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*May your servants rejoice
 in unfailing health
 of mind and body,
 and through
 the glorious intercession
 of Blessed Mary
 ever-Virgin,
 may we be set free from
 present sorrow
 and come to enjoy eternal
 happiness.*

From The Editor's Desk

"KEEP WATCH OVER US"

Among the many magazines that literally flood my desk week after week from far and near, I chanced upon this beautiful prayer some time ago. I cut it out and stuck it on a card and placed it in my prayer book. I've always found its tone just about right for the evening, when I'm tired and want to spend the last few moments of my day just sitting back and thinking about my day and the simple people I encountered during the course of my waking hours. Then I turn to this prayer and I bring to my mind's eye all those people...and take out my 'improvised' prayer card and pray this prayer (I can't for the life of me, commit it to memory), so here goes:

"Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give thine angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake. Amen"

God does keep watch over us. Ours is a God of compassion for "all sorts and conditions" of humankind: those who "work or watch or weep this night." He sends his angels to watch over those who sleep, trusting and defenseless.

He tends, ministers to, and heals the sick. He gives rest to the weary by refreshing the spirit of those who seek their relief in Him. He blesses the dying because death is a time of transition from one part of God's Kingdom to another. When we die, we are as surely, in God's loving arms as at any other time in life; perhaps much more.

He soothes the suffering and pities the afflicted, because God smoothes with his compassion all of Creation and is always ready to ease our earthly burdens if we but open ourselves to that divine nurture and balm.

He shields the joyous. Even in joy, we need God, to be enabled to treasure our times of joy rather than take them for granted. We need God's angels to cushion us from precipitous falls from joy. And we need God to help us remain sensitively and caringly aware of the suffering of others, even in a time of joy. What a great prayer, handed down through the centuries by all those earlier generations of God's people who prayed it throughout their lives and rose to find themselves restored, refreshed and renewed.

For us as priests we have another prayer that concludes our night prayer each night and as it were, it sandwiches that beautiful canticle of old Simeon found in the Gospel of Luke: 2:29-32 and it goes like this: *Save us Lord, while we are awake, protect us while we sleep, that we may keep watch with Christ, and rest with Him in peace.*

Finding it difficult to sleep? This is a wonderful bookend to your day, however hectic or harrowing it has been, because...there's nothing like a good night's sleep!

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

LOVE "HOPES ALL THINGS..."

By Gianpaolo Dianin

Hope is that virtue that rises every morning and nourishes relationships of love; like a persistent drop of water that makes spring flowers bloom in a winter that seems endless.

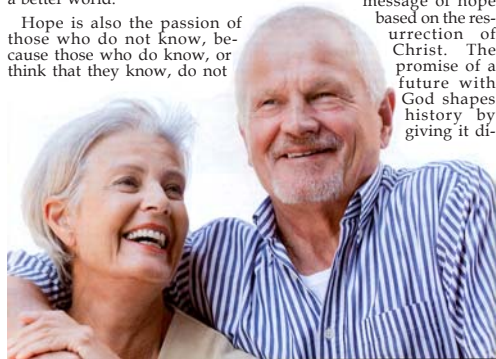
Hope is a constitutive dimension of man; people say "where there's life there's hope." Erich Fromm (1900-1980) wrote: "When hope disappears life is over."

Hope is one of the most human emotions of man says the philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) because it is not a tendency to satisfy a need but an emotion to overcome a state of need. It is characterized as a refusal to let the present ambiguity and tension rob us of a better future. So, hope becomes anticipation at the level of the imagination, for a better world.

Hope is also the passion of those who do not know, because those who do know, or think that they know, do not

hope, they see and foresee. Those who do not know, hope. The philosopher Massimo Cacciari wrote that one of the hallmarks of our technical-scientific culture is the "struggle against hope," against what is still unknown. But then, turning the subject on its head, one could say that hope is also the engine or the fuel of science and the future because in man, it sets in motion research and inquiry.

How can we ever forget Christian hope? The theologian Jürgen Moltmann re-reads the whole Christian message as a message of hope based on the resurrection of Christ. The promise of a future with God shapes history "by giving it di-



rection, meaning and a sense of the future which grounds the commitment of the believer making the Christian community always restless in any city where it would like to remain stable. But today we could also speak about the eclipse of hope. In the context of a lack of powerful thoughts, global projects, long-term perspectives, the one who lives by the day seeks only what is useful and practicable; without seeking any salvation; only looking for what feels good. Charles Péguy (1873-1914) spoke of the theological virtues as three sisters: "Faith is the one who holds out forever and ever; charity is the one who gives of itself forever and ever. But little hope is the one rises every morning."

Pope Francis comments on this verse of the hymn to charity of Paul in numbers 116-117 of *Amoris Laetitia*. Love hopes all things in the sense that it "does not despair of the future," but looks forward with hope. And for those who love, the future is always the opportunity to grow, to improve and to change.

Two spouses cannot stop at comments like: "We did that." Comments like this seems to raise walls before every opportunity to grow and improve. Yet, someone recalls: when we were in love, at the beginning of our journey you did incredible things, you surprised me by your gentleness and creativity. I was even happy and enthusiastic that everything seemed possible to me. You were able to come up with the most beautiful things about me; you were able to

awaken in me the potential that even I never thought I had, you've made me get better.

"You must accept me as I am," replied a husband to his wife and vice versa. It is true that we must not think of changing the other, especially when we want to be like us, being adapted to us. We must not reshape them as we would like, ready to respond to our needs and desires. It is true that we do not have the power to change the other, only to change ourselves, so when we change, conditions can be created for the other to change.

If my spouse never wishes me every morning, I could start wishing him/her every morning with a smile and gradually s/he could melt and start wishing me. People don't change by imposition but by contagion because they are released by the care and love of the other.

Hope is that virtue that rises every morning and nourishes the relationships of love; like a persistent drop of hope that manages to set in motion new pages of life, making spring flowers bloom after an endless winter.

Hope nourishes today because it helps me to look at it from God's perspective and the goal that awaits us. The Pope makes this particular recommendation to the young: "It is not helpful to dream of an idyllic and perfect love needing no stimulus to grow. A celestial notion of earthly love forgets that the best is yet to come" (AL 135). And again "No family falls down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow

and mature in the ability to love. [...] All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us

make this journey as families, [...] May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us" (AL 325).□

STAYING TOGETHER

THE POWER OF LITTLE DAILY ACTS OF HOPE

by Maria Chiara Bregolin

Whatever my husband says: we did not get married following his intuition at the bus stop that first day of high school... but on my precise imposition several years later!

He says he immediately fell in love with me. It took me...a couple of more years. For this reason to the question: "How many years has it been since you were married?" We answer differently; he says 10, for me it is 8, exactly.

But when the time came, I "forced" him to finish his studies so that we could get married.

This is meant to tell you that our love story was based on hope, indeed, on little hopes: that I fall in love with him and that he would marry me. Despite unknown factors, the future would be reserved for us and we would remain together.

These hopes do not abandon us now that we have entered a vortex of "delusional chaos" between work, school, courses, meetings for catechism teachers, training, ... In this vortex, which sees us fighting over very stupid and small things, it is hope that acts as the glue.

I don't mean a vain, empty hope, a kind of superficial optimism. The power of little daily acts of hope lie in the promises they disclose; the confidence of what may not exist right now but which will be realized in the future.

In our family, hope in the small things above all lies in the moments when we quarrel, in outbursts and in moments of tension. It is in recognizing that the other is able to accept even the worst part of you because in the bond of love



that binds us, there is a promise that the beauty that was there will return, which is: that each of us is here for the good of the other.

Every love story rests on little hopes: even yours! No matter where you are on the course. Pope Francis invites us to walk, to live in a dynamic way, the love that Jesus teaches through the words of St. Paul!

The relationship is changeable; what does not change in love stories is precisely this: the dynamic balance that allows us to live through its weaknesses but also its strengths.

What would my love story be if, in addition to all this desire for good, it was not nourished by goodwill towards my husband and my children? How could I continue to renew my love for the one who, after 12 years of marriage has not yet understood that shoes are not to be left ran-

domly in the living room but have a dedicated place?

