooting its departure, and the lonely figure in the doorway of the 'DQ' (it already ran then) as it moved out of the station, gradually getting smaller and smaller until the last coach went down the slope towards Bombay, finally slipping from sight. At that moment, life seemed hardly worth living for us children.

One year, however, as we trudged our way home in glum silence, it struck me that there was another side to the story. The train carrying our beloved uncle might have disappeared beyond our sight, but he would soon be arriving at another airport. While we were left behind, heart-broken and sad at his departure, his friends and colleagues in London were at that moment preparing a big party for him, eagerly awaiting his arrival and looking forward to catching up on the news of the home country. For us there was parting and sadness; for them, reunion and great joy. Our loss was their gain.

The death of a loved one is a bit like that. For us, it is all heartbreak and loss: a silenced voice in the home, an empty place at table, a void in the heart that can never be filled. But there is another side to the story. For death is also, in God's loving plan, an arrival at another shore, to a welcome beyond imagining, and to peace at last.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

A TIME OF GRACE, BUT ALSO OF CHALLENGES

by Giampaolo Dianin

Highly idealised and unrealistic expectations are created around marriages, which inevitably clash with the demands of reality, putting the couple's stability at risk.

After dedicating many pages to engagement, Pope Francis devotes as many articles of *Amoris laetitia* (AL) to the first years after marriage, a time of grace and challenges. If the engagement is like a fertile womb that generates the couple, the first years of marriage can generate the mature couple, but they can also make a still fragile creature, with few immune defences, sick. We want to dedicate this article to this particular season in the history of each married couple.

We are all aware that we marry in freedom, out of love and to

realise a common life project together. It is true that today's engagements are very long and often accompanied by a period of cohabitation that allows people to experience the reality of love first hand, but it is inevitable that the encounter and sometimes the clash with the reality of daily life puts the couple to the test in the early years of their married life.

Added to this is the observation that the time taken for young people to mature is longer: "Often the engagement period is not long enough, the decision is precipitated for various reasons and, what



is even more problematic, the couple themselves are insufficiently mature" (AL 217).

Thus, the first few years of marriage inevitably become a time for maturing personal and relational aspects which - to be honest - should have been part of an earlier time.

The engagement is a very important time, but it never takes away from the challenges of the first years of life together. There is a time of prior training and there is an apprenticeship and training in contact with real life. The same goes for a profession: you study, you graduate, you have a lot of knowledge, but then the first work experiences require you to reformulate what you have learned in books as you come in contact with reality.

There are so many crossroads and roundabouts to go through together and the fatigue is not related to any particular problem of the couple, but it is a path that everyone has to go through. Not that the rest of married life runs smoothly, but the first few years are a delicate season because they are a time of joy and enthusiasm in being able to live together and realise dreams and projects that have been cultivated for so long, but they are also the time of "gestation" for the maturing couple.

Young couples are a resource for all married couples, for those who meet them, and also for the community. They possess a natural positive force that radiates around them. Sometimes their enthusiasm and freshness meet with a slightly ironic smile on the faces of onlookers, but at other times they arouse a healthy nostalgia for what is important and for the freshness of the beginnings of all

love.

We can mention these challenges in more detail later, one at a time: the impact with real and everyday life; the realisation of dreams and projects long cultivated during the engagement; the management of the couple's time, which is always overwhelmed by a thousand other priorities; the integration of the couple with their character, personality, desires and expectations; the establishment of a proper relationship with their families of origin; sexual harmony, which is never taken for granted; the birth of a child, which breaks all balances that have just been achieved; the great trial of not being able or capable of producing a child; and for Christian couples, learning and living the Christian life as a couple.

The accomplishment of these developmental tasks - if sustained by the enthusiasm and joy of loving each other - must come to terms with other problematic aspects which, today in particular, can be present at the beginning of life together. First and foremost, the strong idealisation of married life with expectations that are often unrealistic. In our world today we have built up a real myth, the myth of happiness, of a life of serenity, of well-being, of harmony, of health and fulfilment. Everything that involves effort and sacrifice is a problem and is immediately eliminated or considered abnormal. Thus, highly idealised and unreal expectations are created around marriage and the family, which are inevitably destined to clash with the fatigue of reality. The failure to realise dreams causes disappointment, frustration and sometimes seriously jeopard-

dises the couple's stability.

If these are the challenges of the first years of marriage, the building and maintenance of the spousal bond lasts a lifetime. The task and the joy of rediscovering each other, year after year, is never completed. As the seasons of love change, each partner offering different but always beautiful landscapes. Pope Francis writes: "There is no gua-

rantee that we will feel the same way all through life. Yet if a couple can come up with a shared and lasting life project, they can love one another and live as one until death do them part, enjoying an enriching intimacy. The love they pledge is greater than any emotion, feeling or state of mind, although it may include all of these" (AL 163). □

GOD'S SHOP OF ALL GOOD STUFF

One night I dreamt that a new shop had opened on the main street, with the sign: Gifts of God.

I entered and saw an angel behind the counter.

Amazed, I asked: "What do you sell, beautiful angel?"

He answered: "Every good thing from God!"

"Do they cost a lot?"

"No, God's gifts are all free."

My gaze went over to the large shelf with huge jars of Love; flasks of Faith; packets of Hope; boxes of Salvation... and so on.

I plucked up some courage, and since I was in great need of all that merchandise, I asked the angel: "Give me a lot of God's Love, all the Forgiveness, a carton of Faith and Salvation as much as you can!"

The kind angel put everything together on the counter.

But I was astonished when I saw that all the gifts I had asked for, and which the angel put together turned out to be a rather small packet, as big as my heart.

I exclaimed in surprise: "Is it possible that this was all?"

Then the angel kindly explained to me: "Yes, my dear, in God's shop they do not sell ripe fruit, but only tiny seeds that need to be cultivated...."



IN PIOUS SUFFRAGE

The habit of perpetual daily Holy Masses for the deceased
Jonah D'Adan

Always, but especially during these months of October and November, the Church invites us to meditate on the mystery of the resurrection of the dead. Let us reread the famous fourteenth chapter of St Paul's first letter to the people of Corinth, and feel the power of the divine word tremble within us: "Christ being raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.... And as all die in Adam, so shall all be raised to life in Christ.... "Our hope doesn't deceive us," says St Paul again in his letter to the Romans (5:5). It is from this assurance, this superhuman hope whose reality we cannot even fathom, that our transient, and painful lives must be illumined.

So, enthused by this truth of the final triumph of our life in Christ, we bend over the graves of our deceased. We enter into the darkness of the other world; a world we have precious few precise images, and which therefore we do not know how to

represent in our present way of knowing and thinking. But we do know certain truths, which instruct and comfort us. We know, first of all, that our dead are still alive. The human soul is immortal. Even if separated from the

body, of which it was the living form, it survives. And we also know that a divine presence surrounds them: the mercy of God! We tremble! But we know that the Lord is good and forgiving, that he knows human weakness and so is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4).

And we know even more. That some good and beneficial act of ours can be useful to our deceased, in their mysterious estimation of merits before God. This is the Church's teaching on suffrages; most consoling! The "communion of saints" can also be operative through the afterlife: prayers, penances, works of charity can be carried out by us and credited to our deceased. An ineffable consolation invades our troubled hearts! Let us accept Dante's message as if it came to us from beyond: "That here for those beyond, much is advanced" (*Purgatorio* 12, 24); and let us repeat it as if it were addressed to



ourselves, proposing a loving remembrance of them.

The Pious Association of members at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome has instituted the Work of Perpetual Daily Masses for the Dead in order to help its members to offer worthy suffrage for the souls of their deceased. The Pious Association collects the offerings sent for this purpose by the members into a special fund for the daily celebration of Holy Masses in suffrage of those who are enrolled. In this way, every day, forever, the souls of the deceased members participate in the benefits of the Holy Masses celebrated in their name. Living people can also be enrolled in this

Work, it being understood, in their case, that the application of suffrages will take place after their death.

