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***“What St. Thomas Aquinas says, commenting on St. Basil remains the last word: That while she was at the foot of the Cross and remembered past glories - Gabriel’s message, the ineffable revelation of the divine conception, the great series of miracles - the Blessed Virgin felt her soul “fluctuate,” for, on the one hand she saw her Son in the depths of abjection, and on the other she remembered his triumphs.”***

Charles Journet - ‘The Swoon’

From The Editor's Desk

S...T...O...P

There are some days that I think about what makes a balanced lifestyle. I recall something important from the time when I learned how to drive. Whenever I came to a stop sign on the road, I put my foot on the brakes and repeated to myself S...T...O...P. In the same vein, this is what I need to do when I come to recognize stop signs in my life so that I can move forward with energy and vitality.

Requests for more work challenge my lifestyle. There was a time when I hardly waited for requests and I was off to conduct a workshop, a session to catechism teachers, an overnight retreat for young adults. I kept a rigorous schedule. People saw me at table one morning and off thereafter. They shook their heads and commented: “Where do you get your energy from?” But eventually, I found myself becoming fatigued – surely not a good sign. I came to a point where I felt like giving up everything.

Then I remembered what an elderly Jesuit under whom I made a retreat tell me something from his founder, St. Ignatius Loyola. He quoted to me the *Spiritual Exercises* and told me how the enemy of human nature prowls around a good person studying his strengths and most importantly identifying his weaknesses. *Then at the point where he finds us weakest and most in need, in regard to our eternal salvation, there he attacks and tries to take us’* # 327. My weakest point was a desire to please everybody. Little did I realise that I was burning the candle at both ends by simply saying ‘yes.’

Fortunately after speaking to him, he kindly prompted me to get some awareness over my situation. I stopped and I stepped back from saying ‘yes’ to the extra work. Maybe at a later date I could be more mindful of other requests.

I decided to find a healthy balance by concentrating first on things that have a direct effect on my health and well-being: sunshine, fresh air, sleep, movement, food and water and then on those things that have an indirect effect on my health and well-being: relationships, careers, finances, mindset, spirituality and purpose.

Sleeping well, going for runs and enjoying the seasonal fresh air brought me energy and vitality, while spending time with friends, getting a distance from my reactive thoughts and turning more to prayer centred my being. The two wheels are equally important to each other.

I am so fortunate to have some pretty senior friends, more experienced than I, who I turn to and whose advice often gives me fresh perspective. I am delighted that they are still around for a chat.

On the other hand every so often I find these college students on the road in front of us zooming past on their bikes or in cars, their speakers thumping...not bothering to stop... Truly, I feel sorry for them and it amuses me that *they* feel sorry for me! They don’t know what they’re missing by not taking time to S...T...O...P.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

## LOVE "BELIEVES ALL THINGS"

Gianpaolo Dianin

*It is love that doesn't make the other a crutch for one's weakness;  
it is love that is nourished by sincerity not presuming  
to possess the other*

**A** 'couple experience' involves two partners and two spouses touching the most profound aspects of their personalities. Each one's hidden resources come to light and are strengthened but even each one's limitations and weaknesses, which may be linked to their past, begin to emerge. In a love relationship nothing is hidden; sooner or later other areas of our lives which we might conceal or discreetly hide from others are revealed.

I am thinking of jealousy, for example, which is a normal feeling two people have when they perceive the exclusivity of their relationship. They want to be the centre of the other's life. But sometimes exaggerated jealousy becomes deleterious and harms the relationship. A misplaced jealousy is a sign of a person's emotional fragility; s/he does not believe in him/herself and thinks that the other is always cheating on him/her. Perhaps this is how a jealous person might think: "Since I'm worth so little, s/he will certainly look elsewhere for what I can't give." In such a relationship fears and suspicions arise and they could lead to episodes that slowly erode the couple's relationship.

*Love "believes all things,"*

writes Paul in his hymn to charity (1 Cor 13, 7) and Pope Francis comments on this statement in articles 114-115 of *Amoris Laetitia*. The belief which Paul speaks of is not faith in the theological sense, but trust which is the foundation of every couple-relationship.

What does a person who experiences love believe in? S/he believes that the other loves him/her sincerely; that s/he has chosen to share his/her life with me; s/he places me before all other relationships, even before his/her family of origin. S/he believes that the other is sincere and even if s/he does not say it out of delicacy or not to hurt the other.



This trust has nothing to do with the 'blindness' of love which is commonly spoken of; love is not blind; it sees very clearly; it is the fruit of years of being acquainted; of research; of a mutual knowledge. Love is blind in the beginning when it is still immersed in the strong and all-encompassing emotions of falling in love but then it comes down to reality and becomes aware of the truth that trust and esteem are the common foundation for the project of life that is being born.

Pope Francis explains Paul's statement with a few precise words that help us get a better experience of marital trust.

**The first word is freedom.** People often joke about the alleged end of freedom that affects those who get married. In reality, real love generates freedom. The couple doesn't necessarily have to do everything together; it is not even necessary that the interests of one coincide with the interests of the other. What makes the couple grow is that each person's life and experiences bring as gift, a richness to the relationship.

**Here's the second word: sharing.** "The spouses then share with one another the joy of all they have received and learned outside the family circle."

**The third word is autonomy.** We said that it is not necessary to do everything together, but if they share what each one is and does, it enriches the union. Autonomy is a very important word because it reminds us that in a couple each one remains his/her own person; each one walks on his/her own feet and maintains his/her own

identity.

It is true that the spousal bond asks each one to redefine himself/herself in the light of the life choice that has been made, but this does not mean that the couple is a combination of two halves that now generate a new reality. In the couple each of the two persons remains two individual people who make an alliance for life.

The "*believes all things*" of Paul generates a **fourth word which is sincerity**. Trust allows each one to open their hearts, while suspicion closes them, hides things for fear of triggering a dynamic of jealousy or tension. Sincerity and transparency does not mean that spouses share everything.

Each of the spouses remains unique and unrepeatable; sometimes it is not good to say everything when there is a risk of hurting the other. Sincerity says that between the two spouses there is a true and genuine relationship in which important issues can be explained or expanded and are not forgotten along the way. Sincerity does not get along with deception, falsehood or lies.

This is the love that "*believes all things!*"

It is a love where each is his/her own person and does not use the other as a crutch for his/her own weakness. It is a love that respects and promotes the freedom of the other who has his/her own space, but who brings back everything to the couple's bond. It is a love that is nourished on sincerity without presuming to own the other. □

## THE LITTLE GOLDFISH

Maria Chiara Bregolin

Love believes all things. The verb used in the translation of the Gospels in the ancient Greek is 'pisteuei'. I confide, I trust, I believe, I am confident. So, the love that St. Paul speaks of so far and which Pope Francis has described in family love is the divine way of loving that trusts the other; which does not possess or even control; but trusts.

In the relationship between spouses, this aspect is profoundly examined by Pope Francis and, in matrimonial dynamics expressed by Don Dianin on the preceding page. But can this relationship of trust which generates freedom also be applied to the creatures entrusted to us by God: our children?

You know? I often ask myself: Can you think it's 'fine' till proven otherwise? Can you trust in the good that our children have within them, a trust that they will make the right choices? Can I leave them the freedom to express themselves in ways and means unknown to us? These are big and weighty questions that arise from the terrible need that every parent has to know how to guard and protect and bring to fulfilment the miracle of the adults that they will become.

I would like to share with you a shocking and yet a liberating

experience in this regard. I will share with you a part of a letter that a father Gianpietro wrote to his son Emmanuel a few days after his death at the age of sixteen after a synthetic drug overdose. The letter is full of sweet and 'normal' everyday instances of a life of immense love and how that gave me courage to "believe everything" about my children.

"Emmanuel, my dear son" what can a father say to his own son who is no more?

I tried to break my head trying to figure out where I had gone wrong; because it is obvious that I missed something in you. So, I retraced our life together and I saw you when I picked you up for the first time after you were born. You were beautiful and already so full of life and energy.