How could I teach my children that love is patient, if I didn't have the hope that sooner or later, they too should understand if they are on the phone to a friend...they should not scream blue murder?

Even if I became a caring and patient wife, or a "Zen" mother and I didn't give my family a glimpse into the infinitude of this Love...I would be nothing.

Love never fails.

The horizon towards which Pope Francis invites us to walk is that of the Kingdom of God: where we will know the other perfectly, as He knows us. And the hope of little things will find all the promises fulfilled in the arms of the Father. From the beginning, he has placed in our heart the desire that our love story never has an end. □

THE GOSSIPER

A woman repeated a bit of gossip about a neighbour. Within a few days the whole community knew the story. The person it concerned was deeply hurt and offended. Later, the woman responsible for spreading the rumour learned that it was completely untrue. She was very sorry and went to a wise old sage to find out what she could do to repair the damage. "Go to the marketplace," he said, "and purchase a chicken, and have it killed. Then on your way home, pluck its feathers and drop them one by one along the road." Although surprised by this advice, the woman did what she was told. The next day the wise man said, "Now, go and collect all those feathers you dropped yesterday and bring them back to me." The woman followed the same road, but to her dismay the wind had blown all the feathers away. After searching for hours, she returned with only three in her hand. "You see," said the old sage, "it's easy to drop them, but it is impossible to get them back. So it is with gossip. It doesn't take much to spread a rumour, but once you do you can never completely undo the wrong."



WHY SHOULD I SAY 'YES' TO GOD?

Andrea Peruffo, Psychologist

There is a phrase that I often hear around in conversations on TV or in real life and it makes me really angry...it seems to have become a fashion and I disagree with such fashions. What is it? "Whatever..." that's the magic word, written or spoken after something is respectfully communicated in various situations the response is simply: "whatever," which is another way of saying, "I already have my problems so there's no need to disturb my life because what's important is elsewhere."

While thinking up this article, what came to mind was the exact opposite which is "I-care" and it should become a way of staying with the story to be its protagonist.

Let's take a look at it.

"What's your life worth if you don't make someone happy? If there is no one who's happy for you or who is really happy when you're around? What's the use of the money you have if it doesn't serve to break the chains of hunger, loneliness or despair, so that someone has hope once more, is able to eat, to dress, to study or even feed his children?"

That's a post from a friend of mine who's studying medicine and wants make of her life a gift to others. It's beautiful and excit-

ing to become aware that one's life can make someone happy; that someone's joy serves to make others happy too. I am going to take this seriously because I care about others and I cannot pretend that it's nothing.

But there is also another particular aspect that we can take into consideration, namely the possibility of taking to heart what the Gospel says. Why should I say "yes" to God? Why should I get involved with the Lord? I tried to post this question on FB...and I received so many responses. Someone wrote that it's only in Him that there's fullness of joy; others commented with a straightforward but provocative "and why not?" which I read as "try to do without God; try to say 'no' to God; try to stay away from Him and see if it's really worth it or do you want to risk losing something along the way?" Stay with the question without hurrying on to look for an answer. Listen to what is happening inside you. If you find it difficult to find a compelling reason to get involved with the Lord, you will find there are not many clear reasons to back out and say a direct 'no.' To be honest, this approach seems to assume that there has been a certain kind of

experience of God.

At this point I think it's worth lining up some considerations.

In the first place, in order to get involved with the Lord right to the end, one must have some experience. It is not enough to say: "Ok God, I trust you so I'll get involved" because there's always the suspicion that God might take something away from you, something from your beautiful life, getting you stuck with his stories and/or his rules.

Then the first question at which I must pause concerns the rapport that one has with God and the God of Jesus Christ in particular; getting to know him, to pause during my day to talk to him, and trying to see if what I am experiencing is really his loving face or merely a caricature. There are many risks in this regard because the image of God is strongly linked and influenced by parental relationships. Meeting the Lord through his Word becomes a way of verifying if what I think of him is actually what he says about himself!

In the second place the question is: what must I do with the Lord; if I say 'yes' to Him but to do what?

We become passionate about a person and/or a situation not only because s/he/it is interesting but because in it there is a proposal that involves us in a dream, stimulating within us certain ideals that will become a reality that would otherwise remain just empty words.

In the third place there is the question of personal gain...This is not meant to be venal but I believe that deep within us the demands of the commitment also

ask the question about personal gain. "Ok, I agree, I like the project and the idea that is proposed to me...but at the end of it all, what will I get out of it? And since everyone's life is important, mine is certainly not any less important. What will the outcome of my commitment be?"

It seems to me that these considerations, if they are valid for every choice a person makes, it is even more so for a faith commitment where the Lord himself is concerned.

The Gospel seeks to give answers to the questions set out not so much in a theoretical but in an existential and concrete form beginning from the very life of Jesus. The invitation we are given is to live like Jesus in the logic of giving of oneself in love and being passionate about the Kingdom of the Father. That is how our life will be full, beautiful and happy.

Can you believe that? In this regard a post says: "I still haven't figured out why God always says 'yes' to us." But is it really true that God says 'yes' to us, or is that an illusion? I see so much that's wrong and negative around the world.

The questions would multiply and everyone would have his/her own personal experience. Perhaps this is the way to go; sharing one's own experience of life and lived faith; your own questions and answers; your doubts and your certainties; your joys and sorrows. After all, Jesus did just that and I believe that this sharing of life can become the path we take because we "care" not only for our life but that of others. □



**SALESIAN
SAINTS**

**LOUIS
VARIARA
1875 - 1923
Priest - Blessed**

Louis Variara was born on January 15, 1875 at Viarigi (Asti). Don Bosco came to that town in 1856 to preach a mission. On October 1, 1887 it was to Don Bosco that his father would entrust him to take him to Valdocco. The Saint of the young would die four months later but that thought would leave an indelible mark on him for the rest of his life. He himself remembers the occasion: "It was winter and one afternoon while we were playing in the large playground of the Oratory we suddenly heard shouting from all sides: Don Bosco! Don Bosco! Instinctively we all rushed to the spot where our Good Father would alight after his carriage ride. We followed the vehicle to the place where he got down and immediately he was surrounded by his beloved mob of youngsters. I was looking for a place from where I could see him easily because I wanted to get to know him. I approached as close as I could and when he was just getting down from the carriage he gave me a *tender look* and his eyes rested on me attentively. I don't know what I felt at that moment....it was something I can't express! That day was to be the happiest day for me; I was sure I had met a Saint and that



that Saint had read something in my soul that only God and he could have known."

Louis asked to become a Salesian: he entered the Novitiate on August 17, 1891 and completed it on October 2, 1892 making his perpetual vows into the hands of Don Bosco's successor, Blessed Michael Rua who whispered into his ear: "Variara, don't waver (*variare* in Italian)." He studied philosophy at Valsalice where he met the venerable Father Andrew Beltrami. In 1894 Father Michael Unia passed that way, that famous missionary who had recently begun his work among the lepers of Agua de Dios, Colombia. "What joy and such amazement, when out of 188 companions who had the same yearning he fixed his gaze on me and said: "This one is mine."

Louis reached Agua de Dios August 6, 1894. The *Lazzaretto*

consisted of 2000 inmates of which 800 were lepers. And he immersed himself completely in his mission. He was endowed with musical talents and so he organized and put together a band. The atmosphere in that "City of Pain" immediately turned festive. He transformed the sadness of the hospital to Salesian cheerfulness with music, theatre, sports, and all the characteristics of the Salesian Oratory.

On April 24, 1898 he was ordained a priest and proved to be an excellent spiritual director. Among his penitents were also members of the Association of the Daughters of Mary, a group of 200 girls many of who were lepers. The young priest soon discovered that they would have gladly consecrated themselves to the Lord but this was considered unthinkable because no congregation accepted lepers or even the children of lepers. In the face of this mindset he had the first idea of young people even lepers consecrating themselves and so the Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary was formed on May 7, 1905. He was the "founder" departing from the concept of a "foundation." They were fully committed to religious obedience and for the first time in the history of the Church he founded the first religious community composed of people affected by leprosy or girls who were daughters of leprosy patients.

