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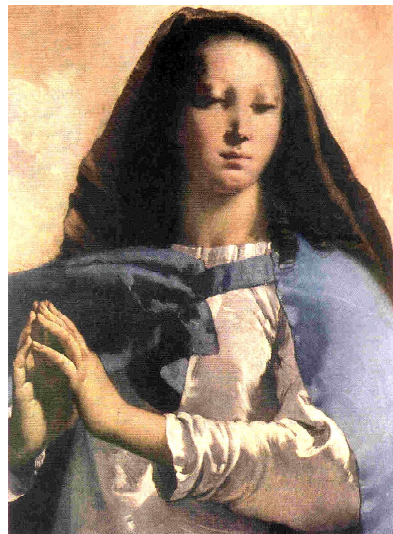
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*Through  
 the intercession  
 of his Virgin Mother  
 Mary, may the  
 Resurrection of  
 our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 grant us the joys of  
 everlasting life.*

*(From the Common of Our Lady  
 for Easter)*

**From The Editor's Desk**  
 WOUNDED WISDOM

Among the old books on my shelves, I chanced on a copy of *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal. It was a gift that I received from a revered Jesuit friend of mine who told me that one day I might pick it up when I am older and wiser and dip into some of its pearls. One such moment came by this Lent.

Throughout the centuries many people have pondered deeply on the question of God, but few have been so original as Blaise Pascal. *Pensées* was one of his most influential writings. For years he jotted down ideas on scraps of paper with the hope of publishing an important book in defense of the Christian faith. This collection was found in a trunk after his death and when they were put together, they came to a volume of some 400 pages entitled *Pensées* (simply, thoughts).

To get people to realize the hungers within them was Pascal's basic strategy, and to do this he had to shock them out of their smugness. "All problems come from not being able to sit still in own's own room," he once wrote. In other words, if they have no space for wondering about life, people can remain on the surface, chasing pleasures that will never satisfy them for long.

As I thumbed through the pages of that awesome book, I realised another strategy that he used: It was to stress the broken and painful aspects of life. Sometimes, in this respect, Pascal comes across as stern and pessimistic. But he was reacting to those who suppress anything disturbing and who pretend that there is no dilemma of evil or any moral struggle.

One of his battles was against over-confidence in reason as the solution of deeper issues - especially if reason is divorced from the rest of a person's life. Pascal wanted to avoid 'two excesses: to rule out reason, and to admit nothing but reason.' I realised that unless I have a disposition of reverence or wonder, reason cannot arrive at the deeper kind of truth. We are more than mere minds. 'We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart,' through intuition, imagination, trusting others and in religious matters by listening to God.

So often in a quiet moment or after a session in Spiritual Direction I come to realise my own woundedness and I realise that it is my darker experiences that usually help me recognise Christ in my own fragility. I might also see how perfect is the fit between the Christian vision, which unites the Cross and love, and my deepest needs, or as Pascal puts it: faith 'really understands human nature.' As we enter the Easter season, I think I will just recognize my own brokenness and notice that even in the Risen Christ there are the wounds of his Passion, and I am consoled.

*Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb*

## THE CHOICE OF A CHILD: A DESIRE AND A RIGHT

by Gianpaolo Dianin

*When two parents think of procreating life, it is appropriate to consider not only their own choice, but also the good of the child and what it will find when it comes into the world*

In February we celebrated the Day for Life; this year it fell on Sunday 5 February and it was its 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was instituted amidst bitter confrontations around the law on the termination of pregnancy, which is now recognised as a possibility in most countries of the world.

Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* speaks of life as a gift and a blessing, but he does not forget the difficulties that can be involved in welcoming a child: "If a child comes into the world in unwanted circumstances, the parents or other family members must do everything possible to accept him or her as a gift from God and to assume the responsibility of welcoming him or her with openness and affection" (AL 166). He adds: "When speaking of children who come into the world, no sacrifice made by adults will be considered too costly or too great, if it means the child never has to feel that he or she is a mistake, or worthless or abandoned to the four winds and the arrogance of man."

In our Western culture we notice two phenomena that seem to be in clear contradiction with each other: on the one hand the rejection of life or at least the

struggle to reconcile with the reality of procreation and child-bearing. Clear evidence of this is the phenomenon of denatality and also the painful scourge of abortion. On the other hand, we note an opposite phenomenon, when the desire to have a child, clashes with infertility or sterility, which are widespread today. In many cases this desire translates into the search for life at any cost, made possible today by the various increasingly sophisticated techniques of assisted procreation.

Two contradictory phenomena then: the rejection of life and the desire for life that seeks to overcome all barriers. But is this a true contradiction or are the two aspects closer than they appear at a superficial glance? There is actually a common denominator linking them: in both cases the primacy and often even the absolutization of the alleged rights and desires of the adult emerges clearly, as opposed to the rights of the child, whether it is yet to be born or desired.

In the case of rejection of life, which leads to a termination of pregnancy, primacy is given to the difficulties of the couple and of the woman in particular. One speaks of the woman's self-deter-

mination, believing that the child living in her womb, in case of difficulty, comes after the woman's concerns. In the case of low fertility or infertility, the couple's desire to have a child comes before the rights of that child to be born with two biological parents who coincide with the birth parents, to have a father and a mother, or not to have a mother who is too old.

We certainly do not wish to deny the struggles of a couple faced with a problematic and unwanted pregnancy, nor do we wish to underestimate the dignity and beauty of the desire to procreate and become parents. But we do want to question the limits of the rights and desires of adults, and we believe that these should be placed alongside and have at least the same dignity as the rights and good of the child, first and foremost that of being born after being conceived and then

that of being born in a certain way and in a certain context. What is problematic is the risk of exploiting the reality of the child over that of the parents.

We believe we can say that a child is a unique reality, original and distinct from its parents from the moment it enters the world. It is true that each child bears the imprint of its parents, resembles them, and depends on them for a long time, but it is also true that from the very moment of conception, that child is a different reality that asks its mother and father to accompany it towards life and autonomy. Even when two parents desire, think about and plan for a child, the responsibility demands that we evaluate not only the parents' wishes and possibilities, but also the good of the child and what it will find when it comes into our midst.

Rather than a right 'to' the



child, it seems right to us to speak first of the rights 'of' the child. It is no coincidence that in Italy there is a very clear law on adoption that puts children first: it is not primarily a matter of giving a child to a couple that cannot have one, but of giving a family to a child that does not have one. The child, who is the weakest, deserves greater protection and attention and this should apply not only to the law, but also to the awareness and choices of adults. The desire for a child, the hardship of having children, the difficulties of bringing an unwanted child into the world are all important issues that should not be trivialised, but all this calls for us not to forget the rights and the good of the one who remains other than us, of that child who

remains a gift and not an absolute right.

The words of Pope Francis are there: "When speaking of children who come into the world, no sacrifice made by adults will be considered too costly or too great, if it means the child never has to feel that he or she is a mistake, or worthless or abandoned to the four winds and the arrogance of men" (AL 166).

Every child changes the parents' lives, revolutionises their existence, demands sacrifices and renunciations; but it also gives intense and profound joy. Every child who asks to come into the world seems to question us adults and ask us to understand what kind of men and women we want to be. □

### LOOKING UP AT THE STARS

A tightrope walker had stretched a rope, at a fair height, over the wide market. At first some jugglers had performed, but their show had lasted longer than expected and the square had been shrouded in darkness. The equilibrist's performance would take place under the light of a spotlight.

In the half-light the artist did not realise that a young boy had quietly followed him up the ladder and when he took his first steps on the rope, he found him behind him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked him.

"I want to go with you on the rope."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"As long as I'm with you, no."

The spectators held their breath. The tightrope walker took the child astride on his shoulders and to distract him from the height, the darkness and the danger of vertigo said to him: "Look up there, how beautiful the stars are! Keep your eyes on the stars!"

And as long as the boy watched the glow of the twinkling stars, he did not think of the danger of the hesitant steps on the thin rope, the depths beneath them, and let himself be carried on the rope across the width of the square. □



### MARKED BY THE POWER OF THE CROSS

Sr Marzia Ceschia

The journey that the Church accompanies us on as we prepare for the solemnity of the Lord's Easter is the possibility of profoundly taking on the mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, in order to live out its results in our daily lives. The experience of so many saints is an example and a stimulus to us. Intense is the experience of a great mystic and saint, the Franciscan tertiary Angela of Foligno (1248-1309), whose spiritual journey - which she dictates to her confessor in the *Memoriale* - develops entirely between two poles in continuous relationship: self-knowledge and knowledge of the cross.

The saint draws from the Crucifix the direction for her own path which is, as she herself affirms, a "going towards the cross," but also, at the same time, a letting oneself be transformed

by constant contact with the "humanised and passionate God," the "All Good." Before the Cross Angela becomes aware of God, she perceives his Presence in her whole person, allows herself to be permeated by him. She embarks on her journey through penance, urged on by an enlightened awareness of her own sin, in an initial, lacerating feeling of shame and pain, proceeding from a time when looking at the cross was "insipid" during a phase in which the memory of the compassion of the crucified Christ urged a passage from pain to love.

