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***"Do you pray
the Rosary
repetitively?"
Father
de Foucauld said:
"Love
expresses itself
in a few words
and always
repeats them."***

quoted by

Pope John Paul I

From The Editor's Desk

FRUIT AND VINE

I'm fascinated with fruit, it seems addicted to it perhaps. Not the fruit that grows on trees, mind you, but fruit people can produce. Sure, apples and oranges are good. But what really gets me going is the fruit of our labours. When I was a little kid, I used to lie awake at night thinking about how I could impress my teachers in class the next morning or when I got a little older, I thought about doing two laps in the swimming pool. Then I began to dream about what I might do with my life that would really make a difference.

I've always thought about what I could do next and how well it might be accomplished. Over the years, a certain portion of my nights are always spent thinking and dreaming about what should be accomplished the next day. And the reason it might be less of a fascination and more of an addiction is that what is going to happen tomorrow is always more important than what has happened or is happening today.

That's what 'fruit' is for me, oftentimes. In my earlier years it seems I was rarely satisfied by anything. Now I do take more satisfaction in certain things, and am a little more accepting of things as they turn out, but accomplishments and meeting goals still hang out there as giant carrots. (know that's a vegetable but stick with me).

John's gospel as it addresses fruit and vine and branch, is a challenge for me. It reminds me that I am often looking in the wrong direction.

The gospel reminds me that I am fruitful only to the extent to which I am sustained. Aging is beginning to show me that my body and mind aren't perpetual motion machines. I must be fed in order to produce. As my attention is more naturally on the fruit, Jesus calls me to focus back to the vine which nurtures me. Lately I am now beginning to realise that as I look to the vine and feed on it, much better fruit is produced certainly and the wonders of the vine are more spectacular than the fruit.

When I look only at the fruit, that becomes the only thing I see. There grows the compulsion to make more of it and even the confusion about who is making the fruit. Is it I or someone else? It is my accomplishment; I dreamed of it; I worked hard on it; I made it happen! That kind of addictive focus leads to a pretty self-centred existence.

As my attention is drawn back to the vine that sustains me, I am beginning to see my proper place in the whole system. I am the branch and I'm content with that. As I abide in that vine, a new peace develops. Perhaps even more and better fruit emerges, yet the truth of the great agelessness of the vine presents itself as so much more wondrous than the very temporary fruit that has only a season.

Am I too fruit conscious? Do I only see what I can do? Have lost that sense of appreciation? May be I am working and pushing my way through life to the exclusion of an overwhelming awareness of the Force which sustains me? The love of Christ has brought me here and only it will take me further.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

LOOKING AFTER YOU

By Gianpaolo Dianin

The "becoming a neighbour" which Jesus speaks of in the parable of the Good Samaritan is also an exquisitely familiar gospel, because the first people to whom one must become neighbour to, are those of one's own home.

The path to holiness of a couple cannot exclude the presence of their children, even if their journey which celebrated their covenant of love before God remains being a human and even spiritual journey that is distinct from that of their children. We often experience this when we observe the ache that the parents experience when they see their children distancing themselves from the Christian values that they have tried to pass on to them. It is true on a theoretical level, because the children remain distinct from their parents, who

are called to generate them humanly and also spiritually, but are aware that it is then up to the children to consciously choose what they do with the gift they have received.

Marriage has two meanings: unitive and procreative, although I like to speak more of unitive and "generative" because fertility is broader than procreation. The love of two spouses overflows at a certain point and becomes life-giving. It overflows towards the other to whom we have promised the gift of life, it overflows towards the



children we choose to welcome, it overflows towards the Christian community and also towards society where we are called to bear witness to love. Fertility in this sense is an essential experience of all true love: to love is to generate life around us and to take care of life. This is the context in which Pope Francis speaks of another dimension of conjugal spirituality: "care, consolation and promotion" (AL 321-324). So, after having spoken of the spirituality of communion, presence and belonging, let us try to recall how the Pope interprets this last aspect.

The family is the first field hospital, says the Pope where you take care of each other. It is the first because it is the closest to people's lives and in this sense, it is also most precious. Spouses are called to care for each other, for their children and, increasingly, for their elderly parents. Caring is caressing, tenderly welcoming tears, guarding fears, healing wounds, promoting, supporting and encouraging. The "becoming a neighbour" which Jesus speaks of in the parable of the Good Samaritan is also an exquisitely familiar gospel, because the first people to whom one must become neighbour to, are those of one's own home.

Caring is also about supporting each other and supporting the children on their journey of growth. I find here the virtue of fortitude as the ability to stand up to support the other. Today I will do it for you and tomorrow you'll do it for me. Family life often asks us to be a support, a crutch, a shoulder for others. Even with children, it is often necessary to encourage, to correct and to

remind them.

Caring is also about stimulating each other to grow, not to sit back, not to get bogged down. Being there for each other like good wood that burns and warms, stimulates and provokes. An old song put these words into a husband's mouth: "You give me strength to carry on." How sad it is, understandably, to see widowed people sitting around, as if resigned to life; they have lost the one who never stopped stimulating them to live.

To care is also to promote the other (AL 322). The Pope writes: "Marital fruitfulness involves helping others, for "to love anybody is to expect from him something which can neither be defined or foreseen; it is at the same time in some way to make it possible for him to fulfil this expectation." I believe that marriage is good medicine for self-esteem and that it is good to feel the esteem and trust of the person I love. It is also incredibly good for children to feel a love full of esteem and trust, to feel that their parents believe in them; this esteem gives them the strength to take refuge in life.

Care asks us to appreciate the Pope writes, "no one felt overlooked in Jesus' presence, since his words and gestures conveyed the question: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mk 10:51) And the Pope continues: "Our loved ones merit our complete attention. Jesus is our model in this, for whenever people approached to speak with him, he would meet their gaze, directly and lovingly" (Mk 10: 21) (AL 323). It is part of the Christian spirituality of marriage to have the style of Jesus towards others, which, in this

case, has the features of trust and esteem. How wonderful to hear your partner say the same words as Jesus: "Your faith is truly great".

To care is to make the other person and also children feel the traits of God's paternity and maternity. We are a sacramental sign of this presence of God. We can do this by means of conjugal love: a word, a gaze, a caress, an embrace; sometimes we are asked to do it in the silence of prayer, when, for example, the children take other paths and our words seem to fall on deaf ears.

Care also calls for forgiveness. The Pope writes: "All family is a 'shepherding' in mercy" (AL 322). Feeling forgiven is like feeling generated by the other who, through his forgiveness, restores my confidence, believes in me again, recognises that I am greater than my error.

The Pope broadens the concept

of the heart beyond domestic walls by speaking of hospitality, which is care for those who cross our path: "Do not forget hospitality; some practice it and without knowing it have welcomed angels" (Heb. 13:2). This is one of the characteristics of *Amoris laetitia*, which asks us to go beyond the overly narrow image of a family closed in on itself, that nest of love protected by bars on the windows and fortified doors. The Christian family is open, welcoming and hospitable. The domestic church thus realises in its reality the maternity of the Church and at the same time bears great witness to our world, which tends more and more to close itself off and fears others. The Pope concludes with a very beautiful statement: "This is itself a way to worship God, who has sown so much good in others in the hope that it will help make it grow" (AL 322). □

RESEMBLANCE

A missionary sister was carefully treating the foul sores of a leper. She went about her work smiling and chatting with the sick man, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

At a certain point she asked the sick man: "Do you believe in God?"

The poor man started hard at her for some time and then replied: "Yes, I now believe in God!"

A missionary was travelling on a Japanese fast train and spent his time praying with his breviary open. A slight jolt caused a small picture of Our Lady to slide down to the floor.

A child sitting opposite the missionary bent down and picked up the picture. Curious as all children are, she looked at it before returning it.

"Who is this beautiful lady?" she asked the missionary.

"She's...my mother," replied the priest, after a moment's hesitation.

The little girl looked at him and then at the picture.

"You don't look much like her," she said.

The missionary smiled: "And yet, I assure you, I have been trying all my life to look like her, at least a little."

And who do you resemble? □ *Bruno Ferrero - Ripples in the water*

THE ROSARY: A PRAYER AND COMFORT FOR THE POOR

by Chino Biscontin

On 7 October we celebrate the memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary. Originating at the beginning of the 12th century, the Rosary has spread throughout the Church, a faithful companion on the path of every Christian.

I have guided many people, especially parish groups, on pilgrimages both to the Holy Land and to the places of St Francis and St Clare. Some might think that after a few times you get used to it and things go without saying. But this is not the case. Returning to the Basilica of the Annunciation and venerating what remains of the cave that the Blessed Virgin Mary inhabited, can only be done with deep emotion and even awe. The same is true of the Holy Upper Room, the Basilica of the agony of Jesus

in Gethsemane and above all the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre and Calvary. But apart from the sanctity of these places, what prevents it becoming routine, is the fact that leading a pilgrimage means putting oneself at the service of pilgrims on an inner journey, with sensitivity, significantly and with deep solemnity.