[...] You had a great need for love and I think we gave it to you. Do you remember when I stretched you out on my chest you relaxed and finally went to sleep? Or when lying in bed I caressed your little face until your eyes finally closed?

How much I loved you, how much I would love you [...]

We always chatted a lot, you and I, even recently. You know that whenever you needed me, I

was there [...]

Obviously as you gradually grew up I gave you the freedom to spend time with your friends so our time together was gradually reduced. It was part of the growth process, but at times when we faced each other there was deep understanding [...]

I went to the point where it all started. They are trying to understand what may have triggered off those five minutes of madness in you. I really hope that even I can find an explanation. But is it possible that in that moment of madness you didn't remember the little goldfish?

You were six years old and one of the fish in the pond floated to the top half dead. I then convinced you after half an hour of explanation to take the goldfish to the river because it would probably revive. And we took it right next to the Caligula bar and to the exact spot where, on that Sunday, you threw it into the water. The little fish started swimming as if he had found new life, but then suddenly a duck swimming by plucked it up in its beak and happily wagging its tail ate it up. How you cried and how angry you got with me! I could not help laughing. But - I say - is it possible that at that

point, in that moment of madness, when you injected yourself, did that episode come to mind? For a moment did you think of your dad? [...]

Too bad, that with that extreme act you did not even give me a chance to help you.

Instead of getting angry with you I loved you even more. In your moment of apparent confidence you hid a great weakness. However it was right that I left you a 'little more free.' I couldn't control you like a policeman. In order to grow up in life we must all dare and make mistakes. It is only in this way that we become adults [...]

After they found you I started descending into a deep abyss. I think I came very close to insanity [...] I felt within me an extraordinary energy. I saw clearly before my eyes what I had to do.

To dedicate life to youngsters creating work opportunities for them; I will set up an association that will take care of starting new projects and ideas that youngsters can get involved in [...] Emmanuel, I will always love you. Letting you go saved me and you will save so many youngsters, I am sure."

Papà Gianpietro



*"I look upon life as a gift from God. I did nothing to earn it. Now that the time is coming to give it back, I have no right to complain."*

- Joyce Cary

## GOD-WITH-US

by Clotilde Prates De Azevedo

**I**n this final stage on our “steps towards a life choice,” let me tell you about a very special person whose presence in our lives would delight God immensely. This person would lead us to the realization of our dreams, the dream of our vocation; **he is the friend and the Lord of our lives.**

I fondly remember when I first had this personal experience of sensing God in this way. I was at a youth meeting, precisely at a conference whose theme was: “Who is Jesus of Nazareth?”

Thanks to this conference, I discovered and recognized the human face of Jesus: “Christ Jesus, though he was God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men.” (Phil. 2:6-7)

As I listened the human face of Jesus became perceptible within me from that experience. I could identify with his proposals, with his actions, with his promptings and I began to see anew the face of God and my neighbour. From then on, for me Jesus and the Father were no longer divine concepts, they began to have a face,

a smell, a body, a sound, a touch, a sense of proximity... They became persons to me in the truest sense of the term.

This experience opened in me a new path that led me to a greater intimacy with God and on a journey of discovering who I am. Yes, the true and profound encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Way that leads to a meeting of two hearts: the Father’s and mine (and yours!).

From that conference I understood that the God of Jesus is God-with-us because he shared our human condition and lived it better. He is a brother because I meet him in the face of the other, of every other person especially the poorest and the weakest. He is a friend because he accepts me as I am and assists me in discovering who I am with my gifts and talents and joys but also in recognizing, accepting and transforming my weaknesses, pains and losses... In short, friendship with Jesus penetrates my humanity. He is the Lord of my life (and of every life) because he shows me and teaches me the fundamental law

of life: the gift of self in love.

To experience God-With-Us as a brother, a friend and the Lord of life, is to walk the path that leads to the Incarnation, to self-emptying, to walking with others as brothers and sisters who live the dimension of service as a lifestyle.

Pope Leo the Great already said: “Jesus was so human that only God could be so human [...] Jesus came to show us that if we want to be divine we must first of all be deeply human!”

Pope Francis, from the beginning of his pontificate continues to repeat this truth: “We become fully human when we become

more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being” (EG 8).

Recognizing God as brother, friend and Lord of my life, was for me, in a nutshell, to experience an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ as the most personal and intimate reality and to recognize him in the geographical and existential peripheries of this world. “When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment. For, “here we discover the profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means” (EG 10).

It is an outgoing movement to communicate, to share the joy that fills us. Feeling and perceiving ourselves, the other, Mother Earth and the reality that challenges us at every moment, is one of the most fundamental conditions for feeling and experiencing God as brother, friend and Lord of our life. As Dom José Tolentino Mendonça says, it is necessary “to take (more seriously our humanity as a narrative of God who lives in this world,” but this does not mean “re-entering our intimate space and forgetting everything else. The challenge is to be present to oneself; it is in the arms of life and there to hear God’s heart

beating without escaping, without idealization” (*The mystique of the moment* pp. 13, 26).

Throwing ourselves into the arms of life in order to listen to the heartbeat of God helps us to discover and welcome the face of God in the many faces around us, first of all in the poor and the marginalized. And, in these faces and in the processes that evangelization establishes, experiencing, listening and cherishing the presence of God; listening to his invitations and discovering ourselves as being called and sent by him. In this outward movement we experience: going out means encountering, encountering means losing, losing means gaining, giving is receiving and serving is rejoicing. □

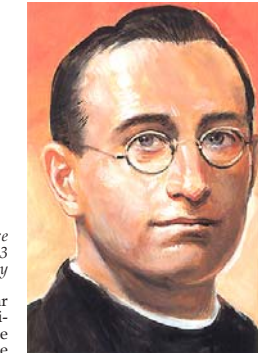


**SALESIAN  
SAINTS**

**ENRICO SAIZ  
APARICIO  
1889 - 1936  
AND 62  
COMPANIONS  
MARTYRS**

*As for their identity: 22 were priests, 18 coadjutors, 16 clerics, 3 aspirants, 3 cooperators and 1 lay collaborator*

During the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 many priests, religious and lay Christians were killed. 95 members of the Salesian Family were martyred in all. Fr. Enrico Saiz Aparicio was the head of the groups of Seville and Madrid. He was the rector of the Salesian Minor Seminary of Carabanchel Alto in the suburbs of Madrid. When the militia broke into the house he promptly said: "If you want blood, here I am but do not hurt the boys. The youngsters were released while Fr. Saiz and eight Salesians were captured and later killed. Shortly before he died he confided to a friend: "What better way to die than for the



glory of God?" He offered his life for the youngsters that Divine Providence had entrusted to him. His last breath was for them.

**Enrico Saiz Aparicio, priest**  
He was born in Ubierna (Burgos) on December 10, 1889 and was baptised the following day. At 16 he felt inclined to the religious and priestly state and was admitted to the novitiate at Barcelona-Sarrià and made his first profession on September 5, 1909. He was ordained a priest in Salamanca on July 28, 1918. The colleges of Campello, Barcelona and Salamanca were his fields of apostolate. He was rector in Salamanca and later at the theological college of Carabanchel Alto where he was surprised by the revolution. He distinguished himself for his piety and priestly zeal. He was a prudent, paternal and sympathetic superior which demand-



ing the fulfilment of one's duty by being the first to lead by example. With prolonged effort he came to develop great affability, a firm character and a spirit of mortification. Already in 1934 as the revolution seemed to draw ever nearer he prepared those entrusted to his care including himself for martyrdom.

On July 20, 1946 the house of Carabanchel Alto was attacked by the militia. Fr. Enrico offered to die for the others but his offer was not accepted. They were all imprisoned and later released. Fr. Enrico sought safe-havens for each of them and was constantly concerned about the fate of the others. On October 12, 1936 the militia realizing that he was a priest, imprisoned him and late that evening they shot him.