As for Francis of Assisi, the Cross was a book to be read, meditated upon, on which to affix all attention in order to enter into the logic of the Lord's boundless love. It is this awareness that not only surprises us with a face of God unimaginable by human



reckoning of justice and meritocracy, but that also places man in an unassailable dignity, despite his fragility and his sin. Before the Crucified One, each of us recomposes his own self-worth, but also the worth of every brother, "for whom Christ died!" (Rom 14:15).

Contemplating the Crucified One, Angela is pervaded with joy because she grasps, in the extreme, the paradox of a crucified God, the immensity of love, not an abstract love, but a love that has "flesh," absolutely concrete, that it profoundly affects every human event: "Once, at vespers I was looking at the cross, but looking at the Crucified One with the eyes of the body, immediately, my soul was inflamed with love, and all the members of my body felt a sense of great joy. Thus, I saw and felt that Christ within me embraced the soul with that arm with which he was crucified, and this happened then or shortly afterwards.

And with him I enjoyed such gladness and security as I never had. And from then on, that joy remained with my soul and with which it understood in what state that man, Christ, is in heaven. I mean that with our soul we see our flesh which is a union made with God. And this singular joy belongs to the soul far better than can be written or narrated. [...] And I have a great confidence in God, so that if all men said that my case was doubtful, I would not believe it."

It can happen that we arrive at the celebration of the Easter Triduum as if addicted to the mystery, without having asked

ourselves if that which we are celebrating communicates to us God, man, history and what consequences it has on our lives, what traces of such an immeasurable passion for humanity we find in our lives, and how we ourselves adopt its logic. Do we live concretely marked "in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20)? In her journey Angela received an extraordinary confirmation directly from the Holy Spirit: "I place within you the cross and the love of God, and this sign you will bear for ever."

This 'mark' is also etched on each baptised person, it is the guarantee that the dramatic tensions of existence - the joy-pain, life-death, hate-forgiveness - have closure in the One who conquered evil, not with violence, not with power, but with the gift of himself. Marked by this Gift we come into the light at Easter as new, liberated creatures. "And then the soul," says Angela, "is kindled with love and in a certain way considers the passion of Christ's body as the rule of the love of divinity."

And again, the soul is told that, "since God has done all these things for you and willed to be born for you, that is to say, He lowered Himself for you to such infamy and misery," it is likewise fitting that the soul should be born to God and die to oneself as to vices and sins, which means to ascend to great dignity. In Easter, not only does the power of the God who loves shine forth, but also the beauty, the authentic dignity, of the man who is loved and saved in love. □

## GRACE ON THE ROAD

by Anastasia Dias

"Did they really see angels?" his friend asked, astounded, "they say they did, but I'm not sure if it's true. Why would they lie anyway? And no one can deny he possessed extraordinary powers when he was alive. That could be one of the reasons why his body is missing," Cleopas replied.

"I wish he would have been alive. We really need him now. The Romans are tormenting our people. I always thought he'd be the one to liberate us," his friend mumbled. "Right when I thought we will be free again, he was taken away and crucified."

"You met him a couple of times and knew more about him. Do you miss him?"

"I wouldn't say *miss* but I think of him often. He used to explain things to us plainly. What I miss in all honesty, is his presence. He was always there to listen and....and...of course, the way he accepted everyone around him.... The way he loved them...."

Cleopas' voice faded as he turned back to look. There was a figure at a distance walking behind them. Cleopas saw him coming closer towards them.

"Are you looking for something Sir?"

"I'm walking to Emmaus, are you going there too?" "Yes, we are, you may join us if you like."

His friend was pondering over the events of the last couple of days, wondering if the women who'd seen angels were delusional or if they had really appeared to them. "Grief makes us see things differently, Cleopas. The women are grieving. This could be one of the reasons they say his body is missing." "They aren't delusional, my friend. I believe that they really saw angels and his body *is* indeed missing" "What are you both talking about?" asked the stranger. "Sir, are you a foreigner?" Cleopas asked. The man shook his head. "How do you not know about the events of the last few days?" "What's been happening?" the stranger asked. "Well, there was this man. Everyone knew he was a prophet of some kind. But the leaders were against him. So, they got him killed." "Sir, we were really hoping he would free our people from this tyranny. These Romans have enslaved us in our own land." The man listened to Cleopas and his friend. He



quoted from Scripture and talked about the Messiah. They kept walking till they reached Emmaus.

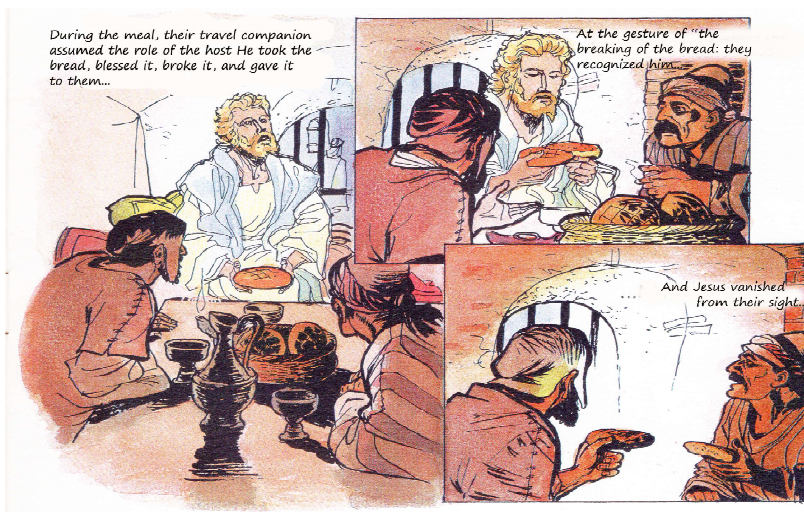
"Sir, would you join us for supper?" both of them insisted. The man smiled and joined Cleopas and his friend. He prayed over the food and started to serve them both. "Hey, this is Jesus!" Cleopas exclaimed with joy. "You've got to be kidding me!" his friend shouted. And, the stranger disappeared into thin air.

The reason why I love this story about the "road to Emmaus" is that I can relate to both Cleopas and his friend. They're both preoccupied with everyday happenings in the city, problems they face due to the government and the dire need for someone to help them. They're so focused on their problems that they don't even realise that the solutions and resolutions they seek are right in front of them, walking with them

to their destination.

I can relate to these two people on many levels. On multiple occasions I find myself focusing and obsessing over a problem for hours, days or even weeks. And after it's been solved, like most problems, I understand that finding the solution was inevitable but I completely ignored the path, if you will, the road to finding the solution. On the way to achieving my goals hastily, I forgot to be grateful for the sacrifices of my parents, the love of my friends, the little moments that matter. I forgot to enjoy the journey. And, I'm sure you find yourself doing it too.

This season let's choose to focus on the journey rather than the destination. We may be going to Emmaus like Cleopas and his friend but what's more relevant and amazing is that we have grace right beside us, to heal us, liberate us and lead us to Emmaus. □



MARISA PATARINO

THE SALESIANS FOR YOU!

## A MILLION FOR GHANA

*A teacher from Bonn raises one million euros for children in Ghana*

"It was an accident. It could have been any other country," says Dorothea Hahn. A coincidence, but a blessing for Ghana, because for over the past twenty-two years this physics and Catechism teacher at the Bonn high school 'Liebfrauen-schule' had helped thousands of people living in this African country and still continues to devote herself to this commitment. Together with numerous colleagues, she has raised a total of one million euros for Ghana and invested it in the development of children, to help them build a life away from poverty. She received a public award at the Don Bosco Campus in Bonn.



In the summer of 1996, a Salesian from Argentina, who had lived in Bonn for some time, invited Dorothea Hahn to Ghana. The teacher was immediately enthused about the people she had met and was impressed by the work of the Salesians of Don Bosco with disadvantaged children and teenagers.

"I realised that something needed to be done here. So many abandoned young people were coming to the Salesians to play," she recalls. Once back in Germany, she sensitised her family, friends, colleagues, students and her parish, inviting everyone to support the Salesians of Don Bosco in that West African country.

Over time, that teacher organised a large group of people who baked cakes, organised bazaars of handicraft, collected various objects or wove palm crosses to commemorate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. "Every year my two sisters organise a market with home-made jams and various objects donated by neighbours," explains the sixty-eight-year-old teacher, who also founded the association "EineWelt (One World) AG" in her school.

"The association collected donations through various initiatives and also tried to present its action through symbols. For example, we once raised funds for the furnishing of a school in Ghana and set up chairs in a specific location in our institute, the number of which gradually increased as the donations increased," recalls Professor Hahn. We organised a similar

initiative for textbooks. The teacher, now retired, “infected” many of her pupils with a love for the African land and its inhabitants and in turn, their lives were positively influenced.