He felt ever more enthusiastic about his mission. He wrote: "I have never felt so happy as a Salesian as I have felt this year

and I bless the Lord for sending me to this hospital where I learned that I did not have to steal heaven." It had been ten years since he had arrived in Agua de Dios: a happy decade rich in achievements. These included the completion of the hospice of "Father Michael Unia" which despite the delays caused by the "1000 day war" was inaugurated on May 7, 1905. But now began a period of suffering and misunderstanding for this generous missionary. It would last for 18 years until his death. He was forced leave Agua de Dios and obedience would assign him to Mosquera, Contratación, Bogotá, Barranquilla... In 1921 he was transferred to Táriba a Venezuelan town on the Colombian border. When he reached there his health began to deteriorate at an alarming rate. For climatic reasons the doctor advised that he be taken to Cucuta in Colombia. He reached there but his condition deteriorated even further. He died on February 1, 1923 at the age of 48; 24 years of priesthood. He died subjected to a heavy "exile" which prevented him from dedicating himself totally to his patients and to his institute. He knew how to combine in himself unlimited religious obedience and fidelity to the work the Lord had asked of him, submitting himself to the dictates laid on him by his legitimate superior which seemed to take him away from the paths that the Lord had willed for him. He was buried in Cucuta. In 1932 his remains were transported to the chapel of his daughters in Agua de Dios where they are still located. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Intensity vs Duration

The patient complained bitterly, "Five dollars is an awful lot of money for pulling a tooth - just two seconds' work."

"Well," replied the dentist consolingly, "if you wish, I can pull it very slowly."

Evangelical Zeal

The new missionary asked the cannibal king, "Did you know Mr. Brown?"

"Oh yes!" he replied. "He was the pride of the island."

Then why did he leave such a nice island?" asked the missionary.

"He didn't, sir," said the cannibal king. "You see, times got hard that had to swallow our pride."

An Eye for an Ear

A recruit was being given an intelligence test in the army: "What would happen if one of your ears was cut off by a bayonet?" asked the examiner.

"I couldn't hear so well."

"Suppose your other ear was cut off?"

"I couldn't see."

"What do you mean?"

"My hat would fall down over my eyes."

Just in Time

Judge: "Have you ever been up before?"

Defendant: "I don't know. What time do you get up?"

Passport to Paradise

Three men were awaiting the celestial screening test by St. Peter outside the Pearly Gates.

Finally, each was asked to step up and report on his activities on earth.

"I, sir," said the first man, "was a minister of the Gospel for forty years."

"Stand aside for further consideration," he was told.

"I, too, was a minister on earth," reported the second man, "although for only thirty years."

"Step aside for further consideration," he was also directed.

Then the third candidate stepped up: "I, sir," he said, "was only a taxi driver for six months."

"Step right in," said St. Peter, bowing low.

"But, sir," objected one of the other two, "how is it that a taxi driver is permitted to enter the Pearly Gates before two ministers?"

"Well," explained St. Peter, "the way I look at it is that this taxi driver scared the devil out of more people in six months than either of you did in a long life time."

The End of His Tether

He: "If you don't marry me, I'll get a rope and hang myself in front of your home."

She: "Please don't do that, you know my father doesn't want you hanging around here." ☐

Witnesses in & for Our Times

ST. JOHN OF CAPESTRANO (23 OCT)
(1386-1456)

Apostle of United Europe



It certainly could not be said that he was a man all worldly or all of the church, or rather, since he was a friar, only obsessed with his convent and his chapel. He had an eventful life filled with rich and varied experiences. He first toured Italy and then Europe but not as a religious tourist or just as a research student, staying in hostels or hobnobbing with various stars but to preach. Don't forget that in the fifteenth century "travelling" itself was synonymous with fatigue, little sleep, great hunger and thirst... accompanied with varied and unpredictable dangers: each day had its fair share of discomfort of various kinds and never always happy endings.

In 1453 the city of Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire fell. This event had enormous consequences. Christian Europe was in immanent danger of being threatened. Fear and anxiety were unleashed on large sections of the population by those who arrogantly held sway over large territories. But not everyone was affected. In the face of every painful event there were always those who were apathetic,



those with narrow ideals and horizons that managed to accede to the establishment for their own safety and self-interest. This happened in those days too.

A new danger that threatened Europe was the bloody and unstoppable advance of the Turks and Islam. Popes Nicholas V and Callistus III organized a crusade in defense of the Christian faith

and the entire West which was threatened by the Ottoman-Islamic danger.

But on the ground it was John of Capestrano, a humble friar who took up the challenge to work hard to recruit men as preachers. Unfortunately only the Hungarians, those who were most directly threatened, responded to his appeal.

With an army of almost 5000 men he set out for Belgrade, a fortress that had been held in a vise-like grip by the troops of Mohamet II and the Turkish fleet.

A week later there was a territorial victory and the undisputed protagonist of this was John of Capestrano; a friar turned victorious general. It was this action in defence of West Europe that earned him the nickname "Apostle of United Europe." But it also cost him his life. He contracted the plague and died three months later at a Franciscan convent of Ilok in Croatia. The year was 1456. It was the year of the battle for Belgrade and for Europe against the Turks as mentioned in the history books.

Preacher in Italy

John was born on June 24, 1386 in Capestrano not far from Aquila in Abruzzo. His parents were of noble birth. His early education took place within the family under a special teacher. Already as a teenager he experienced much trauma at the death of twelve members of his family and the destruction of his house.

John studied canon law and civil law in Perugia and was remembered for his moral integrity and impartiality. He was about to return to his hometown to earn

some money to finance his doctoral studies when, in 1415 as a result of a conflict between Perugia and Rimini he was taken prisoner. Just like St. Ignatius of Loyola a century later, John of Capestrano would be converted during his imprisonment. Some years later he entered the Franciscans, the Friars Minor and was ordained a priest in 1417.

His life could be divided into two great periods. The first comprised of his activities in Italy until 1451 and the second consisted of his preaching ministry in central Europe, his participation in the battle of Belgrade and his death in 1456.

During the first period John had three main interests: preaching, the defence of Catholic orthodoxy and the reform of the friars minor.

Beginning in 1422 he began preaching in Aquila before huge crowds who remained entranced by his words and his enthusiasm. He drew huge crowds even in Rome, Siena, Perugia, Milan, Padua, Vicenza, Venice and other cities. He also made trips to Spain and the Holy Land.

Having become a famous preacher John met another great person, Bernadine of Siena who became a great friend of his (and his defender when he was accused of idolatry). It was the latter who told him about the devotion to the name of Jesus (condensed in the famous three letters IHS which meant - in Latin - Iesus Hominum Salvator, Jesus Saviour of Men). Because of his knowledge of law, John was even called upon by Popes as peacemaker and diplomat to undertake delicate missions their behalf.

Inquisitor against the Brotherhood

He was later appointed inquisitor of the Fraticelli and called to fight Fratricellism (a sect who claimed to practice the rule of St. Francis "to the letter without any gloss" professing diverse doctrines declared heretical by the Church. Because of his success at the reformation of the Franciscan order he earned the nickname "pillar of observance."

John worked with Popes, princes and the governors of cities. He was especially close to queen Giovanna of Naples helping her to enforce the laws against usury in general and against the Jews in particular, trying to force them to observe the dictates of the ecclesiastical and civil law of the kingdom. He wasn't very successful because he did not enjoy the support he hoped to receive.

Preacher in Europe

From 1451 to 1456 we enter the second phase of John's life that was properly called the "European" period. At the request of Pope Nicholas V he left for Austria with twelve companions (including one of his biographers, a certain Nicholas of Fara). It was the emperor Frederick III himself who had requested the presence as a preacher (he preached in Bavaria, Thuringia, Saxony, Silesia and Poland, speaking in Latin and being helped by an interpreter) who was the reformer of the Conventual friars, the inquisitor of the Jews and he also tried to convert the Bohemian Hussites.

But at this point in John's programme it was secondary to the impending danger of Islam that was advancing with the

Turks. He devoted himself to that goal completely till his death.

