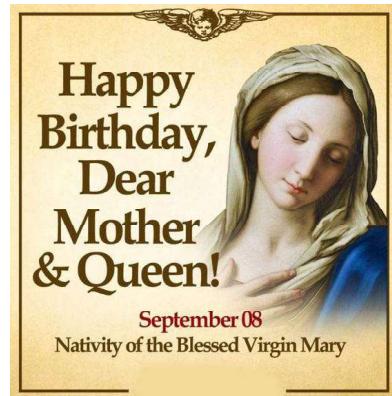


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May your Church exult, O Lord, for you have renewed her with these sacred mysteries, as she rejoices in the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was the hope and the daybreak of salvation for all the world.

Through Christ our Lord.

(The Postcommunion Prayer of the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

From The Editor's Desk

MORNING STAR, QUIET LIGHT

Even as I attempt to put down my thoughts, I'm gradually becoming aware that I get up each morning in a different mood, with different apprehensions, different expectations, anxieties, fears and stresses. I realise that those first moments define the rest of my day – whether I like it or not. It's never predictable or pallid, it's bumpy and anxious, it's exciting, even stressful and this has become a part of the rhythm of my life. I'm speaking for myself, but I know it strikes a chord with you too. We just manage to hold on, perhaps; some mornings we become listless and apathetic or soured and dispirited but this can't go on, we say to ourselves, we need to be lifted up, to experience the joy of genuine companionship, with a new sense of purpose, a revival of our energies, prompting us to action and adventure.

At the onset of this month of September, the person who comes to mind is Mary, our sorrowful mother. Yet she is not meant to be a kind of patroness of pessimists and prophets of gloom. She's been through what we are enduring and that's why she is, for us Christians, a reminder that we are called to be messengers of hope and heralds of joy, even if we have to journey through a valley of tears. The Church is always directing our gaze to her, our life, our sweetness and our hope.

Mary's great gift is to change unhappiness into joy, uncertainty into hope and to bring to our wavering wills a quiet sense of confidence and resolve that seems to emanate from her strong and gentle femininity and tenderness.

In Mary's time, the world was dark, vicious and ugly. Men hoped and prayed for better times. Notice, as you glance through the pages of Scripture, Mary's word causes a change for the better. She said yes to God and Christ entered the world to enlighten those who sit in darkness and to direct our feet in the way of peace. After the horror of Calvary, Mary, crushed with sorrow, was still able to uphold the apostles and sustain their faith till the risen Christ came to them to console and refresh them with gladness.

When Christ's visible presence was with them no longer, after the Ascension, Mary again drew the apostles together to prepare them for the coming of the Holy Spirit and their new mission to the world.

Mary prompts us not just to look at her to sustain us in our grief and pain, but her presence inspires and urges me to do the same for those who will inevitably cross my path, to raise them from the depths of despair to the gentle light of peace, and hope and the message she always gives us is to trust her Son completely, doing whatever he tells us, because of which we will accomplish great things. Nothing is impossible with him. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and he removes all bounds to our hope.

Gentle woman, quiet light, Morning star, so strong and bright, Gentle Mother, peaceful dove, teach us wisdom, teach us love.

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

SOME RENUNCIATIONS ARE TOUGH BUT THEY CUSHION THE SHOCKS

by Don Giampaolo Dianin

There are some existential rossing points that everyone has to endure; not only those who get married, but anyone starting a new life even as a priest or a consecrated person

We wonder about the first years of marriage, a delicate and inescapable crossroad that demands certain cautions from every young married couple. We shall tackle one of them in the near future, the 'purification of motivations,' because it is inevitable that youth also bring with themselves weak motivations.

We shall presently address 'creative renunciation,' because every choice involves renuncia-

tion. Life is made up of choices that link every 'yes' to an inevitable 'no' to other beautiful and attractive possibilities. For example: I choose a profession and renounce others; I choose to become a priest and renounce marriage; I choose to marry that person and renounce others that might also have beautiful and attractive aspects; I choose to come and live in your country and leave mine, where I have many friends and I am well off; I



choose to stay at home to look after our children, because we have desired it together, but I renounce a promising professional fulfilment.

All these choices, and consequent renunciations, take place in the context of an intense love that is not afraid to say 'no' because the charm of a 'yes' makes one feel the levity of these renunciations. But renunciation exists and sometimes takes on the features of a wound that bleeds from time to time because it concerns beautiful things and opportunities for which we are made.

The theologian Gianni Manzone writes: "The decision involves the renunciation of certain possibilities in favour of what one has chosen, which only in this way becomes an effective possibility in life and, as such, allowing a positive approach towards the possibilities sacrificed. Renunciation thus becomes the presupposition to fullness."

Talking about renunciation asks us to embrace the experience of limitation that is part of every choice and of human existence itself. People are asked, sooner or later, to separate themselves from what is unattainable and that was perhaps due to the abstractness of a certain initial idealism. It is not marriage that asks for renunciations, it is life itself that confronts us with the dimension of limitation. It is not marriage that takes away spheres of freedom, it is an unreal concept of freedom that sooner or later must be dropped.

Alongside existential limits, there may be limits resulting from one's own or one's partner's shortcomings that call for

acceptance and reconciliation with flaws due to our humanity and fragility. In this case, let us remember that the willingness to forgive in order to get back on track after a fall is part of the life of a couple.

Without the acceptance of renunciation and limitation, negative processes can be triggered in challenging moments that harm the marriage. When the ideals that made the person say "yes" and accept the consequences of it wane, what the person has renounced comes to the surface, the wound bleeds and the fatigue and even frustration in the face of a life choice that appears problematic and sometimes even wrong is sensed.

We speak of 'creative renunciation' to remind us that the way to handle renunciation is to cherish and cultivate the reasons for our choices.

Here is the moral commitment attached to every life choice. Only the loving and persevering attentiveness to the reasons that led one to make that choice can sustain the person in dealing with renunciations. It takes precise awareness that there are renunciations, it takes realism, prudence and vigilance in picking up the signs of fatigue. The path that could lead to the failure of a life choice is a gradual one: first the gratifications wane, one becomes passive, one feels the weight of the renunciation, one looks for other compensations and one lets oneself go towards a gradual estrangement between what one lives inside and the exteriority of what appears. All it takes is a small tremor to bring everything

crashing down.

A case in point is the presence of a third person who knocks on the door of our heart in various ways and whose presence we notice especially at critical moments in married life. That person may have qualities absent in the one we married because no partner can meet all our expectations and desires. One of the reasons that lead to the failure of a marriage bond today is precisely the irreconcilable contradiction that is created when a third person enters and one of the partners falls in love with them. This never happens by chance, but is part of that slow disintegration of choice linked to difficult moments or even just the repetitiveness of a life no longer cared for and cherished.

Since the new relationship is

built on the same foundations as the first one, with the same language and the same promises, it can only stand if the first one is devalued. These dynamics are very clear: to say that the new relationship is the right one, one must say that my marriage is a disaster. The dynamics of falling in love again often make any realistic reasoning impossible. Attempting to help couples in difficulty when there is a third person involved is just arduous and in most cases impossible. It becomes so when the person has the courage to make cutbacks in the new relationship, cutbacks that are painful at first and only with time can appear as a test for life. The marks of the wounds remain, however, and these are also part of that limitation we spoke about.□

THE RIVER IN THE DESERT

A traveller lost in the desert despaired of finding water. He trudged to the top of a dune, then another and another, in the hope of glimpsing a stream of water somewhere. He kept looking in all directions, but in vain. As he staggered along, he tripped over a dry bush with his foot and fell to the ground. He lay there for a long time, with neither the strength to get up, nor the desire to fight, nor the hope of surviving the terrible ordeal.