The list of martyrs of **MADRID: 9 priests:** Pio Conde, Salvatore Fernández, Andrea Gómez, Felice González, Sabina Hernández, Andrea Jiménez, Michele Lasaga, Germano Martín, Giuseppe Villanova; **14 clerics:** Pietro Artolozaga, Ermanuele Borrajo, Stefano Cobo, Pasquale de Castro, Francesco Edreira, Virgilio

Edreira, Vittoriano Fernández, Teodulo González, Giusto Juanes, Giovanni Larra, "gueta, Ermanuele Martín, Luigi Martínez, Carmelo Pérez, Florenzio Rodríguez; **14 coadjutors:** Emilio Arce, Giovanni M. Celara, Antonio Cid, Giovanni Codera, Nicola de la Torre, Raimondo Eirin, Matteo Garolera, Anastasio Garzón, Valen tino Gil, Paolo Gracia, Francesco Giuseppe Martín, Eliodoro Ramos, Dionisio Ullivarri, Stefano Vázquez; **3 aspirants:** Federico Coba, Igino de Mata, Tommaso Gil; **1 Lay Collaborator laico:** Giovanni de Mata. **SEVILLE: 12 priests:** Paolo Caballero, Enrico Canut, Antonio Fernández, Ermanuele Fernández, Emmanuele Gomez, Giuseppe Limón, Francesco Míguez, Antonio Mohedano, Michele Molina, Felice Paco, Antonio Pancorbo, Antonio Torrero; **1 sub-deacon:** Onorio Hernández; **1 cleric:** Giovanni Luigi Hernández; **4 coadjutors:** Tommaso Alonso Sanjuán, Giuseppe Blanco, Stefano García, Raffaele Rodriguez; **3 cooperators:** Bartolomea and late, Donna Teresa Cejudo, Antonio Rodríguez. □



*"What better way to die than for the glory of God?"*

*Fr. Enrico Saiz Aparicio 1889-1936*

# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## ST. NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINO (1245-1305) (SEPTEMBER 10)

### HE DID PENANCE AND RADIATED JOY

by Mario Scudu, *sdb*

**H**oliness, above all, is a gift of the Spirit who works in us so that we may be conformed to Christ. But on our part it is a daily commitment which requires our response that needs to be made in faith, in love and with patience. People live virtuously not just for a day or a month (often for themselves) but all the time; not just for good times, when everything is bright and sunny but in times of pain and hardship and they often do this to a heroic degree. There are heroes known to everyone and there are those who are unrecognized but those we know we can emulate.

On the evening of April 8, 2005 after the solemn funeral of Pope John Paul II, in St. Peter's Square, one of the anchors on a TV channel commenting on the crowd's chant: "santo subito" (Saint at once) rising several times from the crowd said: "the people evidently perceive a



trace of holiness that this pope left." That is an apt description not just for John Paul II but for all the saints within and outside the liturgical calendar.

These words of the anchor can also be aptly applied to St. Nicholas of Tolentino who died in 1305. Already while he was alive, but more especially after

his death 'the news of his sanctity spread beyond the walls of Tolentino, and beyond Italy and even to this day. In fact, just a few years after his death his cause for beatification and canonization already began and there were a good 371 witnesses who spoke about his sanctity and punctuated their testimonies with many instances of miracles and extraordinary occurrences wrought by God to alleviate human suffering even while Nicholas was alive and after his death through his intercession.

The Church officially declared him a saint (but for the people of God he was already a saint and they had already invoked his intercession for quite a long time) only on June 5, 1446 because of the political events through which the Church was going (read: the Avignon Schism in the West).

As proof of his sanctity St. Nicholas of Tolentino has, over the centuries had an impressive iconography. First of all there is a pictorial biography by the Rimini School in the Chapel of St. Nicholas in the convent in Tolentino. It was done a few years after his death and depicts episodes of his life as a person who imitated Christ so perfectly as embodied in the spirituality of the Augustinian order and also a man favoured by God with special talents and mystical experiences.

#### He Never Lost his Smile

Nicholas was born in Castel Sant'Angelo (today S. Angelo in Pontano in the province of

Macerata) in 1245. Although his parents had been married for several years they had no children. They were very pious and religious. In those years they became great devotees of St. Nicholas of Bari (as he was known in the Western world) thanks to the translation of his relics to Italy in the eleventh century.

Finally their vows and prayers were answered and they had their first child and named him Nicholas to honour the saint of Bari whom they had invoked.

From the time he was a child he expressed his desire to become a religious. In fact, he joined the Hermits of St. Augustine in his town. Here is a significant and beautiful detail. A witness at the process of canonization affirmed that Nicholas "Libenter ibad ad ecclesiam...et ad scholas ac esset magnus" which means "He would go willingly to church and to school as if he were an adult." That reveals that he was a youngster who had been well brought up.

He began his novitiate at the age of 15 and after completing his studies he was ordained a priest in 1269 at Cingoli by Benvenuto the bishop of Osimo.

Thereafter, Father Nicholas began his ministry of preaching in the various towns of the Marches. He was an effective and convincing preacher; his words were sustained by a great life of prayer and an uncommon ascetical commitment demonstrated relentlessly enduring long and demanding journeys,

when commonsense suggested the contrary. It was said that some mitigation was permitted at least when you were far away from home (the convent) but since Father Nicholas (as he said) felt at home wherever he went, he did not give up any of his prayers and penances.

His language was so simple that the people understood everything they heard, were fascinated and converted. Even those who thought his sermons were just the usual stuff of an austere ascetic with a sad and crestfallen face changed their opinion when they saw Father Nicholas. Between ferocious penance (hours of prayer and then living on bread and water), he was able to smile at everyone and even infuse a holy joy in all those who approached him to hear his preaching or who went to him for confession. This was real holiness.

#### **Intercessor for the souls in purgatory**

One night he was in an Augustinian convent near Pesaro and while he slept he had a dream in which he heard a voice calling out to him pleading: "Brother Nicholas, man of God, look at me. I am Friar Pellegrino da Osimo whom you met in person. I am tormented in these flames. Having accepted my contrition, God has consigned me to these flames. Through his mercy he has not condemned me to eternal punishment. So I humbly beg you to celebrate a Mass for the dead to free me from these flames." Nicholas replied: "To help you

dear Brother, my Saviour has shed his blood for you. But I have been appointed to celebrate the Community Mass, more especially tomorrow since it is a Sunday. The liturgical rubrics must be respected; I cannot celebrate the Mass for the dead." And Brother Pellegrino replied: "Come now, venerable father, come and consider if it seems convenient to reject the appeal of so many poor people who sent me." And he showed him the plain around Pesaro full of people. Then he added: "Have mercy, Father, for such a miserable multitude awaits your help. In fact, if you can celebrate this Mass for us, most of us will be freed from these atrocious torments." Nicholas awoke and began to pray and then he asked permission from the prior to celebrate Mass for the souls in Purgatory. This episode inspired the pious practice of St. Nicholas' Septenary, which are seven masses and special prayers in suffrage for souls. This also explains the fact why he is invoked as the protector of the souls in Purgatory as well as women in maternity.

#### **"Sweet words and always at prayer"**

In 1274 while he was in Recanati he learned of the violent death of his brother Gentile. Shocked by the news he began to pray for his soul but he still remained troubled and disturbed because he did not know his final destiny. After fifteen days of prayer he heard a voice saying: "My brother, I give thanks to my God and the Lord Jesus Christ because, having regard for your

prayers and cries, in his mercy, while I could have been condemned he sought to save me." A year after this episode he went to the convent of Tolentino where he remained until his death. From this convent he continued his ministry of preaching, hearing confessions not only in the convent but also outside: visiting the sick, helping the poor, and becoming a peace-broker among the warring factions of the city. He was well accepted by everyone and many people sought to go to him for confession and as a spiritual guide. When death came to him he was well prepared: it was September 10, 1305.

Meanwhile, his fame as a worker of miracles and of being a saint spread rapidly. But in what do we see the holiness of Father Nicholas? The answer comes very simply from the testimonies of those who knew him. Some claimed that Father Nicholas: "orabat semper" - always prayed, day and night and without getting tired.

He was also a humble person, merciful, hospitable and discreet with everyone. He was someone who only uttered "verba dulcia," that is, sweet words of encouragement and exhortation to everyone.

