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*Receive, O merciful God,
to the praise of your name
the prayers and offerings
which we bring to you
as we venerate the Blessed
Virgin Mary,
whom you graciously
gave to us
as a most devoted Mother
when she stood
by the Cross of Jesus.*

From The Editor's Desk
PRIORITIES

I am writing this piece as we are in the throes of the Coronavirus epidemic. Imagine even the computer recognizes the spelling! There is such panic and such fear. As I was telling my 6.30 pm congregation yesterday, this is such a profoundly 'teachable moment' that we will remember long after it has passed. We will refer to it as our elders referred to the World Wars and their aftermath of yesteryear.

But I believe that at moments like these, the human spirit is capable of rising to such heights as we never see in ordinary time. We see the best in people at the worst of times, did you notice?

I am reminded of the little plaque I saw on the desk of my spiritual director some months ago. Now I realise what drew me to him. Now I realise what made him the person he comes across to me as. I am urged to share his secret with you. Though I was embarrassed I plucked up courage and took it down after a session with him. It is taken from the writings of St. Francis de Sales. It reads:

NEVER BE IN A HURRY;
DO EVERYTHING QUIETLY AND
IN A CALM SPIRIT; DO NOT LOSE
YOUR INNER PEACE FOR ANYTHING WHATSOEVER,
EVEN IF YOUR WHOLE WORLD SEEMS UPSET.

At times, my priorities go a bit out of kilter. If I cannot sort out my life priorities then I will never be the person that God intends for me to become. God in Christ can assist me as I traverse the road of life, but certain choices I make determine if I am on that path or have allowed myself to be diverted.

Before doing anything, it would be good to attempt to clear our minds with quiet prayer or meditation. We can then begin to write down all the 'things' that are vying for our time and effort, ranked from highest to lowest. Pause again for some prayer. Then with our ranked list in hand, reflect on: life and relationships (with God, family, friends and self), level of overall happiness (with work, relationships, and the course of life) and dissatisfactions. We might be surprised to find an interrelation between the areas of reflection and our priorities. What to do after all this?

Spend some more time in prayer. Listen to what God is telling us about our life, the direction of our life, our priorities. Allow ourselves to be vulnerable to the desires of the Father, the way of the Son and the guiding of the Holy Spirit – and be prepared for some surprises and blessings.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

IMPERFECT LOVE

Gianpaolo Dianin

Only at the end of the journey, looking back, will it be possible to recognize, with amazement and immense gratitude, that despite our imperfect love, God was able to build a work of art

One of the most beautiful aspects of *Amoris Laetitia* is the concrete manner in which it approaches the love and the lives of the spouses. The Pope is not taken up by contrived versions that readers often find only in books or romance novels. The first chapter, for example, tells of couples and wounded families that populate the pages of Scripture: "The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises" (AL 8). And then he chooses to speak of love concretely as he refers to Paul's hymn of Charity rather than the passionate pages of the Song of Songs. And finally,

in the chapter treating the subject of broken bonds in need of being fused together, he rereads it within the context of the great river of God's mercy.

Francis sees the family and "what it is," with that sober realism which should cause the Church to a constant pastoral conversion that leads her to prefer the style of the Good Samaritan rather than a sheaf of great proclamations. The family, says the Pope, is not a "trade" or skill (AL 16), as if to remind young people that they do not need "degrees" in marriage to get married, but that they should start walking the journey day by



day. It is only at the end, looking back, that they will be able to recognize, with immense gratitude and amazement that, despite our imperfect love, God has made a work of art.

The Pope makes this specific recommendation to young people that we find in n. 135: "It is not helpful to dream of an idyllic and perfect love needing no stimulus to grow. A celestial notion of earthly love forgets that the best is yet to come."

It is good to hear these words in the present context that describes love as exaggeratedly romantic or in unreal tones, or its opposite extreme, highlighting its dramas and continuous failures. It is above all the means of Social Communication that proffers deceptive notions of love. It calls them "sanitized" families. Certain advertisements show them young, beautiful, always smiling and all the children are blond and blue-eyed.

We know in reality this is not so. Youth passes in an instant; there is joy but there is also sorrow: there are beautiful but also difficult and problematic children. "In joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health," are the words of the vows which encompass real life with its polarities, recalling that love is recognized above all when it goes through demanding storms or when beauty is revealed in wrinkles are the years go by. At the other extreme, there are those who have a tragic image of marriage and the family, which today is evidenced in violence, femicide and divorces. Between these two extremes lies reality in its beauty and drama in which marriage is not conserved but constantly tested.

Imperfect love also urges the Church to have its feet on the ground when speaking of marriage. On this issue the Pope is rather provocative: "We should not however confuse different levels: there is no need to lay upon two limited persons the tremendous burden of having to reproduce perfectly the union existing between Christ and his Church, for marriage as a sign entails "a dynamic process... one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God." (AL 122). It is a real risk to talk about marriage with very high-sounding affirmations, with elaborate and profound theologies before which the spouses will always feel inadequate and small. It is not a question of lowering an ideal from above, but of opening up a path for growth. *Gaudete et exultate*, the Pope's latest Apostolic Exhortation, helps us with this with a provocative image of "middle class holiness" (n. 7). It is an imperfect and fragile love that we are capable of living on this earth, the same is true of forgiveness, justice, sincerity and meekness.

In the final paragraph the Pope affirms: "No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love [...] Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together! [...] All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families and every family must feel this constant impulse. [...] May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us" (AL,325). □

THE YOUTH POWER OF ELDERS

Maria Chiara Bregolin Tezzon

As I write this I am thinking of my grandmother, my most hardcore fan and supporter and certainly my most important source of inspiration. I must admit that my grandfather too is also 'young' in a different way. I am also thinking of many others whom time has separated from us but whose steadfast love for one another we continue to admire.

What we really need are living witnesses: those who have passed the many tests of life together; tests of pain and loss, huge challenges, scaling heights, even making compromises and sharing missions together. To me they are certainly models who can 'do it!'

Try to ask these couples if they would do this all over again, with all their falls and setbacks; because they are aware of everything they have experienced and how useful they found them. They would tell you it was all worth it because of the bigger picture. And it has helped them to become who they are.

How many times my grandmother would emotionally narrate a difficult time she went through dividing her time between work and her family but she would always say: "I would get back immediately to see my children again."

We young couples can draw from these mature lovers a sense of deep serenity and satisfaction

We young couples can draw inspiration from these mature lovers; a sense of deep serenity and satisfaction for who we are, I mean it!

What my grandparents lived through is as much of what we are

living through *mutatis mutandis* (with the necessary distinctions). Being a family today, is as easy or as difficult as it was for them.

Admitting that they were not saints, super heroes or aliens, they were people who had a history, they had limitations and hurts. This awareness helps us as spouses to understand that happy and fulfilled married life is a goal that God the Father has placed within the reach of his children.

St. John of the Cross said: "God is at the bottom of reality," not at the top of an ideal.

And as if, in our continuous search for happiness, God is showing us the way. And the path home, in our everyday life. God makes us feel adequate to the task, absolutely capable of carrying out His plan in our lives. Not without a struggle.

But with the awareness that we are created to succeed.

Pope Francis says that God invites us to continue on our journey with the assurance of those who are already blessed. In short, with the assurance and the security of children. □



Don Bosco's Madonna

THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS:

Gallows or the Means of Salvation

by Don Chino Biscontin

This very ancient feast (September 14) dates back to the construction of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The bishop of the holy city was able to meet the emperor Constantine (274-337) and had told him about the distressing situation of the places that concerned the life of the Lord Jesus. Emperor Hadrian (76-138 AD) had, for the second time destroyed Jerusalem by stirring up an anti-Roman revolt and had decided to erase any trace of Jesus. Bethlehem, where the cave of the Nativity had been venerated, was filled with debris and a temple to Adonis had been built on it. In Jerusalem, the place where Jesus was put to death and was buried had been covered with more than seven metres of earth and rock and a forum had been built on it. He had wanted to call the square the Aelia Capitolina. Just above the site of the Holy Sepulchre, a temple to Venus had been erected. The emperor an ardent admirer of Hellenistic culture was also bitter derogator of both the Jewish and the Christian tradition. Thus, he hoped to obliterate any memory of the Nazarene. He contributed to the conservation of the holy places.