All this becomes a strain on the soul, which is sometimes so severe that it is experienced as a wound in the soul, a burn. And so, there is no solace except in prayer. That



is why I cling to the Rosary, and there I find comfort, and little by little my soul calms down, finds rest and peace. That is why, the Rosary is for me a prayer of which I have an intense need, and I always carry a rosary with me. The real kind, with beads that are easy to feel with my fingers, with a suitable space between each bead; because the Rosary is also prayed with the fingers!

The Rosary began as a prayer for the poor (and so I am, in the strain this journey makes on my soul). In the great Benedictine monasteries, monks who could read and write (and sing) prayed the Liturgy of the Hours in Latin. Those monks, however, who could not read or understand Latin, prayed the Our Father followed by the ten Hail Marys and concluded with the *Glory be*. And since there are one hundred and fifty psalms, one hundred and fifty Hail Marys should also be recited.

I believe that it should remain a prayer for the poor. It is not uncommon to burden the praying of the Rosary with reading of Gospel passages (if they are short, it is fine) followed by reflections (sometimes they are long and heavy, and this is not good). And then it is said that one should concentrate on meditating on the "mystery" which was announced before the *Our Father*. I believe that simplicity is the most appropriate attitude. A recollected simplicity, of course, flavoured by true devotion, which means trust, affection, gratitude and with a desire for intimacy. Then the words of a beautiful psalm (131) come true: "Lord, my heart is not

proud, nor haughty my eyes; I do not seek great things, nor wonders greater than myself. Instead, I remain quiet and serene: like a weaned child in its mother's arms, like a weaned child is my soul in me."

Thus, the prayer of the Rosary is both easy and difficult. Easy, because of what I have just said; difficult because it requires a certain familiarity with the attitude that I have called devotion. But for those who have the gift of familiarity with the Rosary, it is clear from experience that it is a feminine and maternal prayer. And that praying the Rosary is like visiting a Marian shrine: there is a maternal presence that welcomes you, and welcomes you precisely with the great heart of a Mother. In one of my pockets there is always this chaplet: a kind of reminder that I am given to take with me. What a great grace!

Some might get the impression that all this is sentimentality. That it is about feelings is true, but that it is reduced to superficial emotionalism is not. Many times, I have witnessed very old people in their beds of suffering and on their way to death. With tears in my eyes, I have often heard the sick person, in their suffering, cry out: "Mama!" No, this is not sentimentality. It is the emotion of someone who always feels like a son, especially when he is weak and wounded. So, he calls out to his "Mama," which can mean his earthly mother, it can mean the Mother that Jesus gave us on the cross, but it can also be God himself because, as John Paul I taught us, "Mama" is one of the names of God. □

THE BEAUTY OF SECOND CHANCES

Anastasia Dias

'M'a'am, one more chance please!' I could hear her plead. She had been caught cheating and was begging the invigilator to overlook what she'd done and give her another chance. I left the examination hall shortly after this commotion. So, I never got to know what the fate of the student had been or if she got her second chance. Undoubtedly, she would've been very fortunate if she'd been given one more chance.

In life, we often ask people to give us second chances; at school/college, at the workplace and in our relationships. We need second chances so that we can learn from our past mistakes, improve ourselves and perform better. Sometimes, people give us that second chance that we're looking for or they don't. But, the most important second chances are those we give ourselves.

All of us have had times when we made mistakes. Many of us repeat those mistakes. The worst part is when we're caught repeating our mistakes. It's then that we're consumed by guilt and remorse. That kind of guilt is dangerous, it can be can be constructive or destructive. Constructive if used to make up our minds and never to repeat the same mis-

take again. Destructive if that guilt turns into shame and that shame into a life-threatening depression. Shortly, we will be going through the lives of two very different people to understand this well.

Hundreds of years ago, there was a group of fishermen; young, rugged men, some of them married, who sat fishing around the sea. In those days, fishing was a small, developing industry and two brothers were fishing, as usual.

Some distance away, a wise, young man was surrounded by a crowd of people. The elder of the two brothers was least interested in what was happening around there. He wanted a big catch and it just wasn't happening! The younger boy was distracted. He couldn't take his eyes off the radiant, young guy who was addressing the crowd.

You see, these boys descended from people who had suffered terrible persecution at the hands of foreigners, they'd seen the worst of days. And, these brothers had heard stories that one day, from among them, a powerful leader would rise up. He'd fix everything. So, instead of fishing the younger brother got closer to the wise guy. He was awestruck by





his presence and wonders: Is He the promised one?

Things took an unexpected turn when the wise guy dismissed the crowd. As He came closer, He passed by the younger boy and went towards the elder one. He gazed at him. The man saw the older brother frustrated and said, 'Go ahead, try again, let down your net.' The elder brother said, 'You've got to be kidding me! I've been here all night long and haven't caught a single fish. And, you're telling me to do it all over again.' The wise man persisted. Since he had nothing to lose, the elder brother gave in and let down his net into the sea. Within a few seconds, the net was full and overloaded with fish, a number this guy never dreamed of catching in his entire lifetime. He stared at the wise guy, thought to himself: 'who can this be?'

These two brothers, along with ten other men formed an unlikely friendship with the wise guy. They followed Him around, everywhere. Over the next three years, the wise guy went around listening to people, talking to them, healing them, helping and serving them. The twelve assisted him. The upper class, this included the priests, formed a strong dislike towards this man. With the help

of one of His twelve friends, they plotted against Him. And, they killed Him.

By now, you would've figured that the wise guy was Jesus. The elder brother Peter, the younger Andrew and the friend who betrayed Jesus was none other than Judas. If you look at the entire narrative, you see that Peter denies Jesus thrice. He denies his best friend to three different people. Then on hearing the rooster crow he was filled with unfathomable guilt. He exited the scene and wept uncontrollably.

Judas, on the other hand betrayed his best friend and was filled with indescribable shame. He made up his mind that there is no hope for him, no second chance. So, he gave up on life and killed himself.

Peter composed himself. He remembered the love of his friend Jesus. He called to mind what Jesus had told him, thinking of the responsibility Jesus had entrusted him with. Peter recollected the purpose of his life, while he struggled with the guilt of denying his best friend. After, Jesus rose again, he met Peter. And, Jesus never mentioned his denial. Instead, he assigned him a new role. Peter got the second chance he was longing for!

You see, both Peter and Judas had been consumed with guilt. Peter's guilt was constructive. And, Judas' was destructive. The lesson we all must learn from this story is to not give into the shame and guilt that our wrongdoings can bring. Instead, we must use that guilt to shape us into better individuals, individuals deserving of second chances. □

PAVEL ZENISEK

THE SALESIANS FOR YOU!

MONGOLIA

Don Bosco in the Land of Genghis Khan

The Salesian Delegation of Mongolia currently has ten Salesians located in Ulaanbaatar and Darkhan, and runs a technical school, three youth centres, and various agricultural and social development projects. In addition to the 10 Salesians, the Salesian Family in Mongolia is made up of 5 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, 18 Salesian Cooperators and several hundred or so former students of Don Bosco, who are gradually being trained and organised.

After many years of helping other Salesians and lay people to go on missions, Fr Jaroslav discovered that he himself felt a missionary vocation. Today he says: "I am happy to have found the courage to respond to God's call."

Dear Fr Jaroslav, how did you survive the first winter in Mongolia?

Every winter lasts eight months here. At the end of September, the first snow falls. In October the temperature can go to 20 below zero, but this is only the beginning of winter. January is the most brutal part; the normal temperature is 40 and 50 degrees below zero. So far, I have only experienced two winters in Mongolia, this year the government closed the schools for a whole month because of the cold. During the winter, however, everything works as it does in the summer: cows

graze in the snow, cars travel, open-air markets do not close. The same applies to the Salesians and our youth service. We just need to dress up more.

Jaroslav, why did you want to go as a missionary to Mongolia?

Ten years ago, I would never have imagined going to Mongolia. However, I took three small "blows." The first came with the words of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Let us go and bring Christ to everyone." The second was the words of the Rector Major: "Lord, send me!" The third was the experience I was having: for three years I had conducted preparatory courses for missionary volunteers destined for different countries around the world, and their enthusiasm was contagious.

I also conducted the "Come and See" meetings in which I taught young people that it was necessary to always be open to the voice of God. I heard that voice and at the age of 45 I answered: "It's now or never. I am not yet unfit and if I can serve young people more than in the Czech Republic, I am at their disposal." After a

month's discernment, I wrote a letter to the Rector Major and he invited me to Rome for a personal meeting. So, Mongolia became my



Promised Land.

How did you prepare for this?

Before leaving for the East, I went to Maynooth in Ireland, where I attended an English course for four months. English is an indispensable language for the Church in Asia: it is used daily in Salesian communities and serves as a basis for learning the local languages. Without English in the only Salesian community in Mongolia, I would not be able to communicate. My brothers come from Vietnam, South Korea, India, Poland, Hong Kong and East Timor.

How is Mongolia today?