Another detail: a witness stated that Father Nicholas was a man of "boni sensus," that is,

of common sense; a saint yes, but with his feet planted firmly on the ground and a good sense of equilibrium. We don't have saints who are pathologically unbalanced. He was certainly a man of penance, who strictly observed the rules of his religious order possessing a great devotion to Christ crucified and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

He also prayed very much for all the souls of the faithful departed (the souls in Purgatory). And what of all those corporal penances that we moderns consider superficial and are tempted to brand as unconscious expressions of some form of masochism or a pathological nature? How do we judge him?

Even a witness, who knew him well, had the same doubt and wanted to ascertain the authenticity of those out-of-the-ordinary "practices." Finally convinced, he declared that the saint was inclined not only to overcome his own egoism (that is the 'flesh' in a broad sense) but above all because "integraliter conserve Domino nostro Iesu Christo," - that is - he could assimilate the mind of Jesus Christ our Lord the humble servant."

Here was the source of the sanctity of Nicholas and the absolute centre of his life: the love of Christ that went out in continuous service to all. □

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*The heavens are not pure in the sight of Him whom I serve,  
how then shall I, a sinful man, stand before Him?*

*St. Nicholas of Tolentino*



## UNFAILING FAITH IS GOD'S DESIRE

Ian Pinto sdb

*“Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, and a crippled woman was there. An evil spirit had kept her bent for eighteen years, so that she could not straighten up at all” (Lk 13:10-11).*

**D**isease is a part of life. It's one of the inherent evils plaguing our world. All of us have contracted some or the other disease at some point in our lives. We know what it's like to be ill. The word itself indicates what its nature is about: *dis-ease*. It takes away our ease and causes discomfort. For some, the discomfort is milder as compared to others but that's not the point: We all suffer.

Think of the poor woman of the Gospel. For 18 years she has been bent over, unable to stand erect. Her discomfort has definitely been great. She is terribly dis-eased. I suppose all of us have experienced back pain, so we will know what it is like to have an injured back. Every minute of pain is terrible. Such is the nature of the pain that we are prevented from doing anything else. The woman went around probably with such pain for years! Finally, her whole pos-

ture itself was altered.

When you think of a disease that lasts for a few days or weeks, you realize that it is doesn't appear as bad as one that lasts for years! Whatever she was in the past, her disease changed completely. Her beauty, youthfulness, physical capacities and so on were all severely affected by her illness. Diseases begin with making exterior or physical changes like causing high fevers, boils, restricting movements, pain etc. and slowly proceed to cause interior, both spiritual and mental changes like feeling helpless, hopeless, abandoned by God, doubt, etc.

In the case of the woman, we clearly see that her exterior structure was completely altered by the disease: “she could not straighten up at all” (v.11) and was bent over as if a heavy load was placed on her back. Although we aren't told about her interior condition, it's

safe to say that she probably did feel helpless and hopeless, since no doctor or medicine could help alleviate her suffering. But the striking character of her personality is that she never lost her faith and hope in God even after all those years of suffering. When she could have so easily turned away from God since He wasn't answering her prayers, we find her still clinging to faith. That is the highlight of this incident. She was at the Synagogue when Jesus encountered her! The last place I would expect to find a suffering person would be in a house of prayer. She wasn't standing in queue outside the doctor's clinic; she wasn't lying on her bed, bemoaning her fate; she wasn't sitting by the roadside, begging; she was there, where the faithful gathered to hear the word of God and pray. If not for anything else, she deserved to be healed at least for her persistent faith!

I've heard of numerous cases of people today, giving up on God at the slightest challenge of sickness or failure. This is probably because they see God merely as a business client who offers rewards for services offered. The typical remarks are: 'How could God do this to so and so, s/he is faithful for daily mass, Friday adoration, novenas and activities of the Church.' This is a faulty way of thinking. It is typical of primitive religion where God was conceived of as a Cosmic Power that had to be pleased if one is to enjoy His favour. All negativity like sickness, failure and pain were the result of God's displeasure.

God, in Jesus, revealed an altogether different idea about His

divinity and nature. God is not a client with whom one performs business transactions. Jesus showed us the loving, merciful and parent-like face of God. God is not some Cosmic, Transcendental Entity who requires human action or sacrifice to satisfy His thirst. He is the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep leaving the 99 on the hillside (Mt 18:12-14). He is the God who takes the first step toward humankind (Gen 3:8-9). He is the God who gave His only begotten Son to redeem us from our sins (Jn 3:16). He is the God who heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds (Ps 147:3); the One who lifts up the lowly and all those who are bowed down (Ps 145:14); the One who cares about the widow, orphan and stranger (Deut 10:18); the One who carries us like lambs in his arms and keeps us close to His bosom (Is 40:11); the One who loves us with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3) and whose mercies never end (Lam 3:22).

*“On seeing her, Jesus called her and said, ‘Woman, you are freed from your infirmity’” (v.12).* The woman never even asked Jesus to heal her. She just came to listen to God's word and praise Him. It was Jesus who noticed her ailing and extended his healing. This is the nature of our God. We needn't even ask Him for He knows all that we need and is ready to grant it to us (Mt 6:8). All He asks of us is faith: faith in Him and in His plan for us. The woman trusted in God totally and her faith was rewarded. Are we ready to do the same or do we still want to rely on our own resources (Ps 118:8)?



# Quiet Spaces

## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Morning meditation by His Holiness Pope Francis  
in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, September 4, 2018

Every evening, make an “examination of conscience,” like a prayer, to determine if it was “the Spirit of God or the spirit of the world” that prompted us throughout the day. This is a decisive action in our “spiritual battle” which leads us to “understand His heart” and the meaning of Christ. This is the suggestion that Pope Francis made during Mass at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 4 September, 2018, recalling that a person’s heart is like a “battlefield” where, throughout the day, “the Spirit of God, which leads us to good works, to charity, to fraternity” encounters “the spirit of the world, which leads us to vanity, pride, sufficiency, gossip”.

In the first reading, referring to the passage from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (2:10-16), the Pope pointed out that “the Apostle Paul teaches the Corinthians the way to think like Christ, Christ’s sentiments” and to have the attitude that Christ had. It is the path that allows the Holy Spirit to work in us. Indeed, Saint Paul reminds us that we all received the Spirit of God.

Pope Francis explained that it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to carry on in life, that brings us to know Jesus, to have the same sentiments as Jesus. He reiterated that we can study a great deal, study the Bible, study history, study theology, but these are not the paths that lead us to have the same sentiments as Jesus. They certainly help, but the true way is to let oneself be drawn forward by the Spirit, by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that leads us to the heart of Jesus, to understand who Jesus is, how Jesus acts, what Jesus wants, what Jesus’ will is - to understand the heart of Jesus.

The question is, how can we get there? Saint Paul affirms that the “unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God” and therefore, as Pope Francis explained, we need the Holy Spirit for this journey, this Christian walk. Similarly, the Apostle Paul explains, “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God.”

Essentially, reiterated the Pope, “There are two spirits, two ways of thinking, of feeling, of acting: that which leads me to the Spirit of God, and that which leads me to the spirit of the world.” And “this happens in our life: We all have these two ‘spirits,’ we might say.” There is the “Spirit of God, which leads us to good works, to charity, to fraternity, to adore God, to know Jesus, to do many good works of charity, to pray,” but there is also “the other spirit, of the world, which leads us to vanity, pride, sufficiency, gossip - a completely different path.”

“Our heart, a saint once said, is like a ‘battlefield, a field of war where these two spirits struggle’ and he called this a ‘spiritual battle,’” the Pope explained. “In the Christian life, one must fight to find space for

the Spirit of God, and to cast away - like Jesus expelled the demon - the spirit of the world,” he added, referring to the day’s Gospel passage (4:31-37).