Professor Hahn collects donations which she mainly allocates to school construction and she also offers support to various young people, especially girls. “It has always been important to me to invest in education. Girls are the mothers of the future. If they go through education, they will also send their children to school,” she explains. “Education is a solid basis for a life away from poverty. The youngest children cannot travel eight kilometres every day to school in the neighbouring village. That is why we built seven new schools and so 90 per cent of the children living in the various villages now have access to education,” explains Hahn. “The children are enthusiastic about going to school.”

### Sixty-five times to Ghana

Attending school is free, but you have to pay for uniforms, sports equipment, use of the library and for taking exams.

Professor Hahn made her 65<sup>th</sup> trip to Ghana in August 2017. “The tropical climate is very good for me. Every time I go there, it is almost as if I were undergoing a cure,” admits the professor with a smile. “These frequent visits and the human relationships that are built are the secret of the initiative’s success,” says Martin Wilde, Administrator of the Don

**Bosco Mondo** Association. Professor Hahn has aroused the interest of many people. One example is the story of an eight-year-old girl who, when the teacher first met her, was “very thin, had lice and was very shy.” “A Salesian accompanied her to an institution for girls and allowed her to go to school. Now she is a serene and jovial young woman who has just finished her training as a governess.”

The provincial bursar of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Ghana, Fr Krzysztof Nizniak, praised the commitment of the Bonn teacher: “Dorothea Hahn has explained how important it is to educate girls. She has provided financial support for two Houses housing 100 girls each, thus giving thousands of young people over the years the opportunity to complete their education in peace.” She has also built a network of many young people, reaching as far as schools in Poland. “Of the donations received, only 1 per cent goes to administration costs,” Martin Wilde emphasises. “Thanks to the close cooperation with the Salesians, the education offered is always very work-oriented,” Professor Hahn adds with satisfaction.

With a project launched in September 2017, the Salesians also want to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. “In Ghana, people with disabilities are often still stigmatised. In six schools they are now expected to be present together with other pupils,” says Fr Nizniak. Of course, Professor Hahn is also involved in this project. □

# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## ST. GILES OF ASSISI (April 23)

Just from the title you can draw an impression of the kind of person we are getting to know this month. Giles was born in Assisi, the same town as St. Francis. More than that, he was part of the first band of Franciscan friars who rejected the world to follow Jesus, the poor man.

Not much is known about Giles’ personal life. He was born in 1190 and came from a family of farmers. Living in Assisi, he was aware of the ‘scandal’ caused by Francis. But unlike the rest of the town, he kept his ears open for stories about Francis. All that he heard inspired him. Francis had experienced something deep and powerful – something so powerful, it caused a dramatic transformation. Giles was enamoured by Francis’ experience. He mustered up the courage to follow him and his courage inspired him and he took the drastic step himself.

Giles sought out Francis and asked to join his little band. Francis welcomed him and introduced him to their style of life officially on April 23 by presenting him with their simple habit. The habits used today have undergone a considerable change from the coarse monk-habit of the time of Francis.



Since joining the band, Giles remained close to Francis. He accompanied him on a preaching mission in The Marches of Ancona. While they were there people began to respond positively to these two holy beggars. One of the things that was striking about them was that they worked to earn their share of food everyday. Giles came to be known as a simple person with a mild temperament. He was humble and meek but zealous to fulfil any task given to him. Giles became aware of the people’s perception of Francis and himself. He

went to Francis with the warning: "O my Father, I fear we shall lose the true honour if we are honoured by men." This gives us insight into the mind of Giles. He truly understood the spirit of Francis and the model, Jesus Christ.

### THE WANDERING MONK

Giles made a number of journeys in his lifetime. In 1212, he made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James at Compostella in Spain. On his return to Italy, he visited various shrines in Italy like St. Michael at Monte Gargano and St. Nicholas at Bari. After that, he burnt with desire to visit the Holy Land, and venerate the places of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. He is believed to have even visited Tunis, the capital of Tunisia.

While these journeys were opportunities to evangelize, they were also occasions of learning for Giles who was poorly educated, and occasions to strengthen his spiritual life. Wherever he went, he made sure that he earned his food and shelter by the sweat of his brow. He was not a spoilt beggar. He was not ashamed to beg when the situation demanded but he was not the kind of person to turn his nose up on hard manual labour either. At Ancona, he earned his livelihood making baskets; at Brindisi, he carried water and helped bury the dead; at Rome, he cut wood, crushed grapes in the winepress and collected nuts; while housed as a guest of the Cardinal of Rieti, he insisted on sweeping the house and polishing the cutlery. With regard to work we have a quote of his: "Happiness is to do bodily labour for the love of the Most High and not to take any lesser wages

than Paradise for the good work one does."

As he travelled from place to place and country to country, Giles developed the art of keen observation. He learned by watching. Not only was he picking up information, he was learning to look deeper than the surface. Thus, he gained valuable knowledge and experience which he put to good use in his evangelical work. Wherever he went, he made sure he preached the Good News, thereby putting into practice the exhortation of Francis himself: "Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words." Giles wasn't erudite and eloquent but when he spoke, there was passion. His sermons were short and heartfelt, and full of positive exhortations and advice. He used his experiences to capture the audience and deliver messages they needed to hear. He was straightforward too, and did not hesitate to call people out on their behaviours and customs.

### HOLINESS OF SIMPLICITY

After some years of apostolic wandering, Giles was commissioned to the hermitage of Monteripido. There he lived a life of prayer, penance and contemplation until his death. Giles had no formal education or training in a seminary. He picked up the spirit of Francis by living with him and sharing his life. He learned from observation; he probably never learned to read or write. But Giles excelled in wisdom. He gained a lot from his experiences but he was endowed with the gift of ecstatic contemplation. He would spend hours contemplating heavenly things and the life of Christ. Whenever he spoke, wisdom would flow from

his lips like honey from a comb. People from the surrounding countryside would come to listen to his sermons. Even the rich came to seek his advice and learn from his experience.

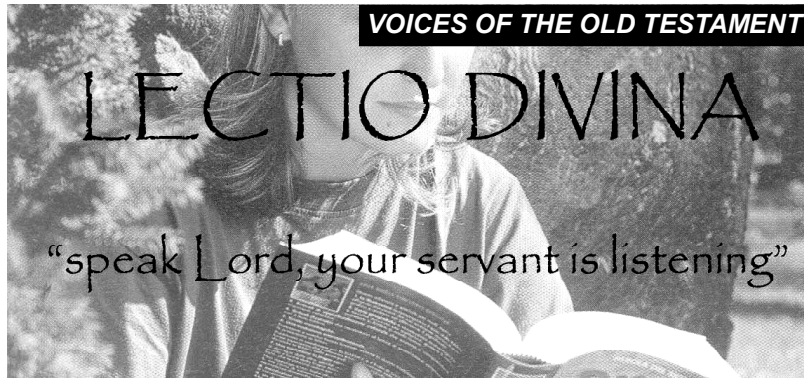
As his popularity began to grow, his admirers began to note down his words. Thus, was born the 'Dicta' or 'Sayings of Brother Giles.' St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan saint of great stature, held these sayings in high regard and used them in his own life. Many spiritual and ascetical writers borrowed from this collection and quoted them in their works. These sayings are pithy, popular counsels on Christian perfection, applicable to people from any strata of society and anywhere on the Christian spectrum. They embody the spirit of early Franciscan teaching and are recognized for their mystical and humane emphasis.

Giles embraced poverty and lived it to the end of his days. Ever since he renounced the riches and comforts of the world on joining the band of Francis, he never expressed his discomfort nor did he ever show a desire to possess more than what was absolutely necessary. Once he was approached by a poor woman who was begging for alms. Giles himself was a beggar but he recognized in her a child of God and having nothing else on him, offered her his hood.

He didn't have to preach about poverty or humility as his demeanour spoke so eloquently. He loved to preach about the love of God and would often invite his audience to perform penance and make reparation for sin so as to benefit from the unconditional

bounty of God's love and mercy. On one occasion he was requested by two wealthy gentlemen to pray for them. Giles retorted, "You do not need my prayers." Confused and taken aback, they inquired as to why not. The saint answered, "You live among all the comforts of the world and still believe that you will get to heaven; but I, a poor human being, spend my days in labour and penance, and yet I fear I will be damned." On the surface this appears morbid and unnecessarily harsh. However, such is often the case with saints. They develop such a relationship with God that sin abhors them to an extent that we can only imagine. They can appear scrupulous on the surface but it is in fact, their soul's desire to present itself before God, pure and holy.