As he lay there, helpless and miserable, he suddenly became aware of the silence of the desert. It was that majestic calm that allowed him to hear a small noise: the sound of flowing water.



Heartened by the hope that this sound aroused in him, he got up and continued walking until he came to a stream of clear, fresh water.□

FEAST OF THE MONTH

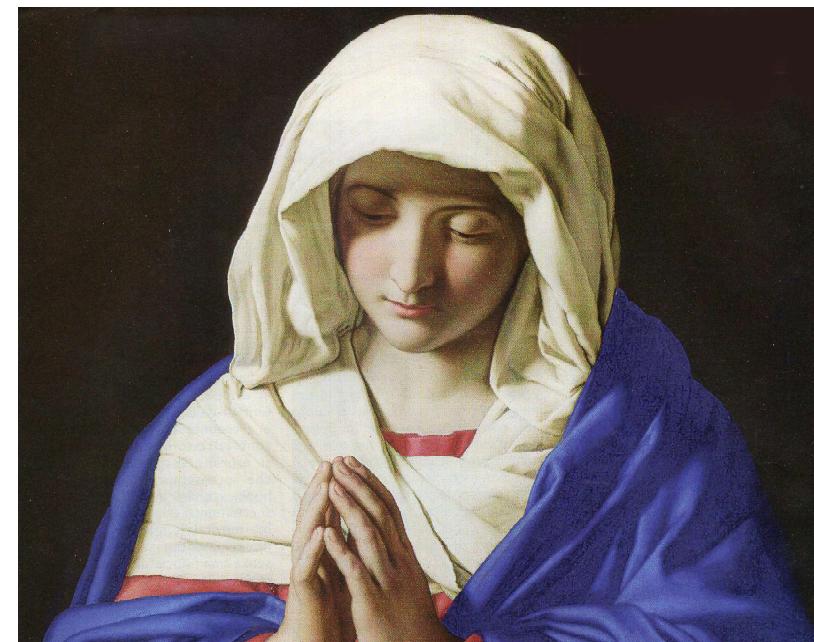
THE FOUR NAMES OF MARY

Several times in salvation history, God Himself intervenes to give people an important mission, a name. We can deduce that this was also the case for Mary

Strange as it may seem to us, the Muslim conquerors saw themselves as the legitimate heirs of the Roman Empire and judged the peoples of Europe as illegitimate invaders. This view, together with other factors, explains Muslim expansionism first into Egypt and North Africa, and then Spain and France, where they were stopped at Poitiers in 732 by Charles Martel. To the east they invaded the Balkans and reached as far as the gates of Vienna.

The Ottoman Empire also aimed to achieve dominance in

the Mediterranean, and Turkish incursions into the cities bordering that sea were frequent and devastating. They had come to conquer Nicosia and Famagusta on the island of Cyprus. In 1571, the fleet of the Holy League, at the behest of Pius V and composed of ships from all over Christendom, succeeded in prevailing over the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Lepanto. Pius V, who had invited Christendom to pray to Mary with the recitation of the rosary, attributed the victory to Our Lady and established her



feast on 7 October.

When, on 12 September 1683, the army led by John Sobieski, consisting of less than 80,000 Christian soldiers, succeeded in defeating the 140,000-strong Turkish army under Vienna, Pope Innocent XI attributed the victory to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, and extended a feast of the Name of Mary to the entire Church. It was a feast that had arisen in the early 1500s in Spain and had later become established in the Kingdom of Naples in the second half of the 17th century. **He set the date precisely on 12 September.**

In biblical tradition, the name is not a purely registry data, but has to do with the meaning of the life of the person who bears it. This is why God Himself repeatedly intervenes to give a name to people destined to have an important mission in Salvation History. It was so with John the Baptist and it was also so with Jesus. And we can deduce that when Our Lady's parents chose, what to call their daughter, experienced as a gift from God, her name was divinely inspired. It was an important name in tradition, borne by the sister of Moses and Aaron.

Exegetes do not agree on the literal meaning of this name. Church fathers and preachers of the Middle Ages identified four meanings.

First 'Star of the Sea,' and a second similar one: 'Illuminatrix.' "Stella Maris" is the title of the shrine on Mount Carmel, in

the Holy Land, dedicated to Our Lady. It is the pole star to which sailors looked for orientation in navigation. Its characteristic is that it is like a fixed point around which all the other stars seem to revolve. So it was of Mary Most Holy: faithful to God, the "Fixed point of eternal counsel," as Dante wrote. Looking to her, to her total docility to God, we can direct the path of our lives so as not to lose the way to salvation.

The third is of dramatic significance: the "Bitter Sea." She is a sea because she is "full of Grace," as the archangel Gabriel declares in the annunciation. And indeed, the extent of graces that Mary Most Holy has poured out over the centuries of Church history is immense, the gifts of meditation and prayer that she has inspired is immense. It is bitter, because Mary shared the dramas of her Son Jesus. Devotion has enumerated the seven sorrows that, like seven swords, pierced her motherly heart: Simeon's prophecy about the child Jesus, the flight into Egypt, Jesus' loss in the Temple, the encounter with Jesus on the Way of the Cross, when she found herself at the foot of the cross, the laying in her arms of the body of the Crucified One, the burial of her Son.

The fourth is "Lady," i.e., Queen. In affection Mary, assumed into heaven, shares the fullness of glory of her risen Son. And it is a title that spread devotion to Mary in France, modelled after chivalric customs. A devotion charged with affection, but also with reverence and a desire to belong and to imitate her. □

SAYING "YES" TO THE GOD OF LIFE

by Anastasia Dias

It was raining heavily and a strong wind blew into her room. The candle flame went out. She knew it was time to go to bed, so she shut the windows and sat on the corner of her bed. It had been a long day.

She closed her eyes and began praying, for her parents, sister and fiancé. She prayed that she'd have the courage to face the challenges that marital life would bring upon her, that both of them would try their best to understand each other and come what may, they would face it together. Then, she lay in bed, her eyes wide open.

She hadn't been slept well for the last couple of days. She was

nervous and a bit excited too. She'd known him for a while. He seemed like a kind person. But, then again, he was so much older than her. How could she understand him? And, more importantly, would he understand her? With all these questions swirling about in her mind, she tried to sleep.

She heard the wooden floor beneath her bed creak. The room lit up. She could see a reflection on the wall. She shuddered at the thought of who the figure could possibly be. She didn't open her eyes but turned around, slowly. Then, she opened an eye and peeked out from the edge of her bedsheets. She could see a glowing



figure standing before her. He looked like an angel. Surely, he would do her no harm, she thought to herself. Without another thought, she got up.

By now you would have guessed that was the story of the Annunciation: the day the Angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her she was chosen by God to be the mother to his Son. Try to look at this story and try to read between the lines. Throughout the narrative there is one thing that stands out: Mary's willingness. Mary's willingness to accept God's plan for her life.

Mary was just a young girl, engaged and to be soon married. God's plan for her life interrupted all the plans that she had set up for herself. In those days, society wasn't as open and accepting as it is today. And, there could have been a lot of possible consequences to Mary's decision to say 'Yes,' possible consequences for her future and the future of humanity. To name a few, her engagement would have been called off, her family would have been infuriated and society would have shunned her. Without thinking of any of those possible outcomes, Mary trusted that the purpose for her life lay in *this* plan, this plan that had been set out before her birth. She didn't let her doubts get the better of her, she simply said 'Yes.'

The difference between Mary and you and I is Mary's openness to life, open to new experiences, even challenging ones. Of course, she would have been looked down on in society. Perhaps, even her family might not have stood

by her. Her fiancé would never have accepted her either.

In spite of knowing all this, she said "Yes" to the Angel Gabriel, "Yes" to her destiny and "Yes" to bringing salvation to the entire world.