Mongolia today seems to me to be similar to Italy in Don Bosco's time. People move from the small villages to the capital Ulaanbaatar, where, 15 years ago 700,000 lived and today there are more than 1.5 million. Of the three million inhabitants of Mongolia as a whole, one million lead a nomadic life. In the vast steppes, flocks and people live in yurts, the characteristic round tent with animals, in extreme climatic conditions but also with the background of a beautiful and rich culture linked to hospitality, respect for the elderly, solidarity and respect for the environment and nature.

What do you eat in Mongolia?

Most of the meat eaten is mutton, beef or goat. Mutton is the cheapest meat and the peasants know how to prepare it in many ways with potatoes, carrots and onions. Honestly, it is a delicious dish for long walks on the steppes or in the mountains.

How do the Mongols deal with

foreigners?

Mongols are very welcoming by nature, especially outside the city and in the steppes. They take me as an American and say "Hallo." They are surprised if I answer in Mongolian. They are afraid of the Chinese because they have been under their power for a long time and do not want the Chinese to encroach into their country. The government protects the state with various regulations, controls, residence permits, the obligation for entrepreneurs to give work to Mongolians first. Foreigners also have higher taxes and visas are very expensive.

How do the few Christians manage to live their faith?

Mongolia is traditionally a Buddhist country. In the 18th and 19th centuries they adopted Buddhism and became more peaceful than in the days of Genghis Khan. In the 1920s they became the second most atheistic communist country in the world after the Soviet Union. Persecution of Buddhist monasteries began and many monks were persecuted and killed. Christianity only arrived in the country after the anti-communist change in 1990, mainly thanks to tourists from South Korea and the USA. The Catholic Church only began its mission in 1992.

The Mongolian Salesian work is part of the Vietnamese province. What is your task today?

I was in Darkhan for two years and became bursar from the beginning. I also worked in the oratory, where we have more than 900 children. Since 2019 I have been in a village parish near Ulaanbaatar, which is called Shuuwuu. □

**Witnesses
in & for
Our Times**



**ST. DEMETRIUS
(OCTOBER, 26)**

Ian Pinto, sdb

THE GREAT MARTYR SAINT

There is very little information about Demetrius because he lived so long ago. Even though he lived at the end of the 3rd century and died somewhere in the beginning of the 4th century, it wasn't till much later that accounts of his life were gathered and published. Since the records are scanty, it is hard to construct a narrative of his life and to definitively separate the facts from the legends.

According to early accounts, Demetrius was born into an upright Christian family in Thessaloniki, Illyricum in 270. He was attracted by the guts and glory of battle and enrolled himself in the Roman army. His upright ways of dealing and strong sense of discipline helped him rise up the ladder of power. He was made proconsul of his native district of Thessalonika. A proconsul in today's terms would be a governor. Within the Roman political scheme, a proconsul was a civil position and not necessarily a military position. However, a military commander could be appointed as proconsul if the situation demanded it, like for example, if the region was under



threat. Even though the position was not necessarily held by a military officer, it usually was.

We don't know much about Demetrius' social and political life. We cannot even be sure if he ever was a soldier in the first place! Various hagiographic pictures of his life show him to be dressed in senator's clothing. The possible reason for him being associated with the military is that numerous miracles of protection were

reported whenever Thessaloniki was attacked. The Slavs coming in from the Balkan region attempted to capture Thessaloniki on more than one occasion but somehow never succeeded. The people of Thessaloniki held Demetrius in high regard and attributed their military successes to his protection. Probably, this is why he came to be depicted as a soldier.

A popular image of Demetrius is similar to that of St. George in many respects. He is depicted riding a red horse while in the act of spearing a fallen gladiator. The legend goes that the gladiator, Lyaeus was responsible for the killing of many Christians. He was defeated by Demetrius who is shown ready to strike the deathblow. Lyaeus is depicted as lying down, already defeated and shown to be far smaller in size than Demetrius. However, hagiographies reveal that Demetrius was not directly responsible for the death of Lyaeus. The victory was won through his intercession but performed by his disciple, Nestor. There is another similar legend that is narrated by Dimitry of Rostov. Demetrius apparently appeared in 1207 in the camp of Tsar Kaloyan of Bulgaria and killed him with a lance. This scene has been immortalized in art and iconography.

There are some depictions of Demetrius riding side by side with George. Demetrius is bearded and riding a red horse while George is clean shaven and riding a white horse. They were both appropriated as patrons of the Crusades. Such imagery arose and gained popularity around that time.

An icon of the 11th century discovered in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai depicts

Demetrius as a civilian. This could also indicate his possible lifestyle. He was venerated as patron of agriculture, peasants and shepherds in the Greek countryside during the Middle ages. According to historian, Hans Kloft, this patronage was attributed to him after the decline of the cult of the pagan goddess, Demeter. The similarity of names probably led to the spread of devotion in the countryside once Christian influence spread.

Demetrius met his end when the Caesar, Galerius Maximian returned from one of his campaigns. He had the traditional ceremonial games and offered ritual sacrifices to celebrate his triumph. Galerius did not look kindly on the fledgling Christian religion and continued the persecution begun by his predecessors. Demetrius was betrayed by those who were envious of his position and standing in society. He was imprisoned and condemned to die. While in prison he was visited by Nestor, a young Christian disciple who was scheduled to participate in the games as an opponent to the giant Lyaeus. From this encounter we get that famous icon described earlier. Demetrius blessed Nestor who went on to slay his opponent against all odds. This infuriated the Caesar and he had Nestor beheaded outside the city.

A little while later, soldiers came and stabbed Demetrius to death in the prison where he was held. It is said that his servant, Lupus somehow came in possession of his blood-stained tunic and signet ring which he subsequently used to affect a number of miracles. When discovered, he too was beheaded. Demetrius and Nestor were buried together in a bath where the prison stood. Legend has it that in the 7th

century, from the place where his tomb lay, a miraculous flow of sweet smelling myrrh was detected. This gave rise to a nickname – *Mirovlitis* or Myrrh Gusher. Today this place lies within the Church of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki.

HEROIC WITNESS

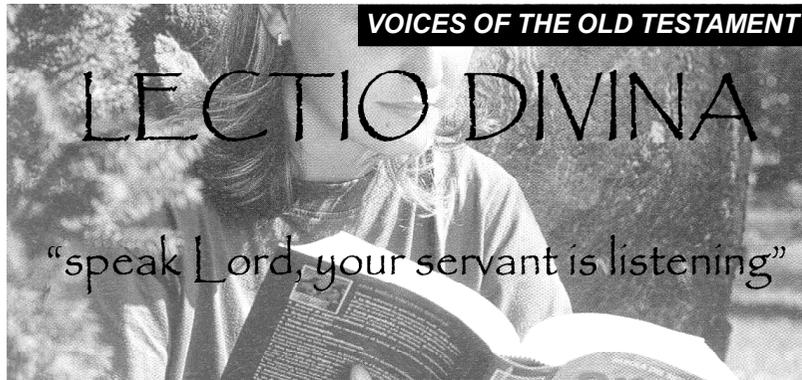
Demetrius seemed to have garnered more fame after his death but the very fact that he was popular after his death implies that he was influential while still alive! As a public servant, Demetrius put the needs of others above his own. He carried out his duties as proconsul to the best of his ability with transparency and integrity. It was religious and political prejudice that led to his imprisonment and subsequent death. It can be surmised that Demetrius was popular as a proconsul, not just among Christians who he would have offered solace and help but also to the others.

Hagiographies say that he spent most of his time preaching the faith like a devout missionary. He organized secret meetings where he would catechize people and offer them courage to face the persecution that targeted them. He is also shown to be involved in the conversion of many people to the Christian faith. Some records state that it was this high conversion rate that brought him under the scanner of Caesar. When he was captured and brought before Caesar for judgement, he is said to have borne witness to the faith by declaring: "Only in Christ do I believe." Even while in prison he did not stop preaching the gospel. There were many who would come to visit him and get inspired by his faith and courage.

Demetrius stands out as a passionate disciple of Christ. One can see

his love for Jesus brim over from his heart and flow out into his actions. Isn't this exactly what St. James alludes to when he says: "I by my works will show you my faith" (Jas 2:18)? Our faith is not a theory to be held but a relationship to be lived. You cannot have a Christian snob or a selfish Christian. The two can never go together. Christian, by its very nature implies community and sharing. Therefore, you cannot have a snob or a individualistic person calling themselves Christian while at the same time holding tight to their un-Christian ways; it's an oxymoron.

