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**O God,  
 grant us protection  
 in our weakness,  
 that through  
 the intercession  
 of the blessed  
 Virgin Mary,  
 we may rise up  
 from our iniquities**

*(From the Common of Our Lady)*

**From The Editor's Desk**  
*THE LOVE OF MY LIFE*

When I was young and the blood was strong in my veins, I would go tramping over hill and over dale in the hilly Sahayadris. I could hear birds chirping and butterflies flipping their silvery wings in the quiet of the morning sun.

I knew little then, what I would be getting myself into when I decided to ask to be admitted to the Salesians of Don Bosco, but as the years passed and I went on to encounter youngsters of every stripe, I realised how much I loved them; with their varied moods and reactions to situations, I would wonder at the beauty of God's creation in these vibrant and ruddy youngsters placed in my charge. Each of them had dreams and yearnings of varied kinds and as I spoke and listened to them, I found that one yearned to work on a farm, another wanted to become a chef, yet another wanted to go overseas to see what life was like there while yet another was quite happy when I gave him a box of crayons and blank sheets of poster paper for him to express himself.

As the day drew to a close, at the night I watched them 'unwind' and go to sleep after their boisterous and hectic day and I would wonder at their innocence and poignant beauty and their innocent dependency on me. At such a sight all that was proud and selfish within me would drain away and I would pledge in my heart to be to them the 'elder brother' Don Bosco expected me to be. I felt humbled that I was here in charge of these wonderful 'images of God' and gradually the mystery would open before my eyes and I began to see the immensity of the river of life of which I was not the source but which carried me along too.

At the beginning of each new year when the youngsters arrived, I realised that my capacity to love them expanded a pace so that, gradually I began to understand the meaning of those searching words 'openness to life,' and that was why I could never look back.

As the years have rolled on and the youngsters have all grown up to start families of their own, I pray in my fumbling way that they too will reap the harvest that comes from loving "till our last breath" (Don Bosco's words) and to hear again the chirp of the birds in the cathedrals of their hearts.

And so, as one returns to the place of one's youth - in my case, my beloved hometown in the Sahayadris - I feel refreshed and I renew again that rich and fruitful commitment I made, as one might sing an old and golden song to savor the melody once more. I will walk the remaining days with peace in my heart when I did not know it myself, and it showed me the vision when my eyes were blind.

And, in words I was taught a long time ago when my mind could grasp but little of their meaning, I can utter them once again with memories of all my days, that 'I will give myself to my very last breath for my boys.'

*Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb*

## LOSING A CHILD, BUT WHERE IS GOD?

by Mons. Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

*We cannot but dwell on a painful aspect, but one that is part of the story of so many married couples: the loss of a child while still in the mother's womb or just born*

**A**moris Laetitia is accompanying us to reflect on the fruitfulness of marriage and the gift of children. The fifth chapter of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation dwells on welcoming, the joy of paternity and maternity, and addresses the extended family by dealing with adoption. We cannot fail to dwell on an aspect that is often overlooked because it is difficult to talk about, but which is part of the story of so many married couples: the loss of a child while still in the mother's womb or just born. How many miscarriages occur, and how many times serious illnesses steal a life shortly after birth.

Some time ago it also happened to me, but it was not the first time, that I had met and accompanied a couple who had already come to terms with the death of a newborn child, and a few years later it happened a second time.

Luke and Julia (invented names) already had a son, but after the loss of their second son to a serious illness, they had given much thought as to whether it was right to open up to life again after the doctors had spoken of the possibility of it happening again. But sometimes, while we reflect, life appears on the horizon and, for these young newlyweds, it had to be welcomed, accepting all the

risks involved. I will share with you a letter I wrote to these dear friends on the day of the funeral of little Teresa, who died shortly after her birth.

"Dear Luke and Julia, I am taking the liberty of making myself present, on tiptoe as it were, with these few lines, to tell you of the closeness, affection and esteem that I have for you and to accompany Teresa on the day when you thank the Lord for having been able to welcome her, love her from her conception, accompany her and now hand her over to the God of life.

We met some time ago and you shared with me your story as married couple and parents eager to live in faith what life was asking of you, in search of a solution that required understanding and discernment, but also open to providence. Thank you for your testimony of love for life, thank you for always putting life first, considering it a gift before a problem. Faith, you have experienced, is not an insurance against the unexpected events of life.

Everyone, especially we believers, wonder why these things happen and would like an answer. God, who created the heavens and the earth, chose that life and history walk on their own

feet and he created man and woman giving them the gift of freedom, of which we are all jealous. And so, the story of our planet is inhabited by many wonderful things, but also by pandemics and earthquakes; and the story of mankind also by wars, injustice, birth, illness and even death. God is always by our side, He has promised that to us, and you have experienced it, but He does not always intervene and when He does, they are exceptions whose reasons we find difficult to understand: "Why is it that in some cases He does and in others He does not?"

Death is the sign of our radical fragility; it constantly reminds us of the absurdity of our chasing only earthly happiness as if it were, to be eternal. Death is always there to remind us that we are creatures and not creators, poor even when we think we are powerful, small even when we feel great.

Our enemy par excellence, death, always wins because we all die, but for us Christians it is an illusory victory; it can be defeated when it becomes an act of love, a gift of life. This is what



Jesus did by transforming an act of injustice into the greatest act of love, and that love saved us and today gives meaning even to this death.

I read so much love in your story. Teresa's death then is not a wall, but a threshold; it is not the end, but a beginning; it is not a tomb, but a birthing room. "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me even if he dies will live, he will not die eternally."

Allow me to venture a reflection: God takes responsibility for Teresa's death as he does for every other absurd death. True, he is the 'guilty one' because in creating us he allowed this. He also allowed and continues to allow affliction and tribulation, pain and human wickedness. God is the guilty one as is every father and mother who, by bringing a child into the world, inevitably exposes him or her to the challenges of life, to many joys, but also to many trials. But God, guilty of allowing all this, is the same one who in Jesus, transformed death into an act of love, just as you did, dear Luke and Julia.

My homage to Teresa exudes love: that of you, that of so many who have been and are always close to you, that of your parents. Of this Earth of ours, Teresa has only known the welcoming womb of Julia; in fact, she has known that most beautiful reality; perhaps it was brief, it would have been nice to have her know many other beautiful things, but she will bring both of you, Julia and Luke to the Father, and she will speak to God telling him of this world as she knew it, in her

mother's womb; and that it is as I wait in anticipation for the beautiful. I will accompany you opportunity to meet you." □

## TWO BABIES

In the womb of a pregnant woman were two babies. One of the twins asked the other: "Do you believe in life after birth?"

"Of course, I do. There must be something after birth. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."

"Nonsense! There's no life after childbirth. What would that life be like?"

"I don't know, but surely... there will be more light than in here. Maybe we'll walk with our legs and feed through our mouths."

"But that's absurd! Walking is impossible. And eating through our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord is the way to feed... I'll tell you one thing: life after birth is out of the question. The umbilical cord is too short." "Instead, I think there *has* to be something. And maybe it will be different from what we are used to here."

"But nobody has returned from life after childbirth. Childbirth is the end of life. And at the end of the day, life is nothing but an agonising existence in the dark that leads us to nothingness."

"Well, I don't know exactly what it will be like afterwards, but surely we will see mum and she will take care of us."

Mum? Do you believe in Mommy? And where do you believe she is now? Where? All around us! It is in her and because of her that we live. Without her this whole world would not exist. And yet I don't believe! I have never seen mother, so it is logical that she does not exist. Maybe, ... but sometimes, when we are silent, you can feel how she caresses our world. You know... I think there's another life waiting for us and we're just getting ready for it... □



## MARY, SUBLIME AMONGST THE STARS

by Chino Biscontin

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1950 Pope Pius XII proclaimed the Assumption of Mary a dogma of faith. The Orthodox Churches celebrate the feast of the Dormition of the Virgin on the same day

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus* of 1974, Paul VI summarised the meaning of the feast of the Assumption as follows: "The solemnity of August 15 celebrates the glorious Assumption of Mary into heaven. It is a feast of her destiny of fullness and blessedness, of the glorification of her immaculate soul and of her virginal body, of her perfect configuration to the Risen Christ; a feast that sets before the eyes of the Church and of all mankind the image and the consoling proof of the fulfillment of their final hope, namely, that this full glorification is the destiny of all those whom Christ has made His brothers, having "flesh and blood in common with them" (Heb. 2:14; cf. Gal. 4:4). This long, dense sentence contains all the elements of this feast.

