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*May we,
 who honour
 the memory
 of the Mother
 of your Son,
 may show forth
 in our mortal flesh
 the life of Jesus.*

(From the Common of Our Lady)

From The Editor's Desk

GRIEF IS THE PRICE FOR LOVE

When Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth was writing to console those who most loved ones in the World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001, she said "nothing that can be said can begin to take away the anguish and the pain of these moments. Grief is the price we pay for love." I wish more people understood that. In fact, trying to address such deep pain with trite phrases or platitudes is likely just to cause more pain. When you experience pain that deep, usually the best thing you can do is just sit with it. Honour it. Hold that person and be with them. You won't be able to take their pain away, but you can make sure that they aren't suffering alone.

Most of the disciples could not stand by and watch their teacher and friend, a man whom they loved greatly, suffer. They ran off afraid to face the persecution and the pain, afraid to look into the eyes of someone whose agony they could not relieve. Those that stood by Christ to the end were few, but they are the ones who probably loved him the most.

Maybe it is for this reason that the Church has traditionally looked to the Virgin Mary for inspiration on how to be a Christian. She was the first to hold him when he came into the world, and she was the last to hold him when he went out of it. Her ability to stand by Christ, even though it meant her own heart-shattering pain, was inspiration for generations of Christians struggling to make sense of this thing we call the crucifixion. Her presence there at the foot of the cross meant the fulfilment of the words that the priest Simeon said to her when Jesus was born: "a sword will pierce your own soul too." And now it happened. The centurion could have pierced her side with that lance and it would have hurt less. How can we learn to love Christ that deeply, so deeply that we would not look away or walk away from him in his agony? This is the question Christians have had to ask themselves whenever we have walked the way of the cross: how can we approach the cross with Mary's love and faithfulness?

Standing side by side with Mary at the foot of the cross, we realise that, while it is not always possible to take someone else's pain, it is possible to share their pain with them. It is possible to keep faith with them, to stand there steadfast and not allow them to suffer alone.

One of the responses to that question is a Latin hymn: *stabat mater dolorosa*. We now associate this hymn with the Stations of the Cross, as its verses are frequently sung between the stations because these lyrics invite us to walk the way of the cross with Mary.

When you look at Mary at the foot of the cross, you begin to realize that this is exactly what Christ is doing on the cross for us. God, as a loving parent, is not going to let one of his children die alone. With Christ's crucifixion, God forever knows our pain, whether it is the physical pain of being beaten or tortured, as so many are in our world today, or the emotional pain of watching someone you love die. When we walk the way of the cross, we honour all those who, through grief, pay the price for love.

Fr. Ian Doulton sdb

DREAMS AND FRAGILITY IN THE WORLD OF AFFECTION

Gianpaolo Dianin

Fidelity and indissolubility, tenderness, love and openness to life. It is indeed true: The Church's Magisterium on sexuality and marriage is today more than ever a sign of contradiction.

I have just begun my twenty-eighth year of teaching on family and morality, first in the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy and now in the Theological Faculty of Triveneto (Italy). Every time I find myself in front of the large group of seminarians, religious and lay students, I feel a little uneasy because I am aware that I am teaching a difficult and uncomfortable subject, the contents of which are very far from how love relationships, marriage and the family are understood and lived today.

I look at my students and I know that they too are going through many difficulties associated with the world of love. This is true for everyone: for those who are preparing to give their lives to the Lord by choosing virginity or celibacy, and even for those who are engaged or married. I am aware that every time I begin a lesson I am not only speaking to their intelligence, but I am inevitably touching their hearts and the eternal polarity between body and spirit, dreams and frailties that inhabit them, will always inhabit the world of affection.

"The Church in her

teaching is a sign of contradiction": these are the words that we find in the opening paragraph of chapter six dedicated to family ministry in *Amoris Laetitia* (n. 200). How can we fail to recognise the truth of this statement? Again, this year in class I will be talking about indissolubility and fidelity, sexuality and love, openness to life and contraception, marriage and cohabitation, homosexuality and trans-sexuality.

While I write this little article, I have received an e-mail which I quote verbatim: "We are Georgina and Luke (names changed), a couple married for 11 years with three children. Now, for the first time, we are in a crisis over a question of family morality. A friend advised me to turn to you before this problem leads to serious consequences within our family. We are therefore here to kindly ask



if it would be possible to meet you. Thanking you from the bottom of my heart for your willingness to help. I send you my best regards." I can understand the issues that concern this married couple with three children; perhaps she would like to act in a certain way, but he does not understand and so conflicts and tensions arise.

The words of Jesus come to mind: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? From now on, if there are five people in a family, they will be divided three against two and two against three; father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law" (Lk 12, 51-53). **It is indeed true, the Magisterium of the Church on sexuality, on marriage, on the fecundity of love is today more than ever, a sign of contradiction.**

It is not easy to venture into the area of sexual and family morality, one of the most complex and debated areas: the unease of many Christians is evident, the perplexity of those who observe the Church from the outside are not few, and the gap between the Church's teaching and the choices Christians have to make are getting more and more profound.

The Catholic theologian, who exercises his ministry in the Church and takes up his pen to write, has the arduous task of 'omitting nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ' (HV 29). A task that becomes even more demanding and challenging when, in addition to teaching, because

those who teach are in daily contact with those whom the Lord has called to holiness in marriage.

As if this were not enough, the theologian knows that he too is a disciple who struggles to live out the radical demands of Jesus; the provocative words to the doctors of the law resound: "Woe to you who burden people with unbearable burdens; and would they lift a finger to lighten their burden? not they" (Mt 11:46).

Pope Francis, however, adds other words that encourage those who teach Catholic morality: "The Church wishes, with humility and compassion, to reach out to families and "to help each family to discover the best way to overcome any obstacles it encounters" (AL 200).

Then the Pope adds three important emphases: "It is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems. [...] but needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one's dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness."

Secondly: "This consists not merely in presenting a set of rules, but in proposing values that are clearly needed today, even in the most secularized countries."

Finally, he states: "It is necessary to unambiguously denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors (AL 201).

To be a sign of contradiction in the name of the Gospel is not just a question of our times, but of all time when the Church wants to be herself, a true disciple of her risen Lord. □

THE REAL FACE OF MARY

by Don Chino Biscontin

On September 8, the Church invites us to recall Mary's birth. By carefully and lovingly reading what the Gospels tell us about her, we can sketch a faithful portrait of her; one to compare ourselves to.

It is only right that we are filled with gratitude and joy as we recall the great gift God gave us when Mary was born – given to us. In view of the supreme gift, which is the Son of God, but who having to come as a man among men, had to pass through the womb of a woman. Thus, in the mind and heart of God the two gifts, that of Mary and that of Jesus, are conceived together. But what personal characteristics did Mary



possess? Reading carefully and lovingly what the Gospels tell us about her, we can sketch a faithful portrait of her (right: *la Madonna Tempi, Raffaello, 1508, Bavaria*).

She was a woman of great religious conviction, who lived in an intense relationship with God, to whom she turned with a faith that comprised humility and trust. Doctrinal tradition speaks, in this regard, of Mary's "immaculate conception," to say that she was not stained by the consequences of what Augustine would call original sin, and

which introduces into all of us an innate problem of living in a proper relationship with God. This is how tradition interprets the title with which the angel Gabriel greeted her at the annunciation: "full of grace." She believed in the fidelity of the God of her fathers, in his care for the poor and the downtrodden, in his interventions in the history of his people. Because of this faith, she would fully accept God's will manifested to her; that of giving birth to a child destined to be the "Emmanuel," the "God with us," and she

would believe that it was for that reason she would be proclaimed blessed by all the nations.

She was also a strong and courageous woman. Although her journeys took place together in the company of other people, it must not have been easy for a very young woman from Nazareth, already pregnant, to go to her relative Elizabeth, who lived in the mountainous area northwest of Jerusalem. It was her intent to share with her a similar religious experience: the gift of unexpected motherhood from God. Pregnant and close to giving birth, she faced another long journey, due to a census ordered by the Emperor, once again to Judea, where, in Bethlehem, she gave birth in an outhouse used also as a stable. She followed her husband into exile because of death threats to the child, and finally returned to Nazareth.

She was sensitive, generous and active. At Cana in Galilee, where, together with Jesus, she was invited to a wedding celebration, she was the first to realize that there was a lack of wine, not only a necessary beverage to fuel the merriment but also a necessary symbol of the divine blessing on the young couple, becoming active, asking for her son's intervention. It would not be difficult for her to be a mother to John, and the other

disciples, as Jesus asked her from the cross. She would be present in the Cenacle when the Holy Spirit, the gift of her risen son, would descend upon them and her.