Who knows what would have happened if she'd said, 'Wait a minute, let me think about it,' or, 'Hey, I'm too scared to do this.' Or, 'No, what will my parents and fiancé think?'

That's what you and I need to learn from her story. We may have plans for ourselves, just like she did but these plans are interrupted by life's plans for us. It may seem tough to endure everything that life throws at us. But, just like Mary, after enduring it we will see why it happened in the first place. And, something wonderful, something worthwhile will always come out of that pain.

Saying 'Yes' to everything that life offers us, whether easy or challenging. Maybe a subject that's particularly trying, or a friend/family member who just can't change or a difficult life situation that makes us want to quit.

Don't say 'yes' to them all.

Say 'yes' to the experience that these challenges have to offer us.

Say 'yes' to the goodness that follows them.

Stop paying attention to the millions of 'What If's.'

And, say 'Yes.'

Say 'yes' to the saving grace that lies within you and me. □

WHAT DOES KINDNESS COST?

A strange feeling

"I was baptised when I was five. I came from a Buddhist family that later became Catholic. I used to go to the parish church every Sunday, it was my second family, but when I became a teenager, I didn't want to go there any more, nevertheless, when I was 16, my mother forced me to go to the *Summer Club for boys* run by the Salesians. The beginning of such a captivating story made us ask Sister Scholastica Jung, a Korean, to tell us the ending, and this was how she continued her story: "At the Salesians I was not happy at all, I didn't like it, I found everything boring. In addition, I had an accident: I hurt my foot and that irritated me even more. I wanted to go home. One evening, before dinner, I needed to change the dressing on my wound, so I went to the nurse and asked her arrogantly if she could change it for me; when she said I could come after dinner, I started bickering with her. At the end of the evening, as I was on my way to the dormitory, I heard a voice politely calling me by my Korean name: "Kyoung-Jin!" I turned around and saw the nurse: she was free and ready to help me. I had a strange feeling, I wondered why she was not upset with me even though I had been so arrogant towards her.

I later reflected some more and thought of a quote from Aesop: "However small, no act



of kindness is wasted" and I began to realise that it really was priceless. After the *Summer Club for boys*, I discovered a great love in me that welcomed me as I was and loved me with so patiently. Love had changed my life and had begun to give shape to a dream: to follow it! I understood more and more, that that love was called God."

Learning from children

"After my college studies I decided to train to become a Salesian Sister and later a missionary, in fact in 2012 I left Korea to walk with Him wherever He would lead me, without any fear."

In the following years, Sr Scholastica has been to Italy,

Malta, the United States, and is currently in Ethiopia, in Gubrie. "Each nation and each place is an encounter with Him, each has been special and significant to my religious life. From a little girl in the Oratory at Malta, I learned what it means to be a missionary. It was one day when we had adoration with the little ones and the boys, her father came to pick her up while she was in the chapel. When she heard her father calling her, she went to him and told him she couldn't leave because Jesus was there. The father knelt down beside her and began to pray beside his little girl.

"In Ethiopia I carry out my educational mission with the poorest girls and young women who wish to become nuns, always remembering the experience I had as an adolescent, the one I told you about, and realising that from that day on Jesus asks me every day to love as He loves me. Living with girls 24 hours a day is a great gift; like a mother I share their difficulties, their joys and their sufferings. Part of my story is in theirs and vice versa. Maria Mazzarello, co-founder of our Institute, also did this when

she lived with the girls in Morneze: with patient love she made each one sense her affection and won their hearts. Of course, I am aware that there is still a long way to go to become among the



young girls a concrete sign of His prevenient love," Sister Scholastica tells us smilingly.

"Before leaving for the mission, I did not dream of living as much as I have lived these past ten years. I never thought that I would go to different countries, that I would meet so many people and have different experiences. Each time I was available I realised that His dream became a reality both for me and for the people I met, in fact I am convinced that He continually fulfils the dream He has for me, for the mission He entrusts to me. I would like to tell all young people not to be afraid to follow Him but to trust Him: He will fulfil promises filled with unimaginable love, always and forever faithful! I would also like to leave you with a sentence written by the journalist Anne Herbert on a paper placemat in a California diner in 1982 and which has since gone and continues to go around the world: 'Practice random kindness and meaningless acts of beauty, never forgetting that kindness begets kindness as much as violence begets violence'." □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



HILDEGARD OF BINGEN (September 17)

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 into the seminary or religious life 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 noblewoman, 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 re-established 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.

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 handiwork, and 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 the 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 re-

ceived 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:

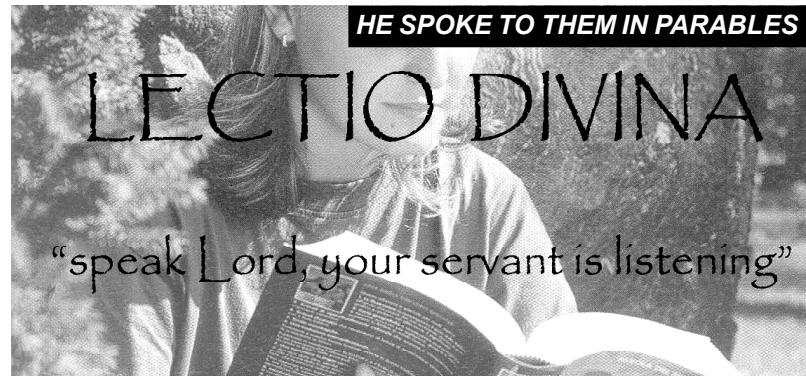
"But I, though I saw and heard these things, refused to write for a long time through doubt and bad opinion and the diversity of human words, not with stubbornness but in the exercise of humility, until, laid low by the scourge of God, I fell upon a bed of sickness; then, compelled at last by many illnesses...I 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 the 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 on a 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. □



THE CRAFTY STEWARD

(Lk 16:1-9)

by Carlo Broccardo

In a parable that is truly strange and hard to forget, speaking of a scam planned in grand style, Jesus invites us to be inventive and shrewd in sanctity

This parable is really strange. Try reading it once more before moving on; look up your bible near at hand. What effect does it have on you to hear Jesus say: "Make friends with dishonest wealth, so that, when it fails, they may receive you into eternal dwellings"? Concretely, what does this mean? Many parables are told to effect; but this one surpasses them all: it is a tale that impresses and makes one think; it is a parable that challenges us.

It all starts with a rich entrepreneur who fires his administrator, the one who took care of all his business affairs (it was normal for these super rich people not to do it themselves). He calls him and tells him: you're fired! He doesn't even give him a chance to defend himself, to explain himself.... He only gives him the time he needs to go home and get his books, put them in order and give them to the person

who will take his place. After the first two verses, the whole parable tells us what our steward did in these few hours; let us look at his words and actions and we will know exactly what kind of a person we are dealing with.

Firstly, he is someone who does not want to work. "Dig, I don't have the strength; beg, I'm ashamed...." Some commentators sharply note that between a very hard manual job like digging the earth (in those days, everything was done by hand!) and a humiliating "job" like begging, there was a wide range of intermediate possibilities; but he prefers to be maintained without struggling: he aims to have someone always willing to take him in for free, rather than work!

Secondly, he is dishonest. One by one, he calls his master's debtors and gives them mind-boggling discounts: one hundred barrels of oil is about 3,000-3,500

litres; one hundred measures of wheat is about 30 tonnes. To the first debtor, therefore, he gives 1,500 litres of oil; to the second 6 tons of wheat. This is not a few cents, but huge sums. If we think that those debts were not to him, but to his master, we realise that he really robbed him! But in this way, he made many friends; indeed, the parable says that he called all the debtors one by one, not just the two he brought as an example.