In order to register, it is enough to send your offering to the Pious Association the name and surname of the deceased or living person (through the Shrine of Don Bosco's Madonna) and an offering. The offering does not buy Grace, because Grace is an infinite gift: it is only a gesture of generosity that is associated with the request. A special certificate will be sent (or received) by those who have requested registration. The Rector of the Basilica at Rome follows its development every year. □

"Why wait for death to know you, Lord, when you are in the indescribable splendour of this unexplored sublime life? Let us love the moment that gives us the grace to see you. At your call the poplar rises towards you; under your insistent gaze the nascent leaf moistens and sprouts transparently, the hard bark is torn away by the sun's heat; your embrace, after

a day of separation, bids farewell to the sadness of the heart. I know, it is You! The shadows of the dead await us, each in his place in the dust: your love is for them and for us. Thine also is the night woven of moonlike threads and traversed by a stream of stars... And here comes your spirit, the wind, the restless consciousness of the forest, knocking at the windows with its rhythmic beat."



Marc Chagall 1913
The dead man and the Violinist

God appears in this prayer by the Greek poet Giovanna Tsatsos as in the paintings of the painter Marc Chagall: He is at the crossroads of the streets, in the tremors and colours of nature, in the emotions of conscience. The poet reminds us that this life of ours, often wasted or dragged along like a burden, is already 'the site of great epiphanies of a God who loves us tremendously. □

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED

Anastasia Dias

We're always planning things, aren't we? Planning what we're going to do right now, pre-planning what we're going to do tomorrow, day-after-tomorrow, the next week, next month or next year. Life's great when everything goes according to our plans, right? But, what if it doesn't? What do we do then? To get answers to all of these questions you have to read on.

I remember a young boy from college. He was bright-eyed, hard-working and immensely talented. In his second year or so, things changed for him. Rather, he changed. He had become silent and looked very sad in class.

A close friend of mine told me that this boy was from a small town. He had studied and got a full scholarship to go to college. Sadly, he was being mentally harassed by his professors. At first, he was brave. Gradually, he started taking all of this to heart.

Like everyone else, this young boy had pre-planned his entire life before joining college. He was going to study well, graduate, work hard, gain work-experience and start his own company. Those were his plans. While planning his life, he had never dreamed that he would be mentally harassed in his second year of college. He had never ima-

gined that he'd be battling depression shortly thereafter.

The good news is that this young boy was courageous and determined. Even though the situations in his life had reached breaking point, he didn't give up. He persevered and became a college graduate: a first-generation graduate in his family.

For people all over the world, the past year has been unimaginably difficult. You would've planned on getting your college degree and starting work. Or, you would've planned on getting married and starting a family. But things haven't worked out according to your plans.

For those of you who feel that life's not fair, for those of you who feel that you are treading uncharted territory, I have a story. It is a story of a bereaved yet incredibly courageous woman and her journey toward the unknown. It is the story of Ruth, reimagined in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. I believe that this story will fill you with undeniable hope, resilience and determination to face every situation that comes your way, good or bad, courageously.

Thousands of years ago, in the town of Bethlehem, lived a woman named Naomi, with her husband and two sons. There was a terrible





a slave, but she didn't mind.

And when she'd crossed over to the Land of Judah and begun a new life in the grain-fields, she found what she'd been hoping for. Help in the form of a man named Boaz who would redeem the property that belonged to Ruth's father-in-law. And, Boaz would go on to marry Ruth and would have a son named Obed, who would have a son named Jesse and Jesse would go on to be King over all of Israel. And, from the house of David would a man named Jesus be born.

Ruth could never have ever dreamed of this. After all, Ruth was just a foreigner who had come into enemy land (the Israelites and Moabites were hardcore enemies) out of faithfulness towards her husband's family. What set Ruth apart was the courage that she possessed when her whole world came crashing down. And, faith: faith that things would stand her in good stead at some point in her life. Yes, she would have to endure a huge amount of struggle, strife, pain, grief, poverty and persecution as well. But there would be an end to all of this, one day.

Right now, you might be entering or walking into uncharted territory. Depression, grief, financial burden – all that the pandemic has put the entire world through was completely unexpected. Yes, you and I are living in uncertain times, where things do not go as planned. Just like Ruth, you and I are walking into the unknown. In spite of everything, we need to choose to be fearless. Because we have an unshakeable hope that even though we are treading into uncharted territory, we will stand our ground. □

famine in the land. Because of this, Naomi and her family moved to Moab, a neighbouring country. Naomi's husband passed away in Moab. And, her sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Shortly after this, Naomi's sons died too.

Naomi was sorrowful and decided to go back to the land of Judah. She instructed her daughters-in-law to go back to their parents' homes. Orpah left. But Ruth wouldn't budge. She had adapted to the Jewish way of life and accepted the culture and traditions as her own.

Even though Ruth was grieving her late husband, she plucked up the courage to move into a foreign land, penniless. Certainly, she would've been afraid with every step that she took in uncharted territory. She'd probably have to spend her entire life as a servant or

THE SALESIANS IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

The terrain was not only prepared but well tilled and cultivated, by Fr Antonio Belloni, founder of the Orphanage of Betlehem and of the Holy Family Congregation.

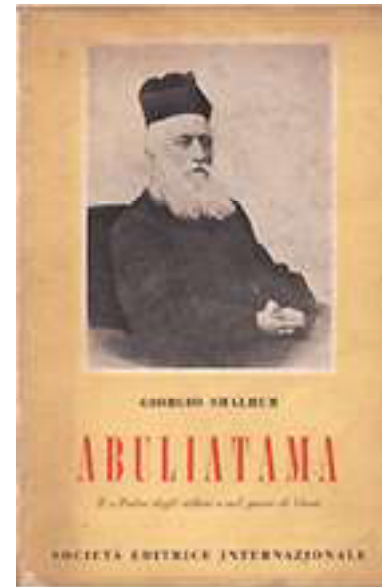
Already in 1893 Fr Belloni and around half of his confreres entered the Salesian Congregation professing the vows and Rule.

since then remembered as the "father of the orphans" ("Abuliatama").

Gradually the Province grew in the other countries of the Middle East: Egypt in 1896, Turkey in 1903, Iran in 1937, Syria in 1948 and Lebanon in 1952. Between 1976 and 1998, the MOR Province also included some presences in Ethiopia.

NAZARETH

Right in the upper part of the town, visible to anyone coming from the Esdreylon plain, we Salesians have a beautiful school with about 500 students. The students are Arab-Israeli, mostly Muslim, and the rest are Christian. It is the best school in the whole of Galilee. It is extremely moving to hear the testimony of the young people, especially the Muslims, who call Don Bosco a "father, teacher and friend."



Becoming a salesian, apart from the house of Betlehem, Fr Belloni brought with him "as dowry" the agricultural school of Beitgemal, the novitiate of Cremisan and the vast terrain on which the house of Nazareth was to be built. Fr Belloni died in 1903 and has been



The bakery of Betlehem: for the poor the bread is absolutely free

BETHLEHEM

A very beautiful and unusual house. It is a large

building built entirely of white stone in the mid-19th century, as an orphanage, by Fr Antonio Belloni. The Salesians arrived in Bethlehem in 1891 and immediately Fr Belloni asked to become part of the Salesian congregation. The name Bethlehem means “house of bread” and the Salesians have the most famous bakery in Bethlehem. Contact with needy families, generated during the Intifada period, led to a list of poor people receiving bread every day at a symbolic price, some receiving it daily for free.



of spirituality and interreligious dialogue, particularly with the Jewish world. In Beit Jamal, the Salesians are the custodians of the tomb of Saint Stephen the first martyr. The church of St Stephen also houses the remains of the Venerable Simon Srugi, a simple Salesian coadjutor, who lived humbly and was attentive to the poorest, and whose life exuded an aura of sanctity even while he was still alive. He was particularly loved by the Muslim population, whom he favoured in his support for the neediest. □



CREMISAN

On the outskirts of the city of Jerusalem, in Palestinian territory, but dangerously surrounded by the wall that Israel continues to build to delimit its borders, is the house of Cremisan in the middle of a vast expanse of agricultural land cultivated with vineyards and olive groves. It produces excellent red and white wine, which has won several international awards. The income from the farm helps to support the neediest of the area.