John's Message

What is the message that John of Capestrano leaves us? It was first of all, his total dedication to the cause of the Gospel through his preaching throughout Italy and central Europe countering the heresies of the time.

John of Capestrano left a deep impression on the Church of the fifteenth century for his overwhelming and convincing preaching (his sermons were not a snapshot: in fact they lasted two or three hours, with some exceptions, even longer).

He was a man of apostolic success because of his spectacular conversions, the miraculous powers which he exercised for the benefit of the poor and not least for his sanctity. "John appears as a disciple of Christ, whose example he follows as far as his human condition permits him.

The imitation of Christ is therefore his primordial and evangelical mode of life. His profound piety and great humility struck his contemporaries; he himself gave a great example of humility by traversing the city of Perugia, of which he was the judge, badly dressed and riding a donkey. His love for peace was linked to his sense of justice and his ardent love for his neighbour and this places him in the category of the saints. He lived a life of austerity; eating just bread, wearing only sackcloth, and fasting everyday in equal measure" (from the *History of the Saints and Christian Holiness*, Vol. 1). Even today John of Capestrano remains significant in many respects. □



CARRYING PEOPLE TO JESUS

Ian Pinto, *sdb*

NARRATIVE

One day Jesus was teaching in a house and a huge crowd had gathered to listen to him. People had come from all over Galilee and Judea, and some even from distant, Jerusalem. Besides the common folk were Pharisees and teachers of the Law. As they sat there, they saw the power of God at work in Jesus as he healed the sick.

In the midst of all the commotion, some men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They tried their best to enter the house so that they could place the man before Jesus but they simply couldn't find a way in. So they went up on the roof, removed the tiles and lowered the man on his mat into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he healed the man and there was praise and thanksgiving for God on everyone's lips (Lk 5:17-26).

SOME KIND OF FRIENDS!

The story of the paralytic being carried by his friends is one of my

favourite episodes. Not only is it a lovely story of God's healing power but an even greater story of friendship of brotherly love.

I like to picture Jesus' and the crowds' reaction to the friends who went to great heights (pun intended) to give their paralyzed friend an audience with Jesus. I cannot help but see Jesus smiling in amusement at the acrobatic effort of love these friends showed. I can almost see him smiling up at them and saying to the crowds, "there is no greater love than this, to give one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13).

This incident is a fantastic example of true friendship. The friends of the paralytic were of the highest quality. You hardly find such friends; whenever you do be sure to treasure them as you would a fine pearl. The first and foremost quality of these friends that strikes me is that they stuck with the man even in his hour of sickness and need. They weren't just goody-good friends who came around when the sun was high and there was wind in the sails;

they were there even during the storm, when the wind was harsh and the sun was nowhere in sight.

Certainly, people would have scolded and belittled them for risking their lives over their friend's possibility of meeting Jesus and being healed. Healing was only a probability but serious injury looked far more likely. The whole affair seems absurd doesn't it? I mean can you imagine a group of men scaling the wall of a house, lifting up their friend—who lies helplessly on a mat—to the roof, removing the tiles and lowering him down into the house with precision? Surely, most of us would have also raised our voice to scold them for their foolhardiness. Who, except a lunatic or a desperate person, would conceive the idea of climbing the roof just to get somebody else down into a room that is already packed to capacity? Think about the risks involved. There was no room for error at all! Any mishap in the operation would result in fatal injury and even death. All this for what, a sliver of hope?

Were the friends deterred by all this? Certainly not! And this is the second character that strikes me about them. They were men of passion, courage and great love. They probably didn't do a risk analysis and find out whether or not their venture would fail or succeed. They trusted in their efforts and put their faith in God. Ultimately, their faith and efforts paid off. Thank goodness they did, otherwise the story would have been very different! Nevertheless, the quality of heart of the friends is amazing and worthy of emulation. Who wouldn't want friends like these?

BECOMING INTERCESSORS – FRIENDS OF QUALITY

But let us not fall into the trap of looking at others as 'should-haves'; let us start with ourselves. Are we friends of this kind? Do we have similar qualities of heart? In the Gospel, we see how these friends acted as intercessors or mediators on behalf of their friend. The paralytic was unable to take himself to Jesus but his friends 'carried' him. This is what being an intercessor is about. We might not have to physically carry any of our friends to Jesus but we can and must definitely carry them spiritually. Our friends are in need of Jesus' healing, grace and mercy, but perhaps, they are not in a position to approach him directly. Can we do it on their behalf? Can we 'carry' them to the Lord in our prayers?

The world is not short on people in need but it is desperately short on intercessors. We are well aware that only God is the answer to the problems of the world and even more, to the problems of our individual lives. But who will take us to Him? Each of us would be doing this world a huge favour if we first develop and maintain a personal relationship with God and more importantly, offer ourselves as intercessors for the needs of others and the whole world.

Intercession is not simply about reciting prayers on behalf of someone else; it is an attitude that is fostered in an atmosphere of prayer and self-sacrifice. It is practicing the commandment of 'Love of Neighbour' strictly, with no excuses or compromises. Intercession is a commitment to establishing God's Kingdom here on earth. ☐

Quiet Spaces

THE JONAH SYNDROME

On the morning of October 14, 2013 Pope Francis broke the Word of God for the little congregation at the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

On Monday, 14 October, Pope Francis commented on the liturgical readings of the day taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (1:1-7) and the Gospel of St. Luke, in which the Lord says: "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (11:29-32).

Pope Francis first noted the forcefulness of the Lord's words. He explained, however, that Jesus was speaking principally to the doctors of the law and to those who were seeking to put him to the test and demanding proofs.

Before commenting on the sign of Jonah, Pope Francis described what he termed "the Jonah syndrome." He explained: "Jonah did not want to travel to Nineveh, and so he fled to Spain. In his mind: the teaching is this, you have to believe this. If they are sinners, they



can sort it out for themselves; I have nothing to do with it!"

"This is the Jonah syndrome," he said, "and Jesus condemns it. For example, in chapter 23 of Matthew's Gospel those who have this syndrome are called hypocrites. They do not want

the poor to be saved." He continued: "The Jonah syndrome afflicts those without zeal for the conversion of others; what they are looking for is a holiness, if I may say, a holiness they can pick up at the dry-cleaners. It is clean and pressed but wholly lacking in the zeal that leads us to preach and proclaim the Lord."

Pope Francis then contrasted this with the sign of Jonah: "In St. Matthew's version, we read that Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights. This refers to Jesus in the tomb, to his death and resurrection. This is the sign that Jesus promises: against hypocrisy, against the attitude of perfect religiosity, against the attitude of the Pharisees."

"The sign which Jesus promises," the Pope said, "is his forgiveness, through his death and resurrection." Therefore, "the true sign of Jonah is the one that gives us confidence in being saved by the blood of Christ". He continued: "There are many Christians who think they are saved on the basis of what they do, on the basis of their works. Works are necessary, but they are a consequence, a response to the merciful love that saves us."



"The Jonah syndrome afflicts those who trust only in their personal righteousness, in their works," the Pope explained. It is a grave illness, while the sign of Jonah is the mercy of God in Jesus Crucified and Risen for us, for our salvation."

Today's liturgy, the Pope concluded, puts the decision before us: "Do we want to follow the syndrome or the sign of Jonah?" □

(L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly ed. in English, n. 42, 18 October 2013)

THE SIGN OF JONAS

"They seem too technical, and I need not literature but the living God. *Sitivit anima mea.* The strong living God. I burn with the desire for His peace, His stability, His silence, the power and wisdom of His direct action, liberation from my own heaviness. I carry myself around like a ton weight."

"Above all things have charity, which is the bond of perfection and may the peace of Christ exult in your hearts in which you are called unto one Body. And be grateful." † It seems to me that all mystical theology is contained in those two lines."

Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*

TOMORROW IS EASTER

by Pierluigi Menato - adapted and edited by Ian Doulton sdb

The train stopped for a few seconds at the little village station and then resumed its run. Just three passengers alighted. One of them was a slender young lady dressed in blue; she carried a simple tote bag. The expression on her face was grave; her lips pursed tightly as if anxious and worried. Her brown cap hardly hiding the blond tresses beneath it.