Giles did not achieve great things. Even as a missionary, he wasn't very successful. As a contemplative however, he found his real calling and was able to climb the heights of sanctity. It is interesting to note that he did this out of sheer obedience. It is not like he asked to be a contemplative and be reduced to living in a monastery for the rest of his life. It was a recommendation given by Francis who Giles considered to be acting on behalf of the Lord. It was this sort of abandonment to the Will of God manifested through his religious superior that allowed Giles to discover a deeper side of his personality. Obedience can work wonders when performed with faith and spiritual fervour. Such was the example of Giles that Francis himself called him the "Knight of our Round Table." □



## NEW LIFE

by Carlo Broccardo

**W**e are in the plains near Babylon, today in southern Iraq; the area is beautiful and fertile, but for the Jews it was a land of exile: first in 597 and then in 587 the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, conquered the city of Jerusalem and deported part of the population, especially the rich and influential families. He forced them to leave their land, which may have been arid but had been their home since ancient times; he forced them to live among a foreign, hostile, pagan people (just read the famous Psalm 137, 'By the rivers of Babylon').

Among those exiles, full of sadness and resignation, was the prophet Ezekiel. And his role, at a certain point, became clear: to boost morale, instill hope and announce better times.

The situation was not easy; after the initial enthusiasm, the people's morale plummeted. Everyone began to say: we will never make it; we will never make it home! God has abandoned us! The Lord does not take care of us!

Let us read the beginning of

chapter 37, from the book of the prophet Ezekiel: "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and the Lord took me out in spirit and laid me in the plain which was full of bones; he made me pass by them on every side. I saw that they were in great numbers in the expanse of the valley and all withered. He said to me, "Son of man, shall these bones be revived?" I answered: "Lord God, thou knowest." The rest of the vision is extraordinary: at God's command, Ezekiel prophesies over the bones and then invokes the Spirit; and behold, the bones are joined and clothed with flesh until they form bodies. "I prophesied as he commanded me, and the spirit entered into them and they came back to life and stood up; they were a great army, exterminated."

What does this image mean? To what was God referring? God himself explained it to Ezekiel a little later: "Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Behold, they go saying: "Our bones are withered, our hope is vanished, we are lost." Therefore, he prophesied

and proclaimed to them: "Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, I will bring you out of your graves, my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel" (Ez 37:11-12).

This is where our reading comes in. It is like a jewel set on a golden ring that is the vision of withered bones; like the lyrical conclusion of that vision, with God saying: do not lose hope! You will succeed, for I am with you. I myself will bring you back to your homes.

The style is not one of the most beautiful; unfortunately for us, Ezekiel wrote in ancient Hebrew, and so we lose much of the poetics of these words. Let us trust the experts: the few verses we are reading today are a poem, playing a lot on repetitions of phrases, words or sounds. Four times God says: I am opening/open your graves, I will bring you out/raise you from your graves. We can almost imagine God rolling the stone of a tomb and saying to those who were locked up: It is I. I have come to bring you out. Exile is like a grave, a place of death; and I will bring you home, says the Lord.

This promise is also repeated, twice: I will bring you back to the land of Israel, I will give you rest in your own land. We can discern a hint of the Exodus behind these words; of the days when the Lord had delivered his people out of Egypt and brought them into the promised land, into the land he had sworn to give to Abraham and his descendants.

Finally, we see a hint of the creation account of Gen 2, when God says: "I will cause my spirit to enter you and you will live

again". Indeed, the book of Genesis recounts that "the Lord God moulded man with dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). The Exile killed God's people, took away their breath and their will to live; now God will remedy this. The situation is not easy in exile; morale is low; everyone is beginning to say: we will never make it home! God has abandoned us! He does not care for us.... To these people God says, through the word of Ezekiel: lift up your hearts, for I have not forgotten you; I will bring you back, I will bring you out of this tomb, I will give you life again. "I have said it and I will do it!" These last words are beautiful for God needs no guarantees; his word is enough: trust me, I tell you, says the Lord.

The season of Lent usually begins with the story of Adam and Eve not trusting God; this is the root of all sin: the word of God is no longer enough for us, we do not believe it, indeed we begin to think that doing the opposite might be a better thing. We end Lent with God himself inviting us to trust him; there are no guarantees, no deposits to assure us that it is the right choice: there is only his word, to be believed. And there is the example of Jesus, who in the imminence of his passion and death says to his disciples: "Behold, the hour is coming, or rather has already come, when you will scatter yourselves each on his own and leave me alone; but I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (Jn 16:32). Guiding Jesus (and each of us?) is this certainty of faith: the Father is always with me. □



# Quiet Spaces

## TO EACH HIS OWN ENCOUNTER

*Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on May 1, 2015*

**E**ach man and woman has a personal encounter with the Lord. A true and actual encounter that can radically change one's life. The secret lies not only in being aware of it, but also in never forgetting it, so as to preserve its freshness and beauty. Pope Francis shared these thoughts during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday morning, along with some homework and practical advice: pray for the grace to remember, and then read the Gospel once again, in order to recognize oneself in the many encounters of Jesus.

The First Reading (Acts 9:1-20), Francis began, recounts "the narrative of Saul — Paul", of his being "certain of his doctrine, even zealous". But "this zeal led him to persecute this new Way that was born there, namely Christians". Thus Saul "asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, for the authorization to put Christians in chains". And "he did this with the zeal of God".

Then, the Pope explained, "we all know what happens next". He has "that vision, and falls from the horse". At that point, Francis recalled, "the Lord speaks to him: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' — 'Who are you, Lord?' — 'I am Jesus'". This is "Paul's encounter with Jesus". Until that moment Paul "believed that everything the Christians were saying were stories". But "here he encounters Him and will never forget this encounter: it changes his life and makes him grow in love for this Lord whom at first he persecuted but now loves". This encounter, the Pope added, leads Paul "to proclaim to the world the name of Jesus as an instrument of salvation". Thus, this is how "Paul's encounter with Jesus" happened and what it meant.

"In the Bible", Francis said, "there are many other encounters", and "in the Gospel" as well. They are "all different" and thus, truly, "each one has his own encounter with Jesus". Let us think about "the first disciples who followed Jesus and stayed with Him throughout the night — John and Andrew, the first meeting — and they were happy about this". Indeed, "Andrew went to his brother Peter — then called Simon — and said: 'We have found the Messiah!'" . This was followed by "Peter's encounter with Jesus", when Jesus said to him: "'you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas', (which means rock)".

There really are many such "encounters", Francis reiterated. There is, for example, "that of Nathaniel, the sceptic". Straight away, "with only a few words, Jesus bowls him over". Indeed, the intellectual admits: "You are the Messiah!". Then there is "the encounter of the Samaritan woman who, at a certain point, feels herself in difficulty and tries to be a theologian: 'This mountain, the other...'" . Jesus responds to her: "Your husband, your truth". The woman, "in her own sin, encounters Jesus and goes to proclaim him to those in the city: 'he told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?'" .

Thus, the Pontiff summarized, "we can find so many encounters in the Bible, because the Lord looks for us to have an encounter with us" and "each of us has his own encounter with Jesus". "Surely," Francis said, Jesus "encountered you on the day of Baptism: that is true, you were a child".

And "if we do not remember it, it will be beautiful to think back and ask the Lord to remind us, because He remembers, He recalls the encounter". Francis offered a "nice homework assignment", asking them to recall "when I truly felt the Lord near me", to think about "when I felt I needed to change my life or to be better or to forgive a person", and "when I heard the Lord asking me something" and, thus, "when I encountered the Lord".

Our faith is, in fact, "an encounter with Jesus", and this is precisely "the foundation of faith: I encountered Jesus like Saul", as offered in the passage from the day's Reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Therefore, Francis continued, if one says to himself, "I don't remember" my encounter with the Lord, then it is important to ask for this grace: "Lord, when did I consciously find you? When did you tell me something that changed my life or invited me to take that step forward in life?". And, the Pope recommended "this is a fine prayer, do it every day". Then, when "you remember, rejoice in that recollection, which is a remembrance of love".

Francis also proposed another assignment, which "would be to take up the Gospels" and read again the many accounts there are in order "to see how Jesus encounters the people, how He chooses the apostles". And realize, perhaps, that some encounters "resemble mine", for "each one has her own" encounter.

Thus, the Pope offered two practical and concrete suggestions "that will do us good". First of all "pray and ask for the grace of memory". And then ask yourself: "When, Lord, was that encounter, that love I had at first?". In order "not to feel that rebuke that the Lord gives in Revelation: 'I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first'".

The Pope's second suggestion was to "take up the Gospel and see Jesus' many encounters with so many different people". It is obvious, he explained, that "the Lord wants to encounter us, He wants a face-to-face relationship with us". For certain, "in our life there was a strong encounter that led us to change our life somewhat and to be better".