BEIT JAMAL

About 35 kilometres from Jerusalem, down towards the Mediterranean Sea, is a centre

THE ACTUAL POPULATION IN 2021

PALESTINE has a population of 5, 051,953 as of February 2020, ranking 121st in the world. ISRAEL as of 13 April 2021: According to the Central Statistical Office, Israel's population amounts to 9, 327, 000. Specifically: 6,894,000 Israelis are Jews (73.9% of the total); 1,966,000 are Arabs, including Muslims, Christians and Druze (21.1%); another 467,000 (5%) are non-Arab Christians, members of other minorities or not affiliated with any religion.

Witnesses in & for Our Times ST. GREGORY THAUMATURGUS (NOVEMBER 17)



Ian Pinto, sdb

You might be misled to believe (as I was) that Thaumaturgus is a Greek surname. The truth is that Thaumaturgus in Latinized Greek means ‘Wonder worker.’ This new knowledge casts a spell of curiosity and mystery around this ancient saint. Gregory the Wonder worker! It sounds so grand, doesn’t it? Why was he called so and who was he in the first place?

Uncovering Biographical Details

Gregory was born around 213 AD to a wealthy pagan family in Neocaesarea, in modern day Asia. Very little is known about his early life or his family. We know that he studied law and became a lawyer. Around the year 233 AD, he and his brother Athenodorus were accompanying their sister to her husband’s house in Caesarea, Palestine. They were actually on their way to Beirut to do a course in law.

While they were on their way, they met the famous Origen who had made a name for himself as a scholar of Scripture and an effective teacher of the faith. They were impressed with him and decided to abandon their plan of going to Beirut for law studies. Instead, they joined Origen’s school at Caesarea



and began studying theology. The words and ideas of Origen penetrated their minds and hearts and they were eventually converted to the Christian faith. They spent a good 7 years learning from Origen the truths of the Christian faith.

In 238 AD, Gregory decided to return home to practice law. To his surprise, on returning home he

found himself in the middle of a discussion regarding the appointment of a new bishop. Given his background as a lawyer as well as his 7 year discipleship with Origen, he was elected bishop. It must be noted that Neocaesarea was not a Christian town. In fact, some records say that there were only 17 Christians in that place! Nevertheless, Gregory took his appointment very seriously and committed himself totally to the preaching and upholding of the Christian faith. Such was his efficacy that in a short time, the number of Christians multiplied significantly. Crowds would gather to hear him speak; such was his proficiency and charisma. To accommodate the new converts, he began to establish new churches. Legend has it that he worked numerous miracles as well, which acted as an aid to his preaching ministry. One can recall the words of Christ who said, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news... these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mk 16:15-18).

Around 250 AD, the Roman emperor, Decius unleashed a fierce persecution of Christians. Gregory fled to the desert along with a deacon companion. He had instructed his people to do likewise in order to escape the persecution. Once the persecution subsided, he made a return only to be faced with the outbreak of plague and the invasion of the Goths in 252-254 AD. He courageously faced these difficulties and continued to

minister to his diocese with great pastoral zeal and concern. In 264-265 AD, he participated in the synod of Antioch. At the Synod, he played a role in clarifying the doctrine and teaching of the Church against the heresies of Sabellianism and Tritheism.

It is believed that at the time of his death in Neocaesarea only 17 non-Christians remained in the city! He is invoked as the patron against floods and earthquakes. The reason for this patronage is that he was reported to have stopped the river Lycus from flooding and on another occasion he moved a mountain.

Conversion Experience

As mentioned earlier, Gregory came from a pagan family. He had probably never even heard of Christianity, or if he had heard of it, he hadn't paid much attention to it because it was only just emerging as a religion of repute within the Roman world. We must remember that we are talking about the first one and a half century since the Christ event. At that time, the followers of Jesus were captured by the Spirit and relentlessly and zealously proclaimed the Good News that Jesus came to bring. They were fired with zeal because they felt that Jesus would come at any moment and therefore, the world had to be prepared to welcome him when he returned in glory. There was a deep sense of urgency about their mission.

Nevertheless, they hadn't succeeded in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth as Jesus had desired. They had made missionary expeditions and there had been attempts to reach as far as possible but for the most part,

Christianity was centred in and around Jerusalem. Paul and his disciples had introduced the gospel in Asia minor but their progress was slow due to the vastness of the land and the density of the population.

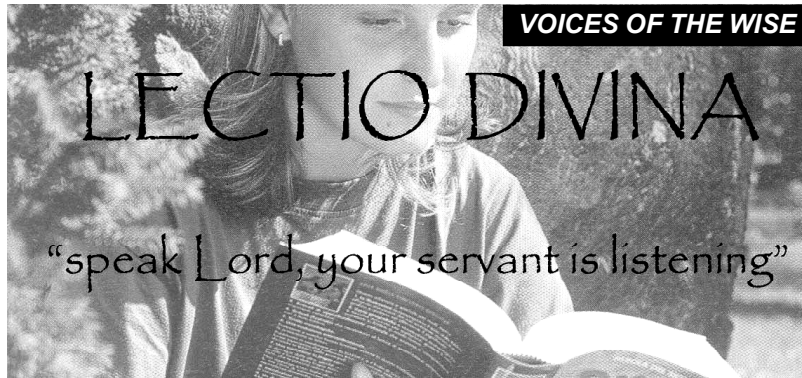
Gregory's encounter with the gospel took place when he left his hometown of Neocaesarea. There is an important lesson hidden here. It is important that we leave our comfort zone to experience the power of the Gospel. For Gregory, his first encounter with the message of Jesus happened only when he left his hometown. For us, if we haven't had a spiritual experience, maybe we need to move out of the comfort zone of our sin, unhealthy habits, unforgiveness and pride or whatever else is preventing us from opening ourselves up to Jesus.

Gregory's conversion happened at the intellectual level. A Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan delineates three kinds of conversions. He speaks about an intellectual conversion. This means that new knowledge impacts us in such a way that it brings about a change in our life. It takes place largely at the level of the head. One is exposed to ideas and arguments and after having examined their cogency and veracity, one decides to accept them. The second form of conversion is moral conversion. Moral conversion happens at the level of the heart. It implies a change of values. One is swept up by a moral value or a set of values and makes the choice to abandon one's previous values in exchange of the newer ones. The basic reason for this is that one seeks a better way of living. One begins to ask whether something is good not just in the

immediate present but in the broader horizon of the future. The third form of conversion is religious conversion. Lonergan defines religious conversion as an 'other-worldly falling in love.' One is completely enveloped by the supernatural or the transcendental that one is led in a deep sense of love to give oneself totally. This is a dramatic form of conversion. The experience of Paul on the way to Damascus could serve as an example of this kind of conversion while the experience of Zacchaeus could serve as an example of moral conversion.

These three conversions are not hierarchic that means none is below or above the other. They are of different kinds and all bring about a similar result — change. It doesn't matter how one comes to the truth, it only matters that one comes to it! Each of us also have our own conversion story. For many of us, the conversion might have been slight since we were born and brought up in the Catholic faith but perhaps for some of us it was dramatic. Maybe there are some reading this who haven't yet had a conversion experience; if you are such a person then I am sorry to say that you haven't begun living your Christian life. You are not really a Christian just because you are baptized, confirmed and fulfill your Christian obligations; you are really a Christian if you allow the Word of God and the teachings of Jesus to penetrate your mind and heart, your values and choices, and live in accordance with them to the best of your ability. This is the mark of a true Christian.