We venerate her and rightly call her Queen. And yet we should never forget that the Mother of the Son of God lived a modest family life, engaged in common household chores. A woman's tasks were manifold, requiring good manual dexterity and being busy the whole day. The nagging concern for food to be procured and prepared; the cultivation of vegetables; the grazing and milking of sheep and goats; keeping the house in order; procuring water necessary both for drinking and for personal cleanliness; the carding and spinning of wool and vegetable textile fibres, linen and cotton, and the making of clothes. And the care and custody of the child which also involved his daily religious and moral education.

It is of such a woman that we joyfully celebrate her birth. And we get the impression that a very sweet light emanates from her, the light of God's tenderness that turns preferentially to those who in the eyes of the world are poor and small, but in His eyes are more precious than the sun and all the stars in the sky. □

THE NEW MAN AND THE NEW WOMAN

She, the "New Woman," stands beside Christ, the "New Man," in whose mystery alone the mystery of man finds true light, and it is there as a pledge and guarantee that in a pure creature, that is, in her, God's plan in Christ for the salvation of all mankind has already been fulfilled.

St. Paul VI

TO BE OR NOT TO BE ALONE

by Anastasia Dias

L“Leave me alone!” I’ve heard this phrase so often and even used it myself when I feel overwhelmed. After all, I’m human. And, there are times I want nothing more than to be left alone. Sometimes, people annoy me. The list of people includes my family, friends and colleagues. I’ve always thought that solitude is the only way to avoid people: being isolated until I feel ready to face them again. For the better part of this year and last year, I’ve been isolated from people. The only difference is that I, along with most of you, was forced into isolation. I didn’t isolate myself by choice. It is during this time that I asked myself a few pertinent questions. Am I meant to be alone? Is spending time alone the best solution when I’m faced with challenging circumstances or people? Do I really need people? If you want to know the answers I got; you will have to read on.

First off; there’s a famous Biblical story that can give us a deeper insight into these questions. Over two thousand years ago, the King of Israel chose a foreigner to be his wife, a move that would build diplomatic relations. His wife brought in her own cultural influ-

ence and traditions. While doing so, she forced the people of Israel to adapt to her traditions. When one of the wisest men in the land confronted her and told her that she was wrong in forcing people to change (note: forcing), she wanted the wise man killed.

So, she sent an army of soldiers to get rid of him. The wise man ran at lightning speed, fleeing for his life. He saw a cave on the way and took shelter there. He hadn’t done anything wrong, only confronted the queen about what she was doing. He was old, tired, sick and isolated from the outside world. And, here he was, afraid



for his life. It was there that he wondered whether his life was worth living or not. He wanted to die, but then he realised that he was the only righteous man left in the land. And, if he died every person in the land would turn to unrighteous living.

It was in the cave that he shut out the madness of the outside world and looked within himself. In isolation, he realized that he wanted to live and so he garnered enough courage to face the queen once again. It was in that isolation that he saw hope at the end of the tunnel, cave – if you will. It was in solitude that he understood that he needed people and his people needed him. This wise man, as you may have guessed by now, was the prophet Elijah.

Elijah’s story speaks to me on so many levels. There have been days, months and years that I wished moments away. I’d been called out and punished when I stood up for what I believed was right. I hadn’t done anything wrong, but there were times that I’ve felt scorned by those around me. And, it was in those moments that I longed to be isolated.

In the life of the Carpenter from Nazareth, we see him withdrawing from people, even his family and friends. He fed the hungry and went to a solitary place. He healed crowds of people and then left. He calmed the storm and withdrew from there. Just moments before his death, he chose to be alone with his three closest friends some distance away. Jesus’ withdrawal was not based on circumstance. Unlike Elijah, he needed those few

moments of solitude to contemplate on his mission here on Earth.



The examples of both Jesus and Elijah describe to us the approach that two different people had towards the same situation. Elijah is forced into isolation, like most of us have, due to the pandemic. It drove him crazy for a while, until he learned to live with it, whereas, Jesus chose to be isolated so that he could figure out what he had done so far and what he was going to do next.

Your approach can be like that of Jesus or like that of Elijah. But that doesn’t answer the question that I posed, does it? The real answer is: we need people. Even if they deride us, drive us crazy or simply can’t leave us alone. We need people. We are created for community. Elijah was and Jesus was. You and I are. We’re here to help each other out. We’re here to make a difference. And, that can’t happen if we lock ourselves up every time life throws something different at us.

So, the next time you think of going into isolation, bring to mind your purpose here. What are you called for? A life lived in isolation? Or, a life lived in service of those around you? You must make a choice that you won’t ever regret. □

SALESIAN LAY MISSIONERS

Stephen and Matthew are two young Americans who had chosen to give a little of their lives to the youth and the poor of Papua New Guinea

The Salesian Lay Missioners (SLM) programme for young lay people in the Eastern United States Province sent missionaries to Papua New Guinea from 1993 to 2005. Since last year, the new Visitatory of Papua New Guinea-Solomon Islands (PGS) sought to revitalise the presence of lay missionaries, and in 2019 a lay volunteer from Ecuador and two young men from the United States arrived there. The latter were Stephen and Matthew. They arrived in the country that would host them for several months after they had completed an introductory course in the local culture.

Briefly, please introduce



Stephen and Matthew: "Our story is a story of God who has opened up the path to allow us to meet the Salesians."

yourselves.

"My name is Stephen Stafstrom, I am 21 years old and I am from Florida, United States. I graduated in May 2018 from the University of Central Florida. Throughout my life I have been surrounded by witnesses who have said 'yes' to God's call in their lives: from my mother's example as the Youth Ministry leader in my parish, to the very name of my parish, 'Annunciation,' the idea of choosing God's will as the direction for one's life has always been evident; so I have tried to live my life accordingly."

"My name is Matthew Nguyen, and I too am 21 years old. I

am from Texas, United States. I graduated from St. Martin University in 2017. My parents emigrated to America when they were very young, during the Vietnam War."

How did you get to know the Salesians?

Stephen: "It was in the autumn of 2017 that the call to spend a year or more of my life on a mission abroad crystallised within me. From there, my story became one of God opening the way for me to meet the Salesians. Briefly, I spoke to the chaplain on the university campus, who suggested a few options from the best-known programmes, including the Salesians Lay Missioners. During my research on the Salesians, I was able to speak with a former volunteer from the programme who had served in Ethiopia and Rwanda, and our conversation only confirmed that the Salesian charism was the one with which I most identified. Later, along the way, I received further confirmation from many friends and acquaintances. Ultimately, it was the Lord who set me on my mission with the Salesians."

Matthew: "When I went to Saint Martin's University, I found myself surrounded by friends who were inflamed with the desire to spread the faith, called to do more to "be holy." But I only began to make a discernment about being a missionary a couple of years ago, when I met a very devoted, zealous friend of mine at the university, who was excited about sharing her faith with others. Some time later she



told me that she was gathering information about, among other things, the Salesians. It had been about a year since I had heard that name, and I went back to check the messages I had exchanged with my mother to realise that it was the same programme she had written to me about a year earlier. It occurred to me that mothers often know what is best for their children."

What do you think of the introductory course for new arrivals in the Visitatory of PGS? (Papua New Guinea-Solomons)

Stephen: "The five-day introductory orientation, led directly by the then PGS Superior, Fr Alfred Maravilla, deepened our knowledge of the culture and made us appreciate the way Don Bosco works with local Melanesian traditions and values."

Matthew: "I found it like a breath of fresh air that gave me life and peace in what would become my home for some time. Being able to live simply with my brothers here helped me to understand that God was already here and was waiting for me in this place. Now he only asked me to experience his love and mercy in a new way. Those



"God has further confirmed my call to mission through the support, kindness and welcome of the people and the Salesian community."

first 5 days that I spent learning, walking, sharing meals and every moment with the people there made me feel the total love of the Trinity. My brothers and sisters welcomed me with open arms. I didn't know if I was ready, but I was no longer afraid to follow my path."

What would you say about the beginning of that missionary experience?

Stephen: "As soon as I arrived in Papua New Guinea, God further confirmed my call to mission through the support, kindness and welcome of the people and the Salesian comm-



unity. The country is beautiful and every day I was fascinated by something new, unique and wonderful."