Reflecting further on this, the Pope suggested “a beautiful prayer that each of us can recite every day, before going to bed, looking back on the day” and asking ourselves “which spirit did I follow today? The spirit of God or the spirit of the world?” He pointed out that this is what is meant by an examination of conscience: “feeling within our hearts what took place in this interior battle, and asking how I defended myself against the spirit of the world that leads to vanity, ugliness, vice, to pride.” In other words, “how did I defend myself from real temptations.” We must identify the temptations, Pope Francis stressed, and “this is to be done as a prayer, before going to bed, today, asking ourselves what kinds of feelings we had, identifying which spirit prompted us to which sentiments: the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God?”

By making an examination of conscience with this evening prayer, the Holy Father continued, “if we are honest, we will often find that ‘today I was envious, I was greedy.’” This is “the spirit of the world.” Identifying these feelings is important because “we all face this interior battle, but if we do not understand how these two spirits work, how they act, we will be unable to move forward with the Spirit of God which helps us to understand Christ’s thoughts, the meaning of Christ.”

“It is very simple” said the Pope, “we have this great gift, which is the Spirit of God, but we are weak, we are sinners, and we also have the temptation of the spirit of the world.” And “in this spiritual battle, in this war of the spirit, we must be victors like Jesus, but we must know the path to take.” This is why, he continued “an examination of conscience is so useful, to look back on the day in the evening and say, ‘Yes, I was tempted in this way today, I was victorious here, the Holy Spirit inspired me.’ Essentially, it is about “knowing what is going on in the heart.”

The Pope then cautioned, “If we do not do this, if we do not know what happens in our heart - and I don’t say this, the Bible does - we are like ‘animals that understand nothing,’ that move along through instinct.” But “we are not animals, we are children of God, baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” “This is why it is important to understand what happened in my heart today. May the Lord teach us to make an examination of conscience every day. ☐”

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## THE WAIT

Pierluigi Menato - translated by Fr. Ian Doulton

Every evening as it grew dark, she sat in her little room and dreamed of those days when she was twenty and resolved she would never ever grow old. Looking around she picked up a photograph that was mounted and stood on her nightstand. She looked so composed - even then, she dressed in black, her pale face stood out like a bright star in the haze of a moonless night. Her hair was dark, almost black and her lips seemed to look like a rose in bloom. Walking down the street, heads turned as she passed by and she grew self-conscious. Her face felt hot with the attention she drew and she felt the blood rush to her otherwise pale cheeks. She would lower her gaze like the flash of a falling star.

She was attending Accounting classes and she took the same route every morning and returned the same way every afternoon. Sitting in the dark, she could still picture the shady park she walked through. In December it was the whiffs of Clianthus



September 2019

perfume and in March it was the subtle scent of Violets. Then, when May came around it would be the dreamy scent of lilies that caused her to feel drowsy. Shut up in the accounts classroom she could re-sense those perfumes and suddenly if the professor called out her name she jumped up as if caught unawares and her heart would pound in her chest, ready to jump out.

She wasn't very close to her mother who seemed distant and cold now more than ever, since her father had died. She would have liked have had them both around: her father and Albert, her brother, eight years older than her, all the time. Such thoughts cheered her up and she could hold up her head and occasionally smile.

When Albert was around her mother seemed to be a different person but when Francesca came home for lunch earlier than her brother she had to listen to her mother recounting all the woes once more causing the young girl such distress and sadness.

"Why does she say all these things?" she thought, "As if I can fix them?"

"I'm so exhausted," her mother regularly complained, "I should be resting, instead..."

Francesca had heard all this before. She would go on: "I have to slog all day only so that my daughter can go on studying."

She was an only daughter, and Albert had finished his three years, then it would be two and then a year after which he would gradu-

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Don Bosco's Madonna

ate. He finally made it and even secured a scholarship after which he was able to give private tuitions which brought home some money. He wanted his mother to get some help at home but she hoped that Francesca would stop going to her classes and stay home to help her with some chores. A house-help worked so little and cost so much.

But Albert went on: "You never know, mamma, it might be better if Francesca finishes her diploma." By now he was on the eve of his graduation. In fact, he passed with flying colours and in the process he got himself a position in a little town nearby.

Now, it was to be Francesca's turn. She managed to graduate as an accountant and now it was time for her to look for a job but her mother became all sentimental: "How can she go it alone in the world; she's so young!"

Nevertheless Francesca did find some accounting jobs here and there which seemed to ease the expenses at home, adding to what Albert sent home.

Her mother kept saying: "Albert always loves me I know. He won't forget me."

As for Francesca, she not only gave her mother all she earned from the few jobs she undertook, she but she gave her mother all her time from early morning to late in the evening. Her mother was particular that she should finish as much as she could while it was light, "electricity was expensive," she kept saying.

But Francesca was always up before dawn and she would make the coffee and give her mother her medicine and from then on she only lived for her



mother till seven in the evening.

The only time she left the house was to go to the market. That was her hour of freedom and she drank deeply of the breeze that caressed her face; her eyes lit up bringing that contagious smile to her rosy lips. She always dressed in black and her bearing was ever so gentle and elegant.

In spring, she walked about enjoying the weather; her soul opened like a flower to the sun. In April when she had turned twenty, everything around her seemed to sing of love. She didn't notice him, but he came into her life as if like a breath and - as it were - took charge of her very soul.

For Francesca love had a name, Karl: he had bright eyes and a candid smile like the sea at dawn. From then on they met every morning along the road that the bright spring sunshine had dressed up with brilliant hues and Francesca ran up as if buoyed up the sheer joy of life.

But whenever she returned home she felt so much her old self once more. She had to leave the most beautiful part of her life outside, almost rejected out of

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Don Bosco's Madonna

necessity.

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This love would not last. It was nearing summer and soon Albert would come home and Francesca would talk to him. Karl had very serious intentions: he wanted to introduce himself to her mother but Francesca feared her mother would reject him.



Albert came home and asked about the young man and he received excellent reports: Karl was about to graduate in Engineering and would immediately be absorbed by the company of a wealthy industrialist nearby. Character: excellent.

Albert spoke of Karl to his mother who moaned and complained that she would be all alone if Francesca moved out. She added; wasn't she entitled to some affection from her children for whom she had done so much? She was now old and didn't expect much from life, at the same time she did not want Francesca to refuse this proposal; couldn't she wait a year or two, or three...while the young man could secure a more respectable position till then her daughter could stay and keep her company, didn't she have her whole life

ahead of her?

Francesca clearly knew what would happen: she would inevitably become a victim of her mother's morbid moaning and would never be free again.

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And that was exactly what happened.

Karl graduated and gradually moved on; but their souls remained ever close to each other. The thought of Karl filled her thoughts. As for Karl, he saw her dark eyes in which the light of love had earlier glistened but now bespoke deep sadness. Her voice which had earlier sounded like music now sounded soft and grief-stricken. She seemed rather guarded and rather distant when speaking only to him. Through all this her heart was filled with that love that almost soured into a painful spasm...

"We will wait," they said to each other, "but from a distance."

"It's you or no one else," he promised her.

She shook her head a little and her eyes, moving from side to side, filled with tears till they fixed themselves on Karl.

He had written to Francesca and she kept all his letters, rereading them every time she was alone and her heart ached for him.

"My dear star..." he wrote again, always seeing her as she looked on those distant April mornings.

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Months passed and then the years and they hadn't seen each other again. Both of them were afraid that should they see each other once more the pain of the parting would be unbearable.

Albert had come to see his

mother and sister every so often, but each time he came she was out. Then he married. His mother apparently resigned to this state of affairs, only grumbled to Francesca: "Poor mothers, if they only knew this earlier..."

Then Albert's visits became more infrequent; till recently he dropped by for just a few days in summer yet their mother was so convinced it was her right to see him that she even imagined him coming to visit.

"No mail, Francesca?"

"Nothing, mother" she would reply despondently.

For Francesca there was almost nothing to look forward to and yet she waited; they waited. Francesca waited for the young man with bright eyes and a smile like the sea at dawn and Karl waited for the girl with a fair face in the prime of youth with lips like a rose in bloom. But as each day passed little wrinkles began to appear at the corners of her eyes and around her temples and the lustre of her hair faded as did the light in her eyes.

Then, when her mother died Francesca felt less a sense of grief than a painful sense of bewilderment. Her mother's last words were: "Well, you've done your duty to your mother." Then it suddenly dawned on her that her duty had been like a bitter cup of hemlock."