Gregory's conversion led him to become a saint; the question is: what does my conversion mean for me? □



CHRIST IN US, THE HOPE OF GLORY

by Antonion Barbierato

The risen Jesus Christ is the ultimate reason for our hope. "He has also opened for us the door to a full life, beyond death," writes Saint Anthony in his Sermons. May this truth be a comfort to us when the thought of death, especially during this month of November, makes us sad and fills us with fear.

"Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For if by one man came death, by one man shall the resurrection of the dead come also. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all receive life" (I Corinthians 15: 20-22). We must have the courage to look with hope beyond the darkness of death, because the Apostle Paul warns us: "If we have had hope in Christ for this life only, we are more to be pitied than all men" (I Corinthians 15: 19). The Spirit that God

has given us is already the pledge of this final fulfilment: "If the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." (Romans 8:11).

The risen Jesus Christ is also the model of our life beyond death. We will be transformed into his image; we will share his glory. Through him, the full light



and infinite love of God will be communicated to us without limitation, so that we can share in the divine life itself.

Sometimes, out of curiosity, we would perhaps like to know more about our condition beyond death. We must be aware that we are talking about a reality of which we have not yet had any direct experience and therefore only a negative description is possible. If our life in the body is now limited by weakness, by the influence of evil, pain and death, then all these things will no longer be there. If now our relationship with others and with the world is still restricted and opaque, then it will be full and luminous. Paul speaks in this way of the transformation that takes place in the resurrected: "The body is sown in corruption but it rises incorrupt; it is sown in misery but rises in glory; it is sown in weakness but rises in power; it is sown in the animal body but rises in the spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15: 42-44).

It is already possible to glimpse how, in the resurrection, God will explode and bring to an unimagined fullness all the potentialities of life that he had placed in the heart of man when he created him. It will truly be like a new birth.

Man is called to reach this goal, to which Christ has opened wide access, through the dark test of death. In this last, decisive experience, each person, almost summing up all the attempts of his or her life, will present either his or her total readiness to open

up to God's love or his or her definitive closure within himself or herself. The encounter with God, without any more veils or masks, in death, will illuminate our entire existence as a judgement. Then it will be clear to each one, without equivocation, what his or her life has really been: whether it was a successful attempt to mature in love, or a forever failed trial in isolation and radical selfishness.

The Gospel scene of the final judgement is particularly significant: those who have known how to recognise Christ, living in love, will be able to participate in his life and glory; those who have rejected him, closing themselves off from love, will see their eternal expression fixed in a painful and total incapacity for communion with God and with their brothers and sisters.

As we move our steps and attempts within the fragmentary nature and veil of human history, let us never forget to turn our gaze and expectation to the fullness of the future that is open to us, to the heavenly city where the tree of true life grows.

"In the city there shall be the throne of God and of the Lamb, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face and bear his name on their foreheads. There will be no more night, and they will no longer need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will illuminate them. And they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22,35). □

Quiet Spaces

LUKE WARM THINKING

On the morning of November 15, 2016, the Holy Father celebrated Mass at Casa Santa Marthae. The following is the edited English text of the Pope's homily which was delivered in Italian.

The confrontation with a “powerful” Lord, who scolds harshly, though always out of love, was the focus of Pope Francis’ homily at the Mass he celebrated at Santa Marta on Tuesday morning, 15 November, 2016. The liturgy proposed the image of Jesus “who stands before us,” and does so in order to reprove us, because he loves us; either to invite us or to be invited.”

The reproach can be found in the book of Revelation (3:1-6,14-22) and in how the Lord addresses the Christians of the Church of Laodicea. The Pontiff explained that it consists of the “example of a Church,” but that it is found “everywhere.” It can indeed be applied to all “those Christians who are neither cold nor hot: they are lukewarm. They are always like quiet waters.” The Lord rebukes them and they ask: “Why do you rebuke me, Lord? I am not bad.”

“Perhaps,” the Pope said, “I was bad! But this is worse. You are dead.” In fact, the Lord uses powerful words: “Why are you like quiet water which do not move, because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth.” It is the situation you encounter, Francis noted, when “warmth enters the Church, into a community, into a Christian home,” and you hear people say: “No, no, all is calm, everything is alright here, we are believers, we do things well;” that is to say, when everything is “starved” and lacking “consistency” and “with the first rain it dissolves.” However, the Pope asked, “what does a lukewarm person think” that merits him such harshness? We read in the Scripture passage: “think of being rich.” In fact it is certain: “I am rich and I do not need anything, I am calm.” He is a victim, therefore, of “the tranquillity that deceives.” However, the Pontiff warned, “when the soul of a Church, a family, a community or a person, is always calm, God is not there. Let us be careful not to walk in this manner in the Christian life.” In fact, the Pope added, paraphrasing the passage from the Book of Revelation: “You say: ‘I am rich’”, but “you do not know what it means to be wretched? Nor miserable, poor, blind and naked?” There are three “great slaps”, the Pope commented, “to awaken the tepid soul, asleep in the warmth.” And to those who complain: “But I do not hurt anyone, I am calm,” they should remember: “Neither do you do good!”

The Lord’s answer is tough, “it seems like an insult;” but he “does so out of love.” In fact, shortly after we read: “All those whom I love, I rebuke them and teach them.” He also adds a suggestion: that of “purchasing, from me, gold refined by fire in order to become rich.” Namely: to discover another richness, “one that I can give you. Not that wealth of the soul that you believe you have because you are good, because you do things well,

everything in a calm manner;” but precisely “another wealth, that which comes from God, which always brings a cross, always brings a storm, always brings some unrest in the soul.”

The next counsel is that of “buying white clothes, to dress yourself, so that you do not appear in your shameful nakedness.” Other people who are lukewarm, the Pope explained, “do not realize that they are naked, like the tale of the naked king in which the child says: ‘The king is naked!’” Even the Lord suggests buying eye drops in order to “anoint your eyes, recall the view and you can see:” those who are lukewarm,” Francis pointed out, “indeed lose the capacity for contemplation, the ability to see the great and beautiful things of God.”

Therefore the Lord stands before those who are lukewarm and says: “Wake up, correct yourselves!” He does this “to help us convert.” However, the Pope continued, God is also present “in another way: he comes to invite us.” We read again in Revelation: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to him, I will eat with him and he with me.” The Pope explained that “the ability to hear when the Lord knocks at our door” is very important, “because he wants to give us something good, he wants to come to us.” Unfortunately there are Christians “who are not aware when the Lord is knocking. Every noise is the same for them.” They do not realize that the Lord is knocking and saying: “It is I, have no fear. I want to enter, to be with you, to take dinner with you. In other words, to celebrate, and to console you. Not with the consolation of warmth, that which is not needed; but with the consolation of fruitfulness, that which helps you to move forward, to give life to others. You can open up.”

Finally, the Lord also wants to “be invited.” As we read in the scene with Zacchaeus from Luke’s Gospel (19:1-10): the tax collector from Jericho “feels that curiosity, a curiosity that comes from grace,” which “was sown by the Holy Spirit” and brings Zacchaeus to say: “I want to see the Lord.” The initiative “comes from the Spirit,” the Holy Father said. Hence the Lord “looks up and says: ‘Come down, invite me to your house!’”

God, therefore, “always acts with love: either to correct us, to invite us to dinner, or to be invited.” He is going to tell us: ‘Wake up.’ He is going to tell us: ‘Open up.’ He is going to tell us: ‘Come down.’ But it is always him.” Hence the final invitation, that every Christian asks himself: “Do I know in my heart how to distinguish when the Lord says ‘wake up’? When he says ‘open up’? And when he says me “come down’?” □

THE LABURNUM

Pierluigi Menato (TA/ID)

The Laburnum grew in the most desolate corner of the garden, here the scruffy cabbages spread the greenish-brown wings of their leaves glistening with icicles over the ground. A sad corner indeed, between those two cracked walls crowned with shards of bottles. But above them, the view of the countryside opened up vast and clear, from the arid hills to the east to the snowy mountains streaked with blue gullies to the west. The air circulated freely and the first rays of the sun came to catch its red rays in the sprigs of the flowering laburnum: thin rosaries of amber corollas, sprinkled with gold and honey, that's what they looked like.