Matthew: "If the mission is a call, I had the opportunity to respond. And Papua New Guinea in turn had responded to me with an encouraging "hello!" I was very excited to continue my dialogue with the Lord in meeting each person who offered me a welcome and much affection. I knew we had much more to learn and I was excited about the opportunities we would have that year to serve and deepen our faith. I recognised that I might receive more than I could give. I wanted to continue to grow in humility and understand more intimately the value of community. I was hoping that my missionary service would increase my reliance on God and develop the virtues of charity and love. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. HILDEGARD OF BINGEN (SEPTEMBER 28)

BELOVED DAUGHTER

Hildegard was born in the year 1098 to parents Mechtild of Mexheim-Nahet and Hildebert of Bermersheim. They were of noble class and had a relatively large family. Hildegard was the youngest of 10 children. As was the custom of those times, the youngest child was encouraged to enter a seminary or religious convent as a form of tithe. Hence, Hildegard too was offered to a convent. According to the biography by Theoderich, she was merely 8 years old when she was put in the care of a pious noble woman, Jutta of Spanheim. She spent the years with Jutta preparing herself to enter the convent.

In 1112, Jutta decided to enter a convent herself. She chose to join the recently reestablished monastery of Disibodenberg. She took along with her Hildegard and another young girl whose name is not known. It is believed that in the next couple of years, Hildegard made her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and put on the veil of a nun. She was just 14 years old. Perhaps in those times it was possible for a girl to become a nun at such a young age but today, the Church does not allow anyone to either enter



the seminary or convent before they are 18 years of age. Of course, there are houses that help young men and women discover and decide on their vocation to the priesthood or religious life but they cannot become official members until they have reached the age of maturity and are capable of taking this important decision on their own without any external coercion.

Hildegard revealed that Jutta taught her to read and write but she lacked formal education and hence could not teach her proper biblical

interpretation. Nevertheless, Jutta was a visionary and therefore attracted many followers who came to visit and join her at the convent. Since Hildegard remained close to her, it is likely that she assisted her in reciting the psalms, working in the garden and other household chores besides tending to the sick. It was probably at this time that she learned to play the ten-stringed psaltery (it is an instrument that looks like a harp). Volmar, a monk and prior in the same monastery and confessor to the sisters, may have taught Hildegard simple psalm notation. This was probably the beginning of her illustrious career in music that would see her become a composer of renown. There are more chant compositions surviving by Hildegard than any other medieval composer.

Hildegard had spent 20 years in the convent when Jutta, her mentor passed away. Immediately the nuns looked to Hildegard for leadership. Hildegard wanted that the nuns have their own monastery but the Abbot wasn't in favour. Nevertheless, she was adamant and sought permission from the Archbishop of Mainz, Henry I, to establish a convent at Rupertsberg. Perhaps she was trying to effect a radical shift to poverty from the well-established environment of the Disibodenberg monastery. The new place wouldn't be as well-furnished and things wouldn't be so easy to come by. The tension with the Abbot resulted in her falling seriously sick to the point of being confined to her bed. She interpreted her illness as God's displeasure for having gone against obedience to the Abbot. Ultimately, the Abbot granted her wish and she along with twenty nuns moved to the St. Rupertsberg monastery in

1150. Volmar also moved with them and served as provost and Hildegard's personal confessor and secretary.

MYSTIC AND WRITER

Hildegard claims to have received visions from a very young age. Her spiritual awareness is associated with what she called the *umbra viventis lucis*, the reflection of the living light. She describes her experience in a letter she wrote to Guibert of Gembloux at the age of 77: *"From my early childhood, before my bones, nerves and veins were fully strengthened, I have always seen this vision in my soul...In this vision my soul, as God would have it, rises up high into the vault of heaven and into the changing sky and spreads itself out among different peoples, although they are far away from me in distant lands and places. And because I see them this way in my soul, I observe them in accord with the shifting of clouds and other created things. I do not hear them with my outward ears, nor do I perceive them by the thoughts of my own heart or by any combination of my five senses, but in my soul alone, while my outward eyes are open. So I have never fallen prey to ecstasy in the visions, but I see them wide awake, day and night...The light which I see thus is not spatial, but it is far, far brighter than a cloud which carries the sun. I can measure neither height, nor length, nor breadth in it; and I call it "the reflection of the living Light." "And as the sun, the moon, and the stars appear in water, so writings, sermons, virtues, and certain human actions take form for me and gleam."*

Hildegard was hesitant to share her visions with anyone. Her only confidant was Jutta who would in turn pass them on to Volmar, who

was their superior at the time. After a while, Hildegard became comfortable enough to share her visions with Volmar directly and he proved to be a sympathetic listener. In 1141, at the age of 42, she received a vision in which God told her to write down her visions. This is how she recounts the experience:

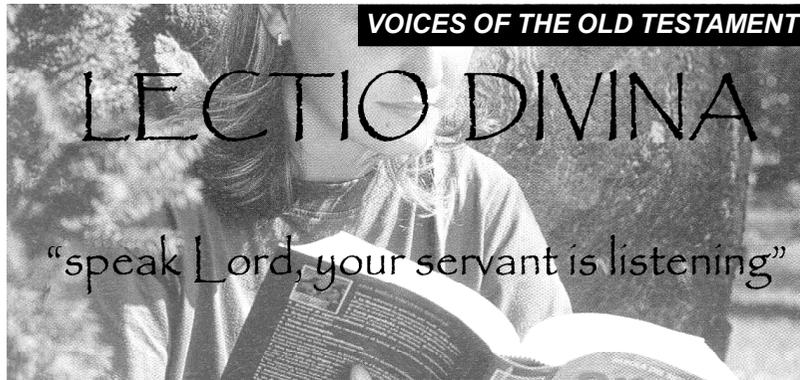
"But I, though I saw and heard these things, refused to write for a long time through doubt and bad opinion and the diversity of human words, not with stubbornness but in the exercise of humility, until, laid low by the scourge of God, I fell upon a bed of sickness; then, compelled at last by many illnesses...I set my hand to the writing. While I was doing it, I sensed, as I mentioned before, the deep profundity of scriptural exposition; and, raising myself from illness by the strength I received, I brought this work to a close – though just barely – in ten years. (...) And I spoke and wrote these things not by the invention of my heart or that of any other person, but as by the secret mysteries of God I heard and received them in the heavenly places. And again I heard a voice from Heaven saying to me, 'Cry out, therefore, and write thus!'"

Pope Eugenius heard about Hildegard's writings and gave her his approval to document her visions as revelations from the Holy Spirit. She began to receive recognition for her immense knowledge of things pertaining to faith, music, natural science, herbs and medicinal arts. What is astounding is that she was hardly educated. She is believed to have received nearly all of her knowledge through visions and therefore, in this sense, one could say that she was Divinely instructed.

Her fame began to spread across Europe. People from all over would come to hear her speak and to seek her counsel.

By the end of her life she had written volumes enough to fit along the wall of a room. Her magnum opus is titled *Scivias* and it consisted of three mighty volumes of visions and visionary theology. She also produced a variety of musical compositions that were used in liturgy as well as a musical *Ordo Virtutum* which offered moral lessons. Among her large corpus of writings one can find correspondence ranging from popes to emperors, and abbots and abbesses. She wrote two volumes on natural medicine and treatments, and even invented a language called *Lingua ignota* (unknown language) which she used to record her visions. Her other works include commentaries on the Gospels, the Athanasian creed and the Rule of St. Benedict and some hagiographies of saints.

She died on September 17, 1179 in the convent she had set up at Rupertsberg. Her fame seemed to grow faster in death than when she was alive. Her biographer notes that there were many miracles that occurred through her intercession. She was one of the first people to be canonized according to the Roman canonization process which was just being introduced. Pope Benedict XVI in 2012 declared her a Doctor of the Church. She is one of only 4 women and of 35 saints in all to have been bestowed with this title. He recognized her as an authentic teacher of theology and a profound scholar of natural science and music. □



AND THEN THE WORLD WILL BE CHANGED

Carlo Broccardo

The prophet Isaiah speaks to all those who, at this moment of their lives, are breathing heavily; and he says: this peace is a gift that is not only for you, but for everyone. Share it!

The prophet Isaiah is sometimes really a poet, as when in chapter 35 of his book he sings a beautiful song, full of images that want to convey joy, vitality, serenity: “Let the desert and the dry land rejoice, let the steppe rejoice and blossom. Let the desert bloom like a daffodil flower; let it sing with joy and exultation. The glory of Lebanon is given to her, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the magnificence of our God” (Is 35:1-3). Not that he is an optimist any cost; he is a man of faith, who tells everyone: if God is there, even the desert will flourish.

They are beautiful words. But why sing them? Why this song? We understand that from the verses that follow, they are the ones that introduce the passage we want to explore today (and which accompanies us in the liturgy of Sunday, September 5):

“Strengthen your weak hands, make firm your weak knees. Say to the broken hearted: take courage, do not be afraid!” (Is 35:3-4). Isaiah speaks of weak hands, weak knees, broken hearts: people who no longer want to do anything, who find no reason to go on, who find it hard even to stand upright; people without hope.