Demetrius was on fire for God. He didn't hide his faith so that his life might be spared. He boldly confessed it when the opportunity arose. How many of us witness to Christ? Everyday we get opportunities to witness to Christ; do we make use of them? We could be sitting at a diner to grab a bite; would we dare to take a moment to give thanks while others look on? We could be stuck in a long line; would we dare to take out our rosary beads and pray? We see people who are poor and homeless; would we dare to take time to engage in conversation with them and offer help? Are we comfortable displaying an image of Christ, the Blessed Virgin or a Saint on our desk at work? All of these are ways in which we express our faith. We need not wait for a dramatic moment like persecution or a death threat to witness to our faith; we can do it in little ways everyday. Remember that Jesus says it is the little things that matter: "Just as you did to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). □

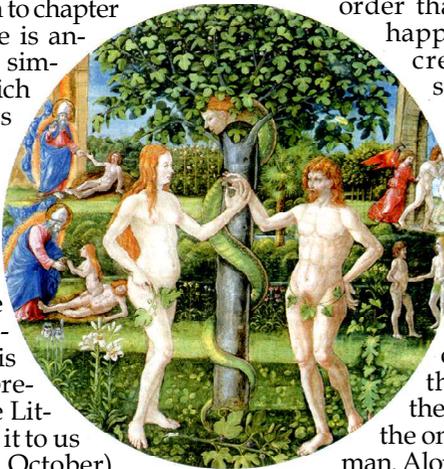


A HELPER “BEFORE” HIM

by Carlo Broccardo

It is such a great mystery, that of creation, that the Bible recounts it twice in the first pages of the book of Genesis. The first chapter tells of God who in six days gave form to the heavens and the earth as we know them today, and then, on the seventh day, rested. It is an ethereal and magnificent story in which God gives life its origin with his word. And it is the Lord of the universe, who is the protagonist of this first page.

We move on to chapter two and there is another story, a simpler one, which almost makes us imagine God as a potter who one day decides to make man by kneading the dust of the earth and blowing into his nostrils the breath of life (the Liturgy presents it to us on Sunday 3 October).



This time creation is more concrete, more practical. It is as if it took more time and effort to complete the project, compared to the previous story in which everything was easy and obvious.

In the beginning, the earth is all a barren desert; there is a spring, but no one to channel water to irrigate the soil. So, God creates man from the very dust of the earth and gives him life so that he can take care of creation. Indeed, in order that he might live

happily on earth, he creates for him a splendid garden, rich in water and every kind of fruit tree. It is the garden of Eden, which in Hebrew means “delights.”

For now - let us note - there is only man and things: the earth, the trees, the water; the only living being is man. Alone. And God says:

“it is not good for man to be alone.” So, he decides to give him “mate to be with him.” In Hebrew (the language of the book of Genesis) there is a word that literally means: a help “in front of him.” In the West they are used to using abstract terms, such as “otherness” (to emphasise difference) or “reciprocity” (to emphasise the possibility of entering into a relationship); those who wrote the Bible, on the other hand, lived in a more concrete world: God creates for man a help “to be with him.” It was not enough for man to have things, however beautiful and all at his disposal; those were “under” his dominion, but man - in order to be himself - needed someone who was “to be with” him, in front of him, different but equal.

And so, God created all the animals of the earth and sky, and man gives each one a name. But even this was not enough. The Genesis account is curious because it almost shows us a God who does not immediately hit the mark, proposing a solution to man that does not prove suitable for him. It was a way of emphasising that even animals were not enough to fill human life with meaning. No matter how “humanely” we treat them sometimes, they are not “before him” either.

“Then the Lord God caused a stupor to descend upon the man, who fell asleep; he removed one of his ribs and closed the flesh in its place. The Lord God formed a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This is bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh. She shall be called a woman, because she was taken

from a man.” I wanted to quote this passage in full, because it is so rich in poetry. The ancient Jewish commentators called it “the first song of songs.”

Like a gift (while he is sleeping, unaware) man finds himself with a woman “before him.” This time, the story is different: it was not another thing, because she was bone from his bone, flesh from his flesh; there was absolute equality between the two, they were of the same nature (not so animals!). But at the same time there is difference, because they were two, before the other; not two halves, but two wholes! In Hebrew all this reasoning was summed up in the name: “man” was called Ish, and “woman” Isshah; the final ‘ah’ was simply the indication of the feminine: man and woman are the same word, but one is masculine and the other feminine.

“It is not good for man to be alone. I want to give him help that corresponds to him, a helper before him.” And this is God’s plan for us: that our life be full, fulfilled, alive; and the quality that makes a man and woman fully themselves is to be before one another, being able to look someone straight in the eye. That is what makes the difference in life, because that is how God has thought of us, from eternity.

Beware, however, because sometimes in the Bible the same expression is used to say that there are two armies lined up “facing” each other in the battlefield. No one says that looking into each other’s eyes is easy; no one says that there will be no problems, difficulties or pitfalls. But there is no other way for life to be full. □

THE HYPOCRITE IS ALWAYS A FLATTERER

On the morning of June 6, 2018 Pope Francis broke the Word of God for the little congregation at the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

A true Christian cannot be a hypocrite, and a hypocrite is not a true Christian": Pope Francis spoke unequivocally against the temptation to be "two-faced". This was his focus during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 6 June, as he reflected on the day's passage from the Gospel of Mark (12:13-17) in which "some Pharisees and Herodians" were seeking to entrap Jesus.

"In the Gospel passage", the Pope noted, "there is a word which Jesus uses a lot to characterize the doctors of the law", because he recognized their hypocrisy. Thus, "'hypocrite' is the word he uses often to characterize them". Pope Francis explained that they are "hypocrites because they show one thing while they are thinking of something else". Actually, the Pope added, alluding to the Greek etymology of the word, "they speak, they judge, but underneath there is something else". Nothing could be more different from Jesus' way: hypocrisy, in fact "is not the language of Jesus. Hypocrisy is not the language of Christians". This fact is absolutely "clear".

However, as Jesus takes care to highlight this characteristic, Francis observed, it is important that we fully understand it and recognize "how they act", how hypocrites behave.

Above all, the Pope said, "the hypocrite is always a flatterer", whether to a greater or lesser degree, "but he is a flatterer". Thus, for example, they say to Jesus: "Teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God". In other words, they use "that flattery which softens the heart" and weakens resistance in life.

Therefore "hypocrites always begin with flattery. And then they ask a question". Part of flattery is to "not speak the truth", to "exaggerate", to "boost vanity". In this regard, the Holy Father recalled a priest whom he "knew a long time ago, not here" — who, "poor man, drank up all the flattery that others gave him; it was his weakness. And his friends said that he had learnt the liturgy poorly" since he had not understood the true meaning of "incensing".

So, the Pope continued, "flattery always begins like this, but with an evil intention". This can be clearly seen in the Gospel passage: in order to put Jesus to the test, the Pharisees "fawned over him, so that he might believe them and slip up". This is the hypocrite's technique: "he shows you that he likes you; he always puffs you up, in order to achieve his aim".

The Pope then underscored "a second aspect" found in "what Jesus

does" when confronted with this "two-faced" ploy of the hypocrites, who ask a fair question but "with an unjust intention". They ask him: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, is it just?" — Jesus, "knowing their hypocrisy, states clearly: 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a coin, and let me look at it'". Observe Jesus' technique: "to hypocrites and ideologues", Pope Francis said, Jesus always "responds with reality. The reality is so, everything else is either hypocrisy or ideology".

This is why Jesus says: "bring me a coin". He actually wants to show "reality". He responds "with wisdom" when he says: "'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's' — the reality was that the coin bore the image of Caesar — 'and to God the things that are God's'".

Lastly, the Holy Father said, it is important to note a "third aspect" relative to the "language of hypocrisy": that it is "a language of deceit, and is the same language as the serpent's with Eve; it is the same. It begins with flattery: 'No ... if you eat of this you will be great, you will know all...', in order to destroy her".

Hypocrisy, in fact, "destroys; hypocrisy kills; it kills people, even so far as to strip away a person's character and soul. It kills communities" the Pope explained. And, he added, "when there are hypocrites in a community there is a great danger there; there is a very horrible danger". For this reason, "the Lord Jesus said to us: 'Let your speech be: yes, yes, no, no. Anything more comes from the evil one'. He was very clear". In this regard, Pope Francis recalled, "James, in his Letter, was even stronger: 'Let your yes be yes and your no be no'".

These clear words help us understand today just "how much evil" hypocrisy does to the Church. How much evil is achieved by "those Christians who fall into this sinful practice which kills". This is because, the Holy Father emphasized, "the hypocrite is capable of killing a community. He speaks sweetly, while judging a person harshly. The hypocrite is a killer". In conclusion, the Pope summarized his reflection by recalling that hypocrisy "begins with flattery", to which one must respond only "with reality"; and that hypocrisy uses "the same language as the devil who sows that duplicitous language in communities in order to destroy them". Therefore, the Pope said, "let us ask the Lord to protect us from falling into this vice of hypocrisy", from "masking our attitude, but with evil intentions. That the Lord might give us this grace: 'Lord, that I might never be a hypocrite, that I might know how to speak the truth and if I cannot say it, to stay silent, but never hypocrisy ...'". □

THE HOMECOMING

Pierluigi Menato (TA., ID)

The firs on the shoreline were ablaze in the sun! Above, the town looked as if a giant lens had focused its rays to set them of fire.

Shop windows displayed summer sales, full of straw hats, swimwear and rubber shoes.

Blue, yellow, black and violet posters with florescent letters lay spread out on the tables summoning curious tourists. The dark shadows of the trees and the drapes in front of houses looked brown and gold in the afternoon sun.