Constantine, having been informed of the situation, asked his mother Helena to take charge of the constructions on those holy sites; a splendid basilica was built in Bethlehem; at Jerusalem, a complex consisting of a large rotunda

surmounted with a dome resembling the Roman Pantheon. The forecourt was fenced off; which included the rock of Calvary. Furthermore, on it was built a magnificent basilica called the *Martyrion*, with a four-pillared portico.

A story, whose veracity we have reasons to doubt, states that Helena, having demolished the temple of Venus and clearing the debris, based on the intuitions of the Christians in Jerusalem, identified the holy Sepulchre and Calvary. In the area, there was a cistern. At the bottom of it, Helena found three crosses, and following a miraculous healing, she identified which of the three crosses was that of Jesus. It was September 14, 320. During the solemn celebration that followed the Bishop showed the wood of the Cross to the public and invited those present to venerate it.



Piero della Francesca, *Recognizing the true Cross* (1458-1466); Basilica of St. Francis - Arezzo

In 614, there was a devastating

invasion by the Persians led by Cyrus II, a sworn enemy of the Byzantines. He stole the relic of the Cross and brought it to his capital. In 628 Emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians and retrieved the precious wood bringing it back to Jerusalem where it was found by the Crusaders in 1099. Once again it fell to Saladin who defeated the Crusader army at the Horns of Hattin near Lake Tiberias in the summer of 1187.

Relics of the Holy Cross spread throughout Christendom and its authenticity is debated by many. But the mere graphic story does not do justice to the great veneration of the Cross. With other inputs like the medieval *Leggenda Aurea*, which says that Adam, as he lay dying handed his son a branch of the Tree of Life and ordered him to place it in the mouth of the 'Progenitor'. It was later found by Solomon, and after vainly attempting to use it to locate the temple, he buried it. It was found once more and used as gallows at the Crucifixion of Jesus. Even to this day, those who visit the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre can venerate the tomb of Adam just below the rock of Calvary. Another sliver from the wisdom tradition: we agree that those who construe non-historical stories do not do so to deceive the gullible but to give expression to their devotion. And mind you, a devotion is far from naïve, if it embraces the whole of Salvation History.

I share all the veneration for the Holy Cross and on Holy Thursday I sing with emotion the beautiful hymn *Vexilla Regis produnt*, an extraordinary Gregorian

melody that seems to caress the body of the *Martyr of the Cross*: "Abroad the regal banners fly, now shines the Cross's mystery: upon it, Life did death endure, and yet by death did life procure." I share all the veneration. But I feel the need to point out that it is not the Cross, though venerable, that saves us, but the Lord Jesus, crucified and risen. In itself, the Cross is an atrocious instrument of torture and death, the result of inhuman violence. As such, it could mark our definitive condemnation, as we can understand it in the parable that Jesus gave on the eve of his passion, that of the devious tenants of the vineyard (Mk 12:1-12). After mistreating the master's servants and killing one of them, they also kill his son. At this point, the master hires a handful of armed men to slaughter those assassins.

That is what God could do with us: I sent you prophets and you did not listen to them, I sent you other prophets and you mistreated some and even killed others. I sent you my Son and you crucified him. The time of mercy is over. Revenge is mine! But no! Even from the cross, the Son of God continues to be the Face of the Father's mercy. He does not curse nor threaten. He prays for those who, not only put him to death so heinously. They do not even let him die with dignity. He promises heaven to the little-known good thief who pleads with him: "Jesus, remember me. He too is suffering next to him."

It is not the Cross itself that saves, but fidelity to the Crucified One and his mission: to be the witness of God whose mercy never fails. □

THE LOCKET

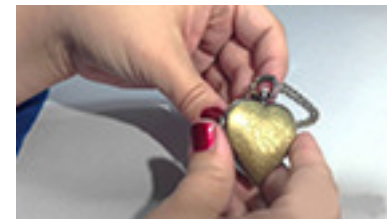
by Anastasia Dias

The memories came flooding back when I laid hands on that tiny, little locket. After all these years, it still looked new. On opening it, there was a small photograph of a bright-eyed girl looking youthful and radiant.

The girl in the photo was my grandmother, the woman who raised me all by herself. My parents had died when I was little and it was my grandmother who had looked after me.

My grandmother Cecile had been very young when she had had my father. He was her only child. And when my parents died in an accident, she couldn't bear the idea of me growing up in a foster home.

I was given a well-rounded education. My grandmother never made me feel the loss of my parents. She saved money, probably all her life-savings and sent me to college.



Every weekend, my friends and I would drive home to visit Cecile (she insisted that I call her by her name). And she cooked her very best recipes for us.

One Christmas Eve, I had a heartfelt conversation with my grandmother. We exchanged presents and I opened mine to find a locket with two tiny photographs of my grandmother and me.

Cecile told me, "This way I will always be with you even when you cannot see me. And every time you get bitter or angry when you have challenges to face, remember that there is someone who loves you. Whenever you feel discouraged, think of all that I have taught you." Cecile's thoughtfulness touched me and I decided that I would buy her the same present for her birthday.

After college ended, I took on a job in the city that I had grown up in. This way I could live with Cecile and run errands for her whenever possible.

Strangely, there had been a gradual change in Cecile's behaviour. The smallest things annoyed her, which was unusual. She started repeating statements, most often to reassure herself.



THE WORLD BEHIND ME AND CHRIST BEFORE ME

Matthew Encounters Jesus

by Ian Pinto, sdb

The Tax Collector

It was just another day in the life of Matthew. He was a tax collector sitting at his desk, mulling over names and numbers, counting and re-counting to make sure every last shekel was paid. Tax collectors were a special lot. They had to pay a huge amount to get the job. The Romans were quite smart in that sense. They got willing people from among their subjects to do the dirty work of ensuring that the taxes were paid on time. Tax collectors were generally hated because they used their power and authority to extract more than necessary from the people to recover the amount they had paid to get the job and then to make a profit. How far this applied

to Matthew is unknown but what was true of some was also probably true of others. Thus, Matthew may have been exactly like any other tax collector, hated and despised for extorting large sums from his own people on behalf of the Romans.

Matthew was at his desk, busy in sin, when Jesus walked up to him and threw him a once-in-a-lifetime invitation to follow him and be his disciple. This was Matthew's opportunity to leave his life of sin and corruption and begin anew. How did he respond to that invitation? All the three synoptic gospels give the same account, no sooner did Jesus utter the words, Matthew "leaving everything, got up and followed Jesus" (Lk 5:28). This is wonderful about Matthew. He was so engrossed in his work, much like many of us today, however, when he heard Jesus' invitation, he willingly left everything. I wonder if we can say the same of ourselves too? In the midst of our busy schedules, are we able to hear the voice of the Lord calling us to be honest and hard workers, who don't make compromises and excuses for their shortcomings and failures? Do we hear the Lord asking us to reach out to a colleague or

One evening, after work, I came home to an empty house. My grandmother was nowhere to be seen. She returned a while later and claimed to have forgotten her way home.

I sensed things were wrong and I took her for a physical examination. The general physician told me that there was a possibility that my grandmother had Alzheimer's. On questioning, my grandmother had revealed that we had a family history of the disease.

We visited a psychiatrist and our greatest fears were confirmed. Cecile had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The psychiatrist warned me that there were worse things to come.

As the disease progressed, Cecile's memory deteriorated. She started forgetting everything, one by one. She sat alone in the evenings, crying helplessly.

It was her birthday. I was waiting to surprise her with the present I had bought for her. I bought a similar locket with our photos inside it.

When Cecile woke, I could hear her wailing loudly. I entered her room and she was bewildered on seeing me. She questioned me, 'Who are you? Where am I? Where have they brought me?'

I went up to talk to her but she was so afraid of me, thinking I would harm her. Slowly, I went up to her and gently hugged her saying, 'Cecile, you are my grandmother. This is your own house and I live with you. Today is your birthday and I bought a little present for you.'

I handed her the gift. She glanced at me, I could see that

thoughts were running through her mind. She carefully unwrapped the present and opened the box. Her eyes scanned the delicate locket.

She looked at the locket intently, as though trying to recollect something. On opening it, she said, 'I think I know these people. I have seen them before. It's so difficult to remember now.'

I smiled at her and said, 'Cecile that is your photograph on one side and mine on the other. You gifted it to me last Christmas and told me to open it whenever I feel low.' Cecile smiled nervously and murmured, 'I'm sorry. It is very hard for me to remember things.'

After this incident, I was used to Cecile's loud cries as she woke up, asking the same questions over and over again. And each time, I would reassure her, repeating the same sentences over and over again.