She stopped for a moment in the shade of the station awning and then walked out into the town square. It was a sleepy little piazza. Looking around she seemed surprised that no one had come to meet the train... to meet her. Perhaps her letter hadn't reached yet. It wasn't chill but Laura pulled her coat tightly around her shoulders and

shivered slightly. The sky was overcast and a mist was settling around the town centre. It was pleasant and a gentle breeze wafted the scent of violets and almond blossoms towards her. She stood still for a moment and looked around once more, then twice or thrice up at the clock tower. The train *had* arrived on time...so why?

She suddenly decided to walk quickly away but after a few steps she seemed to hesitate, turning around to look at the station once more. No, no one had really come to meet her at the train, at least not the person she thought.

Walking through a side street she reached a lane that ran along the meadow leading to her house. By now Laura was breathing hard. It was time to get home, to her lonely little house. She had no relatives. Her parents had been laid to rest in the little town cemetery some years now. There was only their little cottage left. There was not even the old school house; she had taught there for a few years as a substitute teacher

as soon as she finished her teacher's diploma. It was all gone. Everything seemed so distant. Time had really changed so many things, life itself.

When she moved to the city Laura took up a nursing course at one of the major hospitals and two years later she was appointed to attend the surgical ward. The life simply captivated her; she had become a good nurse, sturdy, serious and quick. Doctors relied on her because she showed a sense of purpose. She was liked by everyone because of her friendly nature. She spoke kindly and gently to newly-operated patients and smiled while she dressed wounds, calming their restlessness and their sighs. They were grateful to her and humbly thanked her for everything she did, even when the medications she administered were bitter. All this, in turn, made her happy; so, when she came back home for brief holidays she always felt that she missed something.

This was the first time she had left the hospital without feeling any regret. The one who should have waited for her was the one she loved and who had given her heart wings, flooding her dreams at night. He had met her at the hospital and was fascinated and touched by his conversation whose promise seemed so warm, comforting and tender.

She couldn't stay single all her life, could she? The hospital was like a large family but it was so beautiful being a couple, being able to share a thousand things that every lover wants to hear... and make your heart sing. Matt was from the same town. He had

occasionally noticed her but she, on the other hand, hardly remembered seeing him before. She had always led a simple, quiet and withdrawn life and then suddenly how strange it feels when you encounter someone and everything begins to happen in such an unscripted manner.

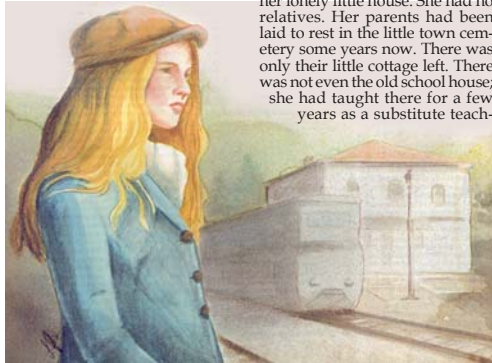
Matt had come home a few months ago and his letters, like a tenuous thread, were the only things that united them. But recently, for some time now, his letters were brief though affectionate; he seemed to be worried about something. This alarmed her.

Since Easter was approaching she had asked for leave. How sweet it would be to be near him, to spend Easter with him, talking about their many plans for the future, their future. Whenever Laura thought about that she felt she was having a magnificent dream.

Then all of a sudden she began to doubt and a sudden bitterness surged within her breast that made her gasp with fear. Matt did not come to the station to meet her. It was certainly because her letter had not reached! Then, why was she so anxious?

The lawn in front of the house was all dotted with daisies. From a serene corner of the sky, through the misty air, a ray of sunshine suddenly flooded over her. It seemed very comforting. As she entered the house she opened the shutters; she didn't want to feel alone, anxious and restless.

Then looking out of the window in the kitchen, at the end of the lane she saw a figure coming





down the path. She immediately recognized that it was him. Her face lit up and she hurried out of the cottage towards him, forgetting her anxiety for a while. "Matt!"

There was an air of embarrassment as he greeted her: "Laura, I'm sorry I didn't come to the station. There was a sudden appointment I couldn't avoid..."

"It doesn't matter Matt, you're here now..."

He was quiet and she noticed that his face was serious. He tried to avoid her gaze. "Matt, what is it?"

She was trembling now...with fear. It took some effort to control her quivering voice.

"You see, Laura, I wrote you a letter a few days ago." He finally began with some hesitation, "Perhaps you didn't receive it in time..."

"No, I didn't. I haven't yet received it." Her voice was low and hoarse, almost unrecognizable. She put her hand to her throat as if something was suddenly suffocating her. "What did you write?" she asked quietly as her face grew

dark. At the hospital she was so accustomed to control herself and her emotions. Would she now let Matt see how much she was trembling?

"Laura, I wrote..." he was uneasy, and she could see that.

"You wrote...?" as if asking him to complete the sentence. Things were becoming clearer. Positively, there was something happening at that moment. She could see their relationship falling apart.

Laura's heart began to beat violently. He eyes filled with tears but she wouldn't let them fall. And in odd contrast, she looked up and Matt was smiling slightly as if that was the only way he could circumvent the delicate situation.

"Whatever you want to say, won't matter, Matt. I'll understand."

"You know Laura, my father objected when I spoke to him about us; I can't and won't stand up against my father. He is old and has a weak heart. This would kill him... He wants me to marry someone else..."

"Who?" Laura spoke in a whisper as if her words didn't matter; all her energy was exhausted in the effort to control herself.

"Anne Bradshaw. She owns a farm next to ours..." Laura lowered her head. She knew Anne was one of the richest heiresses in town; with real estate, farms and even a popular supermarket in the city. She was rich while Laura, who was she? Just an insignificant nurse now had nothing but this little cottage with three rooms...and a heart full of love.

Sighing deeply she finally said: "You're right, Matt, you've got to think about your father. Really, I

don't hold it against you. I hope our 'goodbye' will be as clean and pure as our first date." With that, she turned and walked away without looking him in the eye. She walked slowly back to her cottage upset and devastated.

Matt noticed how hurt she was and for a moment he was tempted to reach out to her but what good would it do, trying to comfort her? It wouldn't change anything, Laura knew that too. She couldn't bear to hear his words of apology and pity.

"I can't go against my father..." That's what he said and as the words were played back to her she smiled cynically. Only someone who was no longer in love or had never really loved her could have made such an excuse. She could forgive him for everything but she couldn't bear him lying to her.

Matt wasn't just small he was petty. He didn't have the courage to face the truth and all the while she had placed him on a pedestal and trusted him. From what she saw this morning, Matt didn't even seem to feel hurt.

Shutting the door of her cottage Laura found herself alone at home; she hadn't even unpacked her case. There was no point in staying here, she would go back tomorrow, return to her work. Her patients needed her. First she would take some flowers to her dear old parents at the cemetery and then catch the train back to the city. Easter would find her at the hospital with that great family waiting to welcome her without asking anything of her, perhaps not even realizing the little drama she had just endured.

As she walked to the cemetery

on the edge of town, the sky began clearing up and a warm spring sun shone down as if to caress her sad face.

At the hospital, they were all surprised to see that she had come back so soon but no one asked her any questions. All of them seemed very absorbed in their own thoughts, just like her. There all curiosity disappeared, everyone's energies were concentrated on boosting hope and encouraging endurance to overcome illness so they would soon be healthy enough to go back home.

As she entered her ward in her neatly pressed smock, the patients all turned their heads towards her and smiled, as if relieved at the sight of this fresh young creature. "Already back, Laura? Welcome!" Their wishes were kind and respectful; several of them were foreigners. In their shy greetings she sensed sincerity, gratitude and even relief.

Outside in the garden, the almond tree branches swayed lazily in the soft breeze, swishing around as if, trying to peep in at the window.

"Look Miss Laura, spring is just about here..." She turned. The voice was that of a young Albanian. She seemed to see spring in his eyes and his smile. There was almost a tone of cheerfulness when he spoke. "Miss Laura would you do me a favour? Tomorrow is Easter, and I would like to have something pretty around me. I'll give you some money; and if you don't mind, would you buy me a bunch of almond blossoms...I would love to have them by my bedside." Laura smiled. To a



youngster who could dream like that, he would certainly still have his whole life ahead of him and so she couldn't say no.