Sometimes the parable gives us trouble because we stop at these first two characteristics of our character: he does not want to work and he is dishonest. Jesus' account, on the other hand, particularly highlights a third characteristic: he was really shrewd;

literally, the Greek word says he was able to use his brain. He was so shrewd that even the master, the one whose money he stole, could not help, in the end, but be amazed at his shrewdness in the end.

If I had invented the parable myself, I might have gone in search of some shrewd, but honest character; cunning, but hard-working. Instead, Jesus made another choice; and he also motivated it: dishonest people are smarter than you, he says to his disciples; and then he adds: you cannot cite as an excuse the fact that so many things in this world are not according to the gospel (dishonest wealth, for example): this world is difficult, it is corrupt, but you must work in it, you

must bring forward the ideals of the Kingdom within this reality, even with all its contradictions.

I am reminded of the words Simone Weil wrote in a letter dated 26 May 1942 (certainly not easy years...): "Today, being a saint is not enough, what is needed is the holiness that the present moment demands, a new holiness, also unprecedented (...). A new kind of holiness is something disruptive, it is an invention." Jesus asks us for shrewdness in holiness, inventiveness in witness, imagination and courage in proclamation. These are difficult times: we need capable Christians. □



Quiet Spaces

OSTEOPOROSIS OF THE SOUL

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, September 22, 2016

Vanity, along with greed and pride, is one of the "roots of all evil" in the heart of every person. The frantic pursuit, so typical of our times, "to pretend and appear" to be a certain way, does not lead to anything, "it does not bring us any true gain" and leaves the soul restless.

The vanitas vanitatum from the Book of Ecclesiastes (1:2-11), proposed in the liturgy of the day, was the focus of Pope Francis' homily in the Mass he celebrated at Santa Marta on Thursday morning, 22 September 2016. The first point he focused on, however, was the anxiety experienced by King Herod, described in the Gospel of Luke (9:7-9). Indeed, the sovereign "was troubled" because this Jesus whom everyone was speaking of, "was a threat to him." Some thought it was John, but the king repeated: "John I beheaded; so who is this about whom I hear such things?" He was restless, the Pope noted, recalling that Herod's father, Herod the Great, had also been "seized with fright" when the wise men came to worship Jesus.

In our soul, the Pope explained, "it's possible to experience two types of restlessness: the good one, which is the restlessness of the Holy Spirit, which the Holy Spirit gives us, and unsettles the soul in order to do good things, to move forward; and there is also the bad type of restlessness, the one that is born of a guilty conscience." The latter is what characterized the two contemporary rulers of Jesus' time: "they had a guilty conscience, and that is why they were restless, because they had done bad things and did not have peace, and every event seemed to threaten them". Moreover, their way of solving problems was to kill people, and they advanced this way, by stepping "over people's corpses."

Those who, like them, said Francis, "do harm", have "a guilty conscience and cannot live in peace": the restlessness torments them and they live "with a constant itch, a rash that does not leave them at peace." The Pope centred his reflection on this interior situation: "these people have done evil, but evil, any evil, always has the same root: greed, vanity and pride." All three, he added, "leave you without peace of conscience", all three prevent you from entering "the healthy restlessness of the Holy Spirit," and "cause you to live with restlessness, with fear."

At this point, prompted by the First Reading, the Pope focused on vanity: "Vanity of vanities ... vanity of vanities! All is vanity." The expression from the Book of Ecclesiastes, he noted, might appear "a bit pessimistic," even if in reality "not everything is like this: there

are good people." However, Francis explained, "the text is meant to underline this temptation," which "was also the first" experienced by "our forefathers: to be like God". Vanity "makes us bloat us", but "it does not last long, as it is like a bubble," and never brings "any true gain." Yet, man "is anxious to appear" a certain way, "to pretend, and to resemble." To put it simply: "Vanity is putting makeup on one's life. And this renders the soul sick, because one puts makeup on his life in order to appear and to seem" a certain way, "and all of the things that he does are to pretend, out of vanity, and in the end what does he gain?"

To better understand this interior reality, the Pope used a few concrete images: "vanity is like 'osteoporosis' of the soul: the bones look good from the outside, but on the inside they are ruined." Furthermore: "Vanity leads us to fraud; as con artists mark cards in order to gain. This victory is false, it is not real. This is vanity: living to pretend, living to resemble, living to appear. And this unsettles the soul."

In this regard, the Pope said, St Bernard addressed those who are vain with a word "all too strong": "But think about what you will become. You will be food for worms". As if to say: "putting makeup on your life is a lie, because the worms will devour you and you will be nothing." However, "where does the power of vanity lie?" Francis asked. "Driven by pride, toward evil," man does not want "his mistake to be seen," and tends to "cover everything". It is true that there are many "holy people," but it is equally true that there are people about whom you think: "What a good person! He goes to Mass every Sunday. He gives large offerings to the Church," while being unaware of the "osteoporosis," of the "corruption he has within." Moreover, "vanity is this: it makes you look as though you have a saintly face, while the truth about you within is quite different."

Faced with this, the Pope concluded, "where is our strength, our security and refuge?" The answer is also offered in the liturgy. In the Responsorial Psalm of the day, in fact, we hear: "Lord, you have been our refuge from generation to generation." In the Gospel acclamation we recall Jesus' words: "I am the way, the truth and the life." This "is the truth," Francis said, "not the makeup of vanity."

Therefore it is important to pray "that the Lord will deliver us from these three roots of all evil: greed, vanity and pride. But especially from vanity, which does us so much harm." □

REDEMPTION

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

As summer waned, it put a circle of purplish shadow around the time of twilight, making it prematurely dull. The air was still warm. Sitting on a rustic arm-chair by the window, Grandpa dozed off after his frugal dinner, while Luisa did the last chores with her usual diligent speed.

Luisa, she was so young, and still looked like a child with her long golden hair falling over her shoulders. Orphaned at a very early age, her grandfather, as she called him, who was the only a distant relative of her mother, had picked her up and raised her as if she were truly his granddaughter. Everything he owned would one day be hers.

'Grandpa' on the other hand, was not rich; he was the owner of that little house and a farm, the only things saved from the ruinous sale that his son's debts had forced upon him. And now with that blossoming young lass beside him, who could ease his great secret sorrow with a smile, he could at least end his life in peace, if not in serenity.

His son! He wanted to forget him, but he could not, and that thought slowly consumed him like a hidden disease.

Attracted by who knows what mirages, by who knows what illusions of riches and enjoyment, the young man, after having squandered much of his father's wealth with his friends and girlfriends, had crossed the borders, and for several years now had not even thought of sending news of himself.

"He'll be back, he'll be back!" mumbled the elderly parent when he was reduced to a wreck rather weak and sickly and even without money, "but then..." and made a threatening gesture with his hand, which did not bode well.

"What if he repents, Grandfather?" Luisa insinuated. "What if he swears to change his life?"

"That would be too little and too convenient; I couldn't forgive him anyway. Just think of the pain and the shame he has caused me!"

The lass sighed and fell silent; the old man's grief had become hers too. When Bertie had left the house, she was small, but his bold, gangly figure had remained vivid in her mind and she would have recognised it among a thousand. Bertie had never been mean to her and certainly, seeing her again, his cold eyes, streaked with grey and blue, would have been full of sweetness, as they once were, when he used to amuse her in the rare moments of rest, and playfully pull her golden hair!

Grandpa woke up momentarily:

"Why don't you stop, Luisa, it's late and will soon be dark." Then he dozed off again.

The lass all dressed and ready, went out onto the veranda and down into the small garden that was in front of the house; but when she reached the gate, she had a sudden reaction of revulsion. There was a man leaning

against the jasmine hedge that covered the railing all around. He could have been a vagrant, a beggar or a thief, perhaps.

However, she overcame that instinct of fear and went on:

"Who are you and what do you want?" she asked. The man no longer tried to hide, heartened by that vision and that voice, and showed his tired face in the dim evening light.