In the evenings, when I came home after work, I would cook for my grandmother. Over dinner, I would tell her the anecdotes she had told me as a little girl. Cecile would end up laughing hysterically. And the next morning, everything was forgotten.

It was during this period, that I started appreciating the littlest things in life. It was these moments that mattered the most to me.

And one evening, when I went to check on Cecile, I found her sleeping peacefully. I looked at her and thought of the wonderful and giving person she had been. It was the values inculcated by my grandmother that would stay with me forever. □



The call of Matthew, Caravaggio

someone else in need? Are we willing to share what we have, be it wealth, time or talent with the less fortunate? Matthew sure did and today, he is honoured. His name is associated with sanctity. His past of sin is washed away in the ocean of God's love and mercy. We have a similar opportunity before us.

The Disciple

Once Matthew left everything to follow Jesus, he put himself completely at the mercy of Jesus. He had left behind his security, money, house, family, luxuries. He left it all to live as a nomad along with his mendicant leader, Jesus. Despite coming from affluence, Matthew made major life adjustments to cope with the lifestyle of Jesus and his band of apostles. You never hear him grumbling or complaining. He has indeed made a big sacrifice but he has made it in good faith. He heard Jesus and he put his trust in him.

Everyday, as he sees Jesus performing wondrous miracles, speaking authoritatively and yet so sweetly about the Kingdom of God, he grows convinced about the veracity of Jesus' talk as well as his personal integrity. Everyday, he makes the effort to renew his faith. This is true discipleship. You and I are called to do likewise. Putting our faith in Jesus is not a one-time event; it has to be done daily. Everyday, as we open our eyes to the wonders of God's love and listen to His voice in His Holy Word, the Bible or encounter him in the Holy Eucharist, we are invited to make a daily commitment to him. Jesus said, "No disciple is greater than his master" (Mt 10:24); let us not seek for per-

sonal glory in the things we do, rather, let us learn to do things for the glory of God.

The Evangelist

The Gospels do not have any of the words of Matthew. It is as if he said nothing of extraordinary significance. It was probably this insignificance and recollection that allowed him to make a lasting contribution to the mission of Jesus — his gospel. The gospel according to Matthew is the longest of the four gospels and is full of many healings, teachings and parables of Jesus. Matthew's meticulousness with taxes and money-collection probably helped him pen down a systematic and elaborate account of Jesus' life and work.

Scholars conclude that Matthew wrote his gospel for the Jews. Thus, even he makes mention of certain events that no other evangelist does. Again and again, he takes recourse to the Law to show how Jesus fulfills it and brings it alive. He was rooted in his Judaic faith and tries to merge his new-found faith in Jesus with his Jewish ancestry. His gospel exemplifies this effort to merge novelty with tradition, faith with experience. Most of us may never write something so significant in all our lives but we could make our lives into a gospel. We need not write out our experiences with Jesus, we need simply live them out in daily life. People are sooner or later sure to take notice. All of us can be evangelists and all of us ought to be evangelists too. Jesus calls out to us each day to embark on a journey with him; may our lives be the story of that journey so that others may be inspired and open themselves up to the voice of God. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. WENCESLAS, (938 CE) (SEPTEMBER 28)

Saint Wenceslas was son of Uratislas, duke of Bohemia, and of Drahomira of Lucsko, and grandson of Borivor, the first Christian duke, and the blessed Ludmilla. His father was a valiant and good prince; but his mother was a pagan, and her heart was as depraved, as to sentiments of morality, as others were attached to those of the Faith. This princess was cruel and haughty, even perfidious and impious. She had two sons, Wenceslas, and Boleslas. Ludmilla, who lived at Prague since the death of her husband, obtained, as the greatest of favours, that the education of the elder might be entrusted to her, and she undertook this, with the utmost care and application, to form Wenceslas heart to devotion and the love of God. In this task she was assisted by Paul, her chaplain, a man of great sanctity and prudence, who likewise cultivated the young prince's mind with the first rudiments of learning. The pious pupil perfectly corresponded with their endeavours, and with the divine grace which rendered him a saint from the cradle. At a convenient age he was sent to a college at Budweis, above



sixty miles from Prague, where, under the direction of an excellent master, he made great progress in the sciences, and other exercises suitable to his rank, and much more in all the virtues which compose the character of a Christian and a saint. He was extremely devout, mortified, meek, modest, a great lover of purity, and scrupulously careful in avoiding all occasions in which that virtue could be exposed to the least danger.

He was yet young when his father was dying, his mother Drahomira, assumed the title of regent, and seized on being in charge. Being no longer held in by

any restraint, she gave a free rein to her rage against the Christians (which she had concealed whilst her husband lived) and published a severe order for shutting up all the churches, prohibiting the exercise of our holy religion, and forbidding priests and all others who professed it, to teach or instruct children. She repealed all the laws and regulations which Borivor and Uladislav had made in favour of the Christians; she removed the Christian magistrates in all the towns in Bohemia, put heathens in their places, and employed only such officers as were blindly devoted to follow the dictates of her passions and tyranny; and these she incited everywhere to oppress the Christians, great numbers of whom were massacred.

Drahomira secured herself an interest in Boleslav, her younger son, whose heart she had so far perverted, as to taint him with the most execrable idolatry, hatred of the Christian religion, boundless ambition, and implacable cruelty. Wenceslav, on the other hand, pursuant to the impressions of virtue which he had received in his education, was more careful than ever to preserve the innocence of his morals, and acquire every day some new degree of Christian perfection. He directed all his views to the establishment of peace, justice, and religion in his dominions, and, by the advice of Ludmilla, chose able and zealous Christian ministers. After spending the whole day in acts of piety and application to the affairs of state, and of his court, he employed a great part of the night in prayer. Such was his devout veneration for the holy sacrament of the altar, that he thought it a great happiness to

sow the corn, gather the grapes, and make the wine with his own hands which were to be used at mass. It was his desire to shut himself up in a monastery, had not the necessities of his country and religion fixed him in a public station: however, amidst the distractions of government, he found rest for his soul in God, its centre. The good prince stood in need of this comfort and support amidst the storms with which he was assailed. Drahomira never ceased to conjure up all the furies of hell against him. Looking upon Ludmilla as the first mover of all counsels in favour of the Christian religion, she laid a plot to take away her life. The assassins found her prostrate in prayer before the altar in her domestic chapel, and, seizing her, strangled her with her own veil. This complicated crime was very heart-wrenching to Saint Wenceslav; a circumstance which exceedingly aggravated his grief, that so execrable an action should have been perpetrated by the direction of his mother.

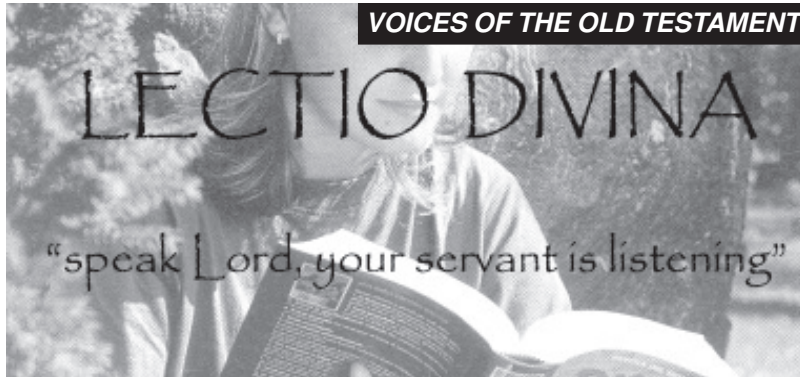
The emperor Otto I, who had the highest opinion of his sanctity, received him with great honour, would have him sit next to him, and bade him ask whatever he pleased, and it should be granted him. The saint asked an arm of the body of Saint Vitus, and a part of the relics of Saint Sigismund, king of Burgundy. The emperor readily granted his request; adding, that he conferred on him the regal dignity and title, and granted him the privilege of bearing the imperial eagle on his standard, with an exemption from paying any imperial taxes throughout all his dominions. The good duke thanked his majesty, but excused himself from