The Eucharistic celebration, the Pontiff concluded, is indeed "another encounter with Jesus in order to carry out what we have heard" in the Gospel (Jn 6:52-59): "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him". Yes, to so abide "in the Lord, let us now go toward this daily encounter". □

## THE CARAVAN

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

High in the sky, the sun was a yellow disc surrounded by rays of glowing flares. An implacable sun: looking at it made one's throat feel dry and clenched in a vise. The prairie appeared scorched. And the horses trudged heavily forward, pulling heavy carts behind them, overloaded with people and goods. In the last wagon Myriam clutched little Tommy to her. The baby did not cry: he stared at her with big, bright eyes on his gaunt face.

"Mom..."

"Are you thirsty, Tommy? Be good: we will find water tonight."

Grandma didn't complain either; she had crouched herself up in the corner of the wagon and stood there, silent, clutching in her lap the knotted kerchief in which she had her mementos: her husband's wedding ring, Myriam's first embroidery, a wooden wand carved by Jeff.

Alone, perched in front of the wagon, Jeff muttered and mercilessly whipped the tired horses, venting the anger and despair that tormented in his soul. Hoping to put Tommy to sleep, Myriam began to sing: a monotonous, wordless melody.

"Shut up, Myriam!" Jeff cracked his whip again, "Shut up! My head is bursting and that chanting of yours pierces my brain like a woodworm. Myriam fell silent, yet, she wanted to answer her brother... to tell him that being angry wouldn't solve anything. Was it not his fault that they had left that quiet little

house? If Jeff had not been lured by the gold, they would not have been in that condition.... If, at least her husband had been there! She would have convinced Jeff: but all that remained of him was a white cross in the cemetery back home.

At the head of the caravan, the Chief signalled to the first wagon not to go ahead. Then he trotted up and down the long line of carriages: "We're stopping, people. The beasts can take no more. You, Jeff, stop!"

"I'm not stopping, Harry! Leave me alone... I've had enough of your orders!"

Harry, the caravan leader, showed his annoyance and his hand, spontaneously, went to his gun, but he did not draw it: "Are you crazy, Jeff? Where do you want to go? To look for water on your own? You don't know the way... You're not practical!"

"Yeah. You're the one who led us into this hell."

Harry wheeled around the wagon: "Tonight we'll find the river. I know where it is.... Stop!"

"No!" Jeff went on whipping the horses. With a final spurt of



energy, the beasts, beaten to a bloody pulp, broke off their gallop.

Harry spurred in turn, but the whistle of a bullet persuaded him to pull the reins: Jeff must have really gone mad.... Rival feelings clashed in the man's heart. It was his duty to stop him, to prevent him from dragging his women into the unknown. He fired again: yet another bullet hissed through the steamy air. Struck the belly of the handsome saurian and it fell, whimpering, and Harry rolled down beside him. A stone had wounded him in the head: a trickle of blood mixed with dust.

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Bushes and stones... and the sun slowly descending over the horizon line. The horses trudged on, now too tired to be sensitive to the crack of the whip tearing shreds of skin from them. Jeff seemed sculpted in marble: sweat and dust had traced a mask on his face. His heart was pounding in his chest, those shots said: 'Stop, come back! There's a child and two women in the cart... you can't put their lives at risk!' But the young man would not give in to his own feelings either. Then the voice spoke again: "You didn't listen to Harry. And he knew the way... he had already been to the mine: is it out of envy that you did that, Jeff?"

"No!" Jeff had answered loudly and the sound roused him: he looked ahead again, but remained spellbound and in disbelief. Was it a mirage? No, it was real. Up there, on a small hill, rose a copse of trees and, perhaps, there was a spring.

"Myriam! Mummy! Look!" The horses too must have understood



and were advancing faster, their necks tense in exertion, their nostrils quivering.

"Trees!" Myriam leaned out of the tent, "Oh no...". An arrow had hissed close to her face and lodged in the tarpaulin. Down from the green hill came a mob of Indians.

"Whooo! Whooo!" A horse, struck by another arrow, reared up. Jeff dropped the reins to grab his rifle and fired, fired. Two Indians rolled to the ground, the others screamed and fell back into the trees. Jeff made as if to pick up the reins again. With a decisive motion, Myriam had in turn cocked her rifle, while her grandmother clutched Tommy frightened.

"If they appear, I'll shoot, Jeff. Whip the horses! "

Jeff did not answer.

He looked at the fallen horse and the other, still terrified by the detonations, kicking. He perked up at his sister's voice, jumped down from the box and with his knife tried to cut the harness of the agonised beast. His fingers, trembling with anxiety and hardened by fatigue, did not respond to his intentions. Then he angrily manoeuvred the blade, but his confusing gesticulations struck the other horse. With a whinny of pain, the animal

kicked him in the shoulder, and Jeff fell hard.

"Jeff! "

"Shoot, Myriam! Shoot!"

Once again, the assailants beat a retreat. The woman jumped out of the wagon and helped her brother take refuge inside the vehicle. She had never been very strong, Myriam, but a new energy dominated her. She managed to dislodge the surviving horse, which fled:

"Run to the caravan, Morello! Run, run! They will understand..."

Jeff gritted his teeth so as not to whine in pain, as his mother caressed his hand. Tommy had snuggled up to his side, "Uncle, where's mummy?" Myriam, still clutching her rifle, had climbed back onto the wagon:

"They are not gone; they are behind the trees."

"We are in God's hands."

The woman looked outside the tent, "I will hold them off as long as I can." And she choked back the tears that would have wanted to flow: she had to have her eyes clear to take aim. The sun was sinking much more quickly towards the horizon. Myriam knew: when the last ray had faded, the redskins would crawl up to them.

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Harry, the caravan leader, had



been carried on the wagon of old Timbot. They had treated him and Timbot himself, who knew a little about medicinal herbs, had applied a kind of greenish poultice to his head wound. The men, meanwhile, had arranged the vehicles in the circle: the beasts had been detached and were now listlessly eating what little barley they had been given. They were too thirsty to enjoy the meal. Timbot poked his head out of the wagon and called out to three of the smartest young men, in that nasal voice of his, a perennial cold.

"Here we are."

The three men, in the wagon, approached the caravan leader: "Well, Harry, what do you say? You've had it rough, but now you must think of us all."

"I have thought about it. Unfortunately, I'm not fit enough to move. You guys are going to have to get busy. Here's my compass.... If you go north, you'll find the Brader River. Bring some barrels. Are there any horses still holding on to their legs enough?"

"Mine can go." Steve, turned to his companion, "What about yours, Bob?"

"Mine too."

"Good. I think in four hours you can go and come back. With a little water in your belly, the other horses will recover and we

can all move." The three men replied with a grunt and got out of the wagon. One of the horses was immediately loaded with the barrels. On the other rode Bob and Steve, while Lloyd proceeded on foot.

The march was exhausting. Steve laughed as he saw a lizard run away: "Look at her run, Bob! We should imitate her."

"If you can. Give it a try!" They were three good guys. The exhaustion weakened them, but they kept joking the whole way. Only when the green snake of the Brader River appeared did they fall silent. The sight of the longed-for water... they drank slowly, drop by drop. Then they filled their kegs. The quenched beasts whinnied contentedly.

Suddenly there was another whinny. Bob and Steve turned: Jeff's horse, bleeding at the side, with an arrow stuck in its mane, galloped towards them: "It's Morello! Jeff's beast..."

Morello drank greedily. Bob removed the arrow caught in his mane: "It's the Cheyenne.... They attacked him. Those poor women, the baby!"

They said no more: they were used to the harsh existence of the New World, born among the assaults of the Indians, made strong by work in the mines. Steve, first, jumped on his horse. Bob followed him with Morello.

"Lloyd, bring water to the wagons! And say where we went."

The sun was almost on the horizon. Shadows stretched across the ground.... Far away, Steve heard rifle shots.

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Myriam could no longer stand. The weapon weighed on her sore arms and her eyes burned. By now there was little light: in the darkness she would no longer see the Indians crawling down the hill. Jeff had tried to help her, but he had fallen back down, his shoulder fractured.

"Myriam... mother... forgive me! It's all my fault."

"Don't worry, Jeff."

"Say you forgive me, Mom."

"A mother always forgives, son."

Tommy had fallen asleep and looked like a curled-up kitten. He awoke when Myriam started shooting again, "They're coming again, my God..." The Indians leapt from bush to bush and Myriam fired blindly. The child woke up terrified, clutched at her legs.

"Listen!" It was a furious gallop. Bob and Steve appeared like ghosts in Myriam's eyes, warrior angels with shining blades drawn. The Redskins fled, screaming, pursued. A black mist covered the woman's pupils, her weary hands dropped the carbine. She felt Tommy's face next to hers:

"Mama..." "We're safe, Tommy. Sing, baby... Sing..."

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Old Timbot also medicated Jeff. He had been brought to him and was now lying on the sack beside Harry: "Why are you looking at each other like that? Can't you shake hands?" Then he laughed, "How silly... you're already doing it!"