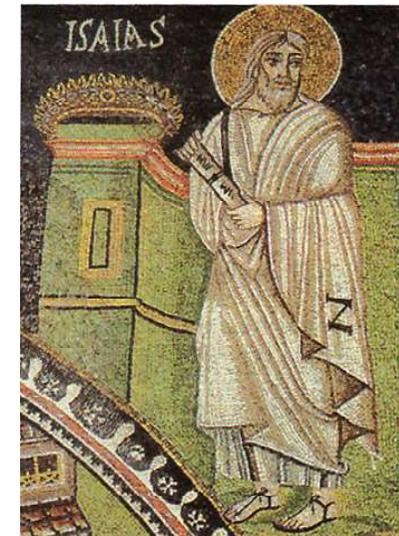
This is why it was important to remember all the great and wonderful things (even the desert has flourished!) God has done: because there are people who have lost hope, and it is of them that the prophet is thinking. Isaiah is talking to someone (a generic “you”) and he says: if even near you there is someone who is lost, who does not find serenity, do something to lift him up! Do not leave him on the ground! Say what I have just told you: if God is able to make the desert bloom, nothing should worry us any-

more! And now God is close to us; say it! Tell everyone: “Here is your God, here comes vengeance, the divine recompense. He comes to save you.”

Parenthesis. Before going on with the reading of Isaiah we must make a reflection on God’s vengeance. There is no need to be scandalized if the prophet attributes to God violent behaviour: he only wants to say that the Lord is so strong that he is able to overcome evil, he has the necessary strength to eradicate it definitively. What can impel the broken hearted to take courage is the certainty that God is there, that he is present, that he is with us and is taking action to save us: the God who does justice, who eradicates evil (revenge) and does good (reward); our saviour is with us! Just as Psalm 27 says, “The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom shall I be afraid? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”

The prophet Isaiah began by singing a song of joy: the desert flourishes because God is there! And he immediately added: you who have experienced his closeness, the strength and serenity that come with faith, do not remain closed in on yourselves but tell everyone! To you who are listening to me - the prophet says - I now ask you to expand the serene trust you place in God, to infect the unbelieving and the afflicted. And do you know what I say to you? If you do that, then the world will change!

And watch out because these will not be minor changes. As usual, God does things in a big way: the lame will not only walk, but will leap like a deer. To the tongue of the



mute not only will speech return, it will shout for joy. “For waters will spring up in the desert, streams will flow in the parched land. The scorched earth will become a swamp, the dry ground will become springs of water” (Is 35:6-7). It is precisely from that which is completely dead that life will spring forth in abundance. And this depends on you, says Isaiah.

Sometimes evil is so strong that it discourages us. Things go so wrong that we lose hope. Problems pile up one on top of another and rob us of our serenity. Worries almost make us forget that God is with us to save us. Sooner or later, it happens to every one of us in a more or less dramatic way. The prophet Isaiah is speaking to all those who, instead, at this moment of their lives, are breathing heavily; and he says: this peace is a gift that is not for you alone, but for everyone. Share it! Go, restore, encourage, help, lift and heal. And the world will change! □

Quiet Spaces

UNDER HER MANTLE

Pope Francis meditation at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Thursday September 15, 2016

In a world of orphans, Mary is the mother who fully understands us and defends us, because she too has personally experienced the same humiliation suffered, for example, by the mothers of prisoners today. Celebrating Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday morning, the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, Pope Francis recommended that in difficult moments we always seek refuge “under the mantle” of the Mother of God. Thus he repeated the “spiritual council of Russian mystics,” which in the West have been reprised in the antiphon *Sub tuum praesidium*.

Speaking about the “mystery of Mary’s motherhood,” the Pope drew inspiration from the scene of the Last Supper: “Jesus, at the table, bids farewell to his disciples: there is an air of sadness, everyone knew that there was something that would end badly and they asked questions, they were sad.” In Jesus’ farewell, however, “in order to give them a bit of courage and also to prepare them in hope, Jesus said to them: ‘Do not be sad, let not your hearts be sad, I will not leave you alone! I will ask the Father to send another Paraclete, who will accompany you. And he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said.’” The Lord, therefore, “promises to send the Holy Spirit in order to accompany the disciples, the Church, on the path of history.”

Jesus, however, “also speaks of the Father.” Indeed, Pope Francis recalled, “in that long, long conversation with the disciples, he speaks of the Father,” assuring them “that the Father loves them and that anything that they ask of the Father, the Father will give to them,” that they “ought to trust in the Father.” In this way, the Pope explained, Jesus goes “a step further: not only does he say ‘I will not leave you alone,’ but also ‘I will not leave you as orphans, I give you the Father, the Father is with you, my Father is your Father.’” Francis continued: “we know everything that happened after that dinner: the humiliation, the prison, the disciples’ betrayal; Peter denies Jesus, and the others flee.”

Referring to the passage in the liturgy of the day, taken from the Gospel of John (19:25-27), the Pope said that under the cross there was “only one disciple with Jesus’ mother, with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, a relative.” There, at the cross, “is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and everyone is looking at her,” perhaps whispering: “She is the mother of this criminal! She is the mother of this traitor”. And Mary, the Pope added, “heard these things, she suffered terrible humiliation and even heard some of the great priests, whom she respected because they were priests”, say to Jesus: “But you who are so great, come down, come down!” Francis said that as Mary stood beside “her

Son, naked there” on the cross. She experienced “such intense suffering, but did not leave, she did not deny her Son, He was her flesh”.

Sharing a personal anecdote, the Pope recalled: “When I was in the diocese of Buenos Aires, it would often happen that when I went to prisons to visit the inmates, I would see a queue, a line of women waiting to enter: they were the mothers, but they were not ashamed, their own flesh was there inside” the prison. Those “women suffered not only the shame of being there, hearing people say: ‘Look at her, what did her son do?’” Those mothers “also suffered the worst humiliation of the inspections required before they could enter. But they were mothers, and they were going there to see their own flesh.” And so it was for Mary, who “was there, with her Son, with that great suffering.”

Precisely “at that time”, the Pope noted, “Jesus — who had said he would never leave us as orphans, who spoke of the Father — looked at his Mother and gave her to us as a Mother: ‘Behold, your Mother!’” The Lord “does not leave us as orphans: we Christians have a Mother”, the same Mother that Jesus had; “we have a Father, the same as Jesus. We are not orphans.” And Mary “gives birth in that moment, with so much pain. It is truly a martyrdom: with her pierced heart, she agrees in that painful moment to give birth to all of us. And from that moment on she became our Mother, since that moment she is our Mother, the one who takes care of us and is not ashamed of us: she defends us.”

“The Russian mystics of the early centuries of the Church”, Pope Francis noted, in this regard, “counseled their disciples, the young monks to take refuge under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God during times of spiritual turmoil. The devil cannot enter there because she is Mother, and as a Mother she defends.” Thus “the West took this counsel and created the first Marian antiphon, *Sub tuum praesidium*: under your mantle, placed under your care, O Mother, we are safe there.”

“Today is the Feast of the moment that Mary gave birth to us,” the Pope continued, “and she has been faithful to this offspring to this very day, and will continue to be faithful.” In a world “which we might call an ‘orphan’, this world that suffers the crisis of a great orphanhood, perhaps we can offer our help by saying: ‘Look to your mother!’” Because we have a mother “who defends us, teaches us, accompanies us, and is not ashamed of our sins.” Indeed, “she is not ashamed, because she is Mother.” In conclusion, the Holy Father prayed that “the Holy Spirit — this friend, this companion on the journey, this Paraclete and advocate that the Lord sent to us — will help us to understand this truly great mystery of Mary’s motherhood.” □

SHE WALKED STRAIGHT AND TALL

Pierluigi Menato - TA/ID

When the accident took place, Andy was away on business. Gisella did not want them to call him.

"Poor guy," she said to herself, "why cause him such a shock? We'll write to him, or better, I'll write to him, as soon as I can. I'll prepare him little by little. Before he comes back, he'll know. But for now, he's far away, and he can't come; he'll suffer very much."

Her mother shook her head saying quietly to herself: "My poor deluded girl, she believes in the hollow and erratic love of that young man!" But she didn't say anything to her daughter... so as not to cause her more pain... Both she and her husband and done all they could to try and prevent Gisella from getting engaged to him, but their wise warnings and advice had no effect on her. They gave up, trusting that time would set things straight; what else could they hope for? Probably as time went by, thanks to the intense and fervent love of their daughter, they hoped that Andy would strengthen his character and shape up to be a little more steadfast and committed.