taking the title of king: which, however, the emperor and princes of the empire from that time always gave him in letters, and on all other occasions. When he had received the above-mentioned relics, he built a church in Prague, in which he deposited them; and caused the body of Saint Ludmilla, three years after her death, to be translated into, the church of Saint George, which had been built by his father in that city. The severity with which the saint checked oppressions, and certain other disorders in the nobility, made some throw themselves into the faction of his unnatural mother, who concerted measures with her other son, Boleslav, to take him off at any rate. Saint Wenceslav had made a vow of virginity; but restless ambition is impatient of delays. A son being born to Boleslav, that prince and his mother invited the good duke to favour them with his company at the rejoicings on that occasion. Saint Wenceslav went without the least suspicion of treachery and was received with all imaginable marks of kindness and civility. This they did the better to cover their hellish design. The entertainment was splendid: but nothing could make the saint neglect his usual devotions. At midnight he went to offer his customary prayers in the church. Boleslav, at the instigation of Drahomira, followed him thither, and when his attendants had wounded him, he despatched him with his own hand, running him through the body with a lance. The martyrdom of the holy duke happened on the 28th of September, in 938. The emperor Otto marched with an army into Bohemia, to revenge his death; the war contin-

ued several years; and, when he had vanquished the Bohemians, he contented himself with the submission of Boleslav, who engaged to recall the banished priests, to restore the Christian religion, and to pay him an annual tribute. Drahomira, perished miserably soon after the perpetration of her horrible crime. Boleslav, terrified at the reputation of many miracles wrought at the martyr's tomb, caused his body to be translated to the church of Saint Vitus, at Prague, three years after his death. His son and successor, Boleslav II. surnamed the Pious, was a faithful imitator of his uncle Saint Wenceslav, and became one of the greatest princes of his time. A church was erected in honour of Saint Wenceslav, in Denmark, in 951, and his name was in great veneration over all the North.

A false religion is not only a grievous crime, but also too feeble a tie for men; it is exposed to uncertainties, suspicion, and the detection, of its imposture, and is in itself always infinitely defective and pernicious. True religion insures to him who sincerely professes it, comfort, support, and patience amidst the sharpest trials, security in death itself, and the most happy and glorious issue, when God shall manifest himself the protector and rewarder of his servants. Virtue, here persecuted and oppressed, will shine forth with the brighter lustre at the last day, as the sun breaking out from under a cloud displays its beam with greater brightness. □

Father Alban Butler. "Saint Wenceslav, Duke of Bohemia, Martyr". Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Principal Saints, 1866. CatholicSaints.Info. 29 September 2013.



THE WAYS OF THE LORD

Carlo Broccardo

The prophet Isaiah almost begs us:

The Lord is merciful, take advantage of that! Look for his mercy and you will find it; it's not far, you don't have to 'steal' it, but only receive it as a gift

We must know that on Sunday of Ordinary Time (excluding Advent and Christmas), the First Reading is chosen on the basis of the passage from the Gospel; in this liturgical year, for example, from Sunday to Sunday we are reading passages from the Gospel according to Matthew and so the First Reading from the Old Testament is a text that serves as a kind of introduction or a kind of side-dish.

On Sunday 24 September we will hear the reading of the famous parable of the workers called to work for the day. Some of them start early in the morning, others come along at noon and some even make an appearance around five in the evening. In the end, everyone is given the same pay: a denarius. Those who came first complain because they hoped to receive more. Then master tells one of them: "Can I not do what I want with what is mine?" or "Why are you jealous because I'm good?" Jesus concludes

the parable with a teaching: "Thus the last will be first and the first, last" (Mt 20, 15-16).

This is a parable of mercy that tells us of God's great love for us is. God is good not measuring out our merits but - as the letter to the Ephesians says: "according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1, 7). He gives us much more than what we deserve, indeed, much more than we could ever dare to hope for. **That is the message of the oracle of the prophet Isaiah (55:6-9) in the First Reading we are going to meditate on,** which is linked to the Gospel

Let's start from the end, when the prophet uses an image to tell us of the abysmal distance that exists between our thoughts and those of God, between his ways (i.e. His ways of acting) and ours. Who can measure the distance between the earth and the sky? Let's put ourselves in the shoes of a man who lived hundreds of years before Christ and who imag-

ines the firmament as a metal plate placed there; who can reach that high? Who can touch it even with his fingertips? The sky is far higher than the highest mountains; so high no one can reach it.

Well, that is how far God's thoughts, his reasonings, his way of seeing, judging and loving are, so far away from ours that we cannot even understand them fully. We, for example, would use a proportionate rule: those who work more are entitled to a greater remuneration. God on the other hand reasons with a measure of gratuitousness. He gives himself to everyone. We judge with the logic of who "deserves" how much. God on the other hand is one who "generously forgives" as Isaiah says.

In ancient Greece there was the myth of Prometheus who dared to challenge the gods. He secretly climbed to the summit of Mount Olympus and stole their fire, hid-

ing it in a cave. In fact, the gods - one of many versions, as the myth imagines - were jealous about their property. They did not want to share it with men.

Isaiah, on the contrary almost pleads: "The Lord is merciful, take advantage of his mercy, don't miss this opportunity. Look for it and find it. It's not so far that you would have to 'steal' it. You have only to receive it as a gift. A document from the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (1965) says that God acts, *ex abundantia caritatis suae*, i.e. out of his great love; a love so great that it overflows and becomes a cascade of mercy. All you need is to open your hands and take it up, quench your thirst, wash yourself and regain your strength.

It may seem impossible; it may seem too much. Yet, that is how God is, says Isaiah: his love is far greater than we can imagine. □



Quiet Spaces

LET US ENTRUST OURSELVES TO THE ARCHANGELS

*Morning meditation by His Holiness Pope Francis
in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae on Friday, September 29, 2017*

Celebrating Holy Mass on the occasion of the feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael at Santa Marta on Friday, 29 September, Pope Francis spoke about the importance of entrusting ourselves to the archangels so that they may help us fight against the seductions of the devil, bring us the good news of salvation and take us by the hand. In this way, they can help us avoid taking the wrong path in our life's journey while at the same cooperating with "God's design". He recalled the words of the day's collect prayer: "Oh God, who dispose in marvelous order ministries both angelic and human, graciously grant that our life on earth may be defended by those who watch over us as they minister perpetually to you in heaven", and then pointed out that we share the same vocation as the angels. "We are, so to speak, 'brothers'", Francis explained. The angels "are before the Lord to serve him, praise him and also to contemplate the glory of the face of the Lord: Angels are the great contemplatives: they serve and contemplate, but the Lord also sends them forth to accompany us in the journey of life", he added.

"Today, we celebrate three of these Archangels because they played an important role in the history of salvation and also because they play an important role in our journey towards salvation



The Archangels Raphael, Michael and Gabriel

", the Holy Father said. He described Michael as being "great: the one who fights against the devil", as described in the day's reading from the Book of Revelation (12: 7-12), and the devil as being our enemy: "troubling our lives: he always tries to seduce [us] as he seduced our mother Eve". "This is mine' are the very words of the devil; he wins us over with seduction and then accuses us before God: 'This [one] is mine, I will take him with me'". "Michael fights against him", he continued, because the "Lord asked him to fight [the devil] for us who are on our life journey towards heaven;



Michael helps us to fight against him and to not be seduced by this evil spirit which deceives us".

Archangel Gabriel "is the one who brings the good news, the one who brought the news to Mary, Zachariah and Joseph", Pope

Francis explained. He is therefore the messenger of the "good news of salvation". He too is "with us and helps us along our journey", especially when, as often happens, "with so much bad news or news with no substance, we forget the good news, the one of the Gospel". It is "Gabriel himself who reminds us of this", he added.

Pope Francis thus summed up the roles of the Archangels: "Michael defends us, Gabriel gives us the good news and Raphael takes us by the hand and walks with us; he helps us with the many things that occur along the journey". We must ask Raphael to help "us not to be tempted to take the wrong step, to take the wrong path", the Holy Father stressed. "Guide us along the right path; you are our traveling companion as you were [once] the traveling companion of Tobias", he concluded. □ © Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

LATE WISTERIA

Pierluigi Menato - TA/ID

Good news: She was granted the ten-days leave she asked for! She wouldn't say anything to Elisa. If she happened to suddenly get rich for the next ten days, she would be thinking of nothing but sun and sea, the sea and blue skies and the pines; no computers, no official letters and no 'frayed' nerves of her boss.

Oh yeah, she really deserved a break; and she was even happier that she would have the chance to meet her little sister who had gone out a month ago and left the house cold and empty; heading off with old Mrs. Gilbert, their mother's kind and rich friend who loved the blue-green Adriatic coast.

For Anna, who was only accustomed to a life of sacrifice and hard work, the ten-day break, seemed like a dream. She readily moved into the background to make way for Elisa; seventeen years old, bright and blooming and who obscured her now slightly wilted beauty.