The fragrance of coffee, the sound of radio and television and a swarm of holidaymakers dressed in all the colours of the rainbow chattered as they strolled down the main street; and beyond, the firs, stretched out on the beach kissed by the sea.

Midday and the streets are suffocatingly warm. The solitary sound of the church bell dedicated to the Mother of God directed most people from the beaches up to the hotels and guesthouses for lunch and a well-earned siesta.

Julia had come out of the train station into the blinding light of the town square amid flashes of sunshine and sea sounds. She walked slowly towards her home, where her mother and two sisters were waiting for her and she for them.

She was tired, exhausted. She had worked for eleven months in the insane atmosphere of an office in Mestre. Eleven months tapping the keys of a computer, covering the white pages with black ciphers.

Figures and numerals! From morning to night, figures of one kind or another! She herself was considered

nothing but a cipher at the end of the month, by her boss, by the landlady, by the woman who did her laundry. Now she was home for a fortnight utterly exhausted in heart and nerve.

On the train a gentleman said: "Today stress has become a social plague, we're all stressed. Today we are born stressed. We work too much and where machines abound, they wear out your brains and your stamina. That's progress!"

Now images of the train trip came back into her thoughts. Two teenagers at the ticket counter were chewing gum, listening to songs in their headphones and smoking shaking their heads to the rhythm.

In the short stops on the Venice-Ancona line, she saw groups of boys and girls decked out for the sea, with guitars and tambourines and brightly coloured shirts, trousers and shorts. They were scattered images; then she heard the trundling of the train heralding the iron bridges over the Adige and the Po and the countryside with all the colours of the plantations.

As her thoughts came disjointedly her heart droned in drowsiness. She had learned to silence it. That was a defence like the defence for those who are alone among people they do not know and don't want to interact with anyone.

She reached her house, surrounded by tall firs.

Her mother had prepared lunch for her in the shade of a patio outside the kitchen. A white tablecloth, shiny cutlery, a vase of flowers, bottles of water and white wine.

Her two younger sisters stared in wonder like two schoolgirls with that innocent astonishment in their eyes as they looked at their older sister's clothes, which, although simple, had a certain class. Oh! the family! How beautiful in that shade, behind those lowered branches! No one could peep over the wall.

Julia talked about the office, her colleagues, her landlady, the ciphers, the journey, trains that are always late, the heat, and her voice filled the whole house.

Suddenly, in unison they told her: "Did you know Robert was sick this last winter? He was in bed for nearly three months and he never stopped asking for you; calling your name. It had become a fixation for him."

She had a sad, incredulous smile...as if to say, 'that could hardly

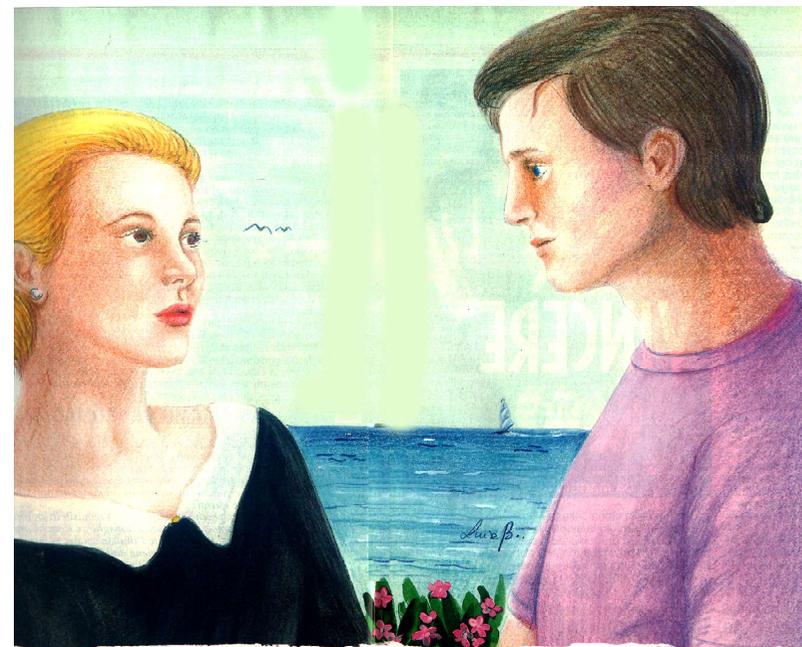
be true!'

Robert? If Robert had passed through her soul it was like a hurricane years ago, and then they had drifted apart; he to his brilliant life as a rich young man always traveling, hunting, partying and idling; she, a poor working girl struggling with the exhausting hours of overwork. No, it was not possible. It couldn't be possible.

She got up, looked for some sheet music, sat down at the piano in the living room, and played something, then sang a song by Lucio Battisti, her beautiful vocalist. But her voice trembled with warm notes, her eyes glistened with a strange light.

Days went by.

Life in the seaside town was growing busier by the day; foreigners, artists, millionaires, workers on holiday; they were all flooding



in.

Every hour the train belched out a cosmopolitan crowd of people, especially young people and every hour the heat grew more unbearable. Posters on the street corners were ripped off their boards in the strong sea breeze and beat-groups played till dawn.

Robert's villa had a wrought-iron gate with an arbour of oleanders and laurels. The windows wreathed with flowers and wisteria tendrils protected their privacy; a large veranda looked out over the beach and the sea.

Robert was lying down, listless. He'd thrown the newspaper to one side and the book to the other. He seemed too tired to read.

His mother was working on a large lace curtain, in large geometric patterns in raw cotton.

Mother and son made small talk. "Mum, would you push that wisteria creeper aside, I want to look over there, the sea; there's a sail boat coming this way."

"It's not a fishing boat, it's a sail boat. You can't see well if you're lying down like that; get up on the cushions."

The young man shook his head. He just didn't want to do anything, least of all, move from his position.

The illness had devastated him, yet all around him everything urged him to live: flowers, songs, fragrances, the activity along the endless streets.

The flight of swallows was alive and chirped as they flew by. He felt the tormenting spell of life, but abandoned himself to lying there without the will to be drawn into the melee with a sense of melancholy.

What was wrong with him? There was nothing, actually.

Nothing! As proud as he was, he responded that way... yet he winced at every woman's voice in the street that came up to the balcony; then shook his head and plunged into reading or burying himself in his thoughts.

Now he looked at the oncoming sail boat. That white sail brushing against the wave gave him a vision of peace. Was that hand as white as that distant sail resting on his forehead? Was it his mother's, yes, but it was not enough, and not only hers.

Julia walked past the shadow of a building. Wrapped in a dark dress, with a white collar, her blond hair pulled back tightly like a halo on her forehead, she reached the avenue of firs.

A strain on her heart more searing than the summer sun occasionally suffocated her.

At the wrought-iron gates she stopped and the oleanders bowed as if to greet her, the laurels rustled and that flight of swallows like a garland around the roof invited her to go in, because those two hearts were silent, one in pride and the other in renunciation; they were waiting. She rang: she was let in.

She appeared on the veranda darkly dressed, and she seemed like a dreamlike creature. Not a word was uttered. She stretched out her hands towards him.

Now swallows and oleanders were hushed; their anxious hearts waiting as these two lovers decided to go back to the way they were. The summer symphony resumed its movement probably...reaching a crescendo. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 21

Michele Molineris

115. Another will die in your place (1862)

On August 15 [1862] fourteen-year-old John Petiti of Fossano died at St. John's Hospital in Turin. He was the boy Don Bosco at, had hinted at some time before when telling a small group (I was with them - John Garino) that within three moons an Oratory pupil would die. During those three months, a nineteen-year-old apprentice tailor, David Quadrelli of Novara, fell seriously ill. Don Bosco visited him to offer him comfort and the Last Sacraments. "I don't want to die!" Quadrelli exclaimed as soon as he saw him. "In that case," Don Bosco replied, looking at him kindly, "you'll recover. Another boy will take your place..." Then he blessed him. Quadrelli fully recovered. (*EBM VII, 142-143*)

116. Nothing escapes my gaze (1862)

In the autumn of 1862, at Becchi, where Don Bosco had taken those who had not gone to their families, to his nephew's place, a surprising incident took place. A pupil had left the house and alone had gone into the woods. There he suddenly found a person who spoke to him in an inappropriate manner. The boy was dumbfounded and did not understand, but immediately he heard a voice that distinctly called his name twice. He immediately ran to his teacher, because the voice seemed to be his, and asked him why he had called him. The professor replied that he

had called no one. He quickly realised the danger he had run into and who had saved him. He went to Don Bosco who was surrounded by a crowd of boys. As Don Bosco fixed his gaze on him with a knowing smile, the boy knew for certain that Don Bosco had seen everything.

Another time, after supper, a throng of boys jammed the room where Don Bosco was having his meal. "Get me Marcora, Salvi and Daniele!" he suddenly said. Several boys ran out to look for them. The three had left the premises without permission. By sending for them, Don Bosco wanted his boys to realize that nothing escaped his attention. After checking to see if anyone had tipped Don Bosco, the boys had to exclaim, "How could he know?" How often we heard that exclamation (*EBM, VII, 161*).