There are no accounts of this event in the New Testament, and faced with the question of whether or not to affirm the assumption of Mary's body and soul in the glory of the Risen One as revealed truth, voices of misgivings were not lacking both in antiquity, the Middle Ages and more recent times. But the evidence of widespread devotion in the Church since the 2nd century and continuously until the solemn dogmatic definition in

1950 by Pius XII is of an undeniable universality. Then, from the 17th century onwards, there were initiatives in the



Bartholomew Passerotti  
(1529-1592)

*The Assumption of Mary, a fresco  
in the church of St. John  
the Evangelist, Brescia, Italy*

Church on several occasions, including impressive collections of signatures, to urge its affirmation. In the period from 1921 to 1940 alone, there were no less than 6,411,000 petitions on the subject.

Pius XII warned that the time had come, even taking into account the immense wounds still open from the terrible Second World War. Mariologist Ignatius M. Calabuig (1931-2005) goes so far as to say: "In this context, Pius XII's defining act was not only an exquisitely religious magisterial intervention, but also a political act in the highest and noblest sense of the term: in the pontiff's mind, the dogmatic definition would have been of great benefit to all humanity."

But what does the dogma state? In his bull *Munificentissimus Deus*, which summarises the results of all the careful research done for the proclamation, Pius XII states: "Therefore, after having raised up again to God supplicating petitions, and having invoked the light of the Spirit of Truth, to the glory of Almighty God, who has poured into the Virgin Mary his special benevolence to the honour of his Son, the immortal King of the ages and victor over sin and death, to the greater glory of his august Mother and to the joy and exultation of the whole Church, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and Ours, we pronounce, declare, and define to be dogma revealed by God that the immaculate Mother of God, ever virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed into

heavenly glory in body and soul."

We can now ask ourselves: how are we to understand this consoling truth? First of all, it bears witness to a love of God that is stronger than death, that is faithful and therefore trustworthy, and that is also characterised by moving tenderness. All this is in full harmony, in the light that illuminates Mary Most Holy, with what of God's love has been re-vealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus trusted the Father: He expired addressing Him with these words: 'Father, into your hands I commend my life'. And the Father responded to the Son's trust by raising him from the dead, He who, having created all things from nothing, can by His almighty love prevent His children from being swallowed up by nothingness in death. And he has shown in Jesus, the first-born, how much he will do for us his brethren: we too, who have received from baptism the Holy Spirit, the participation in the divine life, are destined for the glory of resurrection.

But there is also a very sweet aspect of tenderness, underlined by this phrase from the preface of the Mass of the feast: "You have not willed that she who brought forth the Lord of life should know the corruption of the tomb." A tenderness that employs the loving power of God to prevent that very body from which the Son of God had received his 'flesh' from returning to dust. □

## BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE!

by Anastasia Dias

"I'm tired of being myself, of this life...of everything. I wish I could start all over again. Each time I look in the mirror I don't like the person I see, the person I've become. I can't even recognise myself anymore! I wish I could talk to someone. I wish someone would help me," he thought to himself one night. His thoughts had been keeping him up all night long, multiple nights in a row. "Should I go and visit the Teacher? People say he's good at listening and giving advice. But what if the others see me? They'll be the first to judge me."

The first time he saw the Teacher, it was in the temple. People sat outside buying and selling things, and no one said anything to them. It was the Teacher who was angered by this scenario and so he drove those merchants away from the temple. The young man had greatly admired him since then.

He got out of bed; it was around 11 at night. He washed his face and started to get dressed. He wasn't sure if he'd go or not. But lately.... things had gotten worse. There was no point in living like this, feeling com-

pletely hopeless, without a purpose in life.

He had a good-paying job, a settled life, what then was missing?

He wanted to find out but had no way to do so. His last resort was to meet the Teacher.

He walked the lonely, deserted streets that night, hopped on to the sidewalk, walked a little further and finally reached.

The Teacher was with a few close friends of his; he raised his head and looked at Nicodemus and smiled: "Sir, I've heard a lot about you and have seen you in person once before. I want to experience something more than this. I know I'm capable of greater things. But I'm not happy with the person I've become. Can you help me?"

Jesus laughed: "You need to be

Seriously, Jesus, at my age, how can I enter my mother's womb and be born again?



born again, Nicodemus." That first statement confused Nicodemus. "Sir? born again...surely you don't mean going back to my mother's womb...?"

Nicodemus was a Pharisee; which meant he was extremely learned and knew the scriptures pretty well. His was once a respectable position, but in Nicodemus' day and age people started misusing power.

The above-mentioned encounter was Jesus' first face-to-face meeting with Nicodemus. His last would be at Jesus' death. Nicodemus helped take down Jesus' body from the cross and embalmed it.

There were only three encounters mentioned of Jesus and Nicodemus in the Bible; all of them only in the Gospel of John. Nicodemus was a person who knew what was wrong with his life but didn't know how to change it.

I feel like him sometimes; I really do. And I know of other people who do too. Days, weeks and months pass, when we look into the mirror and can't even recognise who we've become. On these days, like Nicodemus, we wish we had another chance to go back and be "born again."

Today, the word "born again" may have very different connotations. Personally, I feel it means being dead to things that have made us feel dead and coming alive and being born again into life.

I feel that on this path of wanting to be 'born again' the first step has got to be acceptance. Accepting the things that have happened and things we've done; that's the first. The second is for-

giveness; which means, forgiving others for things they've done and more importantly forgiving ourselves for things *we've* done. And, lastly, courage. That's tough! The courage to change.

Life will always throw us challenges. For sure, we will have both good and bad days. But that doesn't mean that our life of itself is bad and isn't worth living. It's precisely on days of despair that I've found unknown reserves of strength and perseverance. It's on those days when I've seen the person I truly am. It's easy to be nice when things are easy but when things get difficult, we get to know who we truly are.

And on those most difficult days in my life, I have felt grace; I have felt loved; I have felt born again! I may not have had a personal, face-to-face encounter with Christ, but I have felt his love, endless, unconditional and true. That was how, for me, each challenge in itself was an opportunity to be "born again."

Not go back to my mother's womb, to a place of comfort and security, but to face the very things that caused me discomfort and made me insecure.

I love how Nicodemus gets the privilege of embalming the body of Jesus.

The first time he met Jesus, he would never even have imagined that any of those things would happen. But, life surprises us in unimaginable ways.

You and I have this incredible power; we can use the opportunities and challenges life gives us to become stronger. This season let us choose to be "born again," born again as bigger, better, stronger human beings. □

O. PORI MECOI

THE SALESIANS FOR YOU!

## DON BOSCO IN MOROCCO

Interview with Fr Alexandre Damians



### Can you introduce yourself?

I am a Salesian, and although it may seem strange, I become more Salesian as the years go by. It is as if inside me, despite my limitations, I cultivate something that 'calls' me and I feel the desire to open the door growing every day. Yes, I feel like a Salesian in search and I try to help young people to always be available to search. Because life is a tireless search.

### Why did you decide to become a Salesian?

When I was already a university student in Barcelona, I found by chance in my hands the old copy of the Gospel book from the time I was in high school. I started reading passages from it every

night... and I realised that I had to follow that path. The decision was not easy, I had to leave too many things behind. I said "accident", today I know that it was not a fortuitous event. God is good, he calls us and accompanies us.

### How does your family feel about it?

The answer is twofold: at first my parents were surprised and saddened, but they never objected, on the contrary. From then until now, they have always felt chosen from among many families. I still feel the joy of my sisters and other family members and, of course, I feel that they accompany me.

### What are the most beautiful experiences you have had?

There are many! At the beginning, as a seminarian and a young priest, I taught my classes with passion and was very happy to be with young people, to participate in the many outings, to animate groups. Recently I worked as a university lecturer, I experienced the closeness of young people, aged between nineteen and twenty-four. Their dialogues touched me deeply. Yes, it was they who evangelised me and made me feel like father and brother...