Finally Karl returned just as they had promised each other. His mother too had died. But, seeing each other again seemed awkward to them; a very strange feeling surfaced in the souls that had waited so long. There were a few wrinkles it was true but their faces

were the same. It was like that April spring morning when they had first met. They accepted that they had promised to wait for the other.

Sitting side by side, neither of them could find the right words that could hide their pain or relieve their disillusionment. Those long years of separation passed before their minds' eyes: month by month, day by day, their entire youth...almost an eternity. But Francesca held on only to the memory of Karl: the certainty of his love for her, the sweet communion with his spirit that was the fuel that helped her fulfill all her daily chores. It was only when she was alone, perhaps, her soul must have rebelled. And Karl felt that each of those days of fruitful work and harsh struggles always held a ray of sweet hope that came from the thought of this sweet creature that worked and struggled growing increasingly weaker but with ever more courageous hope.

Now Karl's eyes that met Francesca's were filled with heart-felt tears of uncertain nervousness. A surge of tenderness rose in his heart but he found no voice to express his sentiments. Only silence seemed to hold what passed through their souls as their hands gripped each other's and their mouths could utter the same word: "Thank you!"

It was spring once more when such tenderness and fervent gratitude blossomed from their new-found union. They could now look forward once more to live together and confidently move toward an autumn of serene sweetness. □

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 7

Michele Molineris

### 23. Why do you disregard your arms so much? (1842)

It so happened that a family, the Vernianos, through their son, Emil, became acquainted with Don Bosco. The father, the son, or the daughters, accompanied by their mother, would call on him on Thursdays (Thursdays were visiting days) at the Convitto. There were eight children in the family, and all were very eager to see Don Bosco. He, however, was rather uneasy on account of the girls' somewhat scanty dress. Two of the girls, barely ten and twelve respectively, could be excused, but not so their elder sisters who were past eighteen. Since they were simply following the fashion of the day, and neither they nor their parents saw anything wrong in it, Don Bosco chose to wait for the right moment, rather than give advice that might savour of reproach. One day the whole family came to visit him. As he spoke, one of the smaller girls stood before him, mouth open, listening.

Suddenly Don Bosco turned to her and said, "I'd like to ask you something." "Oh, please do," she replied joyfully. "Tell me, don't you care for your arms?" "Of course I do," answered the little girl. "I'm afraid you don't." "Quite the contrary," interjected the mother. "If only you knew how often I have to scold her for being so vain. She is forever washing them, and she perfumes them besides." "And yet," Don

Bosco continued, addressing the little girl, "I still say that you don't care for them." "But why? How could that be?" "I hope and pray that when you die you'll go to heaven. But I'm sure these arms of yours will be cast into the fire to burn. This is what I mean when I tell you that you don't care for them." "But I've done nothing wrong. I don't want to go to hell!" "Well, it might not be that bad, but it will be purgatory, to say the least, and who knows for how long!" "Oh, then that's for me, too," one of the older girls exclaimed, blushing; "my neck is all uncovered!"

"Well, the flames will leap up and encircle it."  
"I get the point," the mother said. "It's my duty to correct all this. Thank you, Father, for your warning." (*EBM II, 75-76*)

### 24. The Madonna's Pills (1844)

As a young seminarian he availed himself of a stratagem to assist the sick through the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He dispensed small pills made of bread crumbs, or a dose of sugar and maize flower in small envelopes, on condition that the recipients would receive the sacraments and recite a given number of times the Hail Mary, the Hail Holy Queen and other prayers to Our Lady. Sometimes the pills and the accompanying prayers were prescribed for three successive days, sometimes for nine. Even those who were seriously ill recovered. The news spread from village to village and people flocked to this new doctor, whose reputation increased as more and more of his patients recovered. Even in those early days Don Bosco re-

alized the great power of prayer to Our lady. Perhaps the Blessed Virgin Mary had granted him the gift of healing, which he concealed behind the artifice of pills and powders to avoid becoming an object of admiration. He continued to avail himself of this means even as a priest while he was at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, and decided to cease its practice only as a result of a truly regular occurrence.

In 1844, at Montafia, Mr. [Joseph] Turco was stricken, with fever, and no doctor's prescription could cure him. The family appealed to Don Bosco. He first recommended confession and Holy Communion and then gave the sick man a supply of pills, to be taken each day after reciting three Hail Marys, Hail Holy Queens. To everyone's astonishment, the patient was completely cured after taking the first dose. The local pharmacist hastened to Turin. He presented himself to Don Bosco and said, "I have great respect for your talent and the new medicine you have discovered. It has proven to be a powerful remedy against fever. I beg you to let me buy a quantity of these pills, or else give me the formula so that the good people of Montafia won't have to come to Turin whenever the need for them arises.

Don Bosco was somewhat embarrassed and could find no other way out but to say, "I have used up my supply; I don't have any more."

The pharmacist returned to Montafia and, eager to discover the ingredients of the pills, he obtained a few which some family still had and subjected them to a

careful analysis. "There is nothing but bread in them!" he cried. "Yet the cures are incontestable."

He then went to see another pharmacist, a friend of his, and together they analyzed the pills. Again the findings were the same. "It's bread; no doubt about it." The word spread throughout the village. When Mr. Turco went to Turin personally to thank Don Bosco for his recovery, he told him about the strange rumour of the bread pills and begged him to reveal the secret of the medication. "Did you say the three Hail Holy Queens with great faith?" Don Bosco inquired.

"Oh, certainly," the man answered. "Then let that suffice," Don Bosco concluded. Since his clever stratagem had been discovered, he dropped that method of healing, and relied only on the efficacy of his blessing [of Mary Help of Christians].

Father John Garino told us the following incident:

"In 1862 I was being daily consumed by a relentless fever so that I could no longer attend to my philosophy studies. When Don Bosco found out, he gave me pills in a little box, telling me to take three every morning and to say three Hail Marys per pill. I complied; the fever soon disappeared completely. I must add that to this day (May 6, 1888) I have never again run a temperature." (*EBM VII, 99*)

### 25. Pray the Guardian Angel (1844)

On August 31, 1844 the wife of the ambassador of Portugal had to go to Turin to conduct some business. This journey was tan-

tamount to exposing themselves to brigands who infested the edges of the wooded roads and even more the uncertainties caused by the unevenness of the road and the bizarre temperament of the horses used on stage-coaches.

The mountain road linking Chieri to Turin, approved in 1791 and completed in 1823 was not as impractical as the direct new route, but it did not receive the maintenance supports that were apportioned for it by the concerned municipalities. Therefore it was not surprising that before leaving, people updated their wills and she decided to put the affairs of her soul in order.

With this in mind she went to the church of St. Francis of Assisi hoping to find her regular confessor to confess to him. But not finding him she resigned herself to confess to a young priest with an innocent face who with an angelic aspect was praying near a confessional. That priest was Don Bosco, but she did not know it, much less did Don Bosco, who only a few years earlier had come out of the seminary and was still a pupil at the Ecclesiastical College adjoining the church of St. Francis, and knew the distinguished lady.

Having heard her confession, Don Bosco enjoined her to give particular charity, detailing the circumstances as well. The lady, bearing in mind the journey she was about to undertake and that she would temporarily be unable to do as he had directed, she politely replied:

'Father, I can't do it.'  
'Why not? How can you say that, wealthy as you are?'

The lady was greatly surprised



The bell tower of the church of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin. The building on the right, with the arched windows is of the Ecclesiastical College which Don Bosco entered after his ordination.

at Don Bosco's knowledge of her social position, since she was sure that under no circumstances had they met before. She replied, 'Father I cannot fulfil this penance for I have to take a trip today.'

'Well, then, do this instead: say three times the *Angele Dei* asking your Guardian Angel to protect you from all danger, so that you may not be frightened by what will befall you.'

Yet more deeply impressed by these words, the lady willingly performed the penance and on her way home recited the prayer together with her servants, invoking her Guardian Angel's protection for a safe journey. Then, in the company of her daughter and maid, she got into her carriage.