"Bertie!" Luisa, recognising him, barely stifled a cry.

"Yes, it is I, Bertie, and you ... you are Luisa, aren't you?"

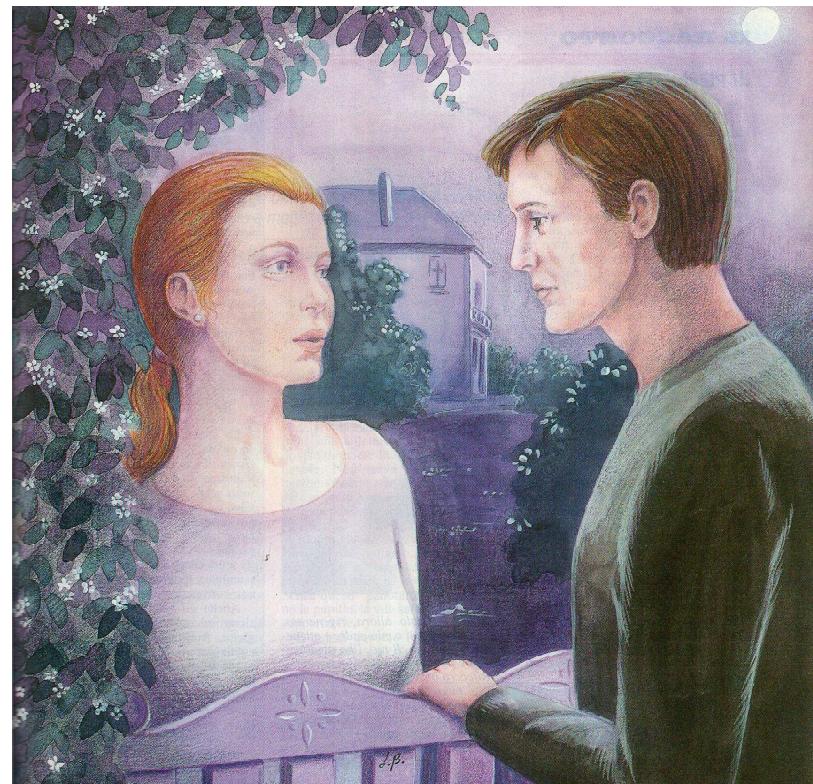
She nodded, as she felt her throat like a vice and her heart was in turmoil.

"How you've grown up, Luisa!" he went on slowly, "and how many years have passed since I made my escape!" He wanted to say more, but could not.

"Come in, then," the young lass finally managed to blurt out, "I'll tell grandpa..."

"No, no, I won't come in, I can't" and he stretched out his gaunt hands against the bars. "After what I did, my father will chase me away; you don't know my father's outbursts!"

He spoke confusedly and with difficulty. "I have suffered so much, you know, Luisa, I've experienced every pain and



humiliation; and now I've come back, not to ask for help, no, but to see these places...this house once more."

Anyone could see that he was exhausted; his eyes all sunken looked like two small pools of colourless water.

Luisa, whom he had always called Luisella out of habit, shivered with anguish. If she was late, her grandfather might just turn up to call her back.

"If you don't want to be seen," she told Bertie persuasively, "at least come and rest for the night in the barn, come. Grandfather won't notice anything, rest assured of that."

How could he not refuse that gentle, insistent voice? He was so tired! He had been walking since morning, because, not wanting to use up what little money he had left, he had made the journey from town to the village on foot. Nor had anyone recognised him, so shaggy and sombre was that face of his from swaggering from day to day. The young man passed through the entrance and skirted the hedge so as not to be seen; Luisa quickly closed the double-keyed gate, then accompanied him to the barn behind the house.

"Thank you, Luisella!" murmured Bertie, "you're so good, forgive me!"

"Tomorrow very early, I'll come to say goodbye to you," she promised him, "for the moment just try and get some sleep." And off she went, like the good fairy from those fairy tales!

As she came into the house again, grandfather had fortunately just woken up. Night had fallen outside, still and pitch

dark. The star-studded sky looked down on the mystery of earth and men.

Grandfather and granddaughter soon went to bed; just as well, for Luisa could not have borne the old man's sad gaze! But the young girl's sleep was fitful, continually tossing and turning between wakefulness and sleep and peopled with ghosts and fears.

Outside in the barn, Bertie too had the same fate. After the first hours of deep slumber, he woke up and finding himself at home, in his own house, next to his unconscious father, he was assailed by a flood of memories.

Oh, how many, how many! They gave him no peace, they came from all sides, chained one to the other, and were condemnations and remorse, hurled against his little spirit burning with disgust and repentance. Sometimes they aroused in him the thought of a desperate act, sometimes the hope of a better future and even the desire for a different life entered his heart.

Above all, the figure of Luisella hovered over all this whirlwind, and she seemed to incite him towards a path of light.

As dawn broke, when the sky was barely tinged with pink, it truly seemed that a light had penetrated him with the will of a heroic decision.

When Luisa arrived, in a rustle, silent and watchful, he was already standing ready to leave. He was no longer the man who came in the previous evening: his eyes had a vivid glint and his person had taken on a new

energy.

The girl greeted him softly and handed him a loaf of bread and a small bottle of lukewarm milk, which took and smiled, drinking it greedily.

"Bertie do you really want to leave?" she asked him anxiously. "Without seeing your father again?"

"I must, Luisella, I would only cause him more pain today!"

"But where will you go then? Do you want to go on roam and never come back?" There was a barely suppressed sob in her words.

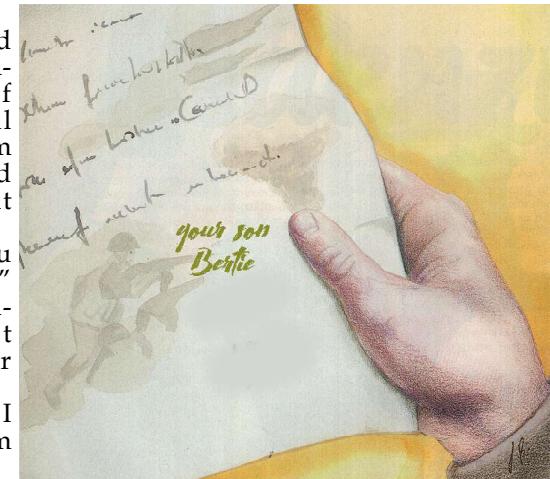
Bertie took the young girl's small hands in his own:

"No, Luisella with your golden braids, I do not want to go back to my former useless life. Last night I dreamt of my only possible redemption. I am going to report to the district and volunteer for an Italian peace mission. The world, Europe, needs my service and I need their love, which will make me brave and honest once again and it will purify me."

Luisa listened to him with a beautiful smile on her pale face; had he perhaps guessed her secret thought?

"Then I'll come home, Luisella, if God gives me grace; and only then, reborn, will I be able to present myself to my father and ask for his forgiveness. Yours, I had at once, and that is what will sustain me for the future!"

They walked together again the



way they did the night before, along the jasmine hedge, and bid each other farewell, more through their eyes than with their lips. Luisa opened the gate slowly and stood beckoning him with her hand until she saw him disappear at the end of the street that curved behind the first houses of the village.

About four months later, when the mail arrived, Luisa handed her astonished grandfather a letter bearing the postmark of the Ministry of Defence - Rome.

When he had read the first few lines, the old man's face seemed brighter as he lifted a transfigured face from the paper: "Luisa, Luisa, a letter from Bertie. He's volunteered for Afghanistan; he writes that he has been slightly wounded and will return shortly." Then, raising his eyes to look into the distance he whispered, "Thank you, Lord! He is still worthy to call himself my son!" □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 32

by Michele Molineris

165. The gendarmes grabbed him by the arms (1867)

As soon as we arrived on the doorstep of the house, Mr and Mrs Vimercati the servants came to open the carriage door so that Don Bosco could get out. Those present were amazed at this gesture, and most of all that of a customs officer. I can still see him there, standing at his post and at a certain distance away, looking as if he would not leave his post, but with his face turned towards us, not daring to approach us. He had a look that made me feel sorry for him. He was almost the colour of clay, thin, dry, and in such a way as to give the impression that he was in great pain.