### Why Morocco?

When my mother passed away, I understood that the time had come to make myself available

without reserve, without any conditions, and so I spoke about it to the Rector Major, who, after inviting me to discernment, suggested Morocco. Whichever would be another centre my answer would have been the same: 'Thy will be done'.

### What is the significance of this Salesian presence?

It is a school, named after Don Bosco, where 1350 pupils study, and a parish dedicated to Christ the King. At the school everyone, pupils and teachers alike, are Muslims; the parish, the only one in Kenitra (the city has a million inhabitants), is 80% attended by university students from sub-Saharan Africa. I am asked what the significance of our presence is: we are "insignificant" in numerical terms, but we are "very significant" at the level of the message we can transmit with our presence, manifesting with our way of being and acting the most important Christian values of Don Bosco's pedagogy: Kindness, Proximity, Patience, Dialogue, Listening, a word in the ear, Joy, Accompaniment...

### How is the encounter with the Muslims?

In our Salesian house, total harmony reigns. Our teachers are very interested in the Salesian world. A year ago a small group went to Turin to learn more about Don Bosco and, as we know, to know is to love. Our teachers love the school because they love Salesian pedagogy. The school is appreciated by the entire population, thanks to the parents who present our face to the outside world. And the pupils are children and young

people like children all over the world, i.e. without the social prejudices that we adults very often accumulate.

### What are young people like?

Here in Morocco, families live together and in the vast majority of cases are well structured, with strong ties. This means that children live in an atmosphere of considerable family security, which translates into a good balance between parental authority and trust. And since family experiences influence the school, we can experience the necessary authority in a good climate of trust.

### How are the Salesians viewed?

In the Muslim population as a whole, it is necessary to distinguish a few fundamentalists, who do exist, amidst a serene majority, and therefore, as the difficult question of freedom of conscience on the one hand and religious pluralism on the other is increasingly evident in Moroccan society as a whole, today we Salesians of Kenitra are seen as very committed to the most important field: education. This is our field and this is where we are recognised. Too bad we have no public financial aid!

### What is the future of this experience?

Where there are young people, the Salesian experience has a great future. If in the eighty years of our school's history there has been a long journey of growth, brotherhood, friendship with young people and adults, all the more reason why the next eighty years will be even more important. I can say that, thank God, we have a very encouraging future in Morocco. □

# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## POPE HORMISDAS (August 6)

Ian Pinto, sdb

**P**ope Hormisdas lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. He came from a wealthy, noble family in Italy and did not have a conventional vocation journey. After reading that he was Pope, you would probably expect to hear how he yearned for the priesthood and even imitated a priest by playing pretend as a young boy. But that was not his story. Hormisdas wasn't called, or at least, did not feel called by God to be a priest until adulthood. He never went to the seminary nor did he spend years in study and preparation for the priesthood.

It is worth knowing, that seminaries, as we know and understand them, did not exist until the 16<sup>th</sup> century! It was only after the Council of Trent (1545-1563) that official seminaries were erected. Prior to the Council, the process of becoming a priest was almost entirely in the hands of the local bishop and parish community. The role of the bishop was central in discernment of divine vocation, education/preparation of the candidate to receive Holy Orders, and ordination of the candidate. As a result of this methodology, nepotism and other forms of corruption crept into the



Church. Mind you, not all candidates to the priesthood were selected for the wrong reasons. The vast majority were genuine and good people. But there were some who slipped through for not so well-intentioned reasons.

Nepotism was an accepted practice as was prejudice for the wealthy and noble of birth. This was the state of civil administration and sadly, it entered into the Church as well. There are instances of bishops appointing relatives or members of the nobility to

ecclesiastical positions. If the candidate was genuine, he would submit himself to the will of God and would either embrace the priesthood wholeheartedly or would resist its authentic form in order to continue in ecclesiastical office. There are examples of individuals who were not priests but laypersons who were appointed as cardinals or administrators of dioceses. Charles Borromeo is an interesting case of this kind. His uncle became Pope Pius IV and he bestowed on Charles the office of Cardinal. He was even appointed Bishop of Milan before becoming a priest! Eventually, he did get ordained and not only did he serve the Church with incomparable zeal and fervour, he is recognized as a saint! Of course, he is an exception among exceptions but it goes to show that such things have happened.

### **Journey to the Papacy**

Hormisdas probably lived an ordinary life as a nobleman except perhaps that he was involved in some special way with the Church. There is very little information about his early life so it is difficult to construct an idea of what his life was like before joining the priesthood. This much is known however, he was married and had a son. At some point, he decided to get ordained. This is normally not possible unless the spouse has expired or has given in writing a chit of no-objection.

Hormisdas was ordained a deacon and was closely associated with Pope Symmachus. He served as notary at the Synod held at St. Peter's, Rome in 502. This reveals that he was a person of learning as well as of good

character, for such weighty responsibilities were not delegated willy-nilly. Pope Symmachus faced tremendous difficulties during his papacy. He was pope at a time when there was a lot of infighting in the Church. The Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople (the 2 capitals and cities of importance of the Roman empire, and so the 2 chief Sees of ecclesiastical authority) were fighting to establish supremacy over each other. While Symmachus was bishop of Rome, the Eastern Roman Emperor, Anastasius I Dicorus supported Laurentius, who acted as anti-pope. This standoff, termed as the *Laurentian schism* resulted in a division within the Church. Not only was ecclesiastical integrity at stake, the Senate as well as the people of Rome were divided among these two camps. During this traumatic event, Hormisdas stood steadfastly beside Pope Symmachus and strove to underline his legitimacy. That is why, when Pope Symmachus passed away, the obvious successor was Hormisdas.

### **Advocate of Peace and unity**

After being elected Pope, his first action was to resolve the schism. He welcomed back with prayer, forgiveness and dialogue all those who supported Laurentius and fostered the schism. Historians point out that the volume of correspondence from the part of Hormisdas addressed to people in Constantinople bear testament to his undying efforts at reconciliation.

Another serious issue threatened unity; this one was theological in nature. The Council of Chalce-

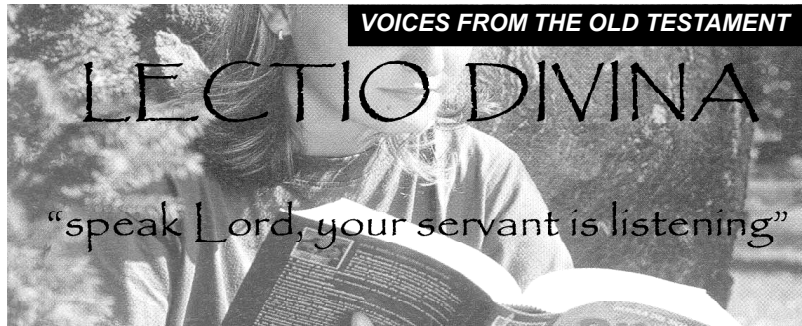
don had defined certain elements of the Catholic faith. There were some powerful individuals in Constantinople who denied the authority of the Council and began persecuting bishops and others who did not share their views. The key theological issue was regarding the nature of Jesus. The Council of Chalcedon taught that Jesus was both God and man simultaneously, that is, he was one person with two natures. Those who opposed this teaching were followers of the Monophysite doctrine which states that Jesus had only one nature - divine. The emperor of Constantinople was the driving force behind this ongoing division. However, once he died, his successor was a Catholic who sought to put an end to this needless hostility. Therefore, on March 28, 519 a solemn ceremony was conducted in the cathedral of Constantinople to mark the end of the schism. It was attended by a great number of people.

Hormisdas was at the heart of this reconciliation. Despite threats and opposition from Constantinople, he stood his ground and endeavoured to interact with dignity and grace, with non-violence and peace. It was probably his attitude that won over many opposing leaders. The formula of faith that he sent around to all the bishops of the Constantinopolitan See to sign so as to show solidarity and submissiveness to the See of Rome remains an invaluable document of ecclesiastical heritage. It was repeatedly referenced during the First Vatican Council in the 1870s when the discussion centred around the role and nature of the Papacy. The doctrine of Papal Infallibility was decla-

red at this Council. The doctrine states that 'in matters of faith and morals, whenever the Pope teaches *ex cathedra* (from the chair of St. Peter) he cannot err. In some way, we owe it to Pope Hormisdas for emphasizing the nature and role of the Pope as leader of the Church and guardian of the faith in the footsteps of St. Peter. He did so when the Church and the papacy were both under attack.