117. Let us recite a De profundis... (1862)

A memorable event took place one evening at Vignale. A number of boys - among them Joseph Buzzetti and the student Modesto Davico - were standing around Don Bosco, when he suddenly became pensive and after a few moments said: "Let us kneel and say a *Hail Mary*, and a *De Profundis* for a companion of yours who shall die tonight."

In utter amazement, the boys knelt to pray. Then, as they stood up, Davico said to Don Bosco: "This is strange! You bring us on an outing and then tell us that somebody has to die!"

"Davico must be scared," Don Bosco remarked. "He is afraid that he is the one!"

"Don't worry," Don Bosco

went on. "It's none of you! The boy who will die is at the Oratory now, feeling fine and merrily playing with his companions. He has no idea that before dawn he will stand at God's judgment seat!"

In 1888, Jerome Suttill gave us this written report:

"After supper on October 12 [1862], we went to the chapel with our hosts for night prayers. Then Don Bosco, who had been kneeling on the altar steps, arose, and facing us, said loudly and clearly, "Let us pray for one of our boys who is now very sick at the Oratory."

The following day, something came to light that caused a stir. It was ten o'clock in the evening when Don Bosco recommended the dying man. During the night the post office did not carry letters. Vignale had no post-office. In spite of this, the next day at 5 o'clock in the morning all gathered in the chapel for the prayers, Don Bosco before putting on his vestments for the Mass, turned as he had done the night before, and said: - Let us recite a *De profundis* for the soul of the boy who died during the night in the Oratory. The next day, Tuesday, a letter arrived from Fr Alasonnatti announcing his death the night before."

In the register of deaths at Valdocco we read: "October 12, 1862, Pappalardo Rosario, a native of Giarre in the province of Catania, died suddenly. He was a plump, fair and young red-haired youngster of 10, short in stature wearing a small gunner's uniform. This was how Joseph Sandrone, his acquaintance and companion described

him, who, hearing Don Bosco's prophecy, confirmed this extraordinary incident. He had gone to sleep the evening before and in the morning, he was found dead in his bed (*EBM VII, 166-167*).

118. And leaving the café, he followed him (1862)

At the beginning of the 1862-1863 school year, Don Bosco remembered a promise he had made to a poor youngster in Turin to help him.

Among the new boys were those whom Don Bosco had admitted personally as he travelled through Montemagno, Vignale and other villages during the fall outing. Upon his return to Turin, he also made good his promise to Secundus Bernocco, a young busboy at a café in Piazza San Carlo, to whom one evening he sent Dominic Belmonte, then a rhetoric student, to tell him he could pack his things and come to the Oratory.

"Did Don Bosco send you?" the youth asked.

"Yes."

Without further ado, he came to the Oratory, completed his courses, and eventually received his degree in literature and a professorship in Rome. He died toward the end of 1889 (*EBM VII, 178*).

119. Clear agreements and long friendship (1862)

Don Bosco also had a striking gift of discerning which boys were suitable for his Oratory. Francis Provera gave us the following written account:

A man wanted to place his son at the Oratory, but Don Bosco firmly refused. The father insis-

ted so much, however, that finally he felt almost forced to give in. When the boy - seemingly a good lad - arrived with his father, Don Bosco called the youngster aside.

"Will you like it here?" Don Bosco asked.

"Sure! I couldn't wait to come," was the answer.

"Well then, if you want to stay here," Don Bosco whispered to him, "you must not do such and such thing again..." The boy was startled.

"Who told you that?"

"Nobody! I just happen to know it."

"Then I don't want to stay here, and no one came make me!"

"Why not?"

"You know too much."

He hastened to his father, and nothing could persuade him to stay. (*EBM, VII, 180*).

120. The devil makes the pots but not...the covers (1862)

During all Her novenas, the Blessed Virgin, pleased with the boys' prayers and nosegays, in various ways rid the Oratory of those unworthy of Her protection.

Such was the case of an unfortunate lad whose name began with "Ton..." a classmate of Father Dominic Belmonte, who spoke about it. Though grieved by remorse for his very blameable conduct, he could not bring himself to mend his ways and stubbornly refused to go to confession. He consistently shunned Don Bosco and foiled his companions' efforts to bring him to his spiritual father.

One evening he told Belmonte: "I have something to tell you, but

keep it secret. Something strange has happened to me several nights in a row. At a certain time, I feel my blankets being yanked to the foot of the bed. I awake and pull them up again, but it's no use. Slowly they keep being pulled down. I can't tell you how awfully scared I am!"

"Maybe you've been dreaming," Belmonte remarked.

"Dreaming? I was just as awake as I am now. I even tried to hold on to the blankets with my teeth, but it was no use because the hem got ripped off."

Belmonte took a look at the blankets. The hem was indeed torn.

"Do me a favour," the boy begged him. "Ask Don Bosco what this means."

"Ask him yourself," Belmonte replied. "You know how anxious he is to have a talk with you."

"Me? Never! But what could this mean?"

"It's the devil!"

"What should I do?"

"Go to confession!"

The boy preferred to leave the Oratory (*EBM, VII, 195*).

121. Beware of scruples (1862)

"Once I was sick with scruples," recounts Fr Francesia. I had wanted to make light of it talking about a companion who was said to be suffering from them, and the Lord was allowing them to fall on me! It was impossible to say in what distress I found myself! However, I felt great spiritual relief, because I was more careful in my words, more recollected in my prayers, more reflective.... But I was still suffering! I almost didn't dare to

reveal all the strange things that were going on in my mind, because I knew they weren't sins. But even so, I said, what if they were? Suddenly these fears fled as if by magic; and then they came upon me like a heavy wave upon the head of a shipwrecked man! What a life!

One evening, and I remember it like it was today after so many years, I went to confession. It was still in the small Oratory of St Francis... Don Bosco had already been hearing confessions for quite a while... The little lamp had been dimmed, and everyone was waiting their turn.

I was kneeling on the floor, and I waited there just like a patient in real agony, waiting for my moment to come. Then an inspiration came to me, and I said to myself: "If Don Bosco, turning to me, said to me: "Tomorrow go and receive communion without going to confession," - I would understand that the trouble I am going through is all nonsense!"

I had just thought this when I felt a hand lightly clapped on my shoulder in the darkness. It was Don Bosco inviting me to confession.... I got up and was about to begin, but instead I heard him say: "Tomorrow you will go to communion; you don't need to make your confession! - I listened, trembling and weeping, to these words, moistening his hand with my tears, and went away... How merciful the Lord was to me! From that instant I was cured of my illness too! (Francesia, *Don Bosco friend of souls*, 79).

122. Don Bosco's calling card Don Bosco (1862)

"In the winter of 1862 my

mother (Mrs Delfina Marengo recounted), who was then 40 years old, fell seriously ill with typhus and pneumonia and, after about two months of illness, was at the end of her life.

After receiving the sacraments, including Extreme Unction, she was visited by Don Bosco, at the request and invitation of the theologian Felice Golzio, the sick woman's confessor.

As soon as Don Bosco approached her bed, he asked her how she was feeling, and she, as she was still lucid, recognised him and thanked him. Then the holy man made me and my sister recite three Hail Marys together with him. Then he turned to me, as the eldest, and said to me: "Be of good cheer; your mother will not die, for you two are too young and still have great need of her."

Then, turning to the sick woman, he said: "But I have told the Lord to let her make her purgatory here, so don't be surprised if she is afflicted."

My mother, who was a holy woman, replied in a low voice: "I want to do the will of God!"

"That's good," Don Bosco replied. He blessed her and left. From that moment on my mother began to improve and the next day she asked the doctor for permission to eat an asparagus. The doctor, who was surprised to find her still alive, put his hand on her wrist and answered:

"Not an asparagus, but a piece of chicken."

Her convalescence was long and difficult, but her recovery was perfect, so that she never fell ill again for about thirty years.

Her tribulations were abun-

dant, especially for her morale, and every time a new tribulation arose, my mother used to say with a smile: "Here's a calling card from Don Bosco."

When the moment of death arrived, which took her away at the age of seventy-five, the priest Fr Valimberti, assistant-parish priest of Carmine who assisted her, without knowing anything of what Don Bosco had said so many years before, consoled me by telling me that, as far as he was concerned, my mother had done her purgatory in this world and that there was no reason to doubt that she had immediately gone to heaven" (*M.B., VII, 123*).

123. I don't have more than two years to live (1863)

On February 1, 1863, the feast of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco being with some clerics and youngsters, happened to speak on the topic of death. To the great sorrow of his listeners, he assured them that he would soon leave them. "I have but two more years to live," he stated. On other occasions, also, he often voiced St. Paul's words, "I am already being poured out in sacrifice, and the time of my deliverance is at hand." They begged him to plead with our Lord, at least for their sake, for another twenty years and asked him what the boys should do to obtain this grace.