After some distance, as the horses swiftly galloped, they suddenly took fright and shot ahead, out of control. In vain the coachman tugged at the reins: the horses did not feel the bit. The women screamed. A carriage door swung open, the wheels struck a heap of gravel, and the carriage tipped over. The passengers were all thrown to one side and the open door was smashed. The coachman was hurled from his box and the women were in serious danger of being crushed. The lady felt her head and hands scraping the ground as the horses galloped on. It was all over in a matter of seconds. Placing all her trust in her Guardian Angel, she shouted as loud as she could: *Angele Dei, qui custos es mei!* [O my Good Angel...]. This was enough to save them. Suddenly the excited horses calmed down and stopped short.

The coachman picked himself up, unharmed to see his passengers, while people came running to help. The lady and her daughter found themselves outside the carriage, but remained calm and without a sign of fear. After straightening out their clothing as best they could, they stared at each other in astonishment noticing that neither had suffered the least hurt. Together they exclaimed, "God and our Guardian Angels saved us from harm!" The lady and her companions were able to continue on their way in another coach. In the meantime, the coachman stood the carriage upright and proceeded on foot for several hours to his house at Chieri.

Informed that it was Don Bosco, she went to him to express her gratitude for his salutary advice.

Thenceforth she became one of his admirers and thereafter sang his praises to all. She became a zealous benefactress of the festive oratory.

All the details of the incident just narrated were obtained in writing from this very same good lady, from her maid Mrs. Teresa Martano of Chieri, and from Father Michael Rua. (*EBM II*, 133,135)

## 26. A Providential Thunder (1845)

When the oratory of St. Francis de Sales in the Pinardi shed was no longer sufficient for the youngsters who flocked there, Don Bosco had to consider opening another place. He looked here and there for a convenient place and in the end he spotted one. He went to ask about the rent from the owner, Mrs. Vaglianti. She demanded too much and remained obstinate and unyielding to the reasons and pleas of the poor priest, whose purse could not afford what she asked for.

All of a sudden during the negotiations, the sky clouded over and a loud clap of thunder shook the entire house and a flash of lightning struck right beside the two interlocutors. Gripped with fear, the lady immediately changed her tone: "God save me from this lightning! I will give you the house for the sum you ask."

"Thank you," replied Don Bosco, "and I pray that the Lord bless you, now and always."

The thunder ceased and the sky brightened almost immediately. The good lady had no difficulty any longer to accept the price that poor Don Bosco offered (*D'Espiney*, Don Bosco, 131). □



## 2 - A LOVING AND SILENT "I'M HERE"

by don Giorgio Chatrian

This was Mary's 'yes' to the call she received: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word." (Lk 1,38).

*Many of us faced with an SOS call or an emergency don't know the words: "I'm here!" We find ourselves focused on our own wills while others offer themselves in service. Even God who is summoned on to the scene as life-saver, or*

*spare-wheel seems to have no place in life.*

*Mary, loved by God, lives as his daughter and trusts him. For her doing his will doesn't mean becoming his servant, selling her freedom, only enhancing it.*

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord: let it be done to me as you have said..." Did I really say that to the angel?

Of course I did. And those



words came out spontaneously from the depths of my being. I must confess in all simplicity, dear Father that it was not a brainwave or a spontaneous "yes," as if to reciprocate the tremendous goodness and love you've always had for me. From the time my mother Anna picked me up when she heard me sobbing in a thunder storm (that was my first memory) until I met the angel I've been touched by your hands day after day by your presence, O God. You've always been beside me; something to calm my days and to soothe me when storms break out.

As the gift of life blossomed in me and I began to flower, I also began to feel tired and impatient. There was uncertainty and misunderstanding too, but my confidence in you grew day after day. Why then would I have said 'no'? Father, you've always walked beside me holding my hand, so why would I tear myself away from you when you asked me to take a path which (I must confess) scared me? But then, you would only lead me somewhere beautiful and so it was.

I'm here and I've never regretted following you. I gave you my consent, in short, I'm your servant. I know that some will be surprised by my attitude: Isn't serving a kind of humiliation? Submitting to a master and accepting his wishes and even his whims without a word?

You, O God, you're not a master: you're my father who loves me madly. And I, I continue to throw myself into your arms and then I did everything you

asked of me because I knew it was for my good. Day after day you helped me realize the plan of my life which made me happy and brought me such peace even along the way.

Speaking of servants, I realized I was in good company. Moses and David were called servants over and over again. It was because they obeyed you and put themselves totally at your disposal. The priests, and especially the prophets were also your servants, some were docile others less so. Jeremiah comes to mind with all his lamentations and Jonah who escaped even before you called him and then seated under a castor oil tree he sulked because you were moved by the repentance of the Ninevites. Even Israel, the tribe of my fathers, is sometimes faithful and at other times tempted away by other gods but you always loved him very much. But more than ever, abandoning myself into your arms O Father, I felt more united to Jesus your Son and mine. He assumed the status of a servant and throughout his life he only served you and everyone else. In his flesh, he felt abuse, misunderstanding and rejection up to the very height of Calvary where he was taken like a lamb to be slaughtered. Isaiah said it well: the Suffering Servant.

But you always supported him and glorified him in the resurrection! O God, when I joined him in doing your will I felt that once again, I was giving him life even more intensely and presenting him to the world as the teacher of true love in service not power.

So many men and women, young and old who put themselves out in service of others, like looking after a sick relative or an acquaintance in trouble. How many had lost everything in a devastating earthquake or a colleague at work, for instance, living a small unplanned life despite the ordeals he does not know what to do or whether to surrender himself to death.

Support everyone, O Father: those who have chosen to serve those who, in a certain sense have found themselves in circumstances that life has imposed on them. Be close to them in moments of difficulty and struggle, but more especially their daily service of others that may last for months, years or even a lifetime.

O Father, I ask this for them, because I can say that I went through it as well. I must admit that, as the mother of Christ it was easy at the wedding feast of Cana or when he healed the lame man or rekindled the sight of the blind.



Even at the foot of the cross, I felt your immense strength, O Father, to stand there without tears; there on Calvary, with my heart pierced by his excruciating cry before he died. I was just waiting for them to take him down from the cross and place his lifeless body in my arms. All this happened in the last three years of his life, and what about the other thirty years?

Only you O Father, helped me to realize that in those calloused hands of that young man, like so many other young men dreaming of his future, he looked towards infinity. There you saw your Son, the Messiah, the Saviour sent to serve the world.

Remove a pebble a day from the foundations of a house and one day it will suddenly collapse or patiently place a brick there faithfully and one day you will see a beautiful house. It was like that for me. May it be so for all your daughters and sons scattered around the world.

Thank you, O Father!

*(To be continued)*

## NEWSBITS

### AMAZONIA



*"In the first economic models the productive factors were land, capital and labour. Over time, only capital and labour remained, while the land disappeared. From unique factor it became a missing one: this has been the fate of the land in modern economic science. And yet, as Laudato Si recalls, if we do not "see" the land, we inevitably tend to offend and destroy it." This is what Sister Alessandra Smerilli recalled when speaking at the seminar on the Amazon recently held in the Vatican in preparation for the next General Synod to be held in October in Rome. She teaches economics at the Pontifical Faculty of Education "Auxilium" in Rome and studies, among other things, the relationship between ethics and finance. "Mutual benefit, the basic principle of economic science - she said in the course of her report - has been applied only to inter-human relations, but not with the earth or with other non-anthropocentric resources, with which the relationship has not been conceived as reciprocity, but has been of a predatory type."*

**Professor Smerilli, in a region like the Amazon, does the protection of Creation still come "before" any kind of development and economic project?**

*"Surely the protection of Creation*

*comes first, in the sense that it is a good that affects everyone not only in the Amazon but throughout the world. I myself have learned what unique ecosystems, the biomes of the Amazon, are. They are ecosystems that allow everyone to live on Earth, thus we go beyond the concept of the Amazon forest as the "green lung" of the planet. [...] We can promote a healthy economy capable of "counting" the environment in its calculations, the environment thus becomes a productive resource and as such must be remunerated, just as it happens for all productive resources."*

**Therefore, it is necessary to somehow govern the type of development in relation to the environment...** "First of all, it is necessary to choose forms of development and methods that have the least possible impact on ecosystems, and then it is necessary to establish guidelines that when actions are carried out to the detriment of a region, then actions of repair must be carried out. [...] This aspect would require a strong attention at the international level because often local governments make choices that bring short-term benefits but the damage far more noticeable over longer periods."