In spite of the cold January, a few bees arrived from distant hives, buzzing and flying up and down along the flexible flowering stalks, as if bound to them by an invisible thread of scent, not yet fully awakened from their winter dream, and already dying of intoxication. Just above that northern corner of the old kitchen garden, the small window of that dark country kitchen opened. The sulphurous sprigs of laburnum

framed the grills, and behind their weave stood the clear, windy sky, in which the pale transparencies of winter sunsets had condensed into a celestial opacity of turquoise.

Small in the width of the wall, that window only gave breath to a little section of the kitchen, illuminating the cupboard and one side of the huge hearth, surrounded by chairs worn out by use, cluttered with logs slowly being consumed, gnawed away by the embers. But the smoky wall, between the hearth and the window, held the reflection of the golden laburnum twigs from morn to night like a faithful promise of sunshine.

The generations of the family had left their traces on the wall, which the smoke and dust of time had gradually erased. Here and there, however, one could still see the rectangular, oblong and round imprints of paintings, copper and pewter utensils, which had now disappeared. But the place of the palm sprig of Palm Sunday renewed every year with anxious care, was not empty! Two peeling frames hung near the fireplace: one contained a faded



photograph of a child with astonished eyes and curls that escaped beneath a crocheted cap, the other was a recent photograph of a young soldier with beautiful black eyes.

Gianni, the soldier, and the laburnum were the same age. This was not because Gianni's father, the elderly Michael, planted the shrub to celebrate the birth of his son, as Ulysses had he done for his son Telemachus in the courtyard of the palace of Ithaca. Michael (Gianni's father) would never have understood the beauty of such a rustic ceremony; or perhaps he would have preferred a seedling of a muscat vine, or maybe an August peach cutting.

Besides, would that abandoned corner at the back of the garden have been a decent cradle for that delicate little plant?

It grew, however, spontaneously, putting on its leaves as the child's teeth sprouted. And little

Gianni would just lean his elbows on his father's knees as he sat at the hearth, and he would look ecstatically at the ruby-haired man, with his cheeks as red as apples, his beard peeking out silvery streaks from his brown neck and his laundered shirt, his gnarled hands barely gesticulating in the slowness of his quiet conversation. But the boy's eyes often turned to the window grill, beyond which, among the golden tufts of the laburnum, passed the first visions of his serene mind: the flight of little angels descending from the clouds in the evening, towards the pillows of good little children, or the hooked profile of the Witch, whose basket made of wind seemed to get caught and shake the thin rosaries of honey-coloured gems.

So, the image of the gentle slender tree had become confused with Gianni's pious and cherished mind.

When, years later, old Michael died in mid-February, leaving to his young son his honesty as a thrifty and deeply Christian farmer, Gianni wanted to decorate the poor grave with a bunch of the most fragrant flowers, which looked like a bronze wreath embracing the small white cross, where the name of the obscure servant of the furrows was carved under an immense poem made of a single syllable: Pax.

From that day on, the absent father's place at the table was strictly observed. The plate and cutlery were still placed on the tablecloth every day, while Mamma Rosa murmured the



window panes to let in its fragrant promise of joy.

On leaving, with a ring on her finger, the fiancée wanted Gianni to lead her down the muddy paths of the garden to the corner where the magical slender tree was in bloom. Under the full moon that bathed her in a shining halo, the blonde girl received the homage of that fragrant pious string of yellow that bent down as if to hide, in the golden veiled half-light, in the heavenly radiance of her eyes.

Angelus. Still Gianni, talking with his mother about his daily chores, turned his eyes to the window of his childhood dreams, to the sky veiled by the texture of the twigs that sometimes appeared yellow-flowered, or deep green.

The laburnum remained, faithful as ever, a friend of the house.

The day finally came (it was Carnival Sunday) when a blonde girl accompanied by her father entered the vast, roast-aroma filled kitchen, blushing, and stood astonished to see what would be her future realm as a bride.

It seemed, however, that nothing around her moved her as much as the vision of the splendidly flowering tree which, in the red sunset, knocked on the kitchen

Every autumn, Gianni would go with his father to saw and chop large pieces of wood in the courtyard of the elderly parish priest, Father Roberto, arranging them in regular piles under the porch that held a strange, woody smell. The boy worked quickly, carrying the bundles tied with a belt on his shoulders, and continuously nibbling on apples or chestnuts, of which his pockets seemed to be an inexhaustible source. Then Gianni went off on his own, adapting himself to "doing everything," smiling and silent.

One day at the end of October, after having once again placed the logs in the woodshed, he shyly entered the parish priest's study and said:

"It's all over, Father Roberto. Tomorrow I have to leave."

"Where are you going, Gianni?"

"After a period of training I'm going to Iraq with the Italian peacekeeping contingent: Look after my mother... for me..." and he threw his cap into the air, catching it immediately.

He quietly said goodbye with a few more words, but his voice was trembling.

On a cold morning, the parish priest was told that the mayor of the village wanted him to accompany him to Gianni's house, far away across the fields. The mayor was carrying a large envelope with a military stamp. With him was Antoinette, the social worker from the municipality.

When they arrived, after a long walk along a cart track creaking with ice, they found the door closed and the large kitchen deserted. The reflection of the snow outside lit up the rafters of the ceiling, but the hearth, black with wet soot, was unlit. They went up the steep wooden staircase to the room from which came a faint, elderly coughing sound. Mamma Rosa was lying in the large double bed, her head very white and her shoulders wrapped in a soft woollen shawl. Gianni's fiancée had made her comfortable like this, before going to the village to stock up on food and medicine, as she did every day.

The mayor and the assistant kindly bent over her. "What did the doctor say?" "Nothing

serious, the usual winter bronchitis, the bronchitis that torments the elderly." "And Gianni?"

Mama Rosa tried to raise herself up on her elbows, turning deathly pale.

So, the mayor took the old woman's bony hands in his own and began to tell her about her son who had died in an ambush, when on duty that he heroically performed with the Italians in Iraq, in Nassirya, receiving a medal for valour...

Father Roberto stood at the foot of the bed and saw the sick woman in front of him. When he realised that she was not trembling, but had begun to sob, squeezing her eyes shut with a sheet, he consoled her for a while and then slipped down the dark stairs and ran into the garden. He knew the whole story of the laburnum.

A few specks of sleet danced in the ashen air, coming down to mist the brown leaves of the cabbages. But over there, in the dingy corner between the two walls crowned with shards of glass, the laburnum stood solitary and precious like a sentinel of ebony and gold.

Slowly, so that none of its buds would fall out, he cut a small bunch of the shining twigs. Back in the kitchen, he placed it in front of the photograph of the good soldier with the wonderful black eyes, which seemed to smile at the memories of his childhood, twirling and dancing with drops of sleet coming down from the vastness of heaven, where the dreams of the simple, the innocent and the pure endure forever. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO -22

by Michele Molineris

125. Hunted with kitchen tongs (1863)

Some of his callers were unpretending or courteous. Some called on him to complain – harshly at times. Yet Don Bosco was so unalterably meek that that they would finally leave not only pacified but friendly. Others – self-esteeming, irritable, overbearing – patronizingly acquainted him with their business plans to have his opinion. Don Bosco never disabused them for their snobbish notions. Courteously, he gave his view but left the matter to their own judgment.

Sometimes, in a difference of opinion on some question, a caller would become rather insolent, and when Don Bosco was later asked why he had been so patient with him, he would reply: “Such persons must be handled as sick people.”

The only time he found it hard to restrain himself was when God’s honour was at stake. As happened on February 21, 1863 when he told his pupils of an incident that had occurred two days earlier:

“A man called on me and, unable to get what he wanted, began to blaspheme shockingly. Up to that moment I had put up with him, but at such conduct I could no longer control myself. I strode over to the stove, grabbed a pair of tongs and, seizing the blasphemer by the coat exclaimed, “Out, or I’ll teach you a lesson!”