He answered that they should help him fight the enemy of souls. "If you don't help me," he added, "I shall wear myself out all the quicker because I am determined not to give up, regardless of the cost. Therefore, help me to fight sin. When I see the

devil hide himself in some part of the house to lead boys into sin, I feel so hurt that I wonder whether there can be a more excruciating torture than the one I'm going through.

When I see God offended, I can't hold back even against an army." Then seeing his faithful sons grieve (some of them were about to be ordained), he concluded, "Pray to the good Lord, I do come to be with you all at your first Mass.

The news soon spread in the house and stirred the boys to do their utmost to prolong the life of their father and teacher. It was a wholesome, visible proof of Don Bosco's power and moral authority over the Oratory boys. (*EBM., VII, 226-227*).

124. If I send him away from me, he sticks to the young (1863)

Don Bosco having said that in Ivrea in 1863 he had been tormented by the devil, the clerics of the Oratory begged him to do what he had threatened if the devil would keep tormenting him on his return from Ivrea.

"If I chase him from me," he replied, "he will go after the boys."

"Do you mean, then," Provera asked him, "that when you were at Ivrea and spent a peaceful night the devil harmed some boys?"

"Yes, he did a lot of harm."

"Then ask him what he wants," we insisted.

"Who says I haven't?" he replied.

"Then tell us!" we all shouted together. But he changed the subject, and all we got from him was, "Pray!" (*EBM VII, 50*) □



POPE LUCIANI AND THE ROSARY

In 1973, on 7 October to be exact, in the homily he gave on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the feast of the Rosary, he said: "The Rosary is disputed by some. They say: it is a prayer that falls into automatism, reducing itself to a hurried, monotonous and cloying repetition of *Hail Marys*...."

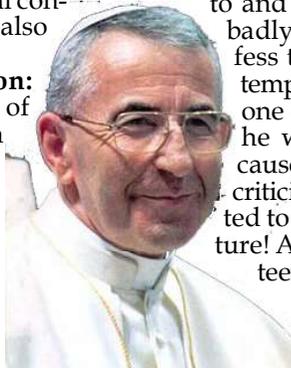
Allow me to say a few words about this as a pastor of souls.

First impression: the crisis of the Rosary comes second. Before it comes the crisis of prayer in general. People are completely caught up in material interests; they think very little about the soul. Din has invaded our existence. It is harmful. Community liturgies are certainly very enriching, but they are not enough: a personal conversation with God is also needed.

Second impression: When people speak of "adult Christians" in prayer, they sometimes exaggerate. Personally, when I speak alone to God and Our Lady, rather than being an adult, I prefer to feel like a child; the mitre,

the skullcap, the ring disappear; I put the adult and even the bishop on holiday, with his seriousness, poise and pondered demeanour, to abandon myself to the spontaneous tenderness that a child has before his father and mother. To be - at least for a few half hours - before God who I really am with my misery and my best self: to feel the child of the past emerge from the depths of my being who wants to laugh, chat, love the Lord and who sometimes feels the need to cry, so that mercy may be shown to him, helps me to pray. The Rosary, a simple and easy prayer, helps me to be a child, and I am not ashamed of it.

Third impression: I don't have to and I don't want to think badly of anyone, but I confess that I have often been tempted to judge that someone or other who thought he was an adult just because he sat on a bench and criticised from above. I wanted to say to him: "How mature! As for prayer, you are a teenager in crisis, a disappointment and a rebel who has not yet gotten over the aggressive-



ness of that ungrateful age! God forgive me for my reckless judgement."

Response to objections

This is how he answers each and every objection.

"Do you pray the Rosary repetitively?" Father de Foucauld said: "Love expresses itself in a few words and always repeats them."

Isn't there the Bible? Certainly, but not everyone is prepared for it or has time to read it. For those who do read it, it will be useful, in certain moments, at certain times, one talks to Our Lady, if one believes that She is our mother and sister, then the mysteries of the Rosary meditated and savoured are a deepened Bible, made of juice and spiritual blood.

Sentimental prayer? It depends. It can be a prayer full of joy and gladness. If one is good at it, the Rosary becomes a gaze at Mary, which increases in intensity. It can also be a refrain, which springs from the heart.

The Rosary - a poor prayer? And what, then, is it a rich prayer? The Rosary is a parade of *Our Fathers*, the prayer taught by Jesus, of *Hail Marys*, God's greeting to the Virgin through the angel, of *Glory Be's*, the praise of the Most Holy Trinity. The Rosary expresses faith without false problems, it helps to surrender to God the generous acceptance of pain.

As for the relationship between the Rosary and the Bible, he simply replies: "The Rosary, after all, is all about the Bible: the mysteries are meditations on the Gospel, the *Hail Mary* and the *Our Father* are Gospel."

Pope Luciani, so devoted to the Rosary, also offers an overall view

of the content of the Rosary, that is, of the Mysteries contemplated in it. Speaking in Pompei, on 1 October 1975, he said: "(*Glorious Mysteries*) Christ is not the solitary Risen One... immediately after him comes Our Lady.

(*Sorrowful Mysteries*) We are...co-heirs with Christ, if we truly share in Christ's sufferings in order to share in his glory (Rom 8:17). That is why in the Rosary we also contemplate Mary's sufferings... at certain moments her trials became acute...

(*Joyful Mysteries*) Fortunately, life, (along with sorrows), also knows joys; we remember Mary's joys in the Joyful Mysteries. At the Annunciation, her joy was not only in feeling chosen by God, but in taking on with deliberate responsibility a very great mission... Jesus' birth, with its various circumstances, bringing her inexpressible joy...."

Some will ask: what are **those five beads in the appendix to the chaplet**, above the small crucifix, for? Are they perhaps an ornament?

It is not a question of adding new prayers, but rather of using the common ones. Few, for example, in the Holy Rosary make use of the first beads of the chaplet. Some - and this is something entirely free - recite the Creed on the first bead, intending to stand firm in the truths revealed by God. The following three beads indicate three *Hail Marys* to preserve the three fundamental virtues: 1) *Hail Mary*..., that I may increase my faith; 2) *Hail Mary*..., that I may develop the flame of my love; 3) *Hail Mary*..., that I may make my hope stronger. Let's be honest, whoever thought of that? G. M. □



MY VOCATION STORY

SERVE THE LORD WITH JOY

by Fr Vivian D'Souza, SDB

We don't meet people by accident; everyone is meant to cross our path for a reason". As I look back at my life as a youngster, a Religious and a Priest, I feel humbled at the tremendous goodness I have encountered in people whom I have lived and worked with. The path that the Lord has chosen for me, and I have trod, is beyond all human calculations. My song of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord then, is constantly on my lips and in my heart.

I had my humble beginning in a small hamlet at Vile Parle, one of the suburbs of Bombay. My father John D'Souza was a well-recognised teacher at St. Andrew's, Bandra for 38 years and my mother Cecilia D'Souza, was an accomplished musician from Pune. They were very devout, loving, supportive, very strict with us and devoted to the Church. My elder brother, Wilfred is a Salesian Priest, my Sister Marietta belongs to the Religious Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes. Clare, the youngest is married and has a family.

My initial schooling upto Std. VIII took place at St. Francis Xavier's, Vile Parle. In the summer of 1966, I attended the Friends of St. Dominic Savio Camp at Lonavla organised by Fr. Thomas Braganza. At this camp, I met Fr. Antonio Alessi, the Rector, who invited me to spend the rest of the



holidays at Lonavla. Those were happy days! When I came back home to resume my schooling, I felt homesick for Lonavla and wrote to Fr. Alessi, who gladly accepted me in. I believe that God writes straight on crooked lines. Having come to Lonavla with no intention whatsoever of becoming a priest like my brother, who was already a cleric there, the call came to me around the time I was in Class X through a talk I heard by Fr. Victor D'Souza on "Vocation as a Call."

From then on, I sought seriously and joyously to answer this call under the guidance of Fr. Olivio Miranda. I encountered inspiring

Salesians throughout my Salesian Formation years, grew in my understanding and love of the Salesian life, and became aware of the challenges that I would encounter along the way coupled with the strength that the Lord provides.

I was blessed with varied opportunities in my priestly ministry: in a parish and school at Hubli, Borivli, Yervada, Wadala; at a school at Nerul, Matunga and Andheri (the last two as Practical Trainee). I also served at a technical school at Chinchwad, Pune, at a Formation House at Koregaon Park, Pune and as the secretary to the Provincial in the early years of my Priesthood. My joy, has always been to work with and for the people of God. Besides liturgical celebrations and parish gatherings, I always tried to reach out to persons and families, especially the poor and needy, in a bid to make the parish one big Family. Looking at happy family life, the struggles of individuals and Families, inspired me to find meaning and to persevere in my vocation. In the schools and parishes, I met the senior boys and I was touched by their dreams for a brighter future; at times, I would slip in the suggestion about following the Lord more closely as his Priest or Religious. It was heartening to meet youngsters who were interested in studying the Scriptures, asking questions about the faith and some even ready to come for Spiritual Guidance.

To be able to come close to Jesus, share him with others and to celebrate the Eucharist, have been the central focus of my Ministry as a Priest.