She left office at seven, posted the letters on Boulton Road and then headed home. It was a cool, clear night. The road that led home from the pretty town square, seemed to be something that the movement of progress forgot... low houses, discreet walls adorned atop with red tiles, that concealed leafy trees and gardens. The scent of late wisteria and lilac locks wafted on the cool evening breeze...

Slightly intoxicated by the beauty and the scent that surrounded her, Anna could hardly resist plucking a few strands of wisteria that hung low over the

wall by the pavement; three beautiful clusters with rich green leaves streaked with gold. Ah, the beautiful scent of spring, though it was almost autumn!

It seemed like autumn in her own life too: she was already beginning to feel old! Her mother had entrusted her little sister to her as a sacred duty and so she spent all her time and her thoughts on her. She hardly had any time for fantasy or light-hearted banter.

But she didn't complain; even if at times she felt sad that her role as "mother" weighed a little too heavily on her slender, young shoulders, still she was sure that from heaven her Angel was blessing her.

Here she was. Everything was ready: her bag, small and light and the house tidy and in order.

Closing the door, she handed the geranium and cyclamen pots, with the cage of the budgies, to the watchman so they would not die of hunger or thirst: and she would be off!

Who knows how Elisa would see her; her little sister, tanned perhaps...and lazy... she only scribbled a postcard saying: "I'm fine, having lots of fun...kisses."

Anna boarded the bus and seated herself comfortably. Soon she was off, the bus speeding along the highway through green trees already turning golden brown heralding the onset of autumn. Anna felt her lungs expand, letting her imagination run away with her a little.

My God, what if I had a little house up there on that green

hillside...and perhaps in the evening, I'd stand by the window waiting.

Elisa was right up front of the bus queue with a group of girls. She stood out with her red skirt edged in yellow and her head full of black curls (how many curlers did she use this evening!).

Her lips formed a silent "oh," as she was surprised to see Anna. Elisa stopped there in the secret hope of seeing the smart uniform with superb gold-threaded should strips of a certain pilot she knew, but instead, she saw before her the simple, slightly plain dress of her sister. Nonetheless she was so happy. Here was her "mom" who before even letting down her shoulder bag, held her in her arms and kissed her as if she hadn't seen her for a year.

Not that she hadn't seen her for a year, but Eliza, in the short space of time had become someone else: the jokes of her youth, the air of

sun and sea and a tan and her cheeks were round like peaches and finally, in her eyes there was a new intensity as though, suddenly from that child a woman had blossomed. Anna immediately perceived this with the sensitivity of her love or so it seemed.

She held her in her arms and in her simple dress she looked smaller and more modest than ever.

Very briefly, Elisa told her everything: about Mrs. Gilbert, her brother Lawrence, who came back home every evening from the city by car and left every morning; of Alexander, her nephew, and yes, a pilot...a very tall young man but with a terrible teasing voice.

So here they were that evening dining at a nice table. Alex was sure that Elisa was not indifferent; that devil-of-a-boy who did not look at her every so often and Anna who bowled him over with her fascinating looks, as she trembled with admiration... he got upset



though he tried to hide it. Then there was Lawrence, Mrs. Gilbert's son the most serious person in the group; he spoke very little but looked at everyone very serenely with kind eyes.

Soon Anna realised that Alex had to leave for the airport; she realised that Elisa was very upset without wanting to appear so. She discovered that Mrs. Gilbert, a widow, with her son, was a shrewd and sensible woman. But above all, she realized that Anna had found a new and unexpected friend. Anna an unexpected soul; that had long been buried beneath the weight of daily chores with little time to let it emerge like a flower that opens at the first rays of sunshine; a sensitive soul that the things that surround it. She found an unexpected joy in surrendering completely to this ten-day dream, as if it were, to the reality of her entire life. But three modest little rooms and her job waits for her at home... She was fighting this reverie. "There's no need to be carried away by hand and heart." She told herself.

In bed late that night, tucked beneath soft linen sheets, Anna stretched out blissfully. As she felt every sinew soften and relax...through the open window she saw the tops of the pines on the seashore, like green, scented feathers waving in the breeze. All the stars were twinkling high above in their divine nocturnal distance, delighting her happy eyes which were now wide and dreamy as if they never knew the harshness of sacrifice.

"Anna, are you coming with us?" That was Mrs. Gilbert's voice.

She and her brother (who had not been to town for two days, strange!) were inviting her to take short drive through the town to the beach to fetch Elisa who had gone ahead of them by herself.

Anna would have liked to go out but she would have preferred that Lawrence wasn't there. Somehow, she felt awed in his presence!

At a certain point, Mrs. Gilbert remembered that she had to go to the nearby chemist to collect some medicines. She stopped the car, and left the two of them alone in the shade of some pines.

Anna was totally embarrassed. She didn't know how to handle the gentle, wise and smiling gaze of Lawrence. She immediately thought that she looked horribly dishevelled while he, slightly grey had a very tidy head of hair...and looked so confident.

"Are you sorry you've got to sit with me for a while?" (How can this be, such a sweet voice...speaking to me?) Anna's eyes seemed to glisten as Lawrence smiled cheerfully. Do I really scare you?"

Who said it's easy to answer such questions? It's actually very difficult and pretty complicated. Imagine, reaching thirty and feeling so awkward!

Anna wrinkled her forehead; she could say and do nothing else. At most she pretended to fiddle with her watch strap and look at her wrist wondering if her face had turned warm and red!

"Dear girl, you know you are blushing! Is that so? Is it spring?"

Finally, Anna found a reply; it was cheerful and beautiful to blurt it out:

"...it's like spring, late wisteria, Lawrence! They look like April

flowers and it's almost autumn..." She finally looked at him; his large eyes, clear and tender with a little restless shyness.

In the meantime, Mrs. Gilbert returned and cheerfully said: "Hey, you two..." Anna only had time to imprint in her heart those two large clear pupils, staring at her very tenderly.

They found Elisa sad. They didn't need to ask why; one look at her and they realized that Alex must have left without even saying goodbye. They all walked hand in hand back to the car and drove home in silence; each having something to think about.

That evening, after dinner, Lawrence stayed with Anna but Anna had something to say to him this time. Her little sister was upset: she was so young and still had the heart of a child! But he reassured her: he knew his nephew. For now, Alex had other things in mind: planes, records, looping, blocks and tumbles. For now, she had to wait...

"And I would like to be here, Anna, waiting with you..."

But Anna had decided she would say no. She had to be there for Elisa! Her duty wasn't finished. From now on it was going to get more delicate than ever. That poor child was in love with that king of the blue skies...who perhaps didn't love her.

It was almost time to pack her little bag...the days had whizzed by one by one and there were hardly any left. She would have to get back to work more diligently; happy with just the beautiful memory of the blue sea and the two clear pupils that had looked so tenderly at her. It was too much for

her (she had long resigned herself to accepting that her time for falling in love was over) to keep this tenderness in her heart.

But deep in her, her heart ached even if she didn't want to admit it.

The door opened. Elisa rushed into the room; her face radiant.

"Look! Anna, look!"

The miracle she showed her sister was a postcard with the view of the airport and behind, a few words but full of meaning: "I'm thinking of you all the time and I want to see you again. Say hello to your sister - Alex."

From the look in her eyes Anna could imagine the joy that sprang from her every move and word. How that taciturn pilot had filled the heart of her dear Elisa!

The little girl threw her arms around her sister's neck and whispered into her ear:

"I love him so much, you know!"

Anna quietly nodded; she understood. She didn't say that even in her happiness she was about to sacrifice the only ray of sunshine that had reached her.

But Elisa broke away; taking her by the arms she stared into her sister's eyes and with a sigh said:

"Oh, Elisa...but now it's your turn. Do you think I didn't realize that Lawrence had feelings for you? Don't say 'no.' But hurry up because...I don't want to wait too long!"

And she ran off laughing, leaving Anna stunned as her heart began to beat wildly. Her mind filled with thoughts and her soul, so silent was now bright... It was as if in that lonely little house, a gust of cheerful children had burst in and thrown open the windows...filling the place with sunlight and happiness. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 20

Michele Molineris

54. In your midst I see a mitre (1855)

From the time he had seen a dove over the head Cagliari, who was dying of Typhoid, Don Bosco could not get out of his mind the notion that this young man would become a bishop. Apparently, he also confided this to Father Alasonatti, so much so that when the latter met Cagliari once day, he said to him: "You have to become very good, because Don Bosco told me something very particular about you.