Half an hour later she returned with a bunch of branches in bloom. "I have brought spring here for you, Anton... You really shouldn't keep flowers in the room," she added gently almost not wanting it to sound like a warning.

He smiled mischievously: "Did I not ask you to buy these for me, Miss Laura? They are for *you*. Take them, please. We want to give you a little gift to show you our gratitude, but a gift that means freshness and sincerity... like you are."

She tried to smile but she could not. There was a lump in her throat. The youngster's gesture moved her. "A gift that means freshness and sincerity... like you..." He didn't know how dark her heart felt, but now she seemed to feel lighter. Her patients thought she was fresh and sincere and Matt, that petty little man, was far away. Here, however, everything was different. Here she could still think of goodness and beauty even in the midst of so much suffering and pain. Young Anton would never know what a

gift he had really given her: the gift of spring. Even if her heart was frozen, she would always find a spring flower that would promise rebirth and a new impetus for her disturbed spirit.

Laura took the bouquet of almond blossoms to her room. There on the white wall above her bed stood the Crucifix with a ray of orange twilight on it. The young nurse looked up at the light. It seemed to comfort her. There was no longer any depressing darkness in her heart. Tomorrow would be Easter and she would not be as alone as she had thought. All those patients and her colleagues were her sisters and brothers and the almond blossoms would brighten up her room... Spring: new impulses, new thoughts, renewed and rediscovered energies. Life always has this wonderful continuity.

For now the veil that covered her had parted. She had overcome the darkness that covered her soul. Everyone needed her; her energy, alertness and enthusiasm. And then she felt a spiritual comfort too, leading to life, to peace to be able to forget those dark hours. Now she could work serenely and committedly for her noble cause. This is a paradise from which she would not be parted. It was an entire world - even when viewed through the prism of sadness and heartache, it actually opened to her often and so unsuspectingly. Sometimes it's just a little song born in anguish that sounds so sweet and cheerful. Laura bent over the almond blossoms, buried her face in the blooms and closed her eyes... letting a sweet peace flood her soul. ☐

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 9

by Michele Molineris

27. The Incredible story of a chalice (1846)

Some time later, Don Bosco was in need of a chalice. He did not know how he could get one, since he had no money. Then, one night he was told in a dream that he would find the necessary sum in his trunk. The next day, while he was attending to some business in town, he remembered the dream. What a fine thing it would be if it turned out to be true! He was so impressed that without further ado he went home. He rummaged through his trunk and found eight scudi, exactly the amount needed. No outsider could have hidden it there because the trunk was always locked, nor could his mother, Margaret, have given him a surprise gift since she had no money either. She too was very surprised when she heard of the find. (EBM III 24-25)

28. Taking away and restoring the sight of a toughie (1846)

Don Bosco possessed the gift of miracles. What we report here was sent to us by Father Cesare Chiala.

Occasionally Don Bosco preached or taught catechism informally in the public squares. Once, at Porta Palazzo, finding himself among a group of people, he began to tell them of the need of listening to the word of God. Some young toughs happened to be present. Far from listening, they deliberately and impudently made a lot of noise. Don Bosco warned them several times to

keep quiet, but to no avail. One of them, a certain Botta, raising his voice above the others, shouted, "We don't want to hear any sermons."

"If you were to be struck blind at this moment, would you then listen to God's word?" Don Bosco rejoined.

"H'm, that's easier said than done!" shot back the young tough. Meanwhile he turned to one of his companions and angrily shouted, "You scoundrel, why are you hiding? Are you afraid? Come out!"

"What's the matter with you?" his companion answered. "Can't you see? I'm right here next to you." "But I can't see you... Oh my! I can't see anymore..."

Terror gripped the bystanders, and they all begged Don Bosco to restore the young man's sight. He too implored him, "Don Bosco, pray for me. Please forgive me!" And he fell to his knees in tears.

Thereupon, Don Bosco replied, "Say an act of contrition. We shall pray too, but meanwhile promise you'll go to confession, and then the Lord will give you back your sight."

"Yes, yes, I will. I'll make my confession right now." He indeed wanted to confess his sins then and there. Don Bosco and the others prayed for him. Towards evening the young man had someone take him to confession, and his sight was then restored to him. (EBM III, 346-347)

29. Away with curses and away with toothaches (1846)

Don Bosco was also famous for blessing people afflicted with

toothaches. One day in 1846 while he was going towards the city, crossing the Piazza Emanuele Filiberto, near Piazza Milano, he met several boys accompanying a friend of theirs suffering from an atrocious toothache. The boy was screaming in pain and cursing wildly. When his friends saw Don Bosco in the distance they said to him, "Look, here comes Don Bosco. Ask him for his blessing." But the youngster, maddened with pain, cursed Don Bosco and his blessings. Meanwhile Don Bosco came up to him, but the wretched boy would not listen to him. After a few minutes, however, Don Bosco's kindly admonitions had some effect. The lad calmed down, dropped to his knees and recited an act of contrition, begging God's forgiveness for his cursing and promising to go to confession. Don Bosco then blessed him, and the toothache vanished.

News of these things spread, and persons similarly afflicted flocked to him for a blessing and were instantly healed. To reduce the flow of supplicants and to prevent people from attributing these healings to himself, Don Bosco began to suggest and asked others to suggest to these sufferers some special act of piety in honour of the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, or St. Aloysius. Once they did this their pain disappeared (*EBM III, 347*).

30. Your Purse or your Life! (1846)

In the month of August (1846), after a serious illness, Don Bosco retired to his family home for a period of convalescence. It was

at that time that this took place:

It was nearing evening and he was returning home safely from Capriglio (his mother's village). He was about to step into a little copse of trees when he was startled by a terrible voice shouting at him: "Your purse or your life!"

The one who said those words held a sickle in his hand and seemed to brandish it in the air perfectly willing to carry out his threat. Having recovered from the shock, Don Bosco said:

- My friend, neither this nor that.

- Shut up! Give me your purse, or...

- And you? What would you do to Don Bosco? Would you have the courage to kill him? Is that a real threat?

Don Bosco could say something like that because he had seen that the unfortunate had been in prison in Turin and he had helped meet his spiritual and physical needs. Realizing his mistake the man threw his sickle down and slapped his forehead several times; falling to his knees he exclaimed:

- Don Bosco, forgive me!

- Yes, yes, I forgive you. But see that you don't mess around with God.

- I'm so unhappy, that's all. I was let out of prison the other day...I went home but no one wanted me there anymore. Even my mother turned her back on me. Everyone said: 'Get out! This is no longer your home or your family. You have disgraced us.' What was I to do? I haven't eaten for two days...driven by hunger...

- You assaulted Don Bosco,

didn't you?

Recalling the attack, the poor unfortunate once more felt the anguish and burst into tears, mumbling to himself: "You're a real rascal, you'll never be at peace!"

- And why? - asked Don Bosco.

- How can I ever be happy in this world? The memory of this day will always be etched in my mind. I'll never have peace anymore!

- Do you want to be at peace right now? I've given it to you so many times in prison; I'll give it to you now that you are free. Come with me.

There was a stone nearby and he went and sat on it leading the truly repentant man by the hand. He made him kneel and heard his confession.

They prayed a little together and then Don Bosco said: You must come with me.

They got up and went down to the cellar of his family home. His folks were beginning to get worried because of his delay. When they finally saw him they rejoiced and said: We thought something had happened to you! Don't give us any more worries...

And Don Bosco smiled and said: "I found this friend and we had such a good time. That's why I was delayed. We had so much to talk about. He'll dine with us tonight."

So saying he introduced him to the house and made him sit at the table and sought a thousand ways to comfort him. The poor fellow took a little soup mingled with his tears. He wasn't able to eat anything or take any wine. He was weeping and sadly say-

ing over and over again: "Don Bosco!" Those at home didn't know what to make of this. They had known him earlier and they couldn't understand this change.