Don Bosco, even though his eyesight had been very weak for some time, nevertheless noticed his poor health; and as if he had come for him alone, he looked at him and made a sign to come closer. The good gentlemen who were at his side were amazed at this move of his and, seeing that the guard, almost unsurpassed by so much honour, was moving towards Don Bosco, they made way for him and let him pass.

"What is the matter, my dear friend? How are you? Your face tells me that you are suffering."

"I have a fever, Sir! Since October, it only leaves me for a short time."

"Would you like to be cured?"

"If only I could! This can't go on. I'll be forced to leave the service... And who will look after my family?" He said these things

with such feeling that we were all touched. There was no longer any hurry, but we stood there with our eyes fixed on Don Bosco, to see what he would say to comfort him."

Then Don Bosco took out a medal of Mary Help of Christians, and lifting it up, in front of everyone, he said: "Take it, my dear, put it around your neck, and start from today a novena to Mary Help of Christians, reciting in the family an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory be, and you will see."

So saying, he placed it in his hand, and went into the house to celebrate Holy Mass.

A few days later, after the religious function at St Peter in Chains, the people came out and spread out over the courtyard. At a certain point the customs officer, seeing Don Bosco, could not resist running up to him and shouting: "Here is my liberator!"

He said these words aloud and waved his cap in the air... This sudden scene was followed by a bit of a commotion. Count Eugenio, not knowing who he was and what he was doing, fearing who knows what surprise, instinctively put his hand on his sword, if necessary, to defend Don Bosco's life and his own, which he believed was threatened.

But he told those around Don Bosco: "The other day he saw me with a fever that was burning in October; he gave me a medal of Our Lady, telling me to pray. Well, from that moment the fever stopped, the pale colour disappeared and now I feel better than I've ever felt in my life. Then, I was in danger of losing my job because of the illness ."

This aroused a great excitement among the crowd who got closer, to get to know who this priest was, who did not appear to be from Rome at all.

The time finally came to leave Rome. The departure was set for around eight o'clock in the evening, and by six o'clock friends had already gathered to say goodbye to Don Bosco and accompany him to the station.

Outside there were several carriages of Roman families, which gave the impression of a large gathering. I was amazed at what had happened and I could still see that on that last evening. I also saw the customs officer, who came to bid farewell to Don Bosco and continued to call him his benefactor (*Francesia, Two Months with Don Bosco in Rome*, 77, 105, 259).

166. On the dome of Mary Help of Christians (1867)

A year after the final completion of the dome of Mary Help of Christians, a distinguished personage, a benefactor of Don Bosco, came up to kiss the golden feet of Our Lady. He was Don Antonio Cinzano, parish priest of Castelnuovo d'Asti. He died three years later, in 1870, after 36 years as parish priest of Don Bosco's native village. Fr Cinzano had given Don Bosco the ecclesiastical habit and administered all those aids that charity allowed him and zeal required, to support a vocation that was so rare, but also so tried.

He was brought up there by a singular grace from the maternal goodness of Mary Help of Christians and on Don Bosco's advice and exhortation. To the many in-

conveniences that already tormented his old age, deafness had lately been added. This, as well as alienating him from life, had also ended up making him distrustful, fearful as he always was that someone might abuse him because of his defect, to disrespect him and play some disrespectful prank on him. He especially regretted that he could no longer attend to his ministerial duties. This affliction made him melancholic and, judging by his behaviour, would soon make him ill. In those days the medical profession had few remedies to offer, and he had tried them all, but to no avail.

It was at this point that the assistant parish priest, also to restore peace in the family that had been rather compromised by what we had said, took the liberty of speaking to Don Bosco about it. Don Bosco did not hesitate for a moment: he recommended to him the novena of Mary Help of Christians. The parish priest clung to it with immense confidence, equal only to his will to recover, which to tell the truth was very intense.

And he was rewarded. The miracle in fact took place on 2 October 1867. That morning, before leaving the presbytery to go and celebrate Mass in the parish, he had already made his nurse cry, accusing her of speaking softly on purpose to spite him. When he arrived at the church, Fr Cinzano renewed all his trust in Our Lady's intervention, asked God's forgiveness for his intemperance a little earlier and then went up to the altar, helped by Cesare Cagliero, then 13 years old and at the time



of this narration a priest and procurator general of the Salesian congregation.

Knowing that the parish priest was hard of hearing, he began to respond by shouting. Contrary to other mornings, Fr Cinzano stopped in annoyance and told him in a reproachful tone:

"You're badgering me, why don't you speak a bit softer?"

He thought he had only heard the unusual voice of his altar server, so he rebuked him; but when he resumed the conversation, he realised that it was instead the effect of his own hearing. Then he exclaimed, distracted: "I can hear," and he was so moved that he could no longer continue either the psalm or the mass.

Back in the sacristy he burst out: "I am healed; Mary Help of Christians has given me the grace."

He decided to go and thank her at her shrine in Turin, where, not being content with venerating her image, he wanted to climb up to the dome without too many witnesses, to kiss her feet and be moved (from M.B., IX, 831).

167. There's a smoker at the top of the stairs (1867)

Fr Antonio Riccardi (who died in Savona on 15 May 1924 at the age of 71) recounts that when he was still a youngster, he went to confession to Don Bosco one Saturday evening. When he had finished confession, Don Bosco said to him: "Go up the stairs at the top of the artisans' building; there is a man smoking; call him and tell him to think about making his confession."

He went: the staircase was dark, nevertheless he went up. At a certain point he began to smell tobacco smoke. He stopped, fearing that the craftsman, large and robust, would be outraged at being caught in open violation of the rules; and he called him by name. All was silent. He called again, and no voice answered. Then, albeit reluctantly, he proceeded to the top. The craftsman was sitting on the floor on the landing, still smoking.

Riccardi quickly told him: "Don Bosco is calling you to go to confession!"

And not waiting another moment, he ran away, fearing he would be beaten, and hid behind a pillar to see what the man would do. It was not long before he saw him cross the courtyard and go earnestly to confession (MB., VIII, 322). □



15 SEPTEMBER - THE SORROWS OF OUR LADY

SHE STOOD BY THE CROSS

by Luigi Melotti

In his Apostolic Exhortation on Marian Devotion, Paul VI wrote "...The commemoration of Our Lady of Sorrows is a fitting occasion for reliving a decisive moment in the history of salvation and for venerating, together with the Son "lifted up on the cross, His suffering Mother." (*Marialis Cultus*, n. 7).

The Liturgy of that day helps us to relive that decisive moment. In the Collect (the prayer preceding the readings), Mary is recalled as the one who was "associated... with the passion of Christ." In the prayer over the offerings, it is said that she was "given to us as a most sweet mother at the cross of Christ." Finally, in the final prayer, the prayer after Communion, we ask that we may "complete in us, for the sake of the holy Church, what is lacking in Christ's passion" (cf. Col 1:24).

The *first reading* is a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews (5:7-9), which tells us of Christ's suffering and death. This passage is meant to indicate that Mary's deepest sorrow was the cruel death of her Son.

As the *gospel*, we can choose Luke 2:33-35: Simeon's prophecy about the sword that will pierce Mary's soul, or John 19:25-27.

For our short meditation, we choose the 2nd, where the prophecy of the first is fulfilled.

"There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the mother of Cleophas, and Mary of Magdala..." .