Around 1855 several clerics and boys were gathered about Don Bosco at table one day lightheartedly discussing their future. After a moment's silence Don Bosco assumed a grave, thoughtful air, as occasionally was his wont, and looking at each one he said: "One of you will become a bishop!" They all looked at him in astonishment. Then he added in a light vein: "But Don Bosco will always remain plain Don Bosco!"

At this they all laughed because they were just clerics and had no idea to whom his prediction could refer. None of them came from the upper class, and generally in those days only men of noble lineage, or at least of rare talent and scholarship, were raised to the episcopal dignity. Furthermore, Don Bosco and his institute were still so humble that, humanly speaking, it really seemed impossible that any pupil of his would be chosen a bishop.

The clerics present were Turchi, Reviglio, Cagliari, Francesca,

Anfossi and Rua and they heard Don Bosco's prediction. They also heard him say on another occasion: "Who would ever dream that one of you is to become a bishop?"

Not a few times he continued to say: "I wonder if Don Bosco is wrong. I see a mitre among you, and it shall not be the only one. But I'm sure of at least one."

The clerics then would try jokingly to get him to reveal which one of them, then simple clerics, would become bishop, but Don Bosco's answer would only be a mysterious smile!

Mons. Cagliari recounts: "One day in my early years of priesthood I met Don Bosco at the foot of the stairs. He looked very tired, so I said to him with filial affection: "Don Bosco let me hold your hand and help you up the stairs!" He did so in a fatherly way. When we reached the top floor, he tried to kiss my right hand. I was so



Bishop John Cagliari

stunned that I could not react quickly enough to it. Then I asked him: "Why did you do that? Were you trying to humiliate me or yourself?"

"Neither," he replied. "In due time you will know my reason."

In 1883, before setting out for France, Don Bosco gave an even clearer hint. After making his will and distributing keepsakes to each member of the Superior Chapter, he gave Father Cagliari a small sealed box and said: "This is for you!" some time later, overcome by curiosity, Cagliari opened it. Inside he found a precious ring.

Finally, in October 1884, after Father Cagliari had been appointed titular bishop of Mageddo, he asked Don Bosco to reveal the secret of thirty years before when he had said that one of his clerics would become a bishop. He replied: "I will tell you on the eve of your episcopal consecration." That evening, pacing up and down in his room with the bishop-elect, he said to him: "Do you remember how ill you were when you were still a boy and just beginning your studies?"

"Yes, Father," Cagliari replied, "and I also remember that you had come to give me the Last Sacraments, but then you changed your mind. Instead you told me that I would recover and, with breviary in hand, go far, far away. You didn't tell me anything else though."

"I'll tell you the rest now," Don Bosco said, and he then described to him the two visions in detail. Afterward, Bishop-elect Cagliari begged him to reveal this story to the members of the Superior Chapter that evening at supper. (EBM V, 71-73)

55. Coffee was also good for Don Bosco (1855)

One day, seated at an abundantly laden table, he remarked: "If only my boys were here! How well they'd dispose of all these gifts of God!"

On another occasion, when the second and third courses were being served, he did not help himself. "Aren't you well, Don Bosco?" his host asked.

"I feel fine," he replied, "but how can I feast when my children are hungry?" a guest immediately leaped from his chair and said: "How true! We must think of Don Bosco's boys, too!" An impromptu collection netted Don Bosco four hundred lire.

Once, [Joseph] Cotta, a banker, while dining with Don Bosco, saw that he looked pensive and asked him if he were worried. "Yes," Don Bosco replied. "I'm worrying about all the money you lent me."

"Cheer up," the banker said. "There is nothing that a good cup of coffee won't cure!" With the coffee the banker served him the promissory notes endorsed "paid in full."

56. Don Bosco, distracted while at prayer (1855)

On the last day (of the retreat) Don Bosco was leading the evening rosary as usual, kneeling on one side of the sanctuary to the left of the main altar, with about a hundred laymen behind him at his left.

As he came to the end of the *De Profundis*, he suddenly stopped; then, while attempting to go on with the responsories and *Oremus*, he hesitated and stammered, unable to continue. He seemed to have lost

his memory or to have suffered a distraction. "That was what I thought," Father [John] Turchi later testified in writing, "but since I was far back, I couldn't see what he was doing. After a few moments he resumed the prayers, and I figured that my guess was right. When we left the church and retired to our rooms, I asked several people if they had noticed that interruption, but from their answers I gathered that, generally, the incident was considered quite trivial.

Nevertheless, quite a few people were surprised that Don Bosco should have stumbled on such a common prayer. However, his more intimate friends sensed that perhaps something extraordinary had happened, and they were right. As Don Bosco was praying, he had seen two tongues of fire suddenly appear and hover over the

altar. One flashed the word "death"; the other, "apostasy." Then the two flares, as if detaching themselves from their wicks, had glided through the Church. Don Bosco stood up to follow their course. The two flames, after circling the group of men a few times, finally rested on two of them. The light they cast enabled Don Bosco to see them clearly. Then the two little flames vanished.

On the following day, as everyone was leaving, Mr. Bertagna of Castelnuovo, who was curious about the incident, managed to board the same coach as Don Bosco, and he took a seat beside him. The clerics, too, were burning with curiosity. When he was questioned about the incident, Don Bosco waited until the coaches had begun to move, before he replied. Then he told them what had happened, beginning with the words: "Last

night I had a funny experience." After describing the incident, he concluded as follows: "When I came out of the church, I watched to see if there would be any comments. Nothing of the sort happened, and so I figured that no one had noticed my hesitation. That's why I didn't say anything. You are the first ones to find out what really took place. Now let's wait and see what happens."

His vision was fulfilled that same year. The man upon whom the little flame of "apostasy" had rested was a wealthy businessman, widely regarded as a good practicing Catholic; he became a Protestant. The other man, over whose head the second flame had hovered, was a baron: he died the same year. (EBM V, 193-194)

57. Wine and Blasphemies (1855)

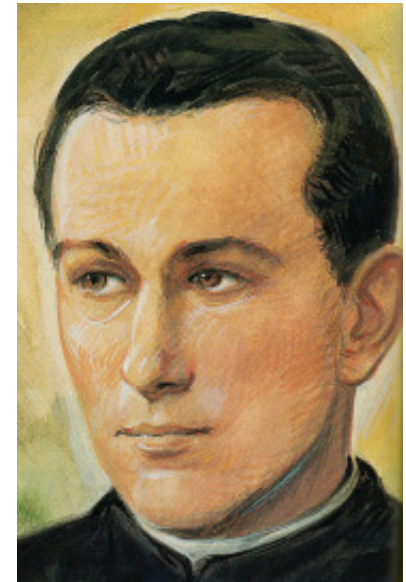
While on his travels Don Bosco sometimes encountered men, who would urge him to hear their confession because of a promise they had made. Among these was a coachman of a public coach. Don Bosco had sat beside him. As he drove, Don Bosco was very pained to hear him blaspheme. Unable to stand it, he courteously begged the man to cease. The coachman tried to excuse himself saying it was a habit and he just could not help it. Don Bosco said: "If you can control yourself until the next stop, I'll give you a bottle of wine."

That did it. Don Bosco kept his word and then remarked: "If you can control yourself for such a small reward, why don't you give up the habit altogether by thinking of the far greater reward that awaits you? And don't forget that you can fall into hell at any moment!" □

SALESIAN SAINTS

ANDREW BELTRAMI Salesian Priest, Venerable 1870-1897

He was born at Omegna (Novara) on Lake Orta on June 24, 1870. Lively by nature, as a teenager he was tempted to associate with a bad companion, but because he frequented the sacraments and had a strong will, he was esteemed by everyone. At thirteen he entered the Salesian College at Lanzo where he spent three years doing business studies that he had begun at Omegna after which he pursued the classics in which he secured full marks. He demonstrated a strong willpower. The years he spent in Lanzo were happy years. He wrote to his mother: "I'm very happy in this boarding school." In fact, in the Salesian house, he found what he was looking for; the answer to his deepest aspirations: a serious spiritual journey, a strong sacramental experience and an enthusiastic family atmosphere. These were signs of an authentic vocation. After a long talk with Don Bosco he decided on joining the Salesians. "The grace of a vocation," he would write later, "was completely a singular grace for me... The Lord had put into my heart a firm determination, an intimate conviction that the only way convenient for me was to become a Salesian." He was the eldest of ten brothers. His parents,



though profoundly Christian, still struggled to accept that their son wanted to become a Salesian. In the end, faith prevailed; his mother who accompanied him to the Salesians at Foglizzo, requested the Novice Master in these words: "Make him a saint." "Make me a saint" was also the firm resolution that he wrote down that day.