The *Formula Hormisdas* by which the Eastern bishops were reconciled with Rome begins with these words: "The first means of safety is to guard the rule of strict faith and to deviate in no way from those things that have been laid down by the Fathers. And indeed the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church' [Mt 16:18], cannot be disregarded; these things which were spoken are demonstrated by the results, for the Catholic religion has been preserved ever immaculate in the Apostolic See." Here we find the orthodoxy of Hormisdas' teaching. He was strongly based on Scripture and the Tradition of the Church.

Over the course of his papacy, he strove to strengthen the bonds of unity between the Church in different regions. His papacy was therefore, characterized by works of reconciliation, peace and unity. Even though he was quite successful in his lifetime, differences between the churches continued to persist for centuries. Nevertheless, there are some historians who claim that Pope Hormisdas ought to be recognized as one of history's most successful popes. □



VOICES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

# LECTIO DIVINA

“speak Lord, your servant is listening”

## A BREEZEY WHISPER FOR ELIJAH

by Carlo Broccardo

**S**urrexit Elia propheta quasi ignis” (Sir 48:1); this phrase from the book of Sirach, written in Latin, greets pilgrims who come to celebrate Mass in one of the chapels adjacent to Elijah’s cave on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. Translated into English, it means: “Then Elijah the prophet arose like a fire!” Here is the prophet Elijah: like a fire, blazing and burning all around his enemies.

Those times of Elijah were hard. To be more precise: they were hard times from the point of view of faith; because the economy and politics were going well. Between 874 and 853 BC. King Ahab sat on the throne of Samaria (the capital of the northern kingdom). He was very adept at forging alliances with neighbouring kingdoms. In order to befriend the king of Sidon, he married his daughter Jezebel; and in order to “welcome” this daughter of his new ally, he allowed her to introduce into Israel the worship of the god Baal, almost completely eliminating the worship of the one true God, the Lord, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses.

Elijah was like a fire, devastating. He did not content himself with denouncing the unfaithfulness of King Ahab and all the people. He challenged the prophets of Baal in a singular contest, right on Mount Carmel (those who want to read the whole story need only open the Bible to chapter eighteen of the First Book of Kings). He defeated and killed them one by one. He was alone against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal; and he won; he slew them all. This was Elijah; now we know well why Sirach said that he was like fire!

The slaughter on Mount Carmel, however, did not go unnoticed. King Ahab reported it to his wife Jezebel, who solemnly swore vengeance; in fear Elijah then fled. From Carmel he went down to Beersheba, in the deep south, at the entrance to the Negev desert; and then from there he went for forty days and forty nights into the desert, until he reached the mountain of God, Horeb. It was not a random destination, the one chosen by Elijah; Moses had also stayed for forty days on that mountain (which was sometimes

called Horeb, sometimes Sinai: cf. Ex 19:11). Elijah went into the desert to flee from his enemies; but also, to seek his only ally, the Lord.

“And behold, the Lord passed by.” This is how our passage begins: Elijah seeks the Lord and finds him. But in an unexpected way!

Three things happen. First: “there was a mighty, rushing wind to split the mountains and break the rocks.” Those who have had the good fortune to spend at least a few hours in the Negev desert can imagine how tremendous it must have been for Elijah; the desert south of Israel is in fact a rocky desert, made up of enormous mountains on which there is not a blade of grass, valleys in which giant boulders have collapsed and cannot be moved by anything. To imagine a wind so powerful that it shatters rocks is disturbing. And then, the second great event, there was an earthquake. This too was no small experience, being there in the middle of an earthquake.

Those were two very powerful experiences, two manifestations of power, which in the Bible are often associated with the presence of God. We read, for example, in the book of Exodus: “Mount Sinai was all smoking, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire, and the smoke came up from it like the smoke from a furnace: the whole mountain trembled greatly” (Ex 19:18); or from the book of the prophet Habakkuk: “God stops and shakes the earth, he looks on and makes the nations tremble; the eternal mountains are shattered, and the ancient hills are lowered” (Hab. 3:3). Psalm 18 says: “The

earth trembled and shook, the foundations of the mountains shook, they shook because he was angry.”

In short, in the Bible, God often makes his presence felt through the most glorious climatic events, such as earthquakes and windstorms. But not today; not on that day when Elijah ascended Mount Horeb. In fact, the account we are reading says: “There was a mighty, raging wind to break the mountains and break the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.” Today for Elijah God thought something different.

“After the fire, there was the whisper of a gentle breeze.” Translating this phrase well from the Hebrew is impossible; literally it sounds like this: “After the fire, there was a voice of gentle silence.” It was the sound of silence that Elijah heard. He understood that that was the voice of God and covered his face with his cloak as “protection,” because one could not see God face to face.

“Surrexit Elias propheta quasi ignis.” Impetuous, that was how Elijah was described. Like a fire. But when God spoke the language of silence, he recognised his voice. Whispering was not Elijah’s style. “His word burned like a torch,” says the Sirach (Sir 48:1); it was not the style with which God had hitherto let himself be recognised. His style this time was that of silence. That was why Elijah was great: because he knew how to change; because he knew how to listen; because he walked with his God even on paths that did not seem made for him. □



## Quiet Spaces

### MELANCHOLY ISN'T CHRISTIAN

*Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on May 10, 2013*

*Acts 18:9-18; Jn 16:20-23*

**P**ope Francis spoke about joy this morning, during the Mass in the chapel of St. Martha's Guest House. He ascribed his state of mind to the presence, in the same residence, of His Holiness Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria [of the Coptic Orthodox Church]. And he wanted to share his joy with the faithful present at the Mass.

"Today," he said, "we have a great reason for joy in the House, where the Pope of Alexandria, the Patriarch of the Church of Mark, is a guest." And he explained why that was a reason for joy: "He is a brother who has come to talk to the Church of Rome, to go part of the way together. He is a brother bishop"; he "is a bishop like me and he is taking the church forward. Let us ask the Lord to bless him and help him in his ministry to take the Coptic Church forward; and also to help us to be able to go this part of the way together. This is a true joy, a joy for today. Let us thank the Lord for this joy."

The pope's reflection on joy was inspired by a passage from Luke's gospel (24:50-53), which speaks of the Lord's ascension and says that the disciples "returned to Jerusalem full of joy. The gift Jesus had given them," explained the pope, "was not a kind of nostalgia" but "it was joy." "This was the joy," he said a bit later, "that Christians should also cultivate and bear witness to today and not be sad. Melancholy Christians," he added, "have vinegar faces like pickled peppers."



The joy he was speaking of was the joy that Jesus had promised to his disciples: Christian joy. And he had assured them "no one can take it from you." But what is this joy? asked the pope. "Is it merriment? No, that's not the same thing. It's good to be merry, to enjoy ourselves. But joy is more than that, it's something else. It's a gift. We can't be merry all the time or it will end up becoming trivial, superficial, and it also leads us to a lack of Christian wisdom; it makes us become rather silly, naïve, doesn't it? Is everything merry? No. But joy is something else. Joy is a gift from the Lord. It fills us inside. It's like an anointing of the Spirit."

And this joy lies "in the certainty that Jesus is with us and with the Father." "The other day," the pope recalled, "I said that Paul went out to preach; he built bridges because he was sure of Jesus." And that same certainty gives us joy. The joyful man or woman is one who is sure" that Jesus is with us. But is this a certainty we can always have? A certainty "that we can bottle," said the pope in a vivid metaphor, "so that we always have it with us? No, because if we want to keep this joy just for ourselves, in the end it goes off and our heart becomes rather jaded and our face doesn't express that great joy but, instead of it, a nostalgia, a melancholy which is not healthy. Sometimes those melancholy Christians have "faces like chilli peppers in vinegar," rather than being joyful and happy in their lives.

"But," said the Holy Father, "joy can't stay still: it must go forward, because "it's a pilgrim virtue. It's a gift that goes ahead, that walks along life's road, walks like Jesus: preaching, proclaiming Jesus. Joy opens the road out further and broadens it." It's a virtue of the great, "those great souls," he said, "who are above littleness, above meanness, who don't get involved in those little internal matters that go on in a community, in the church; they always look toward the horizon."