“I apologise if I offended, you,” the man replied.

“Apologies won’t do! That’s no way to speak of God! I don’t want a demon in my room.”

I pushed him out. Whenever I hear a curse or an insulting epithet to God’s holy name, I really lose self-control, and, were it not for God’s restraining grace, I might do things which I should regret later.” (*EBM., VII, 20*).

126. This is a credit to you and your pupils (1863)

Toward the end of May [1863], at nine in the morning, Mr. Ferri, professor of philosophy and inspector of academic secondary schools, called on Don Bosco and, after introducing himself and showing his credentials, informed him of the purpose of his call.

After a comment on the propriety of repeated inspections of the premises of a law-abiding citizen who charitably gave a free education to several hundred needy youngsters, Don Bosco added, “I defer to authority and am willing to overlook this inequity. Go on with your task. I recommend only that the pupils be not asked inopportune questions or intimidated.” Fr Ferri promised to oblige.

One thing impressed him no end – perhaps despite himself: the silence, discipline, and perfect order in each classroom. Latin III, in particular, with one hundred and twenty-four pupils or more, convinced him that such orderliness was neither momentary nor feigned, but genuine and sound. As he closed his visit to this classroom, the teacher – Celestine Durando, a cleric – courteously offered to escort him to the next

room, but Professor Ferri tried to excuse him, lest even his momentary absence from the classroom gives so many lively boys an opportunity for some mischief. “No danger of that, professor,” the teacher replied. “No one will speak or move about.

“That’s hard to believe,” the inspector rejoined. “How can a hundred and thirty pupils sit still when left to themselves?” But he did allow the teacher to accompany him part of the way. “Let’s go back now,” he said, “and take a look.” He tiptoed back, put his ear to the door, and peeked through the keyhole. The boys were all sitting still and silent as though the teacher were there. “I’d never have believed it,” the inspector whispered to Durando. “This is unheard of, and it does credit to you and to your pupils.” The teacher was the cleric Celestine Durando.

What was a such a marvel to the government inspector was very matter-of-fact for those in the house and happened in all schools, because the young people of the Oratory learned to do good and avoid evil, not for the sake of man, but for the sake of God; not for the reward or punishment of the teacher or superior, but for the sake of their conscience (*EBM., VII, 263-264*).

127. Does he think he’s better than the pope? (1863)

About the year 1863, a nobleman, known to him only by name, wrote to him on an important matter. At that particular time Don Bosco had some very pressing, difficult correspondence to handle. Since the nobleman’s letter

contained nothing confidential, Don Bosco asked one of his priests to reply for him. The nobleman – quite conscious of his dignity and the consideration due him – became very indignant and wrote to Don Bosco a sharply insolent letter, the gist of which was that, since Don Bosco could not possibly be unaware of the identity of the person who had honoured him with a personally written letter, he had insulted the man by not duly acknowledging the social gap between them and by disdainfully to send a personal reply. The nobleman further went on to say that he had often written to the king, the Pope, and very important people and had in each case received a personal reply, not a secretary’s note. Did Don Bosco perhaps fear demeaning himself, or did he rate himself higher than the king and Pope? He should have felt it his duty to bring him a reply in person, and so on.

Unperturbed by such rudeness, Don Bosco wrote back saying he was grateful for such a gracious letter and such masterful acting. Though he knew him to be a well-educated, brilliant man, he had never thought him to be such a great joker. Don Bosco further thanked him for his candour – such as befitted a sincere friend – and went on to say that he felt so honoured by his friendship that he did not want to bypass his chance of strengthening it. Since he could not just then write at greater length, he would dine with him on a certain day and hour, so as to have leisure to discuss the matter contained in his previous letter.

Once his indignation abated,

the nobleman felt greatly ashamed. When Don Bosco arrived to dinner, his host was waiting for him at the head of the stairs. Some-what uneasy at first, he soon smiled and warmed up to Don Bosco, who had seemingly inter-pret-ed his letter as a friendly, subtle ruse for getting him there. Dinner was a pleasant affair. Ami-ably, Don Bosco won his host's heart, and from then on, the nobleman became the Oratory's great friend and benefactor (*EBM., VII, 24-25*).

128. Don Bosco bites the bullet! (1863)

I recall, recounts Fr Berto, that during my three years of secondary school at the Oratory, 1862 to 1865, Don Bosco was always surrounded by young students who spent their whole playtime after lunch and after supper with him. From time to time, he would fix his gaze on some boy who was probably lost in a daydream and would startle him by soundly tapping him on the face. Then he would laughingly take the lad's head between his hands and whisper, "Don't be upset! I wasn't striking you, but the devil" (*EBM., VII 336*).

The boys were convinced too that Don Bosco's little taps would toughen them against the devil. Often, at a youngster's request, he would lightly tap him and jokingly say, "The devil will not bother you anymore today."

Some boys would ask for several taps at a time, and Don Bosco would playfully satisfy them, saying, "The devil will leave you alone for the next six months."

One day a lad asked him for as many taps as he needed to be free from temptation for life, but Don Bosco smilingly replied: "I cannot make you immune for more than six months." Then, somewhat more gravely, he continued, "I once knew a boy who, despite prayers, penances, and good will, could not keep his passions under control. Well, he finally succeeded with the help of a daily tap from Don Bosco.

In 1861, a pupil asked Don Bosco for a keepsake before leaving on his Easter vacation. Don Bosco gave him a slight tap and said: "Go without fear; the devil will bother you no more." On his return to the Oratory the boy stated that the tap had been very effective and that he would get one anytime he had to go home (*EBM., VI, 237-238*).

Fr Bonetti recounts: "On Easter Sunday, April 20 [1862] almost in tears, assured us, "I am more hurt by blasphemy than by a slap on the face. Even in hearing confessions, I feel so bad after listening to two or three such sins that I can endure it no longer." We often remarked when preaching against blasphemy, Fr Borel would often repeat the actual blasphemies people used.

"Fr Borel is a very zealous priest," Don Bosco replied. "No one can deny that his lively, interesting sermons have converted many people. But I can't stand this habit of his. I've cautioned him several times and begged him to get rid of it, but sometimes force of habit and a flush of eloquence carries him away" (*EBM., VII, 80*). □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Ladder Borrower

My next-door neighbour and I frequently borrow things from each other. Not long ago, when I requested his ladder, he told me he had lent it to his son.

Recalling a saying my grandmother used to repeat, I recited: "You should never lend anything to your kids, because you will never get it back." With that, he responded, "Tell you the truth, it's not even my ladder. It's my dad's."

Collateral

I accompanied my husband when he went to get a haircut. Reading a magazine I found a hairstyle I liked for myself, and I asked the receptionist if I could take the magazine next door to make a copy of the photo.

"Leave me some ID, a driver's license or a credit card," she said. But my husband is getting a haircut," I explained. "Yes," she replied. "But I need something you'll come back for."

Cleaning Job

Fresh out of high school, I found a job cleaning the elegant home of an older couple. Among other duties, I had to dust their many imported carvings and petrified collectibles, as well as pick up after their pets.

One day, I was astonished to find two ivory fossils lying on the floor beside the bookcase. I quickly picked them up, and put them back on the shelf. The next week, the same thing happened. That afternoon, my employer

came into the parlour, her faithful dog behind her. Looking around, she eyed the bookcase. "Nya," she asked the dog, "how in the world do you keep getting your bones up there?"

Test Crash

As the test pilot climbed out of the experimental aircraft, having torn off the wings and the tail in the crash landing, the crash truck arrived.

A rescuer saw the bloodied pilot and asked, "What happened?" The pilot replied, "I don't know, I just got here myself."

Mailbox Problem

A friend asked me to replace the rotted post that her mail box sat on, but to save the beloved old box. I managed to extract all but one of the rusty nails in the bottom of the mailbox. To free the last nail, I wrapped my arms around the box in a bear hug and started yanking upward.