He prayed with them and then went to his room but he did not lie down. He spent the whole night in prayer. This was learned from his brother, because he recognized him. Everyone suspected that would end up doing something evil, even possibly setting the place on fire. But none of this happened. In the morning he attended Mass very serenely at the chapel of Morialdo and accepted a little breakfast.

Sure of his conversion, Don Bosco gave him a letter of recommendation to the pastor. That was how he was accepted once more to his home and received as a son and a brother; and the short time he lived there was enough to change him completely (*Francesia, The Life of Don Bosco, 126*).

31. Don Bosco is insane (1846)

The field that Don Bosco had rented for his oratory had dried up and so he had been given fifteen days' notice and a formal notice. At the same time the three months that the marchioness Barolo had given him to vacate because he had decided to devote himself exclusively to his institutions was expiring.

Even though he was hunted out from here and there with his boys he was convinced that his dream would come true sooner or later. He would encourage his collaborators telling them to have patience because there was a beautiful space already prepared for the Oratory with a

large playground with porticoes around it, a church with clerics and priests and they would soon be in possession of it. This language between serious and facetious, with a certain air of persuasion gave rise to the suspicion that he had taken leave of his senses. Because of this he was pitied by some, mocked by others and almost abandoned by everyone.

Father Pacchiotti, his collaborator at the *Refuge*, hearing Don Bosco say that he was going to build a church made this exclamation: You? You're able to build a church? I'll eat dog meat!

I myself, saw that the unbeliever, on the day of the laying of the foundation stone of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, approach Don Bosco and say to him: I'll take an active part in these festivities but I hope you can dispense me of that bet.

- What bet? Added Don Bosco - To eat dog meat! - concluded Father Pacchiotti. And going on from there he said: Now I believe everything, even more than what he told us in those sad days.

The same marchioness Barolo, who had helped Don Bosco in so many ways, seeing him now being fixated on the idea of the Oratory, the church, the clerics and priests began to frown and pray in all her houses: Let us pray for Don Bosco, let's pray for Don Bosco, such a good man, threatening to go crazy!

This pious lady, in an attempt to be of charitable service begged two revered priests from Turin to discreetly take him to hospital where she proposed to have him treated at her own ex-

pense.

It was a feast day and Don Bosco was in the midst of his boys, three hundred or so of them. He was assisting them in their boisterous yet innocent fun in the open meadow. A city carriage drives up and stops near the street and the two priests alight and casually make their way to Don Bosco and invite him to follow them for a ride. The recreation stops and three hundred odd pairs of eyes are on Don Bosco who is leaving.

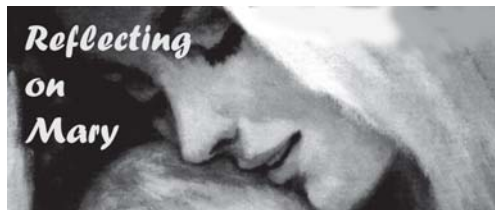
- Where are you going? The question comes from various quarters.

- My children, wait for me, I'll be back soon. I'll go and return!

These words were a new burden on the hearts of these two priests who whispered softly: God willing!

In the meantime, Don Bosco let them first enter the carriage and then finally he got in. The asylum was a stone's throw from the Oratory and in the blink of an eye there were at its doors. But Don Bosco had been warned in time. As soon as the carriage stopped he hopped out and shut the door and returned cheerfully and content to be in the midst of his youngsters. As soon as they saw him they greeted him with shouts of joy and the recreation went on until late in the evening, boisterous, noisy and cheerful as ever.

And the two priests? They laughed a little at their fate and returned home. A few days later, meeting him in the street they joked and said to him: "You rascal, you did it, bravo!" (Francesia, *The Life of Don Bosco*, 128). □



3 - REAL BLESSEDNESS

don Giorgio Chatrian

Mary's visit: "She entered Zachariah's house and greeted Elizabeth" (Lk 1, 40).

Today, there are many who are shut up in their homes; afraid to go out to meet others. They don't dare - or they don't want - to visit the homes of others; to help them if they are in trouble.

Lord, what a joy to see dear Elizabeth!

The road from Nazareth winding through valleys carved up by streams that roar in the rainy season and seem suffocating in the heat when the Palestine sun sucks up every last drop of moisture. It was tough and I was in a hurry, in a hurry to reach my cousin because - as the angel had said - she was pregnant and already in her sixth month: she might have need of me.

And then, I must simply confess with all sincerity to you who search me and know my thoughts, - that I left home very happy. Joseph my husband understood your gift to me, the reason of that maternity which was



growing in my womb.

But what of the others, especially the neighbours, so good but often so ready to spread the latest gossip around the village? How different from Joseph; he never asked an indiscreet question, he never suspected and never regretted. He was only and always very careful and attentive, sharing the same journey that both of us had to take but which we carried forward together. Just imagine, he even accompanied me to the foot of the hills, holding the halter of the donkey on which he made me sit when he saw I was tired.

When we reached our destina-

tion he took my things and a bag with some olives. You know, in the mountains they don't get these things in the hills near the Sea of Galilee. There Joseph left me and returned to his shop while I went into Zechariah's house.

The large room that was sparsely arranged was where we two cousins, one no longer young embraced each other with real feminine affection and the room was suddenly filled with the happy sounds of Elizabeth's joyful greetings.

That's when the wonder began.

What was happening?

The one who was soon to be a mother put her hands on her bosom and realized that as soon as the child heard my greeting it jolted as if my words were ad-

dressed to him.

In reality, while Elizabeth and I were talking our two little ones were also communicating; even before being born they behaved according to the plan you O Lord, had for them.

John was happy to meet Jesus, your Son being conceived in me by the power of your Spirit as the angel had told me.

Always an angel (would it be the same?) announcing to the incredulous Zechariah the birth of a son and that before being born he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. This was what we saw being realized at that very moment: John already became aware of his "duty" as the precursor announcing in his own way, as an unborn child in that house, that the Lamb of God had



already arrived and that it called for celebrations.

I also shared Elizabeth's joy when filled with your Spirit and with all the breath in her throat she blessed you, Father, in the Son that I carried in my womb and recognized him as her Lord and the Lord of history.

I confess that I was very embarrassed when she included me in her blessing when she said that I was being blessed among all women. I lowered my head and surely began to blush. And I didn't know that this praise together with the fruit of my womb, Jesus, would be inserted into the prayer that countless lips would utter several times a day as they turned to me.

Then I calmed down a little after I was told that I was blessed because I believed that your Word, O Father was being fulfilled in me.

On the contrary, I must say that Elizabeth had read even the depths of my heart. Before the angel had charted my future I cast all my doubts aside with a great act of faith in you, Father who always carries out in your own way new ventures in a surprising manner.

Besides, just like us creatures who can see the path of life, only you know where it leads and how we shall get there. From that

meeting with Elizabeth I understood more clearly that I had conceived Jesus first through faith and then in my body.

My cousin herself had tried or rather together with Zechariah, which meant he did not believe in the consequences of unbelief? He became mute; unable to communicate with others, unable to build bridges. To have faith means to build bridges to connect us with you Father. That was how Christ, forever the Word in time breaths the breath of the Spirit.

"Blessed are you who believed... Among all the beautiful qualities, that in your generosity you endowed me with, you fill me with filial gratitude and confidence and over time this will be the best feeling of all. I feel closer and closer to your heart, Father.

Thank you again!

And thank you for the good months spent with Elizabeth: how open we were to each other! How much we prayed together! What plans and dreams we shared for the future! How much was talked about! And all this was not because Zechariah was dumb...and not even because we found ourselves together...two women; but we were able to recount to one another your goodness!

My soul glorifies the Lord...□

GOD IN MARY'S WOMB

"God, made man, found his freedom by imprisoning himself in her (Mary's) womb! He revealed his power by allowing himself to be carried by a little girl! He found his glory, and that of his Father, by hiding it from all earthly creatures, Mary excepted."

(*True Devotion To Mary*, by St. Louis de Montfort)

NEWSBITS

TALGAR, KAZAKHSTAN

In Kazakhstan, a country with 17 million inhabitants belonging to 130 different nationalities, Christian and Muslim men and women joined forces to take care of orphaned children, disabled children and children from families in need.