In 1886 he began his novitiate and received his cassock at the hands of Don Bosco himself, who would whisper to the young novice: "There is only one Beltrami." On October 2, 1887, again into the hands of the holy founder he made his religious profession. He told his Novice Master, Fr. Julius Barberis: "From this moment, I promise to double my commitment to become a saint. Nothing will please me more than doing always what the Lord wills." In the two years he spent at Turin-Valsalice he completed the two-year course

concluding them with a degree. He received news that a Polish prince, now blessed, Augustus Czartoryski, had recently joined the Congregation some time earlier. These two would contract tuberculosis and Father Beltrami would soon become fast friends with him, becoming his spiritual guardian angel in Turin-Valsalice and wherever these two patients were placed. A deep spiritual friendship was born between the two which turned into fraternal concern. It is not difficult to imagine what influence Fr. August exerted on the young Andrew, strengthening his faith, teaching him to suffer for love and gradually instilling in him an oblation and reparative spirituality that would later become a specific characteristic of Beltrami.

For his practical training he was sent to Foglizzo among the novices. But even more exceptional was the spiritual work he did on himself. On a very cold day in February 1891 the first symptoms of the disease that would lead to his death were revealed: he was just 20 years old! He was promptly treated and seemed to improve but it was not long before the disease returned with inexorable ferocity.

It seems that his only fear was not being able to become a priest in time. So his superiors, very wisely, while making novenas for his recovery, also hastened his preparation, and received the necessary dispensations to be able to admit him to his priestly ordination which took place on January 8, 1893. He had not yet turned 23. He was ordained in Don Bosco's bedroom by Monsignor John Cagliero, the first Salesian bishop and cardinal. In the years that re-

mained after his ordination, he wrote some very valuable ascetical pamphlets. He also left other unpublished and unfinished works including the Italian translation of the first volumes of the critical edition of the works of St. Francis de Sales.

He never stopped working. Indeed, one look at his daily timetable stuns the casual onlooker. He offered himself as a victim of love for the conversion of sinners and for the comfort of the suffering. The Salesian cleric Louis Variara was deeply impressed by Father Andrew and was inspired to found the future Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary: to live the victim vocation joyfully with Jesus.

On February 20, 1897, the anniversary of his illness, he wanted to go to celebrate Mass in the basilica of Mary Help of Christians. It would be his last outing. Then he started declining. During the night he awoke on his own and put on his cassock and then lay on his bed. That was how death took him on the morning of December 30 surrounded by several confreres. Just three months earlier Teresa of Lisieux had died at the age of 24, also consumed by the same disease.

Father Beltrami reveals to the Salesian family the difficult message of redemptive suffering, or rather suffering that can become mysteriously more joyful in proportion to the love with which it is accepted. "Believe me," he wrote one day to his rector Father Scappini, "in the midst of the pain, I am happy and full of joy. It makes me smile when I am offered commiserations and wishes for a speedy recovery!" □



FROM 'LET IT HAPPEN' TO 'MAKE IT HAPPEN'

by Maria Ko Ha Fong, FMA

Mary became the Mother of God because "she believed in the words of the Lord" (Lk. 1, 45). This was Elizabeth's interpretation of Mary's *fiat* (let it happen) - under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Four centuries later Augustine would echo her when he would say: "Filled with faith, Mary conceived Christ first in her heart and then in her womb" (*Sermones* 215.4). The fullness of grace on God's part corresponded to the fullness of grace on Mary's part.

Surrendering herself completely to God, she is committed to advancing on her "pilgrimage of faith." She has gradually and profoundly tuned herself to God. Because of her living faith she is attained a strong bond with him, which made her perfectly in tune with God, with this divine sphere, being able to discern God's ways and hear throbbing with herself, the heart of God. When the letter to the Hebrews praises the faith of the ancestors of Israel, speaking of Moses it says, he lived "as if seeing him who was invisible" (Heb. 11:27). Paul too, having attained some degree of union with Christ could say without any rheto-

ric or pride: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Notice that all this can be said of Mary. At Cana in Galilee we find her so simple, discreet and confident standing beside her Son, sure that she will be heard because she's so in tune with him.

Mary at Cana, a prophetic role

She is "the spokesperson of the will of God, the one who points out the needs that must be met, so that the saving power of the Messiah can manifest itself" (*Redemptoris Mater* 12). A prophet is not someone who knows how to predict the future in a prodigious manner, but rather who feels that she has been totally and radically "seduced by God" (Jer. 20:7). She is so drawn into his mystery that she shares his infinite love for humankind. Precisely because the prophet is so captivated by the irresistible power of love, she participates entirely in the fate of humanity's most intimate anxieties, expectations, joys and the dramatic situations of the world. As a "sentinel" among the people, she watches, discerns and reads the historical present, grasping its ultimate

perspectives. She scrutinizes the signs of the times to discover God's footsteps there. She commits herself fearlessly to his/her role so that divine compassion can be received and responded to. She is someone who possesses a "piercing eye" (Num. 24:3); he sees things more deeply.

The two words that Mary pronounces at Cana: "They have no wine" (Jn 2, 3) and "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2, 5) highlights her prophetic role. Mary reads human history intently and identifies its still hidden problems, gathering up those silent groans and perceiving those nameless sufferings. She discovers the crucial knot in the entire tangle of history and presents it to her Son, the only one who can unravel it and in the meantime she prepares the servants to receive divine assistance with her confident directive.

Mary's Commandment

"Do whatever he tells you," is one of the few words Mary speaks in the Gospel; the only time she addresses people, which is why this quote is rightly considered "Mary's commandment." It is her last recorded statement in the Gospel; almost a "spiritual testament." After this, Mary will not speak again. She has said what was necessary for hearts to open to Jesus because he has the "words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). In this directive the reader may perceive the echoes of the Sinaitic covenant. At the end of the Covenant the people promise: "What the Lord has said, we will do" (Ex 19,8; 24, 3,7; Dt 5,27). Mary not only personifies the Israel, obedient to the covenant, but to Jesus from whom the new covenant and the new people begin. This comes

out more clearly if we read these words as a parallel to the last words of Jesus found in Matthew's Gospel: "Make disciples of all peoples [...] by teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28, 19).

Mary trusts the word of God

So, Mary leads us to follow Jesus, to obey his word and to consider it as an absolute point of reference. Mary helps us to form the new community of Jesus. Indeed, she helps us to become friends of Jesus, in the sense that he meant when he said: "You are my friends, if you do what I command you" (Jn 15:14). The "do whatever he tells you" that Mary pronounces is not a theoretical statement, an abstract invitation. It is an exhortation that stems from personal experience. The word penetrates the heart and the life of the interlocutor only if it comes from the heart and life of the speaker. Mary who expertly trusts the word of God, is now able to help others to do the same. Her faith is contagious, her *fiat* lived in the depth of her heart becomes a *let it happen* as it convinces others to do the same.

For us, members of the Salesian family, called to be signs and expressions of God's prevenient love among the young, the figure of Mary, prophet, educator, mediator and helper is particularly enlightening. Like Mary, it is necessary for us to have our antennae directed simultaneously towards and God and towards history. Only a deep attachment to God and a wise understanding of the world will be able to make our evangelizing activity effective. The *facite* (*make it happen*) that we address to others must always come from our personal *fiat* in obedience to God. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Did Noah Fish?

A Sunday school teacher asked: "Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the Ark?" "No," replied Johnny. "How could he, with just two worms."

Higher Power

A Sunday school teacher said to her children. "We have been learning how powerful kings and queens were in bible times. But, there is a higher power. Can anybody tell me what it is?" One child blurted out, "Aces."

Sunday School Version

Nine-year-old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday school. "Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then, he used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved."

"Now, Joey, is that really what your teacher taught you?" his mother asked. "Well, no, Mom, but if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it.

In the Pause Between

Megan was puzzled recently by the odd messages she kept getting on her voice mail. Day after day, all she'd hear, from friends, family and customers alike, would be

their message and then they'd ALL say, "BEEP."

We were talking about something else and I had her check her voice mail message to find something out. She discovered the solution to the BEEP riddle.

Her message said, "I'm not available right now, so please leave a beep after the message."

Compliments to the Chef

I have a reputation for not being a fantastic cook. One evening I worked particularly hard on a new recipe, and once again it didn't turn out as well as I'd hoped.