Just then a truck came by, and the driver stuck his head out of the window. "I tried that," he said, "but the bills just keep on coming."

Psychology Course

During a phone conversation, my nephew mentioned that he was taking a psychology course at the university.

"Oh, great," I said, "Now you'll be analyzing everyone in the family."

"No, no," he replied. I don't take abnormal psychology till next semester." □



MARY'S SANCTITY

by Roberto Spataro
Studium Theologicum Salesianum, Jerusalem

The oldest Christian prayer addressed to Our Lady was discovered in Egypt. It has become one of the most famous of Marian antiphons: *We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.* It dates back to the beginning of the third century and in Egypt. It was precisely at this time that Origen (185-254), lived there. He was born in Alexandria, the great metropolis, the second city of the Roman Empire, in importance and the number of its inhabitants.

Superior intelligence

Mark, a disciple of Peter and the author of the second Gospel, had proclaimed the Good News there and founded a Christian community that never ceased to show vitality and growth. Origen was a leading figure in this Church.

Gifted with an extraordinary intelligence, he has been compared to a kind of Plato of Christian antiquity. In spite of the great shortage of material means that hindered writing those days, he

wrote an impressive number of books, some of which have survived. Because of his intelligence and, above all, his piety, his bishop Demetrius appointed him director of a school of theology, where catechumens were prepared for Baptism. This school was called the *Didaskaleion*. Origen possessed a vast range of knowledge, ranging from philosophy to ancient languages. His passion was the Bible. As a child, he had learnt many passages by heart from his father Leonides, a fervent Christian who died a martyr.

A new approach

Origen commented on almost all the books of Holy Scripture and used a very successful method of interpreting the Bible: allegory. By means of this method, the reader, guided by the Holy Spirit, was able to grasp a hidden, higher, deeper meaning in every word of the Bible. Nourished by this food, Christians perfected themselves more and more perfectly, becoming, as Origen said, "spiritual," so as to resemble the Divine Word more and more. No



Origen's thought, which was not yet fully developed in regard to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, presents the Blessed Virgin very psychologically: troubled by doubt and tested in faith.

wonder Origen saw in Our Lady the model for all Christians who wished to rise from earth to heaven. In other words, Origen, in commenting on the passages of the Gospel that speak of Our Lady, highlighted her exquisite holiness. For example, here is a quotation from *his Homilies on the Gospel of Luke*, in which Origen interprets allegorically the "mountains" of Judea crossed by Mary to visit her cousin Elizabeth. "It was also necessary for Mary, after her conversation with the angel, to go up into the mountains and dwell on the heights. That is

why it is written: In those days Mary arose and went to the mountain. She must also, because she was not slothful in her zeal, have made haste and, filled with the Holy Spirit, was led to the heights and protected by the power of God, by whose shadow she was covered. The peaks of the hills of Judah are the symbol of the summits of the spiritual life. Our Lady, being filled with the Holy Spirit who is the fountainhead of holiness, had therefore reached the summits.

The perfect disciple

Among the Fathers of the Church (even if this title can only partially be attributed to Origen, since he later taught doctrines considered erroneous by the Church), Origen was the first to highlight this element of Marian theology and devotion: Our Lady as the perfect disciple of Christ. When we think and speak of Our Lady, in fact, we can take two different approaches. The first is to extol her prerogatives and therefore to appeal to her powerful intercession. The second approach is to emphasise the moral and theological virtues of Our Lady, who is therefore considered a supreme model to be imitated. Both attitudes are important and useful. Origen, without forgetting the first, also highlighted the second and we are grateful to him for that. Sometimes, however, only very rarely, his presentation of Our Lady's virtues is not convincing, not least because of inappropriate use of allegory. What does the "sword that pierces Mary's soul" represent, according to Simeon's prophecy in the Temple? For Origen it is the

symbol of the uncertainties and anxieties that will agitate the soul of the Mary. Here is his commentary on the episode of the Presentation in the Temple: "And your soul too - of you, whom you have known to have been begotten without human intervention, in the state of virginity, you who had heard from Gabriel: the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you - will be pierced by the sword of infidelity, will be wounded by the sharp point of doubt. Contradictory thoughts will tear you apart when you see that he whom you had heard called "son of God" and knew to be born without human intervention, is crucified and about to die, tormented by the torments of men." According to Origen, Our Lady's faith has therefore known doubt.

Christ's redemption is universal

Why did Origen make this mistake? Because the Church's theological reflection had not yet adequately explored the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Mary, in Origen's eyes, was in need of Christ's Redemption and therefore, affected by sin, had somehow failed in something. "If the Virgin did not suffer scandal during the Lord's passion, Jesus did not die for her sins." Origen therefore posed a legitimate problem: Christ's Redemption is universal, all creatures have benefited from it, including his Mother. But the solution he gave was inexact. It would be necessary to wait for the intuition of another acute theologian, who lived many centuries later, Duns Scotus, a Franciscan. Christ's redemption of Our Lady

preceded her conception. The fire of Grace that blazed from Christ's Passion had exceptionally forged Our Lady's perfect holiness, free from all doubt and even more so from all sin, even before she came into existence. Apart from this "discordant note," Origen always sings Mary's praises. He is, for example, the first to use a term that our Christian brothers of the East, Catholics and Orthodox, love very much to speak of concerning Our Lady: *panaghía*, that is "all holy." To those who objected that in the Gospels some expressions of Jesus seem to show a certain coldness of Jesus towards his Mother, Origen opposes this with a decisive argument: "If Mary had been proclaimed blessed by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of Elizabeth, how could the Lord have denied her that?" And, above all, Origen, commenting on the Lord's words on the Cross "behold your son," invites all the disciples to do as John did, to resemble Jesus, which therefore means to become holy, to be received as sons of and by Mary. "For whoever is perfect; is no longer he who lives, but Christ lives in him. Therefore, when one speaks of him to Mary, one says: 'Behold your son, that is, Jesus Christ.'" Following this teaching from Origen, devotion to Mary is linked to the deepest reason for being Christian, aiming at "perfection," according to the expression beloved of the Alexandrian doctor, or, practising "the high measure of the Christian life," to quote a phrase coined by another great devotee of Our Lady, Pope Saint John Paul II. In short, Mary and holiness: an inseparable pair. □



"YOUR GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR ME"

Fr. Blan y Pinto, sdb

1. Where did you get your inspiration to be a religious priest/what is your source of your vocation?

There wasn't really any such incident or event that inspired me to join Don Bosco, so it is very difficult to pin-point to any experience except that in 1981 February, a friend of mine told me that he was invited for games and a spiritual talk by Fr Oscar Misquitta to Don Bosco Matunga. I had not seen the shrine and the desire to see the shrine led me to Matunga. There I saw many boys with Fr Oscar. They were playing cricket. I too joined them and later Fr Oscar took us to the crypt and told us about the Don Bosco Lonavla camp. I had not seen Lonavla and had never attended a camp. I was very enthusiastic and decided to join the camp in May 1981. The staff at Lonavla impressed me so much that I felt inspired to join the Salesians.

2. What motto did you take for your ordination? Why did you choose this motto?

"Your Grace is sufficient for me" was my motto. However, I cannot say that it was actually my motto. Those words are words of inspiration and I chose the words because I was nervous and frightened as I approached my ordination. My spiritual guide comforted me saying that I have been called to be a Salesian priest and I need to



grow in my trust that God will give me all the graces I need to be an effective Salesian priest.

3. What does it mean for you to be celebrating 25 years in the vineyard of the Lord?

I am overwhelmed with gratitude because God has overlooked all my faults and my failures and given me graces beyond my imagination. When I look back at the 25 years, although I have had joyful moments, I also had lots of struggles and have journeyed through thorny paths. But the several moments of happiness and love which I have received along my way, surpasses all my struggles in every way.

4. Which were the best years of your priestly ministry & why?

It is difficult to say which years have been the best years of my priestly life. I have been enriched during all the years of my priestly life by my community confreres and the lay people.