To Parents and to youngsters

"If the Lord calls you to follow him more closely, he will use every means to make His Will known to you. All you have to do is to keep an open mind, develop a life of prayer..."

Fr. Vivian D'Souza

and young adults desiring to become Priests and Religious I would say: "If the Lord calls you to follow him more closely, he will use every means to make His Will known to you. All you have to do is to keep an open mind, develop a life of prayer, faithfully read the Scriptures and find out the message that the Lord has for you today. To all this, add an encounter with the Lord not only in the celebration of the Eucharist but also during the various moments of your day, following the advice Don Bosco gave his youngsters: "Try living in the presence of God throughout the day." □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Paper Eater

A minister delivered a sermon in ten minutes one Sunday morning, which was about half the usual length of his sermons. He explained, "I regret to inform you that my dog, who is very fond of eating paper, ate that portion of my sermon which I was unable to deliver this morning."

After the service, a visitor from another church shook hands with the preacher and said, "Pastor, if that dog of yours has pups, I want to get one to give to my minister."

Ice Cream Flavours

The young man entered the Ice Cream Palace and asked, "What kinds of ice cream do you have?" "Vanilla, chocolate, strawberry," the girl wheezed as she spoke, patted her chest and seemed unable to continue. "Do you have laryngitis?" the young man asked sympathetically. "Nope," she whispered, "just vanilla, chocolate and strawberry."

Funeral Weather

As with many funerals, it was a cloudy, rainy day. The deceased was a little old lady who had devoted her entire married life to fussing at her poor husband. When the graveside service had no more than terminated, there was a tremendous burst of thunder accompanied by a distant lightning bolt. The little old man looked at the pastor and calmly said, "Well, she's there."

Tree Trouble

Unexpected cold snaps had destroyed the buds on my father's young peach tree for two years in a

row. This spring, Dad was ready. He replanted the sapling in a large box, mounted it on wheels, and put the tree in the garage whenever the temperature dropped.

One warm April day, Dad was wheeling the tree out into the yard, and he stopped to give our dog a drink from the garden hose. A neighbour watched the scene with amusement. "Frank," he finally commented, "you're the only man I know who walks his tree and waters his dog!"

Driving Flash

A man was driving down the road. He passed a traffic camera and saw it flash. Astounded that he had been caught speeding when he was doing the speed limit, he turned around and, going even slower, he passed by the camera. Again he saw it flash. He could not believe it, so he turned and, going a snail's pace, he passed the camera. Again, he saw the camera flash. He guessed it must have a fault, and home he went. Four weeks later he received three traffic fines in the mail, all for not wearing a seatbelt.

Sermon Comment

After a very long and boring sermon the parishioners filed out of the church saying nothing to the preacher. Towards the end of the line was a thoughtful person who always commented on the sermons: "Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God." The pastor was thrilled. "Nobody has ever said anything like that about my preaching before. Tell me why.

"Because, it endured forever." □

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.

On December 5, I was shocked when my husband had a stroke, he could not walk. I was all upset and in such a state I prayed to Our Lady, the three Hail Marys, and to Don Bosco every day and within three days my husband's condition improved. The doctor asked me to do a liver test and I was afraid of the result but by Don Bosco's grace the liver test was normal. There was a blurred vision in his eyes and I prayed to Don Bosco to heal my husband completely. I am grateful to Our Lady and Don Bosco and I entrust my elder son too to his intercession.

Mrs. H. Barreto, Goa

Thank you Mother Mary for healing my husband from herpes through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys.

Ms. S. Pereira, Mumbai

My sincere gratitude to Jesus, the Perpetual Succour for helping my son clear his second level CFA exams last year and also for all the blessings granted to him. My sincere gratitude also for healing my daughter from a very bad and persistent cold and my little granddaughter from bronchitis through our devotion to the Three Hail Marys. Thank you Mother Mary and protect our family always.

A.J. Pacheco

Dear Mother Mary, Help of Christians, thank you for blessing our children, especially our younger son, our daughters-in-law and grandchildren with suitable and good employment. Please continue to bless my family and me. Thank you dear Mother, thank you.

Perth, Australia

We are sincerely grateful to Jesus and Mother Mary through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys we were granted so many favours.

T. M. Ghatkopar, Mumbai

Dear Mother Mary Help of Christians, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for these three favours granted to me: 1) A cure of my longstanding and persistent cough; 2) Continuous itching all along my back; 3) Cure of my left "trigger finger". *Mrs. Alphonsa O'Connor, Hubli* Through the recitation of the Three Hail Marys I received many favours: 1) My daughter delivered a baby boy safely and her pain subsided thereafter; 2) For curing my husband and me from Malaria; 3) For curing me of my vertigo problem; 4) For letting my Coronavirus test show negative for both my husband and me.

A Devotee

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Thank you Abba Father, Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Joseph and all the saints for blessing Cinusha and Ruben with the gift of a baby girl. We named her Zamayra,

Mrs. Theresa Soares

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary, Help of Christians for my child's success in past exams and for the recent exams. I am grateful for all the favours received.

Maria Joseph, Thane

My sincere thanks to the Divine Mercy and Mary Help of Christians for helping my son get his study visa to the UK in order to complete his studies. Thank you for the numerous favours received. Please keep us under your protection dear Mother.

E. Paes, Goa

My humble and heartfelt thanks to Abba Father, Jesus and Mother Mary for all the miracles in my life and blessings bestowed on me in order to complete my Master's Degree and Bachelor of Education degree by securing a distinction and a rank in the college despite hurdles and problems. I am infinitely grateful for the constant encouragement of my family too.

Venezia Paes, Goa

I thank you Jesus for all the help and protection given to my family during this difficult time of the year. Mother Mary was there with us all the time specially during the marriage of my son which went off very smoothly without any problems. Thank you Mother Mary for everything and do continue to intercede with your Son to shower his blessings on us and all the world.

I.A. Udipi

Thank you dear Mother Mary Help of Christians for all the favours granted and for success in my son's exams.

A Devotee

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

Thank you Jesus, Our Lady and Don Bosco for my quick recovery and helping me to get well without a surgery. Pray for me.

Alastair, Kerala

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Our Lady of Fatima, St. Gerard, St. Joseph Vaz and all the saints for safe deliveries of my daughter and blessing her with two healthy sons. Thank you for the favours received.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us.

Glenis, Goa

Thank you Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Joseph for the blessing of good health and the gift of eternal life the Kingdom of God. I also thank the good Lord and Our Blessed Mother for the numerous blessings and protection over our family.

Fernandes & Pereira Family

Thank you Mother Mary and all the Saints for the many favours received and for helping me find my gold and for curing my grandson Mikhail Santamayor from Asthma.

Filda Mazarello

Thanks to the Holy Trinity, Our Lady, St. Anthony, Don Bosco and St. Jude for all the favours received. Bless our family always and grant a complete recovery to our daughter Graciel.

Glenn D'Souza and Family, Mumbai

**THANKS TO DEAR
ST. DOMINIC SAVIO**



Belated thanks to Our Lord Jesus Christ, Mamma Mary, Dominic Savio and all the saints through whose intercession my daughter was blessed with the gift of a baby boy after seven years of her marriage. also my heartfelt thanks to Our Lord Jesus, Mamma Mary and all the saints for all the blessings on my family members, especially for the successful heart surgery of my husband. I plead for your blessings and prayers on the intention of receiving the payments due to my husband from his clients and for continued protection over all my family

members.

A devotee

Our sincere and grateful thanks to Mary Help of Christians, St. Dominic Savio and St. John Bosco for the gift of a baby boy to our son and daughter-in-law in London, after four years of their marriage. Please bless the child with good health and give him happiness throughout his life.

M. D'Souza, Mumbai

Our sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians and Dominic Savio for the safe delivery of our daughter's Marina Domenica Davis, a healthy baby girl on July 30, 2020. Our grateful thanks to Mary Help of Christians and Dominic Savio for all the favours received.

Joseph D'Silva, Mangalore

My sincere thanks to the Divine Mercy, Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for the safe delivery and the gift of a baby and healing with surgery of Sneha. Blessed Mother keep us always in your loving care.

Margaret Abraham

Thank you Infant Jesus, Mother Mary, and St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery of Minella and the gift of a normal and healthy baby boy whom they have named Zayne.

Mrs C. Pinto, UK

Thank you Infant Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio for a safe delivery of Candice and the gift of a normal healthy baby girl whom they named Isabel.

The Pintos, Canada

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OCTOBER 2021**

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MARY WAS THERE

I am from a small village near Mangalore and from the time I was very young my mother inculcated in me a great love for Our Lady. A few months ago, I saw a small tumour near my elbow and it started growing. I was so nervous and scared to see the doctor, imagining the worst. I started pleading with Mother Mary. The first doctor referred me to a specialist which further increased my nervousness. Finally I saw a specialist who diagnosed it as elbow bursitis and now it has healed. My sincere thanks to Mother Mary. She saved me from the worst. Every night before going to bed I recite the three Hail Marys and the Memorare.

B.G. Fernandes, Mumbai

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