**In the Amazon, there are two types of invasive intervention: extractive industry and deforestation. Should a stop be imposed on both?**

*"Surely we have to ask questions about deforestation, in the sense*

that when you reach a critical threshold then the processes become irreversible. As far as the extractive industry is concerned, the theme is not so much to block everything - we cannot go back in history - we must instead deal with the economy and progress, but corporation must be respectful. Of course, I don't think it's a simple way because individual interest always leads to over-consumption, yet then we all pay the consequences, both as individuals and as a community".

**What role can indigenous peoples, who are fighting for the defence of the forest, play in this challenge?**

"The Amazon has always been a land of migration, so we must not forget alongside the indigenous peoples, the so-called traditional populations who are not indigenous but have inhabited that land for many years. Traditional populations have also contributed to the preservation of the Amazon; indeed it is precisely the latter that have demonstrated that one can come from outside and live in these territories without necessarily exploiting them. There are two different models: a way of life that allows development and a way that only provides for the exploitation of resources.

**However, the large companies present in the region act in their own interests even in a violent way...** "Certainly, the point is that large groups have a lot of bargaining power and do not have many scruples, so I say that we must all be vigilant, together, we need an international and global awareness of the importance of these

lands and not leave all the problem to the local governments to solve. A corporation has more power than a single state".

**Pope Francis dedicated a considerable part of his magisterium to the theme of the re-conversion of the development model, of the safeguarding of Creation. How is the Church moving?**

"The missionaries present in the region are very active, and the dioceses are also moving. They are working at the scientific level, there is research and awareness work to be carried out, an analysis of climate change and then there is being close to the people. I believe that the Synod will serve precisely to understand which lines of action must be followed".

**The basic problem remains: how to reverse the direction course in the face of such vast and powerful economic interests?**

"Alone, those who live in the Amazon, will never be able to oppose. What I wonder is whether as a Church, at world level, we too do not have a responsibility, because on the one hand we denounce "an economy that kills", but then we make purchases and manage our savings and investments in an inconsistent way. This system can be damaged both by resistance from inside and by a clear signal from outside that we are not financing you, that you will enter the "black list" if you behave unscrupulously. That is why it is important that the Synod dedicated to the Amazon be held in Rome, because the whole Church must become aware and act consciously. □ *Francesco PELOSO, La Stampa*

## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

**Loving Signals**

She: "They seem such a devoted couple. He kisses her every time they go out and then he waves when he leaves every morning. Why don't you do that?"  
He: "Gosh, give me time to get acquainted with her."

**Matter of Taste**

He stopped at a small hot dog stand and ordered coffee. Just to be polite, he said: "Looks like rain, doesn't it?" "Well," snarled the testy proprietor, "it tastes like coffee doesn't it?"

**All in the Game**

A bored cat and an interested cat were watching a tennis game. "You seem very interested in tennis," said the bored cat. "It's not that," said the interested cat, "but my old man's in the racket."

**Pensive Postures**

Harry: "Why do girls rest their chins on their hands when they are thinking?"  
Sam: "It's the only way they can keep their mouths shut."

**Down Memory Lane**

Mike: Have any of your childhood dreams been realized?  
Al: "Oh, one of them. When my mother combed my hair I used to wish I didn't have any."

**Reliable Responsibility**

Employer: "We need a responsible man."  
Applicant: "That's me! Wherever I've worked, if anything was wrong, they've told me I was responsible."

**Faithful to the End**

Farmer: "And how is the lawyer coming?"  
Doctor: "Poor fellow, he's lying at death's door."  
Farmer: "That's grit for you, at death's door and still lying."

**Precious Predictions**

Patient: "Doctor, are you sure this is pneumonia? Sometimes doctors prescribe for pneumonia and the patients die of something else."  
Doctor with dignity: "When I prescribe for pneumonia, you die of pneumonia."

**Pretty Bargains**

Betty: "When I get down in the dumps, I buy a new hat."  
Dot: "Oh, I was wondering where you go with them."

**Casual Lookover**

Boss: "What are you doing here? I thought I fired you two weeks ago."  
Office Boy: "I know I just came to see if you are still in business."

**Grave Fidelity**

"I am grieved, sir" said the head clerk, to hear of the junior partner's death. Would you like me to take his place?  
"Very much," replied the senior partner, "if you could get the undertaker to arrange it."

**The Family Business**

"It's nice that you and your son can carry on the business together."  
"It works out fine, I run the business and he does the carrying on." □



## A CELESTIAL THUNDERCLAP

by John M. Cunningham OP

Eusebius of Caesarea in his *History of the Church* indicates that already in the third century the faithful were accustomed to the Eucharistic Prayer, the centre of the Mass. In the name of the entire community the priest addresses the Eucharistic Prayer to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

It begins with the Preface with which the priest, in the name of the entire people, gives thanks to God the Father for the work of salvation or for some aspect of it that corresponds to the



day, feast or liturgical season. At its end and in union with the angels and saints, the congregation sings 'Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, ...' The power of the Holy Spirit is then invoked that the bread and wine will become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. After the consecration, the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ are called to mind before intercession is made for all the members of the Church, living and deceased (a reminder that the Church exists not only on earth but also in heaven).

Alone, the priest recites the Final Doxology: 'Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, Almighty Father, for ever and ever.'

Of course, those who listen to the Eucharistic Prayer do not remain passive or uninvolved. They unite themselves to the priest in faith and silence, and show their union with the Great Amen, the most important 'Amen' in the entire Mass. This response is the conclusion of the entire Eucharistic Prayer and is an assent to its content.

St. Jerome (340-420) in his *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians* described how in the churches of Rome the 'Amen' was said with such enthusiasm that it was like 'a celestial thunderclap.'

*Courtesy: St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland, 2008*

## 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**

I am sincerely grateful to my dear mother Mary; through the recitation of three hail Marys, my son is healed. Thank you mother Mary for granting us many other favours. May she always be with us and continue to bless our family. *Sabina*

### LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My most sincere thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Blessed Mother Mary for granting us numerous favours, showering on me and my family numerous blessings and graces. Blessed Mother Mary always keep me and my family safe under your mantle of blue. *Dulcina Dores Correa - Goa*  
My grateful and heartfelt thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary for saving me after a heart attack. May they continue to bless my family and protect us always. *E. Rodrigues, Goa*

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

Thank you for freeing my brother of his skin allergy; and thank you for bringing joy and happiness. Keep our family safe in your loving hands always. *F.D'Souza*

## THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



I am sincerely grateful to Jesus, Mother Mary, St. Dominic Savio, St. Anthony and all the saints for granting my daughter a safe, normal and easy delivery of a healthy baby girl. She had the scapular of St. Dominic Savio throughout her pregnancy. Dear Lord Jesus, Mother Mary and St. Dominic Savio bless and protect our daughter, her husband and their little baby. *Maria Santimano, Goa*

## APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER SEPTEMBER 2019

**Universal:** That politicians, scientists and economists work together to protect the world's seas and oceans.

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#### **MARY WAS THERE**

It was Christmas time and this year we planned to go caroling. We intended to visit the houses of the non-Christians and proclaim to them the word of God. As we thought it would be late returning home, we decided to prepare rice in a pressure cooker and placed it on the gas. As the enthusiasm was high, we left and forgot about the pressure cooker on the gas. It was almost three hours we were out caroling and when we returned home, we remembered the cooker on the stove. We were all tense with the anxiety of what is in store for us when we reached home. To our utter surprise the gas was on and the cooker was totally burnt, yet nothing else had happened. We are sure that our Mother Mary protected us and our house. *Nelson Almeida*

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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**