"Joy is a virtue for the road. St. Augustine said: 'Sing and walk on!' That's Christian joy; the Christian sings with joy, and walks on, bearing this joy. Sometimes this joy may be somewhat hidden by the cross but the Christian sings and walks on. The Christian knows how to praise God, as the apostles did when they returned from the mountain after the ascension of Jesus. Joy is the gift that leads us to the virtue of magnanimity. Christians are magnanimous, they can't be pusillanimous: they are magnanimous. And magnanimity is the virtue of breathing freely; it's the virtue of always going ahead, with a spirit of the Holy Spirit." □

## A RENDEZVOUS WITH THE "FAIRY"

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

When she was going through bad times in her early years, Anna would take refuge in the corner of the living room, by the window all green from the glare of twilight. The saddest part of the day was when her father came home drunk and very angry and began to cause endless scenes, turning his wife's already pained and nervous face pale: a face that must have been very beautiful, as was that of her little daughter. The woman would then, after a few retorts in by

which time her language had turned foul, as foul as that of the man, would quickly put on her coat, if it was cold, and if the season was good, she would leave no less outraged as she was. She would leave the man alone to rage. The little girl, crouched in the corner under the window-sill, stood as quietly as if she were not there at all, waiting for some miraculous creature to come and take her by the hand, snatching her out of that hell. Yes, she was indeed waiting for a fairy.

No one had ever spoken to her about God; only the old woman who lived next door down the hall would tell her a few fairy tales when the little girl went to help her with her chores. Sometimes Anna would stand there spellbound with her broom in her hand, listening to the old woman's tale, and it seemed to her that her fairy, a magical creature dressed in silks woven with gold and bedecked with jewels, would



suddenly appear through her words. A longing for beautiful clothes and splendid ornaments began to entice the little girl's soul and so, more than ever before, she wanted to see the fairy.

Once, in a dramatic moment, Anna had heard a knock at the door: she rushed from her green cove, before her excited father could, or before her exasperated mother. She had rushed in the hope that this fairy, who in the old woman's fairy tales came to the point of defending the weak and derelict, had finally remembered her. Instead, a stranger appeared on the threshold: a diminutive lady, perhaps even young, but pale, gaunt and resigned. The child looked at her disappointed. The very modest creature possessed only the sweet but subdued light of two modest clear eyes; she spoke of love, the love of St. Vincent and made as if to enter, but her father, with a harsh guttural "away, away get out of here," like his poor life undermined by jealousy and scorched by alcohol, quickly closed the door in her face, ranting in a series of swear words that made the child retreat to her green cove under the window to drown her scandalised and unhappy little soul in the shadows.

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But it did not remain Anna's refuge for many more years. As she got older, she learned to slam the door and leave the house like her mother. She went to work in a factory and liked to dress well. Adolescence and early youth had sharpened in her the tendency of teenagers; she earned too little at the factory and by then she knew

that there are no fairies, who, like in the fairy tale of Cinderella, could change the tattered dress into a princely garment.

She needed money: she had to get it. Not that Anna was conceited and stubborn; her yearning for luxury was perhaps born out of the deviation of an instinctive yearning for something lofty, something beautiful that no one had taught her to seek beyond outward appearances: and she knew, unfortunately, that fairies do not exist and that they could never come to her aid and help her out of her poor life.

Instead, someone came to her, all glittering and draped in cheap and gaudy colours. She seized upon Anna's graceful, unguarded beauty, attempting to barter that unspoiled, defenceless youth for a gaudy dress with its vulgar glint of false silk which clouded not only her vision, but tickled Anna's unexplored desires; and she went headlong, scorching the white wings of her soul with that deceptive gleam.

Alas, when she realised that the nefarious garment had irreparably ruined her most beautiful dress that nothing, not even the spell of a fairy, could ever restore intact, the girl wrapped herself in other, even more gaudy and expensive garments to suppress her anguish. To still drown herself beneath the insubstantial yet crushing avalanche of silks, tulle, furs and feathers, with her soul more and more shrivelled and desolate, she did what she used to do as a child, she took refuge in the corner under the window in the greenish and abstract shadow of twilight to wait for the comforting fairy to come to meet

her to free her from that nightmare.

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Even now it was all over, in that sodden puddle, in a corner by a window: only this window gathered a light that was white and rarefied, but no less lonely and sad like a dense shadow of distant evenings. It was a hospital window, in a sad corner. And in that silence, too, as if in pain, it was not her father's swearing that came to crush her, but the even more shameful sense of abjection and abandonment to which she was reduced. Her poor childish soul trembled within her as it once did, but as it once did, something also rose from within her in that miserable abandonment, something that induced her to hope in someone who would not forget her.

Her soul, kept away from God from the beginning, perhaps

sensed him while ignoring him, as one who with eyes closed senses the presence of the sun. This was why deep down, Anna waited for comfort and deliverance with the naivete of her disinherited childhood: only this wait was more fervent, deeper, more conscious, because it was no longer waiting for a fantasy, it was conscience, and a conscience that gazed differently: it's gaze did not deceive, it caused one recognise it at first sight.

Anna, as soon as she saw her, she knew her: she knew the fairy. She was a modest, unassuming creature, with a gentle voice, perhaps softened through otherworldly distances. She came to her bed and took her hand and spoke to her of the One who performs wonders, of the One who performs miracles and who with a single word would transform the soiled garment into a regal



tunic for a kingdom that was not of here, but beyond and above the tiaras of stars.

And Anna wept as she listened to her, because it seemed to her that the fairy had finally come to meet that frightened and trembling little child in that dark corner and, taking her by the hand, was leading her upwards, outwards and towards utter happiness.

She felt she had become a child

again, reassured and happy being held by the hand of that fairy disguised as a nun.

And she wanted to say something to her: something to let her know that she had waited so long and that she had recognised her at last. "But you," said Anna through her tears, "you are..." But she did not say "a fairy"; she said, "You're an angel!" □

### THE LITTLE MOTH AND THE STAR

A little moth with a delicate soul, once fell in love with a star. He talked about it to his mother but she advised him to fall in love with an *abat-jour* (a lamp) instead. "The stars aren't made to fly after us," she explained. "Like lamps, you can flutter behind."

"At least you land on something," said the father, "Going behind stars you don't land on anything at all."

But the little moth did not listen to either of them. Every evening at sunset, when the star appeared, he would fly toward it and every morning, at dawn he would return home, exhausted by the immense and futile effort.

One day his father called him and said, "You haven't burned a wing in months, my boy, and I'm afraid you will never burn one. All your brothers have gotten burnt circling well around the street lamps, and all your sisters have burned their wings around the lamps in the house. Come on, get busy, go get yourself a nice burn! A strong and robust moth like yourself...and you have nothing to show for it!

The little moth left his paternal

home but did not go circling around the street lamps or around the lamps at home; instead, he stubbornly continued his attempts to reach the star which was thousands of light years away. Instead, he believed it was just caught in the highest branches of the elm tree.

Trying and trying again, making his way to the star, night after night gave him a certain pleasure; so much so that he lived to a ripe old age while his parents, brothers and sisters were all burnt up while still very young.

*The star of hope is a hallmark. Every day you should ask for faith to dare the impossible. Those who wish to work with Christ and consequently transform the world will refuse to conform to pre-established laws and regulations. They will be disobedient when others obey, they will carry out things when others find orders meaningless. The world will appear like a prison to them while others speak of freedom. And it will be transparent to their eyes of faith when others are desperate, feeling imprisoned. Doing the impossible is reality for them who can hear the voice of their Lord.*

*If there is a star in the sky of your life, don't waste time burning yourself at some small lightbulbs. □*

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 43

by Michele Molineris

### 203. If you want to say, there's room for you too (1872)

At Easter 1872, 20-year-old Luigi Bologna had come from Garesio (Cuneo) to Turin to represent his family at his brother Fr Joseph's first mass. After the celebration, when he was bidding farewell to Don Bosco to return home, the saint asked him point-blank: "Who gave you something to eat and sleep during these days?"

"Don Bosco," Luigi replied.

"Well then," Don Bosco resumed, "if you want to stay with Don Bosco, there's room for you and the others who will come later."