"Standing by the cross of Jesus" is one of the many Johannine expressions that has two meanings. The first material meaning, is immediately grasped: by the cross on which Jesus was crucified stood his mother. Among the Johannine community, this expression also had a second, spiritual, very deep meaning: it meant sharing in the cross of Jesus, uniting oneself to his sufferings. In other words, we have here affirmed Mary's Com-passion.

Mary at the Cross of Jesus! No one understood the sufferings of her Son as much as She did. No one had associated herself with him more than She. No one suffered more than She.

John Paul II writes: "It was on

Calvary that Mary's suffering, beside the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view but which was mysterious and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of the world (*Salvifici doloris*, n. 25).

Looking at Jesus nailed to the cross, looking at him with Mary's eyes and loving him with her heart: this must be the ideal of every truly compassionate soul.

Throughout the centuries, painters and sculptors have contemplated this climax of pain experienced by the Son and the Mother. They have painted and sculpted them, sometimes brilliantly: think of Michelangelo's Pietà. Few are able to imitate them in art, but all are invited to imitate the contemplation of the great artists. A simple soul overflowing with love can produce in its soul a masterpiece known only to God, but surpassing the most famous 'Pietà' on earth.

In order to have an exact view of the history of the world and the history of our lives, we must stand with Mary at the foot of the cross and, from there, look at everything else. The blood and suffering of the Son of God address a pathetic invitation to each one: 'Believe, repent and love': Mary joins us

with the weight of her sorrows and her tenderness.

Our Lady of Sorrows teaches us to look at her crucified Son. She has scrutinised, more than anyone else, the unfathomable abysses of the Mystery of the Cross. The feelings experienced by Mary on Calvary are beyond words. What words cannot describe Mary's grieving heart can communicate to our hearts.

Jesus looks with compassion upon the Christian soul whose feelings come close to those of Mary on Calvary. The compassion experienced with Mary gives a privileged opportunity to penetrate a little deeper the mysteries of Revelation. Thanks



Don Bosco's Madonna

to Our Lady of Sorrows, the Cross becomes a door of light.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary is not alone in her compassion: John, Mary Magdalene and some pious women are close to her. John and the pious women share in Mary's feelings. Her exemplary attitude moves them. Thanks to Her, they better understand what Jesus expects of them.

These faithful friends are the first of a long lineage that will last until the end of time. Mary is also waiting for us to take our place in this line. She knows that when one has truly met her crucified Son, one never leaves him again. Those who stand with Mary at the cross of her Son are her beloved children. After all, they were entrusted to Her in the person of John.

Let us therefore join Mary's compassion. On Calvary, Mary lived in faith, hope and charity, what Jesus lived in the Spirit. We are all born spiritually from the wounded Heart of the Lamb and Mary's compassion. If we want to live in deep communion with Mary in her compassion, we will be docile to the Holy Spirit. Compassion

was harshly attacked by Nietzsche: "This religion of compassion is unbearable it cannot be accepted." If we instead enter into Mary's compassion, we will not judge anyone. In the silence of prayer, we will look at others with Mary's gaze on John, on the good thief, on the people. In the face of today's unbelieving world, we will live in the best way Mary's faith on Calvary.

Let us repeat the popular refrain: "Whoever welcomes the cross as you do, O Mary, Christ the Redeemer will save him. O Mary, mother of sorrows, pray for us to your Jesus." □

Holy Saturday Prayer

"Holy Mary, woman of Holy Saturday, sweetest estuary in which, for one day at least, the faith of the whole Church had gathered, you are the last point of contact with heaven that has preserved the earth from the tragic black-out of grace. Lead us by the hand to the threshold of light, of which Easter is the supreme source.

Holy Mary, woman of Holy Saturday, help us to understand that, in the end, all of life, suspended as it is between the mists of Friday and the expectations of Resurrection Sunday, is so much like that day. It is a day of hope, when linen soaked in tears and blood was laundered, and dried in the spring sun to become altar cloths.

In short, remind us that there is no cross from which one is not taken down. There is no human bitterness that does not melt into a smile. There is no sin that does not find redemption. There is no tomb at whose mouth a stone is not providentially laid.

Holy Mary, woman of Holy Saturday, tell us how, in the twilight of that day, you prepared yourself to meet your Risen Son." Amen

Mons. Tonino Bello



MY VOCATION STORY

FR JOSEPH (JOE) CASTI

By Fr Ivo Coelho sdb

A missionary in Portuguese Goa and India since 1958, he went back to Italy in 2002. He will be remembered as a formator (he was master of novices in India), and the successor to Fr Aurelio Maschio in the missionary procure in Mumbai. In the latter capacity he came to know thousands of benefactors of Don Bosco both in Italy and elsewhere.

Joe was born to Salvatore Casti and Concetta Tocco in Borbona (Rieti), Italy, on 28 September 1931. His family was originally from Sardinia. His twin brother Francesco is also a Salesian from the ICC province.

He did his theological studies in Turin, at the Crocetta (1954-1958). He was ordained in Turin on 1 January 1958.

Immediately after ordination in 1958, we find him as catechist and prefect of studies in Panjim, Portuguese Goa. In 1965-1966 he was the assistant parish priest in Valpoi, Goa, in 1966-1968 catechist in Yercaud South India.

From 1968 to 1974 he was the rector of the Salesian house in Panjim, Goa. From 1973 to 1979 he was the Vice Provincial of the INB Province, in 1973-1974 and again in 1976-1978. He was the rector of the Salesian Aspirantate at Lonavla from 1975 to 1978. The boys were in love with their new rector, reputed to be a 'black belt' in judo.

It was probably in Lonavla that Joe made the acquaintance of Tony De Mello, SJ, whose Sadhana Institute was just across the small town, where it still stands. He did



a long training course with the great Jesuit master, and became not only his disciple but also his friend. He said that Tony had liberated him: he was no longer Fr Joseph Casti, he was simply Joe. But Joe was indeed a free man: he took from Tony what he wanted, but always remained deeply Catholic and Salesian.

From 1978 to 1991 he was novice master at Nashik (INB). He knew how to respect, to "be patient" and to touch hearts. His novices, who had great affection for him, when they came to Rome, always wanted to meet him.

In 1991, Joe moved to the Provincial House, Matunga, Mumbai. He was rector from 1991 to 1996, with the task of accompanying the

now elderly Fr Aurelio Maschio, procurator and patriarch of the Mumbai province. He ensured a smooth transition when Fr Maschio passed away in September 1996.

After Fr Maschio's death, Joe took over as procurator and rector of the Shrine of Don Bosco's Madonna at Matunga Mumbai, in 1996 and held this post until 2002. During this period, which was certainly not easy for him, he suffered a severe stroke that affected his health. In 2002, he chose to return to his Province of Italy Ligure Toscana (ILT).

Fr Joseph Casti was a good man. He had managed to imbue his whole way of being and doing with goodness. And to this goodness Fr Casti added a cheerfulness all his own. He was famous for his stories and jokes, and he had his own



imitable style in telling them. He was not a photocopy of anyone. He was a deeply Salesian, profoundly free and a content human being. Fr Savio Silveira, the Provincial of Bombay, testifies: "Fr Casti was one of the founders and great pillars of our Province. He was the first Vice Provincial and Novice Master of our Province. He assisted Fr Aurelio Maschio, the patriarch of our Province in his last years, and then he was his successor in the Shrine of Don Bosco's Madonna and the Salesian Procure. He was also one of the great spiritual guides of our Province, who accompanied many Salesians on their vocational journey. But above all, he was one of the best loved Salesians in the Province, a gentle, mild, loving, generous and joyful Salesian. Goodbye dear Fr Joseph Casti. You will always remain in our hearts and memories."