In the last wagon, Tommy slept in Myriam's arms. Tomorrow the caravan would resume its journey. □

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 39

by Michele Molineris

### 190. Tough with the tough does not make a wall (1870)

Around the year 1870 Don Bosco had learned that Princess \*\*\* had been at odds with the bishop of the diocese for some time, and that no one had been able to bring them together again. Meanwhile the princess had fallen gravely ill, and no one dared mention to her the need to think about the sacraments.

In this uncertainty, Don Bosco feeling a strong desire to save that soul, left Turin and went to \*\*\*. He arrived at the palace at a time when he was already in some trepidation. The doctor, knowing that he was dealing with people of faith, thought it his duty to warn the good family that the danger was grave and that it was better to think about the temporal and the spiritual. They were in the midst of this anxiety when a servant came to tell them that a priest from Turin had arrived who said he called himself Don Bosco.

"Him? Let him come in... nay, let us go to him."

So saying the eldest daughter, who was the mistress of the house, moved towards the hall, and everyone accompanied her.

A ray of sunshine seemed to return to this large family, which had fallen into a severe desperation due to their mother's illness. Whatever was needed was immediately arranged... They said to Don Bosco: "You have come to see Mama, haven't you?"

"Exactly. I heard that the illness was not subsiding..."

"But it was an angel who war-

ned her. There is no doubt about it. Providence helps us. Now you get some rest, and I'll go and see the sick person off. I'll go and be back."

On entering the sick woman's room, Mrs M. said cheerfully:

"Mummy, do you know who has come to get news of you?"

"Who indeed?"

"Guess what! None other than the venerable Don Bosco."

"From Turin?"

"Of course! There's only one Don Bosco that I know of."

"Oh! Let him come in! Make him come in! Don't you know," she added, full of life, "that it sets my life back a few years?"

Those last words were still heard by Don Bosco, who with real fondness, without accepting the rest that had been suggested to him, had followed her daughter's steps and was waiting behind the curtain. When she got up, Don Bosco appeared with his angelic smile.

"Here he is, Mama!"

Those who were present later told us how Don Bosco had introduced himself to that lady.

"I heard about her illness and, hoping that a visit might be pleasing to her, I left everything and came. She had done us so much good, and now the time had come to give her a small token of my appreciation."

The sick woman listened with tears in her eyes to these words of Don Bosco and then, motioning to the others to leave, she showed her desire to be alone with him.

When they were alone, the sick woman said without hesitation: "Don Bosco, you come to free a soul from many sorrows. Would you take it upon yourself to speak to the bishop? Blessed man, you

know, I also say a saint; but with his burrs. I offended him, and I have been living in anguish for some time! I fear that there are also scandals to be repaired... You can do everything, dear Don Bosco! Indeed, since time is pressing, I want you to hear my confession!"

Don Bosco, almost unable to recover from his emotion, seeing that the Lord had done everything, without the hand of man having had to intervene. Finally, he said: "Now, Madame Princess, after the minister's visit, prepare to receive the Lord's visit!"

The carriage was kept ready, as Don Bosco had already arranged, and he immediately went to the bishop who was waiting for the visit...

"Excellency, everything is done! God has prepared things above and beyond our expectations. The princess asked for forgiveness and wished to see you."

The bishop paused for a moment, as if to collect himself in thought, and then said: "Behold, you go to the sick woman, and I myself will soon be there with the Lord. In this way I will reward the charitable woman, who has always done so much for my poor, and I will show her that all friction has disappeared."

That was what Don Bosco had proposed. He then returned to the palace. What a change, by God's mercy! It no longer looked like that house before, full of sorrow and sadness. Everything was up and moving. Everyone seemed to feel the importance of that moment.

Don Bosco was near the sick woman who, recollected in meek and holy thoughts, wished to prepare a beautiful welcome to the Divine Visitor. Soft tears bathed her face,

and to the daughter who tried to wipe them away, she said: "How happy I am!"

When she saw a long throng of priests enter the gilded chamber, then the canons, and finally the Lord brought by the bishop, the pious patient exclaimed as if in rapture: "Thank you, O Lord, and forgive me! You too, Father, forgive her sorrows!"

Everyone was moved to tears, and the bishop himself could hardly utter all the words of the sacred rite out of emotion.

Then the bishop returned to comfort the sick person with his presence and his blessing. Everyone admired the work of Christian charity, and how Don Bosco had been the angel of peace. The good princess assisted by the bishop, after two or three days, amid the tears and prayers of her numerous family, purified in her pain, died piously (Francesia, *Don Bosco amico delle anime*, 90).

### 191. The death of the marchesa (1871)

It was said that Don Bosco had heaven at his disposal, such was the array of gifts of prophecy and miracles that punctuated his existence, from the earliest years of his childhood.

The reason is that Don Bosco foresaw these divine interventions even outside and beyond his own earthly experience, in some way mortgaging heavenly help for those who would one day share his labours or enjoy his apostolate. Such was the case with the assurance of eternal salvation to all Salesians and relatives of Salesians, up to the fourth and fifth generations. This assertively categorical assertion was not the result of his ill-

controlled fantasy, Don Bosco was not a man to be laughed at by the imagination; but a heavenly illustration superimposed on his prayers and sacrifices that were never separated from his prayers.

This time, however, I want to tell you about the grace he obtained for a rich lady, the Marquise Vitelleschi, his distinguished benefactor, who felt an uncontrollable fear of death. I do not believe those who say they do not fear death; death is a chastisement and chastisements are always frightening, starting with the rod that school-teachers once used to teach the alphabet.

So, the Marquise Maria Vitelleschi, who felt a terrifying revulsion at the thought of death, wrote to Don Bosco at the beginning of 1866: "Very Reverend Don Bosco, favoured by the Lord with as much good fortune as one can have on this earth, I have only one sorrow, but a terrible one: it is the thought of having to die; this thought causes me unspeakable pain, against which faith does not give me sufficient strength. I am ready for anything, as long as I can see an end to this constant and dreadful torment. This and no other, is the cause of my predicament. Time flies, and the illness I have may bring, perhaps sooner, its dreadful consequence.

"Assure me that Mary Help of Christians will obtain for me the grace not to fear death, but to see the moment of the great passage come without horror. And I for my part make her a promise. Already her collaborator, I will become her servant and her slave; all my possessions, all my goods, what remains of my life, all I will spend for her; I will spare nothing of what is in my power and what I have, to

be an instrument of divine providence towards her; but, for the love of God, may Mary Most Holy free me from the horrible fear that death gives me. Rome, January 1866, Marchesa Maria Vitelleschi."

Don Bosco answered her at the turn of a courier: "Well-deserving Marchioness, ...I assure you, revered lady, that Mary Help of Christians has already granted you the grace you asked for. You will die without apprehension of any kind, in fact, without even realising it. Keep your promise; for the holy Virgin certainly keeps hers.... Don Bosco".

And in fact, towards the end of 1871, one day the Marquise said to her husband: - My dear, as it is quite a while since I made a general confession, I would give the last days of this year to it. What do you think?

"Delighted, do as you please."

And the lady took several days in examining and accusing herself, so much did she want to be precise, and, having received the absolution, returned home so happy that she could not contain her joy.

"I am in a state," she repeated, "as if I had received holy baptism today! Tomorrow I shall receive communion."

It was 31 December, and on the following day, the first day of the year, having received the Holy Host, she returned to her palace, exclaiming: "What a communion! I have never really received such a communion. This is worth much more than all the others of my life! And she went and sat down on a sofa in the middle of the room, which surrounded a large vase of flowers. There the servants prepared for breakfast. A few relatives had been invited, and their little

boys were frolicking not far away.

Suddenly the marchioness said to the servants: "Open the shutters, it's dark in here."

"Dear Marchioness, they are all wide open."

"But open them, I tell you, can't you see."

And the head servant observed that they were open.

"And yet!... and yet!" And, turning to her husband, almost enlightened by a sudden idea, she said, smiling: "Angelo (for that was her husband's name), Angelo, maybe I'll die, you know; maybe I'll die!"

Those were her last words: she died without pain, and also without any alteration to her physiognomy. Mary Most Holy Help of Christians had kept her promise.

In a letter that the Marquis wrote immediately afterwards to Don Bosco to give him this news we read the following sentence: "I do not mourn this death as a misfortune, but I bless Mary Most Holy Help of Christians, as for a distinguished grace" (from E.B.M., VIII, 305-308).

### 192. Stretch a leg! (1871)

St Leonard Murialdo in the Beatification Process of Don Bosco narrated this prodigious fact: "It is a well-known fact in Turin that many people had recourse to the servant of God for extraordinary graces and they were granted. Among these I can mention the fact of the miraculous healing of a little great-grandson of mine.

This child, due to a fall from the third to the second floor, had fractured his leg. After the operation to put it back in place, it was later discovered that the injured leg

had shortened by five centimetres. The doctors were unanimous in their opinion that it would be necessary to have a rather painful operation to heal him, and that it would be necessary to break the leg again in the same place, which would otherwise be very difficult to do.