At this totally unexpected exit, Luigi looked at his brother questioningly and, having received his tacit consent, he answered, clasping his shoulders and with a smile that was usual for him: "Don Bosco can write to Dad, I'm staying in Turin."

His father did not create the slightest objection; indeed, he later let two other sons go to Don Bosco, one of whom was a priest and the other a coadjutor; and two daughters to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

At the Oratory, Luigi began his career, so to speak, quite modestly. Having been entrusted to the director of the bookshop, he received duties as a shop assistant, i.e., transporting the books published by the Salesian printing house into the house and town on his shoulders or on a cart. Moreover, accustomed to

the hard work of the countryside, it seemed unreal to him that he could earn a living and do good to his soul so effortlessly. But intelligent as he was, by dint of hanging around the bookshop, he became acquainted with the art of bookmaking, even though he had no particular aspirations in that direction.

An aspiration, however, which had nothing to do with books, was making its way into his soul. Could he not also have become one of those lay Salesians, who performed various offices and enjoyed the confidence of the superiors? The superiors, observing his diligence and piety, had also formed the same thought, so they admitted him to the novitiate and Don Bosco granted him triennial vows in 1873 and perpetual vows in 1876. At that time, he felt content and wanted nothing more.

After nine years of work, no longer as a labourer, in the bookshop, he had, so to speak, stolen the trade from the professional booksellers. That was why in 1885 his superiors sent him to manage the Sampierdarena bookshop, from where a few years later he moved to Fiacca-dori in Parma, which had been taken over by the Salesians. Finally he returned to Sampierdarena, but to supervise those professional schools. When the First World War forced a reduction in the work of the workshops and there was little left for him to do, his superiors sent him to the archiepiscopal library in Pisa, until he returned to Sampierdarena for the last time in 1920, and he did not leave there again till he died. (Ceria E., *Profili di 33 coadiutori salesiani*, 134).

### 204. Reserved for mothers (1872)

In 1930 Antonio Bruno died in Paisandú (Paraguay) at the ripe old age of 84. Sixty of these he had spent as a coadjutor in the Salesian Congregation, founded by Don Bosco. He was born in Rubiana (Turin), in the Susa Valley, to Giuseppe and Tabone Maria on 18 August 1845. His job was that of a cook and he did it so well and so willingly that neither he nor the others ever tired of doing it. He had been a pupil at Valdocco while Don Bosco was still living and with him, he had been the protagonist of some events that cannot be explained except by the extraordinary intervention of the Lord. Listen to some of them.

In June 1872 he was ill in the Valdocco Oratory infirmary. He had not taken any food for a week and the doctor had not yet been able to define the illness he was suffering from. Having heard about it, Don Bosco came by late one evening to see him. He exchanged a few compliments with the sick man, encouraged him to hope, blessed him and finally ordered him to get up with the others the next morning.

Astonished Antonio replied that he could not have done it even if he had wanted to, because he was in such bad shape that his legs could hardly bear him up. Don Bosco listened with satisfaction to this apology, but he did not give in and repeated to him, this time in a tone

that did not admit of reply: "Tomorrow you will get up and go for a walk with the others outside the city."

Antonio had no choice but to obey; in fact, the next day he too got up with his companions and went for a walk with them. The destination was the Tesoriera, a locality towards Rivoli, a good stretch of road beyond the city walls. He went, came back and felt no harm whatsoever. On the contrary, he felt improved and with an appetite that he could hardly satisfy with the meagre portions served at the Oratory table.

Antonio had two brothers who stayed at home with their mother. One fine day, one of them decided to go to France to seek his fortune. While he was carrying out the paperwork for his expatriation, he took advantage of a break to take leave of Antonio. He went to visit him at Valdocco, and Antonio took the opportunity to introduce him to Don Bosco. It took no more than that for him to be told once again to renounce that intention and to stay in Italy near his



mother.

He did not want to know and left, despite Antonio trying in every way to make him understand that Don Bosco had not spoken to him at random, but with good reason. Unfortunately, a month had not yet passed when the news of his death arrived unexpectedly from France. Don Bosco had foreseen it.

His brother, who had stayed at home with his mother, was to go a soldier in 1872 and Antonio was to leave the Oratory.

He turned for advice to Don Bosco. This time too Don Bosco was no less peremptory: "Put your heart in peace and be calm; your brother will not be called to arms."

In the meantime, called to the draft, the brother left Rubiana with his conscripted comrades the day before, and walked all night to reach the Susa district in good time. Along the way, no one knows how, he began to feel discomfort in one of his eyes, which then swelled, for no apparent reason, in such an unthinkable way that his entire face was deformed. He thus presented himself deformed at the barracks and it was enough for him to be unexpectedly declared unfit for service by the doctors.

On the way back, in spite of his eye, he was, and it was easy to tell, the most cheerful of the brigade. So cheerful that he did not even notice that the swelling was receding, gradually returning him to his natural features, momentarily overwhelmed by the sudden illness. He only realized this in Rubiana, when his eye

had already returned to normal, making those who read the district's response incredulous. Conclusion, he did not go as a soldier and Antonio remained at Valdocco: just as Don Bosco had pronounced.

With these conditions in mind, it would seem natural to anyone that Antonio, asked a few years later by Don Bosco if he felt like signing up for the second missionary expedition, would declare himself willing to make any detachment. But this was not the case. At Don Bosco's request, he put his mother ahead of him again, playing on the sorrow she would have felt at knowing he was destined for a place so far away.

Don Bosco then said in his usual tone, without preamble: "You will tell your mother that if she agrees to your departure; after her death she will go straight to heaven... and you will live a long time."

So it was that Antonio Bruno left with the second expedition on 7 November 1876, bound for Buenos Aires. In 1884 he went to Montevideo where he worked as a cook until his death. One day he saw his mother smiling at him amidst a glittering light. He wanted to know the explanation.

"I am going to heaven," she answered him happily and then disappeared. A few days later Anthony received a telegram from Italy announcing his mother's death. She had made the sacrifice of her son and God was rewarding her with a peaceful death and a reward without an anteroom (from M.B., X, 23). □



## MARY HELP OUR FAMILIES

*Pascual Chavez, Rector Major Emeritus of the Salesians*

*The Rector Major Emeritus of the Salesians, Fr Pascual Chávez, in his homily on the 24th of May 2006, reminds us that Mary is the sure and trustworthy helper for the care and growth of love in our families.*

**A**s every year, 24 May brings us together in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, the home of our Mother, the home of



our family. It is She who keeps us united, who teaches and accompanies us in our commitment to save the family and to grow as a human family, men and women, sons and daughters of God.

As you well know, in the year 2006, on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Mamma Margaret, Don Bosco's mother, and of his boys at the Valdocco Oratory, I invited the Salesian Family to take special care of the family, "the cradle of life and love and the primary place of humanisation." To this Salesian anniversary of ours was providentially added that of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. We therefore wished, first of all, to thank the God Family who created us in His image to be like unto Him, precisely through the institution of the family. At the same time, we also felt the need to find in Mary, the Mother of the Son of God, inspiration to learn how to make each of our families and communities true homes, which keep the bonds of affection between all its members strong and still knows how to develop all the dimen-

sions of the children so that they mature, like Jesus, in their awareness of being children of God. Finally, we wish to pray for the family as an institution, especially today when it is "often threatened by social and cultural factors that put pressure on it, making its stability difficult. Even in some countries it is also threatened by legislation, which affects - sometimes directly - its natural structure, which is and can only be that of a union between a man and a woman founded on marriage."

Here, in our Mother's house, we open our ears, but above all our hearts, to listen to Jesus who, right from the Cross, after having given us his Father as our father, and having loved us to the end, gave us his Mother and promised us the gift of the Spirit.

### Behold your Mother!

The entrustment of Mary, the mother of Jesus to us as our mother means that the disciples must grow up within her house, next to her, and be trained in her school, precisely by her, mother and teacher.

Let us therefore enter Mary's home and school. That of Nazareth, first of all, where we find her, a young woman, listening to God, with the Scriptures in her hands, discerning God's will and disposing her mind, heart, even her womb, to welcome Him to the point of incarnating Him in herself.