Fr Joe Casti will be remembered as a great Salesian. He was always kind and caring... everything a Salesian of Don Bosco should be. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Rustic Dining

As a trail guide in a national park, Danny ate with the rest of the seasonal staff in a rustic dining hall, where the food left something to be desired. When they were finished with their meals, they scraped the remains into a garbage pail and stacked the plates for the dishwasher.

One worker, apparently not too happy after his first week on the job, was ahead of Danny in line. As he slopped an uneaten plate of food into the garbage, Danny heard him mutter, "Now stay there, this time."

Store Safety

While attending college, I worked evenings at a retail store. On slow nights my co-worker Susan would often sing along with the radio while we did paperwork or restocked merchandise.

One evening as the manager was leaving I expressed my concern to him about our safety, being two women working alone at night.

"Oh, you'll be fine," he said, waving his hand. "If you see anybody who looks suspicious, just warn him that Susan knows Karaoke."

Finally

As a professor at the Air Force Institute of Technology, I taught a series of popular courses on software engineering. The programme was highly competitive and difficult to get into, but one student made our decision whether to accept him quite simple.

When asked to fax over his college transcript, the student told

me, "Well, I would, but it's the only copy I have."

Forty Year Difference

When I was a twenty-something college student, I became quite friendly with my study partner, a 64-year-old man, who had returned to school to finish his degree. He confessed, with a wink, that he had once thought more than friendship might be a possibility between us.

"So what changed your mind?" I asked him.

"I went to my doctor and asked if he thought a forty year age difference between a man and woman was insurmountable. He looked at my chart and said, 'You're interested in someone who's 104?'"

Cheap Rhymes With Jeep

A guy bought his wife a beautiful diamond ring for Christmas.

A friend of his said, "I thought she wanted one of those pretty four-wheel drive vehicles."

"She did," he replied, "But where in the world was I going to find a fake jeep!"

Young Patient

A pediatrician in town always plays a game with some of his young patients to put them at ease and test their knowledge of body parts. One day, while pointing to a little boy's ear, the doctor asked him, "Is this your nose?"

Immediately the little boy turned to his mother and said: "Mom, I think we'd better find a new doctor!" □

ONE LAST THOUGHT

NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM SAVIOUR

Vincent Travers OP

It is one of the most compelling stories in all of scripture (Luke 24:13-35). Two stricken disciples – with an overwhelming sense of crushing loneliness and horrible emptiness – walking down the dusty road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, convinced that Jesus is dead and buried. I image their conversation going along the lines:

"I can hardly believe it. He's gone."

"What do we do now?"

"It's Peter's fault. He shouldn't have denied Jesus."

They are joined on the road by a stranger. It's Jesus. But they failed to recognise him. Jesus says: "I couldn't help overhearing you. Who are you discussing? Why the glum faces?"

With the kind of patience that comes from feeling disillusioned, the disciples explained how the dreamer from Galilee had turned their heads with his vision of a better world, how they had been excited by his dream, how he had showed men and women how to live. It had been a mind-blowing experience. Then it all went sour. He finished up on a cross. It wasn't supposed to happen that way.

Busiest road in the world

The disciples on the road feel let down, foolish, and betrayed. They wanted to be

anywhere but in Jerusalem. They had given Jesus their all. He had led them to the foot of the cross and crushing failure. He had stolen three precious years of their lives.

Every man and woman who gives time and talent, love and energy, dedication and commitment to a cause, and then wakes up to find it has all gone away – any such person knows well the twists and turns of the Emmaus Road. In so many ways, it is the busiest road in history. It is a rare person who hasn't walked part of the Emmaus Road.

Mysterious stranger

The disciples had hoped that Jesus was the one to liberate their land from the hated Romans, but they had killed him. Hope had given way to despair.

The mysterious stranger was happy to walk with them and they were glad of his company. Why anyone would want to share seven miles with two depressed human beings must have



puzzled them.

The stranger – God in disguise – listened patiently to their story without interrupting. Puzzled, one asks, “Where have you been these last few days? Haven’t you heard about Jesus of Nazareth? We had hoped that he was going to liberate us from the Romans. Jesus, however, had not come as a political liberator.

To add insult to injury they tell Jesus that some women in their group had gone to the tomb after the Sabbath to anoint the corpse of Jesus. Incredibly, they came back with the story that Jesus was alive. It was a sick story; the last straw. Jesus responds: “Oh, you silly people, how slow to believe.” He might have easily have said: “When will the church listen to its women.”

What did you expect?

We had hoped! How often have you heard or uttered a phrase like that? “We moan and groan with self-pity when we are in the shadow of the cross. We piously ask that God’s will be done, and then have the audacity to pout if things do not go our

way.

Much of our pain, like the pain of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, is of our own making. We hoped the doctor would make her well again. We hoped the surgery would get rid of the tumour. We hoped to pass the exam. We hoped to get the job. Words painted with grey disappointment. What we wanted didn’t happen. The result? Shattered hope. We deserved better. Our world falls apart. And we wonder what kind of God would fail us? On the other hand, this is a human problem. It is the problem of expectations. We expected. Our expectations are not met. We feel let down.

Much of our pain is the result of unreal expectations. Unreal expectations lead to disappointed hopes. “A wise man put a poster on the wall of his study. Written on it were the words: “I am not in this world to live up to your expectations. You are not in this world to live up to mine”. If we take these wise words to heart, we might save ourselves a lot of pain and misunderstanding.



Hope in hopelessness

We are not privy to everything Jesus said. He simply tells the great story going back to Moses to explain their brokenness, to explain why the Messiah had to finish up a failure in order to be a success, and to help them learn from failure. When they reached their hometown before sunset, they are different persons. There is hope, where once there was hopelessness. There is always ‘hope’ in

‘hopelessness’. The resurrection turns our sunsets into dawns.”

Time to eat

In Emmaus the disciples invited the stranger to join them for a meal. At the table, the stranger broke bread, and blessed wine and, suddenly, it was the Last Supper all over again. They recognised the stranger in the breaking of the bread. Jesus was in their midst, alive, and risen from the dead. A new hope welled up in their hearts. They saw a glimmer of light beyond the cross and tomb. Then Jesus vanished from their sight. Scripture Scholar, Fitzmaier poses the question, “Where did the Risen Jesus disappear to?” He proposes that Jesus disappeared into his disciples, into the Church, into the Body of Christ, into the

world, into us, to be part of our lives, and part of our world.

Free at last

Today we are his disciples. It is our turn to witness to the living presence of the Risen Jesus in our lives, in our personalities, in our homes, in our neighbourhoods, in our joys and sorrows, in our ups and downs, on the job, in the board rooms, on the playing fields, in our relationships, not by what we say or do, but by what we are. Words are quickly forgotten. Life is a constant reminder. □



LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I hereby testify to a wonderful Miracle through the faithful recitation of the 3 Hail Mary’s. I was delivered by the powerful intercession of Mother Mary from Demonic oppression. I was sleepless for some weeks I couldn’t sleep peacefully and had only 3 to 4 hours of sleep but upon praying, this demonic oppression stopped and nightmares and disturbance during sleep ceased. *Elvis Pink*

POPE’S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK SEPTEMBER 2022

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We pray that the death penalty, which attacks the dignity of the human person, may be legally abolished in every country.

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MARY SUFFERED FOR US AS OUR MOTHER

The sorrow of Jerusalem that the prophets sang of, was a consequence of the infidelity of her children. That brought down God's chastisement and their exile from their homeland.

The suffering of this new mysterious Daughter of Zion, was caused by the sin of all Adam's children who were expelled from paradise.

Therefore, the salvific mystery of suffering was revealed in a unique way and the extent of her human solidarity.

Thus, the Virgin did not suffer for herself, being All Beautiful and Immaculate; she suffered for us being as she is the mother of us all.

(Pope Saint John Paul II)

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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.

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