So, the mother took the child to Mary Help of Christians and, in the church sacristy, asked Don Bosco bless him. In the meantime, the mother and grandmother, who had accompanied him, promised an offering to Mary Help of Christians if the healing took place.

That same evening, while at table, the child fell from his little chair to the floor, letting out a cry. The doctor was soon summoned, who examined him and exclaimed: - Miracle! It is truly extraordinary and unnatural that the leg should have broken again at the precise joint of the first break. In fact, two doctors had previously asserted that this was impossible.

Then they fixed his leg and it healed perfectly, so that he could be enlisted in the army's *bersaglieri* (infantry) in due course. His mother and grandmother fulfilled their promise. The mother, then, after this grace was obtained, placed a singular trust in Don Bosco's prayers and, especially after his death, entrusted her temporal and spiritual interests to him, attributing to his intercession the happy outcome of her family affairs, and calling him her only advocate. She even wanted to have a plaque placed on a public road in the boundary wall of the Valsalice college in gratitude, which was not granted. □



## MARY AND SACRED SCRIPTURE

by Giovanni Zappino,

**M**ary Most Holy must be greatly loved and honoured, but with a devotion that, to be authentic, must be well founded on Scripture." This was how Pope Saint John Paul II expressed it, on 24 September 2000, in the homily we have chosen as an outline for our Marian devotion.

We have therefore referred by the Pope's authoritative teaching to Sacred Scripture, to base our Marian devotion on it.

We must first note and take very seriously the word 'foundation', because it tells us that if Marian devotion does not have this solid foundation, it is doomed to ruin.

One spontaneously thinks, in this regard, of the parable of the "two houses," with which Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, concludes the Sermon on the Mount.

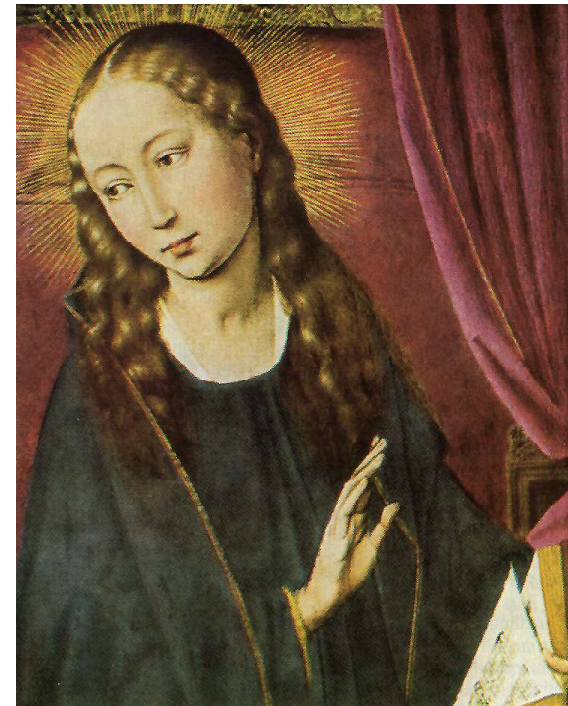
*"He who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice will be like an intelligent man, who built his house upon the rock. The rain came, the rivers overflowed, the winds blew*

*violently against that house, but it did not collapse, because its foundation was on the rock... On the contrary, whoever hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice will be like a foolish man, who has built his house on sand. The rain came, the rivers overflowed, the winds blew fiercely against that house, and the house collapsed. And its ruin was complete"* (Mt 7:24-27).

As it emerges from this context, Jesus is evidently talking about the disciple and his attitude towards the Master's Word, but we can - without forcing it - apply this image of the 'two houses' to the foundation of our Marian devotion, because Mary of Nazareth is - as emerges from the Gospel - a creature totally 'grounded' in the Word of God.

Paul VI, in *Marialis Cultus*, calls her a "listening Virgin."

Another text, which can enlighten us, is the "prologue" of the Gospel of Luke, thus of one of the evangelists most attentive to the mystery of the Virgin Mary, where it says: "I too have resolved



*Mary, who listens and ponders in her heart every word of the Lord, reminds us of what the foundation of all true devotion is*

*to research everything thoroughly, going back to the origins. Now, O illustrious Theophilus, I am writing everything down for you in order, so that you may realise how solid are the teachings you have received."*

For this very reason, Luke will write his Gospel; meanwhile, he confides to us his concern about the soundness of the faith (of Theophilus and his future readers) based in this soundness of faith on the exact knowledge of the facts, concerning Jesus, as will result from the sequel of the account.

The Pope, therefore, refers us back to the text of Sacred Scrip-

ture, to ground our Marian devotion... but already the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*, had referred us back to Sacred Scripture, to the Bible, to speak to us of "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church."

Indeed, in this very solemn document of the Church's Magisterium (which is precisely a Council "Constitution"), a biblical image of Mary is outlined, for the first time in the history of Councils, according to Old and New Testament data.

The Council thus teaches that "the books of the Old and New Testaments (and venerable Tradition) show ever more clearly, the function of the Mother of the Saviour, in the economy of salvation, and they place it almost before our eyes" (LG 55).

An objection, which may arise spontaneously in us, and which concerns the Old Testament in particular, is essentially formulated as follows: how can the Old Testament speak of the Virgin Mary, if she was not yet there; in fact, she will appear as the 'dawn' of salvation and of the New Testament?

To this objection of ours, the Council replies as follows: "The books of the Old Testament describe the history of salvation, in which the coming of Christ into the world is being prepared. And these early documents, as they are read in the Church and as they are understood in the light of further and full revelation, step by step, bring out ever more clearly the figure of a Woman: the Mother of the Redeemer" (LG 55).

After this generic statement, the Second Vatican Council goes on to determine, concretely, which are the 'Marian' biblical passages in the Old Testament. There are five of them:

1. The "Woman," Mother of the Redeemer = Genesis 3,15
2. The "Virgin Mother" of Immanuel = Isaiah 7,14-16
3. She who is to give birth to the Messiah in Bethlehem = Micah 5:23
4. She who "dwells among the humble and the poor of the Lord:"

**Without Mary's 'yes' Christ would not have been born**

A reflection I would like to present for your consideration, taking my cue from the distressing difficulty - most distressing for a mother - in which Mary finds herself because she is unable to offer a shelter to her unborn child. The great mystery of motherhood can give rise to suffering, doubt and temptation in many women.



The generous 'yes' that a woman must say in the face of the life that has been conceived in her womb - a 'yes' often accompanied by the fear of a thousand difficulties - always entails an inner act of trust in God and in the new human being who is to be born. With a fraternal sense of charity and solidarity, we must never leave alone, especially if vacillating and doubtful, a woman who is preparing to give birth to a new human being who will be, for each of us, a new member of the human family. We must try to give her any help she needs in her situation: we must support her and offer her courage

and hope. *Pope St. John Paul II* ☐

5. She who is "the exalted Daughter of Zion."

We shall return to these texts, barely mentioned here. In the meantime, let us contemplate - almost in fade-out - the face of this 'Woman', the object of God's plan, the object of his foreknowledge, of his anticipatory love.

We can summarise what we have said with an image. In the courtyard of Valdocco, near one of the side doors of the Shrine, there is a plaque commemorating the visit of John Paul II, in early September, 1988, the centenary year of Don Bosco's death.

At the top of the plaque, depicted in bronze, are two faces: that of the Pope in the foreground, that of Don Bosco in the background. This is also how the Old Testament proceeds, in speaking of Mary: while it traces the spiritual features of the future Messiah... it already outlines, in the distance, the face of the 'Woman' who would be his Mother. *(To be continued)*



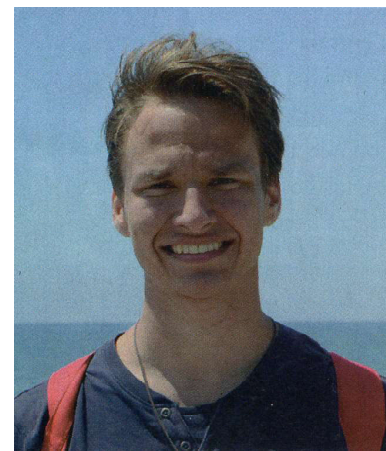
**WHAT IS VOCATION FOR YOU?**

*Emilia di Massimo - Nicole Stroth*

**What is vocation for you?**

*"It is the word you should love the most. Because it is the sign of how important you are in God's eyes. It is the index of approval, in His eyes, of your fragile life. Yes, because if He calls you, it means that He loves you. You are close to His heart, no doubt about it. In an immense crowd of people, one name resounds: yours.... He entrusts you with a task that only you can do. You and not others. More like a bet than a mission.*

*(Tonino Bello)*



**TOMAS KIVITA**  
Salesian Novice

*"Happiness is not something; it is always Someone"*

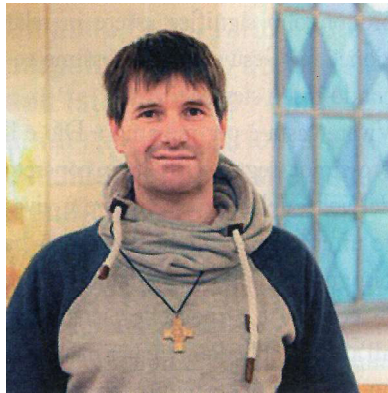
I was born in Lithuania in Vilnius in 1997. My first step towards faith was when I was

nine years old and preparing for my First Communion. My mother used to go with me to church for Masses on Sundays, and she too took up her journey of faith. If it had not been for my mum, I would not have continued with Masses, because she always encouraged me to go, at least with her. So, without thinking too much about faith, I continued. In 2013 my mum was a catechist in the parish and at the end of the year, a Salesian, wanting to thank her, offered her a trip to Italy for me (it was a trip for young people, that's why she couldn't come). I accepted this trip, but then I had to help the animators with the summer youth programme before this trip. I liked being with the boys so much and also the possibility of getting to know Don Bosco made me an animator.