The Ark Village

It all began twenty years ago in Almaty (the most populous city in the country) when Father Guido Trezzani was asked to support volunteers working in local orphanages. He founded, thirty kilometers from the city, in the village of Talgar, a family home that welcomes children and young people orphaned, disabled or from families experiencing moments of difficulty. Built in a small summer colony of Soviet times, this family home has grown over time into the Ark Village, with houses, school, canteen, medical and rehabilitation centres: the foster village currently houses sixty children and youngsters both Christians and Muslims. He also takes care of children and young people with disabilities, in particular those with Down's syndrome, trying above all to promote their inclusion at school: "Unfortunately in this country, disability is often seen as a shame or a curse," he

stresses. "Society is not ready to welcome disabled people, who are excluded from schools and have no job opportunities".

A long journey

In the Village, there are thirty Christian and Muslim people who live permanently and are supported by numerous volunteers, who in recent years have gradually increased: "We work together in harmony, religious belonging is not a reason for division, we share the same vision of life and we share a common goal: to take care of these young wounded lives and offer them a good future," Father Guido continues, who adds: "This is what many try to do here in Kazakhstan, where Muslims make up 70-75% of the population, Orthodox 20-25% while Catholics are a small flock of about 50,000 faithful."

In daily life

Every three years the capital, Astana, hosts an inter-religious meeting desired by its president, Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev, in which Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics and representatives of other religions participate: "It is a meeting inspired by that of Assisi promoted by Saint John Paul II, who came to visit Kazakhstan in 2001", Father Guido recalls. "The State is very committed to promoting peaceful coexistence among all citizens by organizing moments of aggregation that allow people to get to know each other, face problems together and seek shared solutions." □

Cristina Ugucioni, LaStampa

MY NAME IS CODY

Francis Walsh

He has been to more military hospitals and barracks than many of the veteran soldiers. He is not the youngest soldier in history but is a young boy whose legs were amputated when he was only 15 months old. He runs, jumps, swims, climbs and is an inspirational icon and hero to the many soldiers wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan. His name is Cody McCasland and he is now 19 years old.

Many of these soldiers had lost an arm or a leg and had fears about their future lives. Suddenly one day a young boy comes smiling into their hospitals and introduces himself, "My name is Cody" he says "and these are my running legs." He has other legs, more sets of prostheses; a set for walking, another for playing with other children his own age, one for swimming and one for running. He visits the hospitals in his running shoes, talks to the soldiers and lets them see that a life without legs can be lived and enjoyed. His hope is to one day represent the United States of America in the Olympics or Paralympics, as well as to run a marathon, and complete a triathlon.

Parents warned he might not live

When Cody, was diagnosed with Sacral Agenesis, after being born six weeks prematurely, doctors had warned his parents that he might not live. Children with the condition usually suffer from a number of difficulties including kidney problems and Cody had to undergo the first of his 15 operations at just three days old. As a result of his condition, over the next two years he faced operations for a dislocated hip, stomach, gall bladder and intestinal prob-



lems and a hernia, as well as treatment for breathing difficulties and asthma.

Mr. and Mrs. McCasland, were warned by a specialist in Texas that Cody might need both lower legs amputated to give him the chance of walking with prosthetic legs or else he would be confined to a wheelchair for life. Cody's parents gave their permission for the double amputation which was performed when he was only 16 months old. Two months after that Cody got his first prostheses, his new legs, and he managed to walk with help. Now thanks to his prosthetics, Cody takes part in activities with other children in his class and already beats some of them at running.

He is a member of his school swimming team, competing against able-bodied youngsters despite using just his arms. Each year his parents take him to the Endeavour Games which is an international competition for children and adults with disabilities. He has already won gold medals in the 60m and

100m sprints.

Cody's amazing achievements as a double amputee are inspiring numerous others from disabled children, to soldiers who have lost limbs in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Charms all who meet him

"We receive lots of requests from people wanting to meet Cody," revealed Mrs. McCasland. "It really is incredible to see this little boy walking up to grown men and telling them they can do all the things he does."

"Soldiers are just like big heroes to Cody, so he is so excited to meet them. And in a way he's a little hero to them too."

The young athlete has even inspired the creation of Team Cody, a group of fundraisers who compete in marathons, already raising thousands of dollars for the Texas Scottish Rite Children's Hospital. Team Cody has also raised money for the Challenge

Athletes Foundation, which helps disabled sports people.

Mrs. McCasland. "We hope his story helps other kids and adults, and spreads the message that disabled people can do all these things."

This is just a little of the amazing story of young Cody. But it goes on with the family enduring multiple doctor's appointments and treatments to make Cody as independent as possible. Through it all, Cody remains an amazing spirit who charms people "with his infectious smile and cheerful disposition. Cody challenged adversity and continues to do so with extraordinary courage and spirit. Not only is he an inspiration to all those who like him have lost one or more of their limbs, but he is an encouragement to all of us to set our sights higher, that we have the capacity to do much more with our lives than we ever thought possible. □

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.

Thanks to the recitation of the three powerful Hail Marys I was able to make ends meet in my financial debts. Without Mama Mary's intervention and the continuous Hail Marys I couldn't get through to it. Love you Mama Mary. *Candida* Thank you Mother Mary for a very special blessing received: for bringing my sister safely home from the hospital. Dear Mother please continue to bless our families with holiness, peace, compassion, love, kindness, happiness and health.

Heldt Family, Perth W. Australia

My next door neighbour fell out of a running train on his way to work. He was in a critical condition. I continuously prayed the Three Hail Marys and soon got the news that he is out of danger. My heartfelt gratitude to Mother Mary now and forever.

Josephine Mendes, Vasai

I recited the Three Hail Marys imploring Mary Help of Christians for the safe hip operation of Mrs. Boxwalla and her speedy recovery; for the all-clear health report of Mr. Viraf and for assisting Mrs. Martin in her last hours. Our Lady never let me down.

Mark

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I am grateful to Jesus and all the angels and saints, in a special way to our Blessed Mother of Jesus, thank you for hearing my prayer and helping me in my times of urgent need. Thank you dear Mother Mary for good health, my son's job and for taking care of both my sons and my loving grandchildren. I always pray the Rosary and recite the three Hail Marys.

Catherine Raiker, Goa
My sincere thanks to Jesus, Mother Mary Help of Christians and all the saints for curing my eyes. The doctor had informed me that I had a dot in my right eye. I prayed to Jesus and Mother Mary Help of Christians, and all the saints and now I have been healed. In 2017 I had suffered from severe acidity and I was frustrated about it. I kept praying to Jesus, Mother Mary and all the saints and now I am completely fine.

Laura Furtado

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Dearest Mother Mary help of Christians, St. John Bosco, and St. Dominic Savio my heartfelt gratitude for helping me overcome my distress, suffering and my sickness through prayer and the deep faith I had in you and through your intercession. *Aida Borges, Goa*

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



My sincere and heartfelt thanks to God the Father, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mother Mary, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio for the many favours and graces received.

A. Fernandes
Thank you Most Holy Trinity, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for blessing us with the gift of a normal, healthy baby girl after ten long years.

Ashwin and Ginevra Pereira, Goa

Thank you Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for blessing my daughter with the gift of a boy child on 21 March, 2018 and on his christening on 27 May, 2018. He is called Mario Abraham.

B. D. Gracias

My son Colin and daughter Gezela delivered a baby boy after eight years of marriage. My sincere and heartfelt thanks to dear Infant Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for blessing us with this gift. His name is Ethan.

Cipriana Carvalho, Goa

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER OCTOBER 2019

Evangelization: That the breath of the Holy Spirit engender a new missionary "spring" in the church

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QUEEN OF THE HOLY ROSARY

I want to share a powerful testimony concerning my devotion to the recitation of the 3 Hail Marys to the World. After being diagnosed with Clinical depression one of the effects of it was ED in lay man's language which did not permit me to have a normal life. I was afraid that I would not be able to get married but with the walk of faith in Jesus and after reciting the 3 Hail Marys I was healed. I am blessed with good spouse and a happy married life. I urge everyone to go to Mother Mary first, through her intercession your prayers will be answered. *Elvis*

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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