At Bethlehem, where Mary is absorbed in contemplation of the mystery, full of amazement, trying to understand and keeping in her heart all that was happening,



*Mary also had a family. Her total availability for God makes her motherhood unavailable to any reduction other than the universal motherhood of all her children.*

she waits patiently for the hour when God will reveal the mystery to her face to face.

At Jerusalem, where we see Mary attentive to the faithful fulfilment of the law and, at the same time, stunned before the announcement of a mysterious plan for Jesus, which like a sharp sword would wound her heart and involve her ever more intimately in the mystery of the person of her Son.

Mary's school and home was again that of Nazareth, made anonymous, but marked by the most delicate and precious work that, together with Joseph, was ever entrusted to her, the education of her son as true Man and true God.

Mary's home and school, to

which we must go as children and disciples, is then Calvary, where we contemplate her as she gives back to the Father what belonged to him, her Son, and receives in return, as an inheritance and mission, as a gift and a task, not just a son but all the men and women of the world, thus finding new 'reasons' to continue living.

And there was the school and the home of Mary in the Upper Room, where the Church was rebuilt, nourished by prayer and the expectation of the Spirit, gathering around herself the disciples of the Son, her new children, to create the new family of God, the seed of the human family.

The Gospel passage that shows us Mary under the cross receiving the disciple as son, and shows us the disciple receiving Mary as mother, thus evokes the story of the wedding at Cana. Jesus, the disciples and Mary also appear there, anticipating to a certain extent the new covenant, where the wine of salvation would be plentiful and come to gladden men's lives forever. The scene of Mary at the foot of the Cross also recalls the page of Genesis, that of the promise of a Saviour after original sin, who had come to overthrow the whole of God's marvellous plan for Man: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between her seed and thy seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt bruise her heel" (Gen 3:15). The Church Fathers read this text as an early announcement of the victory of the Messiah or woman over evil. In fact, the symbol of the struggle be-

tween the serpent and the woman's lineage was taken up and enriched in Revelation (chap. 12).

### Mary, woman of freedom

Here, then, was Mary to whom humanity was entrusted to free it from confusion and decay, the fruit of the terrible power of evil, selfishness, fear, relativism "which, recognising nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate measure, only the self with its cravings, and under the appearance of freedom becomes a prison for each person. Within such a relativistic horizon, therefore, true education is not possible: without the light of truth, sooner or later each person is in fact condemned to doubt the goodness of his or her own life and the relationships that constitute it, the validity of his or her commitment to build something in common with others!"

Here is Mary to whom humanity is entrusted to make it new through the dynamism of the Spirit. She performs wonders with those who, like the beloved disciple, take her into their home, because she leads them to take on



God's plan, that of marriage and the family, as their life project. These are not a casual sociological construction, the result of particular historical, cultural and economic situations. "On the contrary, the question of the right relationship between man and woman is rooted in the deepest essence of the human being and can only be addressed from here ... Man is created in the image of God, and God himself is love. Therefore, the vocation to love is what makes man the authentic image of God: he becomes similar to God to the extent that he becomes someone who loves."

This is, after all, what was proclaimed to us in the second reading: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heaven in Christ" (Eph 1:3).

Here, then, is Mary, to whom humanity is entrusted in order to free it from the risk of rotting and sliding into abysses of no return, as we are seeing with unnatural forms of marriage and family.

The human person, society and the Church need the family community, where people meet who love, who care for children and young people, adults, the elderly, families themselves. Don Bosco, educated at the school of Mamma Margaret and by Our Lady, reminds us that "education is a matter of the heart and that God alone is its master."

"It is clear, therefore, that not only must we try to overcome relativism in our work of forming

people, but we are also called to counter its predominance in society and culture. It is very important therefore, alongside the word of the Church, the witness and public commitment of Christian families especially to reaffirm the intangibility of human life from conception to its natural termination, the unassailable value of the family founded on marriage, and the need for legislative and administrative measures to support families in the task of begetting and educating children, a task for our common future."

Mary was entrusted with humanity, and therefore with marriage and the family. Therefore, let us take her as mother and teacher and ask her to intervene in this difficult phase of history.

*Mary, mother of Jesus and our mother. Today we are here, in your house, which is also ours.*

*We entrust our families and communities to you, that you may make the family of Nazareth a model of life.*

*We pray for you for the men and women who suffer most from the current tragedy and loss of dignity;*

*for young people who lack the experience of a true family where they are welcomed, loved and accompanied.*

*Teach us to promote life, to form people and to communicate the faith, so that God's wonderful plan for us may become a reality.*

*Mary Help of Christians, Mother of Don Bosco, Mother of the Salesian family, pray for us. ☐*



**MY VOCATION STORY**

**ABBA MELAKU**

Mons. Angelo Moreschi  
by  
Erino Leoni

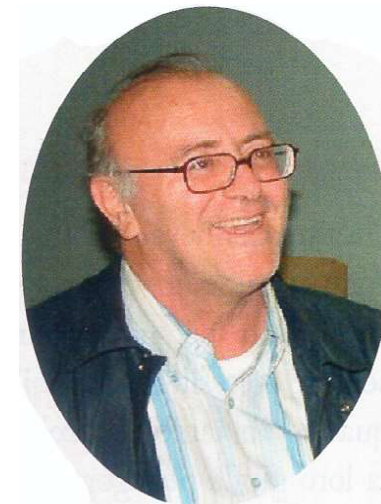
Angelo Moreschi was born on 13 June 1952 in Nave (Bs), near the hamlet of Sacca, the third of seven children. His father Luigi, Gino to everyone, and mother Assunta brought up their children strongly rooted in a faith. They lived without any frills, but robust and joyful. Talk of a vocation was always familiar at the table and our Angelo did not lack the signs that it was a gift from God.

And so, Angelo left for Castel de' Britti and then the aspirantate in Chiari, where he would spend five of the best years of his youth. On 8 September 1974 Angelo became a Salesian and was sent for two years to the Verona Saval house for the two-year course of philosophical studies. At Verona he matured his missionary choice. He wrote a letter to the Salesian provincial in which he said: "I want to give my life to the poor. Send me wherever you want. I am available."

After his ordination, he had a quick initiation in the English language and, on 29 December 1982, he was ready at Milan-Linate to fly to Addis Ababa, the first compulsory stop for the study of the local language, in anticipation of direct contact with the people and the mission.

**His first Missionary love - Dilla**

Arriving in Ethiopia at the end



of December 1982, the missionary group stopped in Addis Ababa at the house of the Comboni Fathers to familiarise themselves with the local language (Amharic) and the customs of the new reality. It was immediately love at first sight. A brief stopover in Dilla and a dream would be realised in May, when the Comboni Fathers would juridically leave the mission in Dilla to the care of their Salesian confreres.

Having inherited a parish, a primary school (6 classes) and a small medical dispensary, the new missionaries spent themselves sparing no effort in a multi-faceted experience of educational and pastoral interventions, in the

style of Don Bosco, always in response to the many contingent urgencies of the local reality. A medical dispensary came, with the arrival after a year of the Salesian Sisters, a Health Centre for the benefit of the whole town and its surroundings. But it was the fruits of inventiveness and overwhelming commitment that hit the mark, through proposals and responses to the needs of the people and in particular the youth population, which demographically had an extraordinary percentage incidence.

'Angelo' was called 'Melaku' in the local language, so Don Angelo becomes Abba Melaku for everyone. The force of passion, however, did not overwhelm the sensitivity of the heart, rather it sharpened it. Angelo and the missionaries rested on a demand for paternity that arose from the little ones "given" to the mission by adults no longer able to take care of them, or from the police who in turn received them from those moved by compassion for a little one abandoned and in danger. Thus, was born the *Casa Don Bosco*, an orphanage built on land adjacent to the Mission.

### Gambella, the pastor in the new missionary frontier

On November 16, 2000, the Holy See officially erected the new Apostolic Prefecture of Gambella, entrusting it to the pastoral care of the Salesians. On the same date, Abba Angelo was appointed Prefect Apostolic and on February 25, 2001, he assumed his mission there. The new Prefecture of Gambella would encompass the province of Illubabor in the regions of Western

Oromia and the Gambella lowlands up to the border with South Sudan. Angelo's fervour and drive were extraordinary and confirmed by those who saw him at work in a self-sacrificing and feverish activity showing that the Prefect Apostolic could think for himself.