In the clinic where she had been taken, immediately after the accident, Gisella lay in bed. Her leg was fractured; x-rays had been taken. The surgeon and his assistant had consulted at length and would soon put her in a cast, but before the operation, the surgeon asked to speak to Gisella's father.

"Hopefully, this might not

happen, but it's my duty to warn you... the bone is broken in several places... I can't assure you that her leg will be as good as it was before."

"Meaning?" asked the poor man alarmed by the doctor's reticent speech.

"It may be that your daughter will have a constant limp, oh, it's a trifling thing, an insignificant imperfection, but I felt it my duty to warn you. Yet, I assure you, it will be very minor... or, in the best-case scenario, it could be nothing at all, and the leg could be perfectly normal again."

Gisella's father sighed and had to force himself out of the chair he was sitting in. To him, the doctor's last statement seemed like little encouragement; he considered them pathetic lies. His daughter would remain lame! Gisella had left the house with her beautiful, slender and agile gait, and she would come back with a limp.

He would say nothing to her, poor girl! He decided resolutely.

"Doctor," he whispered, "I think Gisella should not know this; she should learn of this as late as possible!"

"Of course, I understand!" exclaimed the doctor. "On the other hand, I told you that it's possible that the bad predictions I spoke of, might not come true. I just wanted to warn you; just in case..."

"Yes, yes, I understand. Thank you, Doctor!" Gisella's father left and lingered awhile before going to his daughter's bedside, so that she would not see the

anguished expression on his face.

Gisella had Andy's last letters brought to her and was reading them again one by one. What beautiful expressions! Her heart was overwhelmed with the words and promises, the ardent phrases of commitment and his affirmations of an infinite love.

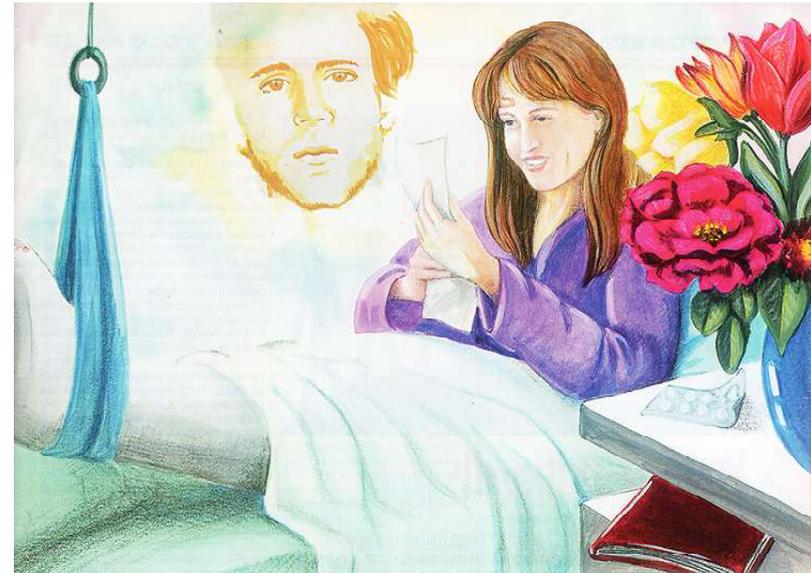
"All my life..." said the young man's letters. "Always close to you. Through sunshine and storms... Nothing or no one will ever tear me away from you... My love is stronger than any adversity and I'll overcome every obstacle to reach you... I'll always be close to you!" Gisella repeated the beautiful words and her heart beat in trusting abandonment to her fiancé's promises. "Always close to you... My love is stronger than any adversity..."

Forced to be confined to her bed in the clinic, her leg in plaster and the apparatus that held it firm and taut, the girl's mind went off into sweet dreams of Andy. Her mother and father stayed long hours by her side; a few friends and relatives also dropped by, but when she was alone, her thoughts drifted far away, to her Andy who must have, by now, received the letter mentioning her mishap... It was just a veiled phrase that her mother had written, as Gisella had instructed her: "Lisa was slightly injured, but nothing serious."

What would Andy have done?

Oh, he would have rushed at once to her side and at that painful news he would have taken the first train to come to her.

Gisella, moved by that thought, hour after hour, expected him to rush into her room at any moment.



He did not come. He wrote a letter, a letter full of beautiful words. "Gisella, I hope by now you are well..." he said, among other things.

When her mother, who was by her side read the letter, she saw the girl turn pale, almost as white as the pillow on which she lay her head. That was when, on her own, the mother decided to write to the young man to tell him the facts just as they were and asking him to come at once. "Gisella is in hospital and wants to see you. I hope you can come."

That was when Andy took the train and reached his fiancée's side. He was able to say those beautiful exclamations to her, able to dispel with a stream of words the painful impression left by his last letter. A sense of confidence returned to the girl's heart and in her eyes, there flickered a flame that burned boldly within her.

Andy left the clinic together with the girl's father.

"Walk with me," he said, "I've got something to tell you."

There was a frown on the young man's face:

"Of course!" He said, falling in step with the older man and off they went together. Gisella's father was sad:

"Andy, dear boy, I must tell you something painful: the surgeon told me that our dear Gisella... maybe..." and he hesitated. Clearing his throat, he went on. "It's possible... that she might be maimed for life."

The older man sighed; he had gotten this news off his chest but he dared not look into the face of

this handsome young man. Hearing no reply, he turned to face him: he saw Andy's face grow dark.

The girl's father nodded. Laying his hand on the young man's shoulder he said: "Ok, I understand... poor Andy. This is not what you expected to hear. Our Gisella... so tall, so beautiful... looks like a flower in bloom."

The young man mumbled something:

"So... so..." he murmured unable to say anything else. Then, at the first tram stop, he held out his hand to Gisella's father.

"I've got to go. I'll take this tram. I'll see you tomorrow at the clinic."

The next day, at the clinic, he reached late: he apologized, giving some excuse, but in his fiancée's attentive eye and sensitive heart he appeared very distracted, worried and dishevelled. Gisella was saddened and pleaded with him to tell her what was worrying him; what secret thoughts were tormenting him. He gave only vague and elusive answers. After he had gone, she remained very pensive for a long time. Now a new sorrow lingered in her heart and accompanied her during the long lonely hours of immobility and solitude.

In the days that followed, the young man appeared cold and distant, until one day he blurted out that he could not remain with her any longer; that the duties of his office called him away. With that he left, leaving a dark shadow on Gisella's mind, like an aching memory.

Gisella's stay in the hospital and her immobility were long. Then one day the surgeon announced that the cast would be removed. Hours of trepidation weighed heavily on the sick girl. Her parents waited, distressed and anxious: to them, this seemed not to be the beginning of her recovery but a time of greater suffering.

Gisella was the only one who was happy, or at least she tried to look happy. But within her there weighed the shadow of a secret premonition: she was certain that Andy did not love her anymore. His letters, few and far between were brief and cold!

The cast had come off. The doctor looked closely at the leg and finally said that everything was going very well. Movement would come later and slowly. "One step, or two at a time, like children," he said. "You will feel like a child again."

Gisella headed home. Then, according to the doctor's instructions, she gradually began walking...

Until, one bright sunny day, she went out into the bright morning. And she walked tall and straight. Looking at her injured leg she saw not a single blemish. Her parents were overjoyed.

Even she seemed happy, forgetting her painful past: she

didn't speak of Andy anymore.

One morning walking into town she was enjoying her new-found mobility; it was as if she was reborn. That was when she saw him; he had come back to town but had not visited her.

"Gisella!" he called to her. He came towards her, beaming.

With a weak and hollow smile he said: "You're looking agile and spritely..., like before. I'm so very happy. So, it wasn't true... that you would be lame after all, as your father feared, and as the doctor said."

Gisella understood in a flash. It was as if the sun had suddenly gone behind the clouds. But not for long. She smiled, disdainfully at her one time paramour.

"No. I can walk pretty well. But there's someone else who's limping: and that is your poor, sickly love, my very dear Andy."

"Gisella, I assure you that..." protested the young man. She would not let him continue.

"What a poor kind of love, that should have been so strong against every obstacle! And there you were; you tripped at the first hospital bed you saw."

He turned to walk away. While she walked, into the sun on the sidewalk, tall and straight. Andy stood motionless, watching her.

Then in one last ditch attempt he tried to move and join her. But it was useless. It was then that he understood that he had lost her forever. □

THE WISDOM OF RUMI

*As God put desire in man and woman
to the end that the world
should be preserved by their union,
so hath He implanted in every part of existence
the desire for another part.*

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO 20

Michele Molineris

109. Don Bosco even gave his shirt (1862)

We must take into account, too, that most callers did not come to give, but to receive. Don Bosco helped them whenever he could.