I was in Divyadaan immediately after my ordination where I was deeply loved and accepted. There I also had a lot of personal time to spend in a very good library. I spent a year at Bosco Boys Home which opened a new world to me. I came to know the life of the street boys, their struggles and it helped me to understand the work of Don Bosco in the streets of Turin. I got the opportunity to view life from the perspective of the poor, marginalized and homeless.

The next two years at Jyoti and then 5 years at Virar were extremely challenging. This was my first experience of being in the parish. I had to learn a lot on how to be a parish priest. Here I must single out Fr. Edwin Colaco, (*my companion and is also celebrating his silver jubilee this year*), had a huge influence on me. It is not an exaggeration for me to state that no priest taught me how to make a parish vibrant; how to get the whole parish involved in the running of the parish as much as Fr. Edwin.

I spent the next 8 years at St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Salmiya. Kuwait was most painful. During my tenure there, I grew to love the Bible. Sitting for daily confessions was indeed a blessing. It gave me an opportunity to peep into the souls and I was convinced that our parish was filled with so many holy people. What was very inspiring was to see how the parents would get their children and

make them pray before the Blessed Sacrament before going to the school. It was such a pleasing sight. I am sure God blesses those parents who were instilling the value of prayer in their children. God was very kind to me in blessing me with wonderful confreres in my community in Kuwait.

5. Who has had the strongest impact on your life?

It is my family. My father passed away when I was barely 23 years old. He was a very kind and loving person. But he could not think of being separated from me. At the same time, he was courageous to give me the freedom to make decisions for my life. My mother taught me the power of prayer and penance. She is a woman of deep faith. When my father passed away I thought of returning home to take care of my family, for the family finances were in shambles. I remember the words of my mother. She said, "If you want to discontinue, that is your choice. But if you want to leave to take care of us, God will take better care of us." That strengthened me to continue and I know that her prayers continue to strengthen me daily. My brother and sister have been a source of inspiration. I have also been blessed with a very loving brother-in-law and sister-in-law in addition to my loving relatives who have deep respect for me, encourage me and have supported me at every moment. □



A STORY ABOUT CHRIST THE KING

Feast of Christ the King 21st November

There is an Irish legend about a king, who had no children to succeed him. So, he had his messengers post signs in every town and village of his kingdom inviting young men to apply for an interview with the king hoping to be able to choose a successor before he died. Two qualifications, especially, were stressed. The person must have a deep love for God and for his neighbour.



A young man who had a deep love of God and neighbour saw one of the signs and felt a kind of inner voice telling him to apply for an interview. But the young man was so poor that he didn't have decent clothes to wear to an interview. He also had no money to buy provisions for the long journey to the king's castle. So, the young man prayed over the matter. He finally decided to beg for the clothes and the provisions he needed. When everything was ready, he set out. After travelling for a month he caught sight of the king's castle on a high hill a little distance away.

At about the same time, he also caught sight of a poor old beggar sitting by the side of the road. The beggar held out his hand and pleaded for help. "I'm hungry and cold," he said "Could you give me something warm to wear and something nourishing to eat?" The sight of the beggar moved the young man. He stripped off his warm outer clothes and exchanged them for the tattered old coat of the beggar. He also gave the beggar most of the provisions he had been carrying in his backpack for the return journey.

Then, somewhat uncertainly, he walked on to the castle in tattered clothes without enough food for his return trip. When the young man arrived at the castle, guards met him at the gate and told him he would have to wait. Eventually he was led in to see the king.

"You were the beggar beside the road."

"That's right," said the king. "Why did you do this to me?" asked the young man. "I had to find out," said the king, "If you really did love God and neighbour." □

THE MOUNTAINEER

The story is told of a mountaineer, who was obsessed with the idea of climbing a notoriously difficult mountain. The achievement would be not only climbing the mountain but doing so in one day. After a year's long preparation he journeyed to the mountain. Having stayed the night nearby he started his climb early in the morning. He climbed alone, not wishing to share the glory with anyone. His progress up the mountain was much slower than he had anticipated and after 5 hours he was nowhere near where he expected to be. It was already afternoon and he was finding the going very difficult. He was still climbing when evening darkness began to fall. Gathering clouds overhead made it still darker.

However he kept going and was climbing a short cliff face near the summit when he slipped and fell at a dizzying speed. Fortunately his very long mountaineer's rope was anchored securely to a rock and his descent ended suddenly with a jerk from the rope and he found himself suspended in the air. He could not see below him, and no matter how he tried, and he tried for ages, he could not swing himself back onto the mountain side. Visibility was now practically nil. At this point he shouted "Help me my God." Immediately a voice answered from heaven "what do you want me to do?" "Save me my God." "Do you really believe I can save you?" "Of course Lord" he replied. "In that case" said the Lord "take out your knife and cut the rope which is holding you." There was no reply from the mountaineer. He hung on more tightly to the rope. Two early morning climbers found him unconscious, his hands tightly gripping the rope just 6 feet above the ground. Taken to hospital he recovered after treatment.

Lord help me never to doubt your love and care for me. "I am holding you by the right hand. I tell you do not be afraid. I will help you." Is. 31 .1 4



THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

They are grateful to Our Lady, Don Bosco and St. Anthony of Padua for helping me find my silver ring. *A Devotee*

My sincere thanks to Don Bosco and St. Jude Thaddeus for the many favours granted to me. *A Devotee*

My heartfelt thanks to Mother Mary, the mother of Jesus and St. John Bosco for healing my mother after a fall; helping Mira find a good job and a nice apartment; helping me to start writing again; for Maya's scholarship; for enabling us to go to the Aurobindo camp; for our safe travels to India and back; for healing my husband; for Aunt Amini and Uncle George and their good health, and please continue to bless all of us. *Puspalata C. Samagond, Mumbai*

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for all the graces received even during this time of the pandemic. *A Devotee*

I am grateful to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus for the graces received through his love and the Immaculate Conception. *A Devotee*
During the pandemic our house roof was opened for repairs. The Lockdown suddenly arrived and we were left with our roof opened as labourers were not available. There was a bout of bad weather but due to constant prayers we were saved. We prayed the Memorare and the Divine Mercy chaplet continuously and our family Rosary and this saved us. God was in control. Within a week or two we had our labourers and a roof over our heads. Our sincere thanks to Mother Mary, her constant protection and intercession.

Maria Fernandes, Goa

Dear Mother Mary, Help of Christians, thank you very much for all the graces and blessings bestowed on us. Please continue to bless and help us. Thank you, my Queen and my Mother.

Your grateful family from Perth, W.A.

My grateful and heartfelt thanks to the Lord Jesus, Our Heavenly Father and Mama Mary for the blessings and wonderful favours received in acquiring a nice job thereby eliminating my problems of survival. I pray to be kept away from alcohol and plead for sound health. *Melwyn D'Souza*

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Thank you dear St. Dominic Savio for my safe and normal delivery. For your constant protection over me and your intercession for me, from the time I was born and even till now. I am 35 years old. I am grateful to you for relieving me of pain during my pregnancy and at the time of delivery even while I was praying to Abba Father and Mother Mary for a Normal and Safe delivery. *Caroline Savianna Kinny*

I am grateful to St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery of a baby boy to my daughter and we have named him Savio. *Nirmala Hudson, Kerala*

THE POPE'S WORLDWIDE NETWORK OF PRAYER

NOVEMBER 2021

Universal intention - People who suffer from depression
We pray that people who suffer from depression or burn-out will find support and a light that opens them up to life.

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MARY WAS THERE

My son who is 38 years old was not willing to marry and we prayed unceasingly to Mother Mary during the Family Rosary and through our prayer group. Our prayers were answered on January 31, 2021. He married a girl from Goa and he now lives a happily married life. We were afraid of the lockdown but everything went smoothly according to God's plan. We are extremely grateful to Our Lady for her timely intervention.

*Maria C. D'Cunha,
Bhayander, Maharashtra*

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