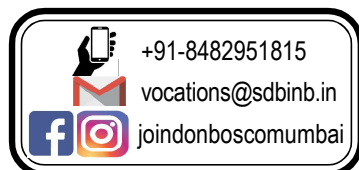
This was the pastoral style that Angelo practised. His motto became a reality with the strength of character, the passion of the heart and the sweat of the brow. Abba Angelo dug no less than 57 wells! The great pastoral work carried out by Abba Angelo and his collaborators was recognised by the Holy See and he was ordained bishop at the Cathedral Church of Gambella, dedicated to Saint Joseph, on 31 January 2010.

His episcopal dignity, however, did not keep Angelo from continuing to be the first always in work of all kinds.

### Illness, icon of a life

The reality, however, was easy to see, far beyond the joke, by those who met Angelo: his health was rapidly wearing out due to a feverish pace of work.

From January the ordeal became particularly steep causing Angelo severe pain. It was only morphine that could ease his suffering. He fought heroically and died in the night, rather; at dawn on 25 March, the Feast of the Ann-unciation... the day when a Christ-ian knows - it all begins, just EVERYTHING. □



## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### Verbal Communication

First Student: "Our economics professor talks to himself. Does yours?"

Second Student: "Yes, but he doesn't know it. He thinks we're listening."

### Fatal Cuisine

A tourist entered a restaurant in China, and ordered a dinner. He was served a large plate of stew, which he enjoyed immensely. When paying the bill, he jokingly referred to the stew.

"I hope you didn't kill a dog to make it," he said laughingly. "Oh! no sir, we no killing dog," he said. "We find him dead!"

### Cold facts

Teacher: "Name a liquid that does not freeze."

Jack: "Hot water, sir!"

### The Spirit of Life

Two soldiers were carrying a stretcher with a wounded man on it.

Bill: "I say, Joe, how did you manage to keep him alive?"

Joe: "Brandy!"

Bill: "What! Don't you know that the doctor said you were not to give brandy to any of the wounded?"

Joe: "I didn't! I promised him some!"

### The Tip of the Tongue

Two students were just going into the classroom for an examination in English literature.

"Great Scott!" said one, "I've forgotten who wrote Ivanhoe!"

"That's easy," replied the other, "I'll tell you that if you'll tell me who the Dickens wrote 'A Tale of Two Cities.'"

### Flying Maths

"If there were four flies on the desk, Eleanor, and I killed one, how many would there be left?"

"One," promptly, replied Eleanor. "The dead one."

### Perfect Tact

A customer sat down at a table in a smart restaurant and tied a napkin around his neck. The scandalized manager called a waiter and instructed him. "Try and make him understand as tactfully as possible that that's not done."

Said the thoughtful waiter to the customer: "Pardon me, sir. Shave or haircut?"

### For the Long Haul

Scotsman (at a riding academy): "I wish to rent a horse."

Groom: "How long?"

Scotsman: "The longest you've got laddie. There are five of us going."

### Scars of the Trade

Barber: "Haven't I shaved you before, sir?"

Customer: "No, I got that scar in France."

### Secret of Longevity

There's a theory around that if a fellow doesn't smoke, drink overeat, or go with girls, he'll live a lot longer. The trouble is, we won't know for sure until somebody tries it. □



## FRIENDSHIP

The mayor's order had been uncompromising. Some employees of the Paris municipality had been given the thankless task of catching as many pigeons as they could in order to transfer them elsewhere or eliminate them. In some parts of the city, the birds were not only soiling the monuments, but also disturbing tourists in an unsightly manner.

The good workers had made a few raids on two squares and were about to place their nets full of birds inside a large van when an old-fashioned but very luxurious car pulled up beside them.

From the car stepped out a furious old woman wielding her umbrella like a sword. The woman set off to attack the poor workers, swinging blows left and right. She pushed her way through the men and with her umbrella, she ripped open the nets that imprisoned the pigeons, who took flight in a flurry of feathers.

Then the woman pointed her umbrella at the workers and began to beat them madly again. The workers protected themselves from the umbrellas, shielding themselves as best they could with their arms and stammering protests that the woman couldn't even hear: "Easy, ma'am... a little respect... please... we're working; it's orders from above... ma'am, ma'am why don't you go and take a swing at the mayor... calm down, ma'am! What kind of a bug has bitten you?" When the tired woman finally calmed down and leaned against the wall to catch her breath, the workers asked her for an explanation.

After a long silence, the lady said: "My son is dead." The workers murmured some excuse, that



they were very sorry, but it was certainly not their fault. Besides, they had had a busy morning and there was still much to be done. Did she understand that?

"My son is dead," the woman repeated.

And the workers: yes, yes, yes, but they were earning their bread, there were millions of pigeons all over Paris, the damn pigeons were the bane of this city.

"Wretches!" Madame glowered at them. And, as if dreaming, far away from the workers, far away from everything, she said: "My son died and became a dove."

The workers fell silent. After a while, one of them, pointing to the pigeons that flew overhead and settled on the roofs and pavements, blurted out: "Why don't you take your son and let us work in peace?"

The woman straightened her cap on her head and said, "Oh, no! Definitely not!" She looked through the workers, as if they were made of glass, and very calmly added: "I don't know which of the pigeons is my son. And if I knew, I would not take him. What right have I to separate him from his friends?" □

## LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My grateful thanks to Mama Mary and Jesus for helping my daughter and during her pregnancy. She had a C-section delivery and a baby girl was born in the 6<sup>th</sup> month. She was kept in an incubator for 3 months. But I never lost hope in Jesus and Mother Mary. I recited the 3 Hail Marys more often. Now she is 2 years and 7 months. I could not come to thank you dear mother Mary due to Covid but I am sincerely grateful. *A Devotee, Mumbai*

Thank you dear Mother Mary for your countless blessings: for protecting our family/family members, neighbours and friends. Dear Jesus and Mother thank you for blessing us all. *A Devotee*

Dear Mother Mary, thank you for all the graces and blessings bestowed on our family through the recitation of the "3 Hail Marys". Please continue to bless and help us. *The Heldt Family*

Thank you Mother Mary for healing me of a thyroid disease. I am grateful for your protection. *Anjali Fernandes, Mumbai*

Thank you dear Jesus, Mother Mary, Dominic Savio and all the saints for a safe delivery of my daughter and for blessing her with a beautiful healthy baby girl. *Zulema D'Mello, Goa*

Dear Mother Mary, I thank you because I was saved from a serious train accident when there was a sudden brake and I could have been seriously injured. *Marila D'Mello*

My niece was entangled with a love affair that was causing several problems for all concerned. Thanks to Our Blessed Mother and our prayers, she settled down in life with good husband. She has two boys studying in Stds, X and XII. I am most grateful to Our Blessed Mother for helping us with these family issues. *Sr. Alicia*  
I am most grateful to Our Blessed Mother for solving our drainage problems. *M. Dodd, Pune*

Dear Mother Mary Help of Christians, I thank you and Don Bosco everyday. I am grateful that through your intercession my granddaughter was healed of her surgery and thank you for all the other graces showered on us. *Lucy G. D'Souza, Thane*

I am grateful to Our Blessed Mother for being freed of depression, for having secured a job. *Monica Naidu*

Thank you dear Mother for healing our child from her stomach pain and severe cough and for all clear reports.

*Mrs. Sophia Jomon, Mumbai*

Our sincere thanks to Our Lady and Dominic Savio for good health. *Anna Maria Vaz, Goa*

## POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK AUGUST 2023

### For World Youth Day

We pray the World Youth Day in Lisbon will help young people to live and witness the Gospel in their own lives.

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### **MARY WAS THERE**

Doctors had advised my daughter not to have a second child since it would be very risky to both mother and child. Trusting completely in the Lord, I prayed to our Blessed Mother to intercede for my daughter. God worked through her friend and she underwent a surgery to heal that particular problem and a year later, she conceived. It was a high-risk pregnancy. During those nine months she contracted COVID twice and had to be taken to the emergency four times due to bleeding. During that difficult period I prayed to Jesus and our blessed Mother to protect my daughter and the baby in her womb. On August 6, my daughter had a safe delivery and was blessed with a normal healthy baby boy. I am grateful to God and our Heavenly Mother for answering my prayer.

*Violet D'Sa, Mumbai*

**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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