One day Don Bosco, surrounded by some clerics, recounted what had happened to him: "An active democrat once called on me. He was hard up and needed money for a shirt, promising to repay me within a few days, I opened my wallet, but there was little there. Glancing toward my bed, I noticed a fine clean shirt which [Joseph] Rossi had laid out for me. "Here you are," I told him, "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have, that I give you." [Acts 3,6]

He looked at me in surprise. "How about yourself?" he asked.

"Don't worry about me," I replied. "The same Providence that has taken care of you today will provide for me tomorrow!"

At that the man was so moved that he knelt before me, exclaiming "How much good a priest can do!"

Don Bosco concluded, "That man became a great friend of priests after that. This is how to win the hearts of men" (*EBM VII,18-19*).

110. A globe of fire (1862)

Fr John Bonetti's chronicle reads: "Thursday, January 9, 1862. Toward nine [this evening] three boys - Vallania, Sciolli and Finelli - went to the St. Aloysius dormitory, located in the new wing of the house instead of joining their companions at night prayers. While they were

gabbing away (or more precisely indulging in questionable conversation) they felt a quiver through the room followed by the abrupt hiss of an approaching gust of wind. Then, a ball of fire flashed outside a closed window, came through it with a hushed sound, skimmed over the boys' heads, crossed the entire dormitory, and then, stopping in the centre, split into countless tongues of fire which scattered through the room and briefly lit up every corner. At the same time, the boys heard footsteps of someone walking through the dormitory. The fiery tongues then fused back into a globe glided out through the same window, and vanished. Thoroughly frightened, the boys hid under their blankets.

Francis Provera, too, saw it about seven feet above his head as he was standing on the terrace at the rear of the house near the window. While he stared, it silently burst into a shower of sparks. Immediately afterwards, the area was plunged into intense darkness..

On Sunday, January 12 [1821], after night prayers, Don Bosco confirmed, described and fully explained the strange occurrence stating: "Brushing aside all conjecture I can tell you exactly what it was. Listen, here at the Oratory we have several individuals who stubbornly resist God's grace and call on themselves His wrath and the threat of dire punishment. The Blessed Virgin, who has always protected this house, visibly held back these punishments, as we have just seen, and mercifully warned those hardened individuals (*EBM, VII, 28-29*).

111. I hear the sound of money (1862)

Don Bosco seemed to have a sixth sense in supervision. It was a house rule that pocket money was to be deposited with the prefect who would prudently administer it according to the depositor's wish. It was a reasonable precaution to forestall trouble. In this regard, the Bonetti chronicle has this entry

On January 31 [1862] Don Bosco was strolling in the porticoes with several boys after dinner when he suddenly stopped and, calling the deacon John Cagliero to his side, whispered, "I hear the jingle of coins but can't locate the spot. Look for these three boys (*he told him their names*) and you'll find them playing for money.

Cagliero told me he searched high and low for them, but in vain. Finally he spotted one of them. "Where were you?" he asked. "I've been looking for you for some time."

"I was in such and such a place."

"Doing what?"

"Playing marbles."

"With whom?"

"With N... and R..."

"You were playing for money, weren't you?"

The boy mumbled but did not deny it.

Cagliero went straight to the hideout mentioned by the boy, but the other two had already left. He continued his investigation and learned for certain that all three of them had heatedly been playing for money ten minutes earlier. He told Don Bosco. The following day, Don Bosco disclosed that in a dream the night before he had seen those three boys hotly playing for money (*EBM VII, 37-38*).

112. Woe to those who cause scandal! (1862)

In the summer of 1862, Don Bosco was urgently called to the bedside of a youngster of sixteen, formerly a pupil at the festive Oratory and now consumed by tuberculosis. He lived in a house near San Rocco. Don Bosco went. The poor boy welcomed him with much celebration and went to confession. Then his father and mother entered the room and stood at either side of the bed. Don Bosco remained close to the bedside. An expression of deep melancholy had appeared on the dying youngster's face. All of a sudden, he turned to his mother and said: "I beg you to call my friend, who lives downstairs."

"But why do you wish to see him?" Asked his mother.

"I know why! I have to say something to him."

It seemed to Don Bosco that his visit made the boy's parents very uncomfortable:

"Don't get so worked up," she said; "what's the need to call him?"

"I want to say goodbye to him for the last time."

The latter did not take long to arrive; he cast an almost terrified glance at his sick friend as he approached the foot of the bed. The youngster struggled to sit up and his relatives helped him by placing another pillow beneath his shoulders.

Then he fixed a look of inexpressible anguish on his companion, stretched out his right hand towards him, pointed his index finger at him and in an awkward voice said: "You...." - he said to him, and regained some breath after a violent coughing fit... "you are the one who murdered me... Cursed be the moment when I first met you... It

is your fault that now I die so young... You taught me what I didn't know... You betrayed me... You made me lose the grace of God... It was your speeches, your bad examples, that drove me to evil and that now fills my soul with bitterness."

"Oh, if I had followed the advice, the command of those who urged me to flee from you."

Everyone was crying. That friend, trembling and paler than the dying boy, feeling his strength failing him, held on to the foot of the bed.

"Enough, enough, calm down!" Don Bosco said to the sick boy. "And so why do you want to distress yourself so? What has been has been, now is past... Don't think about it... You have made your confession and you have nothing more to fear... Everything is erased and forgotten God is so good."

"Yes, it's true! But in the meantime, if it weren't for him, I'd still be innocent, I'd be happy. I wouldn't be reduced to this state."

"Forgive him," Don Bosco added, "the Lord has already forgiven you! Your forgiveness will obtain mercy for him too."

"Yes, yes, I forgive him!" exclaimed the poor man. And covering his face with his hands, he broke into tears.

No one could stand this heart-rending scene any longer. Don Bosco signalled to his relatives to lead away his companion, who was sobbing without being able to utter a word. Not being able to stand on his feet, he had to be supported on his way out.

In the meantime, Don Bosco, with some of those words that he knew so well, brought serenity

back into the poor heart of that betrayed man and assisted him to the last moment (*EBM, VII, 75ff*).

113. Signor Berlaita's cabbages (1862)

Don Bosco's days – even troublesome ones – were always marked by singular, pleasant occurrences. On November 9, 1861, pressed by financial needs, he had sold a piece of land (We are omitting a few irrelevant real estate details) adjoining the Oratory to a man named James Berlaita... who shortly afterward turned it into a cabbage field. His crop seemed very promising until a wave of caterpillars threatened to destroy it. Greatly upset, the gardener ran to Don Bosco and begged him to go over and read the ritual against such a scourge. Don Bosco obliged and then lingered a while to chat with the man. Meanwhile strange things were happening. Caterpillars were wriggling out of the cabbages and streaming towards a small door in the Oratory wall, across from which was a long ditch full of running water, spanned by a plank. The caterpillars crossed the ditch and crawled toward the chapel. Then they inched up the outside wall of the St. Aloysius side altar, swarmed through the open window and side walls, where they died and had to be swept away.

Everyone in the house was amazed at this inexplicable novelty. But Berlaita's garden had been completely cleared. Don Rua bears witness to this (*EBM, VII, 99*).

114. It was a house of ill-repute (1862)

On 6 August 1862 Don Bosco told the youngsters who had stayed at the Oratory during the

summer holidays the following episode which he had experienced only a few hours earlier.

"Today, at twelve-thirty, a stranger gave me a note bearing the address of a critically ill person. After taking care of a brief errand of my own in town, I went to that address. As soon as I got there, I knew that I was in a house of ill repute.

"Is anybody here sick?" I asked.

"Yes, come this way."

Nervously I followed my guide to a room. I could see that the devil himself ran that place. The patient was a woman. As soon as she saw me, she stretched out her arms. "Please save my soul!" she begged, seizing my hand. "Is there still hope for me?"

"Surely," I replied. I dismissed the other women and heard her confession, none too soon, for within minutes she was in death's throes. As I left the room, the other women crowded about me. "Has she a chance?"

"None at all! She will be gone in a few minutes."

"Poor girl!" they grieved.

"You had better worry about yourselves," I replied, "because you are barely a step from hell." And I gave them a sermon such as they had never heard before.

"What you say is true," they rejoined, "but what can we do?"

"Get out of this house."

"Will she be allowed the Last Sacraments?"

"I don't know! I'm afraid that, were the Lord to come here, the whole house would collapse and bury you all."

"What will you do now?"

"I'll report to the pastor. He will do whatever he thinks best." So, I did.