After the summer, I started catechesis to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. In 2016, I participated in a retreat for young people. After Easter, I was 'reborn' in the faith.

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I started going to Mass every day and began to think seriously about giving my life to the Lord. After school, I did a year of university, during which I did discernment with the accompaniment of a Salesian missionary priest in Lithuania. Before Easter 2017, I made a retreat with the Diocese of Vilnius and there I felt that God was calling me to priestly religious life. So after Easter, I decided to go to Italy to begin a deeper discernment towards Salesian life. I suspended my studies at university and came to Italy after the summer. Now I am a novice, who is continuing his journey.



**Fr. Johannes Kaufmann**  
German Salesian, accompanies young people in vocational search in Don Bosco's family

*What does the word vocation mean?*

For us Christians, life is a gift from God, but also a mission; that is, we must discover why God has sent us into the world. This is

the vocation, for everyone. *And concretely what does vocation mean in the Salesian context?*

God calls some people to manifest his love for children and young people. This is a Salesian vocation within Don Bosco's family. It can also be done as employees or volunteers. In the tradition of our religious congregation, however, we have experienced that there are children and young people who need people who live this love in a special way, in the form of total dedication. This is the vocation of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

*How do you realise that someone really wants to be "a Salesian"?*

Reading Don Bosco's biography, getting to know his works and his loving and constructive way of working in the service of the young, a person who has a Salesian vocation feels something vibrate in his or her innermost being. This is why we go to visit the places of Don Bosco in Italy, because there is where this desire in some way begins to motivate all Salesians, all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, all the collaborators who work in our Houses, all the volunteers. Our goal is to help marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people realise their lives. This is more than just an assignment for an employer. □

## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### Home arithmetic

Teacher: "If I gave you a kitten today and another tomorrow and another the day after, how many kittens would you have?"

Small girl: "Five, Miss."

Teacher: "Not five, silly girl! Count again. I'll repeat: One today, one tomorrow, one the day after..."

Little girl: "But please, Miss. We've got two kittens at home already."

### No exaggeration

There had been a long dry spell and the two cowboys were discussing the lack of grass.

"Just how bad are things over at your ranch?" asked one.

"Pretty tough," replied the other. "Why, our cattle are so thin that if we use carbon paper, we can brand them two at a time."

### Shortest way

Old Lady (in the middle of a busy street): "Can you tell me, Guard, how to get to the hospital?"

Civic Guard: "Just stay where you are, ma'am."

### Below zero

"It was so cold where we were," said the Arctic explorer, "that the flame of the candle froze and we couldn't blow it out."

"That's nothing," said his rival. "Where we were, the words came out of our mouths in pieces of ice and we had to fry them to hear what we were talking about."

### Kindness repaid

The plane was full and about to leave. A girl ran up and asked the passengers if anyone of them

would be kind enough to sell her his seat as her mother was dangerously ill and she had to rush to her side immediately.

One of the passengers, a young officer who was returning from leave, gave up his seat and wired to his C.O. "Gave berth to girl, returning by next plane."

When he reported back, his C.O. remarked: "Congratulations! Your next confinement will be in the barracks."

### Let me see

Clerk (to manager): "Sir, I have been doing three men's work for one man's pay. I want an increase."

Manager: "I cannot give you an increase. Just tell me who the other two are, and I shall dismiss them."

### Everlasting peace

"It's wrong to work on Sunday," said the ten-year-old girl to her younger brother.

"What about policemen?" objected the boy. "They have to work on Sundays, Don't they go to heaven?"

"Of course, not," she replied, firmly.

"Policemen are not needed up there."

### Getting near enough

A repair man laboriously climbed up to fix a large clock set in a steeple. After he had finished his work and climbed down again, a curious lady, who had been watching him with great interest, asked: "Was there something wrong with the clock?"

"No, lady," came the reply "I am shortsighted, and I climbed up to see what time it was." □



### THE CARPENTER'S EYE

Once upon a time, long, long ago, in a small village, there was a carpenter's workshop.

One day, during the master's absence, all his tools held a great council.

The meeting was long and animated, sometimes even heated. It was a question of excluding a certain number of members from the honoured community of tools. One took the floor: "We must expel our sister the Saw, because she bites and gnashes her teeth. She has the most vicious temper in the land."

Another one intervened: "We cannot keep our brother Hammer in our midst: he has a sharp and fussy temperament, to bash everything he touches." "Brother Hammer," protested another, "has a heavy and violent temper. I would call him a basher. He is annoying in the way he constantly rebels and gets on everyone's nerves."

What about the Nails? Can one live with such prickly people? Let them go away!

And the File and the Plane too. To live with them is constant friction. And let us also expel chisel, whose only raison d'être seems to be to scratch others!"

That's how animatedly the discussion went on among the carpenter's tools. They were all talking at once. The Hammer wanted to expel the file and the plane, these in turn wanted the Nails and Hammer expelled, and so on. By the end of the meeting everyone had expelled everyone.

The meeting was abruptly

interrupted by the arrival of the carpenter.

All the tools fell silent when they saw him approach the workbench.

The man took a plank and sawed it with the Biting Saw. He smoothed it with the Plane that strips everything it touches. Sister Axe that cruelly wounds cruelly, sister File with its rough tongue, sister Chisel that scrapes and scratches, went into action immediately afterwards.

Then the carpenter took the brothers Nails for their prickly character and the Hammer that bashes.

He used all his bad-tempered tools to make a cradle.

A beautiful cradle to welcome a baby that was about to be born. To welcome Life.

*God looks at us with a carpenter's eye.*



### LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I would like to Our Heavenly Father, Our Lord Jesus, His Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, all the Saints and Angels for hearing my prayer and easing my stress, worry, fear, anxiety and Blood pressure that I've been experiencing lately. The only way that I was able to overcome what I was going through was to put my trust in God. Every day and night I prayed for a miracle to happen. I was sure that if I prayed hard and with faith, my prayers would be answered.

I visited my doctor a few days ago and he told me the good news that my blood pressure had come down and was showing good signs of Improvement and since then my worries, fears and Anxiety have subsided. All thanks and Glory to Our Heavenly Father, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus, His Blessed Mother, St. Joseph. All the Saints and Angels in Heaven. Without prayers nothing is possible.

The doctor advised that I need to continue my medication and that I need to stay positive. I'M sure that my prayers will not go unanswered, and that God is always watching over us and will heal me with his Mercy and compassion. I pray that I continue to be blessed with good health, peace and happiness always. Keep the faith and never lose hope for Our Lord Jesus will always come to our aid and heal us.

*Calvin D'Cruz, Melbourne, Australia*

Long ago I went to collect my certificates and I could feel the presence of Mama Mary and Jesus and I realised that if I didn't get those certificates, I would have been in deep trouble. I'm grateful to the Lord Jesus and Mother Mary for this very timely assistance.

*Anonymous devotee*

Heartfelt thanks to Mary Help of Christians for graces received through intercession of the three Hail Marys.

*Mr. & Mrs. S. D'Souza, Mumbai*

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### **MARY WAS THERE**

In April 2019, I conceived after six years of marriage and we were overjoyed. Alas, our happiness didn't last long and in August 2019, I lost my child owing to some complications. I was both heartbroken and frustrated. My faith was totally shaken. My dream was shattered and I gave up all hope of conceiving again. But I conceived again in November the same year. I was put on strict bed rest. Amidst all my doubts and anxieties I turned in prayer to Jesus and his Blessed Mother Mary Help of Christians to save my baby this time. We were blessed with a lovely baby boy in June 2020. Nathan Antonio was born premature in the seventh month but our Lord and his blessed Mother Mary have watched over him. I urge all who are troubled today to surrender to our merciful Lord and his blessed mother in full faith and prayer. Our Lord and his loving Mother have never abandoned their children. *M. Juliana D'souza, Goa*

**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.

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