My son, always sweet and conscious of my feelings, chose his words carefully after the meal. "Mom," he said, "that dinner was so good I thought someone else made it."

Arrangements

It was a difficult subject to bring before his aged mother, but John felt that he must: "Mum, you're no longer a spring chicken and you do need think ahead of what'll happen in the future. Why don't we make arrangements about when...you know...when...you pass on?"

The mother didn't say anything, just sat there staring ahead.

"I mean, Mum, like...how do you want to finally go? Do you want to be buried? Cremated?"

There was yet another long pause. Then the mother looked up and said: "Son, why don't you surprise me?" □

CRISIS OF VALUES

by Vincent Travers, OP

I remember the first day I saw Jackie in the classroom. My eyes blinked. I noticed his blonde hair. It was six inches below his shoulders. It was the first time I ever saw hair on a boy's head below his shoulders. Long hair was coming into fashion then. I rushed to judgement. I filed Jackie under 'strange'. I should have known better: what matters is not what is on our head, but in our mind and heart. Jackie wasn't the easiest of students. To be honest, he was a pain.

Jackie made a name for himself on his first day in school. He claimed to be an atheist. He got the attention he was looking for. Most of his classmates had never met one. "I don't believe in God," he declared triumphantly. And I reacted perhaps unfairly: "Sorry Jackie, I have bad news for you. God doesn't believe in atheists!" On his last day in school, we had our final conversation. Jackie asked in a rather cynical tone, "Do you think I'll ever find God?" I decided on a little shock treatment. "No!" I said emphatically.

"Why not?" he responded, "I thought God was the product you were pushing." As he walked away, I called after him: "Jackie, I don't think you'll ever find Him, but I am absolutely certain that God will find you." He kept walking. I was a little disappointed that he had missed my clever line. "He will find you!" At least I thought it was a good line at that moment.

Years Later

Some years later, one of his

friends told me that Jackie had terminal cancer. I was saddened and shocked. I got his phone number and decided to give him a call. I wasn't sure if he would take the call but he did. I said, "I heard about the cancer and I am sorry." "I have it in both lungs. It's only a matter of weeks." I knew from the tone in his voice that he was pleased I had phoned. We were having the kind of conversation I never dreamed possible. I said, "Can I ask you a question?" "Sure."

"What's it like to be only twenty-two and dying?"

"Well, it could be worse."

"Like what?"

"Being fifty and having no values or ideals, or being fifty and thinking that booze, seducing women, and making money are the real biggies in life." Instantly I thought of the image I unfairly formed of Jackie years ago when I characterised him as 'strange.'

He said, "Do you remember our last conversation? You said something I have never forgotten." I was surprised he remembered. I had said, "God will find you." Then he said, "I'd like to see you." I said, "I'd like that."



Unrecognisable

I stepped into the hospital ward. When I saw Jackie lying on his bed, my mouth dropped open. I didn't recognize him at first. He was bald. His long hair had fallen off because of the chemo. His cheeks had a ghastly glow. He was skin and bone. He was a pale shadow of the young man I once knew. It was heart-wrenching. My eyes filled up. We looked at each other in silence. He gave a faint smile of recognition. Amazingly, we picked up as though we had never been apart. He talked in a whisper. "When the doctors told me that the cancer had spread to my vital organs, I got serious about finding God. I began banging my bloody fists against the golden gates of heaven. Nothing happened. God did not come out. My 'conversion' didn't last long, so I just quit. I decided I didn't really care about God, or after life, or anything like that."

Love

"I was allowed home for a few days during a period of remission. I woke up one morning and remembered something else you said in school that has made it easier for me to die young. You said there are only two tragedies in life, and dying wasn't one of them. One was to go through life and not to love. The second was to go through life and not tell those you love that you loved them.

I realised how much I have been loved. With time running out, I decided to tell my family how much I loved them, how much they meant to me, and how they were always there for me. I began with the hardest one, my Dad. He was reading the newspaper when

I approached him.

"Dad," "Yes," he answered without lowering the newspaper. "Dad, I want to talk." "Talk, son."

"Dad, it's important." The newspaper came down.

"What is it son?" "Dad, I want you to know I love you." The old man was stunned. It was the last thing he expected to me to me to say. The

newspaper fell to the floor. Then my father did two things I could never ever remember him doing. He cried, and he hugged me. We talked all for hours. It was much easier with my mom and little sister. We cried and we hugged each other. I was so sorry I had waited so long to open up to the people I had been closest to and who meant the world to me."

Anger

"In the final stages of the illness, I was still venting my anger against God. Then, one day, I turned around, and God was there. He was real. I cannot explain the unexplainable. He didn't come when I banged on his door and pleaded. I guess God's ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. I guess God does things in his own way and time. But the important thing is that God was there. He found me, even after I had

stopped looking for him. Yeah, you were right!"

Jack had stumbled on to a spiritual truth that is both profound and magnificent. Life is not so much us searching for God. It is the other way around. Our gracious God is searching for us. We allow for the mystery. Life is not a problem to be solved; it is a

mystery to be lived.

Soft spot

I am sure you have seen pictures of the Good Shepherd with the lamb across his shoulders. Which lamb is he carrying? The lame one? The sick one? The stray one? The lost one? The one who needs to be carried most of all? Oh, yes! God

is always searching for the lost one. The lost one stands for the Jackies of this world, and by the grace of God, that includes you and me. □

Foot Note: This article owes much to John Powell's book *Unconditional Love*.
(*St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland*)

NEWSBITS

VATICAN CITY

Looking for a way to provide both spiritual and physical care on Easter, a group of Italian doctors received their bishop's permission to distribute Communion to those infected by the coronavirus.

According to an article published April 15 by *Avvenire*, the daily newspaper of the Italian bishops' conference, six doctors caring for coronavirus patients at a hospital in Prato, located in Tuscany, presented the idea to the chaplain and subsequently received support from Bishop Giovanni Nerbini of Prato.

Nerbini made the six doctors extraordinary eucharistic ministers, allowing them to give Communion to over 100 patients on Easter.

"I cried with the patients. Hospitals are places of care, but we can't think of separating the body from the spirit," Filippo Risaliti, one of the doctors who distributed the Eucharist, told *Avvenire*. "I realized that in the fight against coronavirus, our effort is too focused on fighting the physical ills of the patients."

Risaliti said the idea was inspired by Pope Francis' call for doctors and medical professionals "to play the role of intermediaries of the church for people who are suffering."

"We are the only ones who could do it, since only we can enter those rooms," he said.

Dressed in protective gear, the hospital chaplain, Fr. Carlo Bergamaschi, accompanied the doctors distributing Communion. The priest carried a ciborium filled with consecrated hosts, which were individually separated by gauze pads to avoid contamination.

For patients who were on respirators and unable to physically receive the Eucharist, the



doctors read a prayer at their bedside.

Risaliti told *Avvenire* that he and the other doctors understood the suffering the patients endure due "to isolation from affection and from relatives."

"They are lonely, suffering people, not only in body but also in soul," he said.

Another doctor, Lorenzo Guarducci, said that for them, distributing Communion helped to heal "a double separation" because "one of the tragic consequences of this pandemic is isolation, of both the sick and health care workers, from

everyone."

Many doctors caring for those infected by the virus have been unable to return to their homes in order to prevent infecting their loved ones. Guarducci said he had not seen his wife and children in over a month.

"For me, giving Communion to the sick was a way to fill this void; this gesture allowed me to reunite with my loved ones through the Lord," he told *Avvenire*. "It was one of the most beautiful experiences I have lived in my life as a man, as a Christian and as a doctor." *by Junno Arocho Esteves, Catholic News Service*

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*

My most sincere thanks to Mother Mary and Jesus Christ for guiding my daughter and blessing her with good health throughout her MBBS course and for helping her pass her final exams. I always recite the Three Hail Marys and guided my daughter to faithfully do the same. I am deeply grateful for your shower of blessings on me and my family. Continue to intercede for us Mother Mary, I pray.

Sabina Braganza, Goa

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

SEPTEMBER 2020

Respect for the Planet's Resource

We pray that the planet's resources will not be plundered, but shared in a just and respectful manner.

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PRAYER ON MARY'S NATIVITY

Impart to your servants,
we pray, O Lord, the
gift of heavenly grace, that
the feast of the Nativity of
the Blessed Virgin may
bring deeper peace to
those for whom the birth
of her Son was the dawning
of salvation.

Through our Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son, who lives
and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and
ever. Amen

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937,
by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay.

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