"I'll take care of her," the pastor told me. He just had time to give the woman the Anointing of the Sick. By nightfall all those women had left. That girl was fortunate that God gave her time for confession. Her sorrow makes up hope for her eternal salvation. To realize what a terrible scourge sin is, especially at death's hour, you should have seen how frightened, pale and shocked those women were! Father Calosso used to say that even if sin brought no other punishment than remorse, this should be reason enough to avoid it. A person cannot long endure the spiritual anguish which is his when, reflecting even briefly on his spiritual condition, he feels his conscience torn asunder by remorse (*EBM, VII, 141-142*). □



FOUR INTERCONNECTED MARIAN TRUTHS

by Antonio Rudoni

I take my cue from a profound and rich work: Sergio Zavoli: *Se Dio c'è. - If God exists*, (a dialogue with Piero Corda. Mondadori 2000, pp. 130-132). I already assume, without recalling them, the reasons why the Catholic Church believes in these four Marian truths.

The basic idea from which they can be better understood, is as follows: Mary represents the whole of humanity (*op. cit.*, 130). In order to understand **Virginity**, united to the **Motherhood** of Our Lady, I think it is appropriate to start from the biblical image of the "bride of God," applied to the

Faithful since the Old Testament: let us recall, for example, Is 62:5: "As a young man marries a virgin, so shall your God marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

In fact, God will fully marry his people when - through the Angel's announcement to Mary - God

declares to them his desire to be united with them in order to bring forth Jesus, a fruit of love that was both human and divine, because he was born of God as father and a woman as mother.

Thus, the Saviour of the world would be God from God, and man from a member of



the human race.

And in fact, the young woman accepts, she says 'yes' to the Father's proposal: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word."

God and humanity assure each other of their eternal fidelity! Indeed, God's irrevocable fidelity to his people is often renewed in the Holy Scriptures: "His faithfulness is for every generation" (Ps 100:5); "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3); "if some have not believed, can their unbelief nullify God's faithfulness?" (Rom 3:3); and so on. As for the people, it is true that they have not always been faithful; but Our Lady has! And, as I have already said, Mary represents the best of humanity: she lived an absolute fidelity to her commitment to the Father, a loyalty that was manifested even to the exclusion of any relationship with others, throughout her life!

The **Immaculate Conception**

highlights how Mary's "yes," as the "yes" of humanity which she represents, was full, without a shadow of stain or infidelity, from the very first moment of her existence. It is not for nothing that God's "declaration" through the mouth of the Angel begins by emphasising her holiness: "I greet you, full of grace" (Lk 1:28). Full, that is, full of that spiritual beauty which, by God's own gift, had never been tarnished by any fault.

Finally, the **Assumption** of body and soul at the end of Mary's earthly life: this Assumption makes it clear that in her, humanity is redeemed, redeemed by that Jesus with whom Mary cooperated particularly, especially as virgin and mother. Therefore, we are not waiting for a hope that is yet to be born: redeemed humanity already exists in its initial state, and individual people and material and realities themselves will gradually be grafted onto it, completing it. □

IF I WERE AN ARTIST

Don Carlo Vallaro

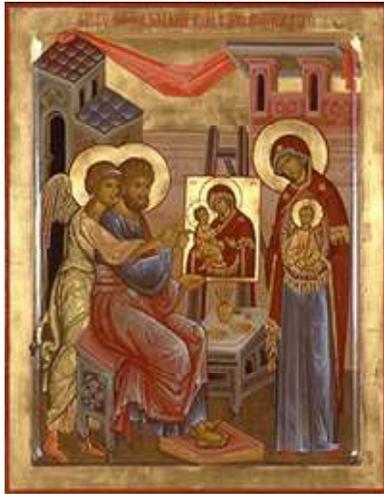
Years ago, as a pilgrim in the Holy Land, before taking off for Cairo to return to Turin, I saw a Palestinian woman breastfeeding her baby.

With my eyes I asked if I could take a photo of her. She smiled and said 'yes,' just like I did with that father holding his baby by the hand had said 'yes' to me in Jerusalem. They seemed to me to be the true image of Our Lady and St Joseph.

But the "click" didn't register anything. Whoever had inserted the Kodak film hadn't latched it properly. What a pity! I wanted to

have the real image of Mary and Joseph. How many artists over the centuries have given that image to us, masterpieces!

If I were a painter, I would like to paint her... you will say I am presumptuous. The Madonna I am looking for has the look of a bride who loves "her Joseph" on her face; who waits for her son like all the women in the world, smiles at him, eats him with her eyes, feeds him with slow and loving gestures, comforts him while he cries and, as he grows older, more with her eyes than with words, says to him: "there is little



St. Luke painting Our Lady
(a Russian Icon)

we can give you.”

To be able to read her face – when she says to Jesus, who remained in the temple with the wise men of Israel: “Why have you done this to us?” and again, to Jesus’ reply: “did you not know that I must be concerned with my Father’s affairs?” the tremor that ran through her, the leap in perspective, the amazement at something so great, which required silence and reflection.

And then, the look when he

THE MASTERPIECE OF GOD

The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady conceals the depth of a mystery. The mystery of original sin, the universal disgrace inherited by the human race from its father Adam, which has separated us from God, has produced a functional disorder in our being that not even the best among us, the good, the great, the wise and the holy could overcome. But today a great

was with his friends from Nazareth, at work in the carpenter’s workshop, when he said goodbye and saw him leaving with the first ones who answered the call on the shores of the lake.

Mary, what was your face like when you alone realised that there was no wine at the wedding in Cana? When they dragged you to Capernaum to the door of the house where your son was preaching, after telling you that he had gone mad?

I have no difficulty in imagining your face at the cross. You are the image of so many mothers of all time, who have seen their innocent children die. Then, at the words of Jesus: “Woman, behold your son... behold your mother!” Your son would never again be just your son.

But the arm of John that supported you as you walked away from the tomb assured you to your face, that you would never feel alone. Tell me: how did you accompany the apostles as they left on their mission? How old were you when you ended your journey on earth?

May I contemplate your wrinkles, stroke your white hair? ... Mary, if I were a painter, this is how I would portray you! □

wonder invades us, a great joy: a creature, just one, but one of us, she who would be the Mother of Christ, was redeemed by Christ himself in advance and restored to the primordial perfection of a creature, typical and sublime and “full of grace,” a woman, and “blessed among all women.” Her name is Mary. (Pope St. Paul VI, *Feast of the Immaculate*, 1974)



REMAIN IN MY LOVE

by Fr. Richard D’Silva sdb

On the day of my Baptism I became a child of God. The day of my first profession was a landmark day in the history of my existence here on Earth. God called me to follow Him. He called me to *remain in His love*. He called me to be at the service of the young. He called me to be a Salesian. Looking back down memory lane, I remember the day of my first profession. On 24th May 1996, I recited the formula of profession and freely chose to be poor, chaste and obedient.

I remember with gratitude, Fr Byron D’Silva, Fr Ronald Menezes, Fr Romulo Naronha, Fr Ian Figueiredo, Fr Ivo Coelho, Fr Thomas Chalissery and Fr Michael Fernandes. Above all, I am most grateful to God because I did have these extraordinary, human and down-to-earth Salesians who accompanied me during the time of my initial formation.

The day of my first profession was only the first page of my life as a Salesian. The rest of my life has been a journey with all its excitement, twists and turns, speed, halts, traffic jams, refreshments, refueling and servicing. All along this journey I was never alone. God was always present by my side. My parents and all my loved ones played a major role in helping me in my commitment to God. I cannot forget that even my companions walked with me



along this journey. Young people in my ministry challenged me, giving meaning to my life as a Salesian.

As a Salesian for the last 25 years, I had an opportunity to work in an institute for the formation of Salesians, in a technical institute, a boarding and school and even in a parish setting. As a Salesian cleric and later as a priest, I enjoyed the company of my brother Salesians. I was given an opportunity to grow spiritually through the practice of Religious discipline. For 25 years my Salesian congregation and my province of Mumbai particularly, nurtured me and blessed me in so many beautiful ways. The best was given to me though I must confess that I did not always give my best to the congregation.

I am grateful to God for the gift of my Salesian vocation. I am grateful to my parents and all my loved ones who have loved me and continue to support me as I live out this vocation. I grateful to all my Salesian brothers, who have been part of my life for these last 25 years. I am grateful to all the youngsters, well-wishers and benefactors who have provided



for all my needs and taken care of me. All I wish today is that my life be a blessing to everyone whom God sends into my life. □

THE OUR FATHER

by John M. Cunningham OP

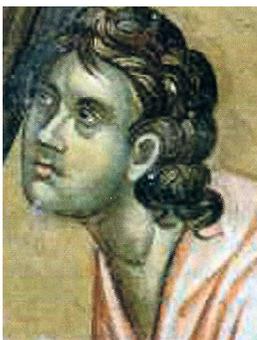
He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." (Lk 11:1) In response to this request the Lord entrusted to his disciples and to his Church the Our Father.

The Our Father is called the 'Lord's Prayer' for the simple reason that it was taught to us by the Lord. St Gregory of Nyssa tells us that one of the benefits of praying the Our Father regularly is that such frequent repetition can help us 'to understand some of its hidden meaning.'

In his explanation of the Our Father, St Gregory reminds us that God is perfect goodness, holiness and purity. 'If therefore the Lord teaches us in his prayer to call God Father, it seems ... that he is doing nothing else but to set the most perfect life before us as our law.' In other words, if we call God our Father we must live as his sons and daughters in this world. To call God our Father has implications for the way we live our lives. It is St Gregory who again reminds us that the child of the merciful and pure God must himself be merciful and pure. For this reason envy, hate and slander should have no place in our lives. The distance that such evils create between us and God is suggested by St Gregory when he says that 'he who is seen to be pure goodness cannot be Father of those who are wholly involved in some evil.'

Since then the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to call God our Father, he tells us to do nothing less than to become like our heavenly Father by a life that is worthy of him. It is the one who lives in a manner worthy of God who can in peace call God his Father and heaven his homeland. 'You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48). □

(St. Martin's Messenger, Ireland)



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Hunting Pairs

A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night, one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under the weight of an eight-point buck.

"Where's Joey?" the other's asked.

"Joe fell and broke his ankle. He's 5 miles back up the trail," the successful hunter replied.

"You left Joe laying out there and carried the deer back?" they inquired.

"A tough call," nodded the hunter. "But I figured no one is going to steal Joe!"

Service for One

On Sunday, the new young pastor arrived at church and found only an old farmer had shown up.

After waiting a while, the disappointed pastor remarked to the old farmer, "Well, it appears no one else is coming, so we should probably cancel service today."

The farmer, dressed in his Sunday best, looked at the young preacher and said, "Well, pastor, I don't know much 'bout preachin', but I do know something 'bout farmin' and if I went out in the field and found only one cow, I'd still feed 'em."

This excited the young preacher who preached for the next 45 minutes a fierce fire and brimstone sermon. Afterwards the pastor asked the old farmer what he thought.

The old farmer remarked, "Well, pastor, I don't know much 'bout preachin', I do know something

'bout farmin' and if I went out in the field and found only one cow, I wouldn't give 'em the whole bale."

Back to School

After raising 4 kids, and losing one husband, I decided to return to college and get the degree I had started, but never finished. And so, on my first day of college, eager with anticipation, and more than a little nervous, I took a front row seat in my first class in over 40 years, a literature course.

The professor told us we would be responsible for reading five books over the course of the semester, and that he would provide us with a list of authors from which we could choose.

He ambled over to the lectern, took out his class book, and began "Baker, Black, Brooks, Carter, Cook..."

I was working feverishly to get down all the names, when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

The student behind me whispered, "Slow down! He's just taking attendance!"

Just Visiting Here

The tall, handsome, confident gentleman walked over to the girl and made a disparaging remark about the men who had been chatting her up.

She laughed gaily, "When I don't want a man's attentions," she confided, "and he asks where I live, I just say, 'I'm visiting here.'"

"Ha-ha," he laughed, relishing her humour. "Where do you really live?"

"I'm just visiting here." □

A MOMENT'S MEDITATION

The body language of Jesus is highly significant in the gospel story of the woman caught in sin. (John 8:1-11). The scribes and Pharisees triumphantly bring to Jesus a woman caught committing adultery. They think they have him in a "catch 22 situation." If he says the woman should be stoned to death (in accordance with the Law) they will accuse him of being merciless. If he says she should be pardoned they will accuse him of not respecting the Law. Now visualize the body language! Jesus does not stand up and confront. He remains silent. He bends down. He writes on the ground. He makes himself small. It is an invitation to see the problem as not big; there is an invitation to cool down, to reflect, to be merciful. When they repeat the question he remains bent down writing still. He now puts the invitation into words: "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." There is no boldly facing down the questioners. Each is offered grace to recognize his own sinfulness. Jesus' gentle invitation could become a blessing for them, so proud, so hard of heart. Jesus however remains bent down. He now looks up at the woman and asks: "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She answers: "No one, Lord." Then still bent down and looking up at her he says: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." Sincere repenting is vital. Not condemning others is essential for us all. But saying this while bent down gives a new sense of self-worth to her and a new grace for a new beginning. For the Pharisees the woman was evidence of sin and failure. For Jesus she was a person to be respected, to be saved and called to holiness and to eternal life. Here is a message for hope and of healing for all.

Finian Lynch, OP

GOD IN THE STORMS OF LIFE

In 2015, Dubai experienced a terrible week or more of sandstorms. I was in my car driving back home when my car felt like it was being pushed towards a concrete barrier. I wasn't driving fast, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't control it, it felt like something wanted me to go into that barrier. To stop crashing into the concrete barrier, I braked, and the car turned turtle. I was strapped in my seat, so, safe for that moment, but all I could see was darkness as the bonnet collapsed. There were people who had stopped by, but wouldn't come near the car.

I prayed, "Dear Lord please help me get out of here, show me the way." And true to His word, there I saw the gap between the seats and light streaming through the rear windscreen. I released my seat belt, fell headlong to the roof of the car, but was unhurt. I opened a rear door. A whole lot of helping hands, pulled me from the overturned car.

A Prayer Group vehicle had stopped and an African lady from the group was dancing for joy that I was safe, but also asked: "where is the man who was sitting next to you?" I said there was no one in the car with me. She was adamant that they should save the man in the car with me. My hair stood on edge as I realized, it had to have been Jesus, sitting beside me to protect me through it all. Later I mentioned this to my daughter, who agreed with me. Of course, there was a long wait for the police while I was being lashed by the swirling sandstorm. Being scared, I refused any

ambulatory assistance. - My blood still runs cold when I envision the car wreckage. I am still scared of barriers on roads, if I'm in a car with someone driving too close to them. But God saved me. Praise Him.

I know God has always been there for me through many situations that I faced. But I was so overwhelmed by the fact that someone saw Him sitting there to help and save me a miserable sinner. I am very grateful and humbled by the experience.

Debbie Fisher-Pinto

THE DEVOTION OF THE THREE HAIL MARYS



The devotion of the THREE HAIL MARYS is a very simple yet most efficacious devotion. Everyday, recite Three Hail Marys, adding the invocation: "O Mary, My Mother, keep me from mortal sin." Many people recite the Three Hail Marys as part of their morning and night prayers. To practise this devotion in time of danger, stress, special need or temptation, is a sure means to obtain Our Lady's help.

During both my pregnancies, I wore the St Dominic Savio scapular and said the three Hail Mary's and today, I am the mother of two healthy children. I am thoroughly grateful to Our Lady and St Dominic Savio for always interceding and being there for me and my family and for the innumerable favours received.

Pamela D'Souza

My father-in-law passed away in March this year due to Cancer. It was an unexpected loss for the family as the disease was detected in its last stage. We found a lot of hurdles in the settlement of pension dues, loan clearance, property and many other matters related to my mother-in-law. Through our devotion of this prayer, ways opened up for all pending problems of my mother-in-law.

Elvis Pink

THANKS TO DEAR ST. DOMINIC SAVIO



Our heartfelt thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary help of Christians, St. Dominic Savio and St. John Bosco for getting a job for my son after 3 years of PG engineering course and for finding a suitable girl and settling down in married life. Please continue to guide and protect him.

C.Xavier Jayaseelan

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

SEPTEMBER 2021

Universal intention

An environmentally sustainable lifestyle

We pray that we all will make courageous choices for a simple and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, rejoicing in our young people who are resolutely committed to this.

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MARY WAS THERE

In the last week of March I lost a very close friend/colleague suddenly diagnosed with Cancer at 73 years of age. The same week my sister was suddenly rushed to hospital with a heart condition. A few days later my nephew was hospitalised with COVID and another nephew was suddenly diagnosed with a serious blockage in his arteries. Faced with these 4 incidents my eldest sister 86 years of age was diagnosed with cancer. I was totally shattered. I prayed with trust to Mary Help Of Christians to let this dreadful week pass. On Easter Sunday I saw my sister in the ICU. I am eternally grateful as all are now on the road to recovery and I pray for a speedy end to the pandemic.

Godfrey D'Silva

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.

The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail)). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors. Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

To help a poor lad to reach the priesthood, is a privilege

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